



House of Commons
Education and Skills Committee

The Bologna Process

Fourth Report of Session 2006–07

Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 16 April 2007*

HC 205

Published on 30 April 2007
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£22.00

The Education and Skills Committee

The Education and Skills Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Education and Skills and its associated public bodies.

Membership at time Report agreed

Mr Barry Sheerman MP (*Labour, Huddersfield*) (Chairman)
Mr Douglas Carswell MP (*Conservative, Harwich*)
Mr David Chaytor MP (*Labour, Bury North*)
Jeff Ennis MP (*Labour, Barnsley East & Mexborough*)
Paul Holmes MP (*Liberal Democrat, Chesterfield*)
Helen Jones MP (*Labour, Warrington North*)
Fiona Mactaggart MP (*Labour, Slough*)
Mr Gordon Marsden MP (*Labour, Blackpool South*)
Mr Andrew Pelling MP (*Conservative, Croydon Central*)
Stephen Williams MP (*Liberal Democrat, Bristol West*)
Mr Rob Wilson MP (*Conservative, Reading East*)

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/edskills/

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are David Lloyd (Clerk), Jyoti Chandola, (Second Clerk), Libby Aston (Committee Specialist), Nerys Roberts (Committee Specialist), Katie Phelan (Committee Assistant), and Susan Ramsay (Committee Secretary).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education and Skills Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6181; the Committee's e-mail address is edskillscom@parliament.uk

Footnotes

In the footnotes for this Report, references to oral evidence are indicated by 'Q' followed by the question number. References to written evidence are indicated by the page number as in 'Ev 12'.

Contents

| Report | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| Summary | 3 |
| 1 Introduction | 7 |
| 2 Origins, aims and procedures | 9 |
| Origins | 9 |
| Objectives | 9 |
| Governance | 10 |
| The role of higher education institutions | 12 |
| The Fifth Ministerial Conference—London, May 2007 | 13 |
| 3 Purposes and action lines of the Bologna Process | 15 |
| Comparability v. standardisation | 15 |
| Mobility, employability, and competitiveness | 17 |
| Modernisation | 21 |
| Life-long Learning | 23 |
| 4 Why join in? | 24 |
| The UK's position in the EHEA | 24 |
| The minimum case for membership and the threat of complacency | 25 |
| The benefits of UK participation in the Bologna Process | 27 |
| 5 Role of the European Commission | 31 |
| The European Community's powers in education | 31 |
| Causes for concern | 32 |
| Relations with the EC and the Commission | 34 |
| Influence and constraint: the UK Government's position | 35 |
| 6 Issues in need of resolution: opportunity for progress | 38 |
| Quality Assurance | 38 |
| Credit and ECTS | 41 |
| Second cycle (Master's) qualifications | 46 |
| Third cycle (doctoral level) | 49 |
| Shorter higher education | 51 |
| Social Dimension | 52 |
| Role of Government | 53 |
| Involvement and engagement of universities | 55 |
| 7 2010 and beyond | 57 |
| Future of the Bologna Process post-2010 | 57 |
| The London Summit, May 2007 | 58 |
| Conclusion | 60 |
| Annex 1 | 62 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Annex 2 | 63 |
| Conclusions and recommendations | 64 |
| Formal Minutes | 73 |
| List of witnesses | 74 |
| List of written evidence | 75 |
| Reports from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07 | 76 |

Summary

The Bologna Process

The Bologna Process is a non-binding inter-governmental initiative between a voluntary collection of signatory countries with the goal of developing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The development of a broad framework to enable comparability of higher education qualifications across the EHEA, whilst maintaining the autonomy and flexibility that defines the UK higher education system, is an ambitious and important goal which will facilitate greater mobility of high level skills in an increasingly international higher education system.

From its origin, the Bologna Process has been driven by leaders in higher education across Europe and reflects the Magna Carta Universitatum, a document setting out the fundamental principles on which university level education is based, signed in 1988 by heads of universities attending the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna. With 45 signatory countries involved (and growing), it is broader than the European Community (EC) and it is a process that originated, and continues to develop, outside the EC.

This inquiry has been undertaken in the immediate run up to the London Ministerial Summit on 17–18 May 2007 in order to facilitate discussion and provide a constructive contribution to the meeting in May and beyond.

Comparability versus standardisation

It is clear to us that the Bologna Process is in intention and design about comparability and compatibility and not about standardisation of higher education systems across the EHEA. We have been further assured in evidence that there is currently no appetite for a homogenised EHEA amongst the 45 signatory countries.

Some of our evidence, however, has demonstrated that anxieties still exist, despite the formal intentions, that working to achieve comparability across the EHEA might in practice lead in the direction of standardisation or uniformity—and therefore undermine the autonomy and flexibility of the UK system. As a result, we have recommended that the Government be increasingly vigilant in guarding against a move towards bureaucratic, top-down, detailed agreements. It is of great credit to all those involved that the Bologna Process has so far maintained the pursuit of a flexible framework based on broad non-binding principles—keeping institutional autonomy at the heart of the process. We have recommended that the Government and others work to ensure this continues—and that realistic criteria and timetables are set for the achievement of the Process's objectives to safeguard the voluntary nature of the process.

Why join in?

It can reasonably be claimed that the UK is in a unique position within the EHEA. The UK has a three-phase degree structure or cycle in place, similar in most respects to that espoused as a standard by the Bologna countries, and a global reputation for high quality higher education provision maintained by a well-developed and independent quality

assurance system making it the second most popular destination in the world for international students, behind the US. The UK's strong position in European higher education raises questions about why it needs to be involved in the Bologna Process, what it has to gain, and why the UK should help other countries in the EHEA to modernise if that is going to risk its competitive advantage.

In a rapidly developing global market for higher education, however, it would be a mistake to think that the UK is in a sufficiently advantageous position as to be able to stand aside whilst other countries in the EHEA make progress through the Bologna Process. Many countries in the EHEA have a long and proud history of excellence in higher education and many European Universities are considered to be world-class institutions. In those countries in the EHEA where their higher education systems were already admired, the Bologna Process is being used to further improve and modernise higher education.

We commend the work that the Government and other agencies have been doing to help shape the modernisation process across the EHEA through the Bologna Process and support this continuing role in fostering a culture of respect for institutional autonomy and flexibility in higher education. We firmly believe that such modernisation is likely to be more successful and sustainable if it reflects a partnership between government and institutions within the higher education sector.

Advantages for the UK

Beyond the minimum case for membership, there are genuine advantages to be gained for the UK in contributing to the achievement of the Bologna action lines that go beyond merely protecting the UK's national interests. There are economic advantages to be gained for the UK through engagement in the Bologna Process: increased employment and productivity; and increased competitiveness of the UK higher education sector through promoting the attractiveness and international reputation of the EHEA. There are advantages for UK students in terms of increased mobility and employment opportunities. Finally there are advantages to UK universities through the increased market for both EU and international students within the EHEA, increased mobility of staff, sharing of best practice and expertise in a broad range of areas, and increased opportunities for research collaboration across the European Research Area.

Role of the European Commission

The European Commission, and the European Community more broadly, play an important formal role in the Bologna Process that is welcome. The expanding role of the European Community in the field of education, however, and the belief that it is seeking to expand its role through the mechanisms of the Bologna Process, is a major cause of concern to UK organisations and institutions. It is also our greatest concern regarding the future of the Bologna Process.

We recommend, therefore, that the Government seeks clarification of the exact role of the Commission in the Bologna Process. A way must be found to ensure its involvement does not undermine the essentially voluntary and 'bottom up' approaches characteristic of its development to date. It remains crucial to the success of the Bologna Process that it remains outside the framework of the EC. We agree with the Minister that the role of the

European Commission must be appropriately circumscribed. This must be a priority issue for the government at the London Summit in May.

Specific issues:

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) is arguable the key issue for Bologna and progress in this area will largely determine the success or otherwise of the Bologna Process. The aim of putting in place a broad framework of comparable higher education qualifications in order to achieve increased mobility, employability, and competitiveness across the EHEA can only take place if it is underpinned by robust and reliable QA systems in each country.

The UK operates a fundamentally different approach to quality assurance to the rest of the EHEA and this external “arm’s length” approach is a major contributing factor to the success of the UK higher education sector. The Government and the Europe Unit, through the Quality Assurance Agency’s involvement, are working to ensure that the UK keeps control of its own QA arrangements whilst in parallel also working to shape and influence the development of QA systems across the EHEA. The Committee gives its full support to this approach.

Credit

We support the important work that has been undertaken to develop a broad and flexible credit framework across the EHEA with the aim of both increasing mobility and opening up a more flexible and accessible higher education system to a wider range of people. We concur with the Burgess Report that credit is a tool for assessing the equivalence of learning and achieved by an individual and, as such, requires framework or level descriptors that outline the general outcomes of learning expected at a given level. Consequently we conclude that the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS), based solely on input or ‘hours studied’, is not fit for purpose.

We are encouraged that the European Commission has agreed to review the ECTS but remain concerned that the outcomes of such a review are by no means certain. We ask that the Government and the UK HE Europe Unit continue to lobby for the ECTS system to be reformed and, more broadly, for a cultural change towards an outcome-focus to be adopted not just in theory but in practice across the EHEA. We hope a progress report on the review of ECTS will be made at the Ministerial meeting in May, and recommend that developing a more suitable credit system for the future should receive priority at that meeting.

Second cycle (Master’s) qualifications

The future of the one-year Master’s and four-year integrated Master’s Degrees was consistently raised as a major concern during our inquiry. Because the European Commission’s User Guide on ECTS is non-compulsory, it is true to say that in theory there is no threat to the future of one-year Master’s and four-year integrated Master’s Degrees—this was the Government’s position. In practice, however, the situation is very different. The fact that the Commission has specified a maximum of 75 credits for one year of study (90 credits are needed for a Master’s qualification) is of considerable concern for the future

of the one-year Master's because of the extent to which ECTS is used and accepted across the EHEA and because it seems to be, in the Minister's words, the "only show in town."

The Government and other agencies involved must properly engage with these issues at the May Summit and beyond. The Government should seek a commitment from the European Commission for the removal of the 75 ECTS per calendar year reference from the User's Guide.

2010 and beyond

The UK should make it clear in London in May 2007, both within the UK higher education sector and across the EHEA, that whilst policy initiatives in this field are necessarily the responsibility of Government, operational decisions will continue to rest with institutions and will need to be discussed, stimulated and evaluated within the sector.

We welcome the emphasis that we believe UK representatives at the London Ministerial Meeting intend to place on the importance of the voluntary principle in the development of the Bologna Process. We agree that there is a need to maintain a flexible and varied pattern of awards and qualifications across the EHEA, within which compatibility will be underpinned by effective within-country quality assurance systems.

We regard the creation of a EHEA as a continuing project, capable of yielding benefits at each stage of its development, and one to which adequate time must be given if the necessary basis of trust is to be established and understanding are to be both strong and sustainable.

1 Introduction

1. In May 2007 the United Kingdom is due to host the fifth conference of Ministers of Education of countries that have signed the Bologna Declaration of co-operation in higher education. The purposes of the Declaration are to increase staff and student mobility, simplify and improve the mutual recognition of qualifications and enhance the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area as an international study destination.¹ The Education and Skills Committee thought it timely to undertake a short inquiry into progress being made with implementation of the Bologna Process, with a view to facilitating discussion of issues affecting UK² universities³ and other providers of higher education that may arise at the May conference. We hope that this Report will prove to be a constructive contribution to the Ministerial Summit in May and beyond.

2. Written submissions were invited from institutions and organisations with interests in this field, and around forty responses received and studied. The Committee took oral evidence in January 2007 from the Minister for Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP; Lord May of Oxford; the President of Universities UK, Professor Drummond Bone; the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education; the UK Higher Education Europe Unit; and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle, Professor Ella Ritchie. The Committee also heard evidence regarding the Bologna Process in its wider higher education inquiry from the Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, Professor David Eastwood; and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester, Professor Robert Burgess.

3. The Committee has reached the following conclusions.

- First and foremost, there is overwhelming support in and beyond the academic community for the UK to continue to play a leading role in the Bologna Process.
- Second, there is a desire to maintain and protect the current distinction between, on the one hand the voluntary, bottom-up, 45 country Bologna Process, focused on academic cooperation, and on the other, the European Community,⁴ with its much broader economic, social and political agenda, legislative and legal powers and massive resource base (from which the Bologna Process itself derives significant benefits).
- Third, anxieties exist about the implications for UK institutions and programmes of certain aspects of the Bologna commitment to a three-cycle (bachelors, masters, doctoral) course structure and the way in which students will acquire academic

1 Adapted from the Quality Assurance Agency's written submission to the Committee, Ev 16.

2 The Bologna Process applies to all universities and higher education systems in the UK. This report has focussed on the impact on the English higher education system and has not looked separately at the impact in Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales.

3 The term "universities" is used throughout the report to refer to all higher education institutions.

4 The European Community is legally separate from the European Union. Each has its own powers—those for education being located exclusively in the EC Treaty (articles 149 and 150). There can be no EU legislation or action on education.

credits. The status of self-standing and integrated Masters' level courses is a particular focus of these anxieties.

- Fourth, there are doubts about whether the full significance of the coming into existence of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)⁵ has yet been adequately recognised by all those engaged in higher education as teachers, researchers, and employers of graduates.
- Fifth, the Government is not so far seen to be sufficiently pro-active in disseminating information, identifying and where possible resolving potential difficulties, and consulting on the future of the EHEA, especially where this entails an increase in the number of participating countries.

4. The remainder of this Report sets out the evidence on which these conclusions are based and makes recommendations for action by government, institutions and organisations, with a particular focus on the forthcoming Ministerial Conference in London.

5. In the final section of the report we look beyond 2010 to the significant potential long-term advantages of operating within a robust, competitive, and flexible European Higher Education Area: advantages for the UK economy, students, graduates, and higher education sector.

5 One of the key aims of the Bologna Process is to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010.

2 Origins, aims and procedures

Origins

6. Universities have from their beginnings been among the most international of social organisations.⁶ The Bologna Process represents an important stage in the continuing development of co-operation between academic institutions, encouraged and supported by the governments of their respective countries. Its origins reflect the Magna Carta Universitatum, a document setting out the fundamental principles on which university level education is based, signed in 1988 by heads of universities attending the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna.

7. Ten years later, a separate inter-governmental process was initiated by the ministers responsible for higher education in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, meeting in Paris, who approved the Sorbonne Declaration, committing their countries to “harmonising the architecture of the European Higher Education system.” One year on, in 1999, Ministers from 29 European countries, back in Bologna, put their names to a declaration which stated an intention that by 2010, a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) would be in existence.

8. The Bologna Process is about developing a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The Process is a non-binding inter-governmental initiative between its signatory countries. To understand this is to understand the nature of the Bologna Process as intended from its origin. It is not a European Community initiative, project, or official programme. The signatories to the Bologna Process are a voluntary collection of 45 countries (and growing). It is broader than the EC and it is a process that originated, and continues to develop, outside the EC.

Objectives

9. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) have summarised the objectives of the Process as follows:

“The broad objectives of the Bologna Declaration were to remove obstacles to student mobility across Europe; enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide; and establish a common structure of higher education systems based on two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate), which would lead to greater transparency and recognition of qualifications. The four main priorities of the process have evolved and are:

- A degree system based on three cycles—Bachelors, Masters and doctoral studies— that are easily readable and comparable;
- Developing a credit system, such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), that can be used for the purposes of transfer and recognition;

6 Jennifer Bone and Ian McNay, *Higher Education and Human Good*, Report of a Consultation held at Sarum College, Salisbury, 3–4 March 2005, (Tockington Press Ltd, Bristol, 2006).

- Measures to favour mobility, transparency and readily comparable qualifications;
- European co-operation in the field of quality assurance and evaluation.

These are underpinned by other action lines that cover:

- a) The promotion of the European dimension in higher education;
- b) A focus on lifelong learning;
- c) The inclusion of higher education institutions and students;⁷
- d) The promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area;
- e) Doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.”⁸

10. The ten agreed Action Lines are listed in Annex 2.

11. The purpose of the Bologna Process, as stated in its formal priorities and “action lines”, is to create a broad framework for higher education to enable comparability within a flexible system and to promote the European Higher Education Area for the benefit of all of the countries involved—including the UK. It is not intended to create standardised or uniform higher education across the European Higher Education Area.

Governance

12. Since 1999 Ministers have met three times to assess progress towards the creation of the EHEA—in Prague in 2001, in Berlin in 2003 and in Bergen in 2005. The official communiqués from these meetings—agreed by all participants—have added to the original declaration. The UK will host the next ministerial summit in London in May 2007 and is responsible for drafting the Communiqué for consideration at that meeting. The 2009 conference will be organised by a consortium of the Benelux countries.

13. Over the past eight years the Bologna Process has both widened and deepened. Forty-five countries are now in membership compared with twenty-nine at the outset (a list of signatory countries is given in Annex 1). Several are from beyond Europe. Questions are now being raised as to whether continuing growth will facilitate the cooperation, mobility and compatibility that were high on the original agenda. Bernd Wachter, Director of the Academic Co-operation Association has said that “a more limited catalogue of concrete aims—which characterised Bologna at its outset—has a much better chance of implementation than a very wide range of issues, especially in a reform-sceptical continent such as Europe.”⁹

7 This action line was intended to formalise the central role of institutions and students in what is officially an inter-governmental process.

8 Ev 29

9 Bernd Wachter, “The Bologna Process: developments and prospects”, *European Journal of Education* 39, 3, (2004) p 265-273. Full quote: “While the move towards widening and deepening could [...] be seen as a welcome development, it could also endanger the momentum of the reform, if not its success. Obviously, a more limited catalogue of concrete aims—which characterised the Bologna Process at its outset—has a much better chance of implementation than a very wide range of issues, especially in a reform-sceptical continent such as Europe. The

14. As previously discussed, it is important to emphasise that the Bologna Process is a non-binding inter-governmental initiative between signatory countries. It is not a European Community (EC) initiative, project or official programme. The signatories to the Bologna Process are the governments of 45 countries (a number which seems likely to grow—see Annex 1). The UK HE Europe Unit,¹⁰ set up in 2004 and supported by a consortium of higher education funding bodies and organisations, tells us that “Decision-making within the Process rests on the consent of all the participating countries,” and that such decision making “is carried out through an ‘intergovernmental’ process by Ministers at bi-annual summits.”¹¹ To reach a decision concerning the Bologna Process requires consensus between participating countries.¹² Thus the Process is broader than the EC and continues to develop outside the EC.

15. The European Commission has a formal role as a full member of the major policy making groups that govern the Bologna Process (see below) and also provides financial support for many activities, but does not lead, direct, or legislate with regard to the conduct of the Process.

16. The Bologna Secretariat is located in the host country for the next Ministerial conference, and usually comprises staff of the relevant Department of Government responsible for higher education in that country.

17. Two other bodies play major roles in governance, namely the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and the Bologna Board.

18. The BFUG has the task of taking forward, by means of an agreed programme of conferences and activities, recommendations made at the ministerial meetings. BFUG is made up of representatives of Ministries of Education from all 45 Bologna member countries, along with those of other European-level organisations, which include the European Commission; European University Association (EUA); European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB); European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE); and the Council of Europe. Other organisations such as the Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederations, the Education International Pan-European Structure and the Scottish Executive attend BFUG meetings

19. The Bologna Board is a smaller body, on which sit the countries that have hosted the previous Ministerial conference and which are to host the next, and representatives of the previous, current and succeeding Presidencies of the EC Council of Ministers. The European Commission also has a place, along with representatives of other Europe-wide

latter always poses the threat of diluting the original set of aims. It could result in a very satisfying intellectual debate, but perhaps only in little genuine change.”

10 The sector-wide UK HE Europe Unit was formally launched in 2004 to act as an observatory of European higher education developments. The Unit coordinates the UK HE sector’s engagement in European HE policy debates, notably the Bologna Process, and lobbies on the sector’s behalf. The Europe Unit is funded by Universities UK and the HE funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales and supported by the Quality Assurance Agency and Standing Conference of Principals.

11 UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

12 *Ibid.*

bodies and of two non-EU countries. The host of the next ministerial meeting is in the Chair.¹³

20. There is no central budget for the Bologna process. Each member country and organisation meets costs incurred by attendance of its representatives at meetings and conferences. Secretariat costs are met by the country acting as host for the following Ministerial Conference. In the UK the work of the Europe Unit is supported by a consortium of higher education organisations and funding bodies. The EC provides support for some Bologna activities cognate with its own programmes of work. EC funds have also been made available to support the development of the stock-taking and score-card methodology by means of which countries self-report upon progress in implementing the action-lines in the Bologna Declaration and other principles and decisions added by the subsequent Ministerial summits.¹⁴

The role of higher education institutions

21. Institutions within the higher education sector play a crucially important role in the Process. Although a creation of governments, the success of the Bologna Process depends on the active participation of individual universities and colleges and their representative organisations. The original Declaration refers explicitly to this in stating that

“[...] European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities’ independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society’s demands and advances in scientific knowledge.”¹⁵

22. The Communiqué from the 2005 Ministerial conference in Bergen stressed the importance of institutional involvement in the Bologna Process,¹⁶ and thus supported the view that although created by governments, the success of Bologna is dependent upon ‘bottom up’ initiatives and actions, and cannot readily be legislated for by national governments and international agencies.

13 Guide to decision making within the process from the UK HE Europe Unit’s web-site.
http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna_process/decision_making_within_the_process.cfm

14 Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, *Bologna Process Stocktaking*, Report from a working group appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19–20 May 2005. “All forty participating countries in the Bologna Process completed their National Reports in accordance with the standard format. It is important to emphasise, however, that the working group relied upon each participating country to respond accurately to the questions in the structured report format. The group had neither the remit nor the resources to validate the content of National Reports.”
http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Bergen/050509_Stocktaking.pdf

15 The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999: http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/bologna_declaration.pdf

16 The European Higher Education Area: Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19–20 May 2005. “We underline the central role of higher education institutions, their staff and students as partners in the Bologna Process. Their role in the implementation of the Process becomes all the more important now that the necessary legislative reforms are largely in place, and we encourage them to continue and intensify their efforts to establish the EHEA. We welcome the clear commitment of higher education institutions across Europe to the Process, and we recognise that time is needed to optimise the impact of structural change on curricula and thus to ensure the introduction of the innovative teaching and learning processes that Europe needs”. http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf

23. When asked whether the Bologna Process was sector-led, the Minister for Higher Education in the DfES replied that:

“[...] the Bologna Declaration itself makes explicitly clear that the involvement of higher education communities is crucial for the success of the overall process. I think, thus far, a major part of its success has been that it has been bottom up and voluntary and respectful of higher education autonomy [...] in negotiating the detail of this we do work hand-in-glove with our universities in this country.”¹⁷

24. It will be essential to maintain a strong focus on the importance of institutional autonomy at the London meeting whilst recognising that the variability at present in university autonomy across the EC, and even more so across the European Higher Education Area, is an issue that cannot be shirked for the future.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference—London, May 2007

25. The fifth Ministerial Conference is due to be held in London on 17–18 May 2007. The Bergen Communiqué proposed that the London conference should focus on:

- implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance as proposed in the ENQA report;
- implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications;
- the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at the doctorate level;
- creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including
- procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

26. The Communiqué also called on the Bologna Follow up Group (BFUG) to present “comparable data on the mobility of staff and students as well as on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries as a basis for future stocktaking and reporting in time for the next Ministerial Conference.”¹⁸

27. The DfES have told us that this event:

“[...] has to satisfy a number of objectives. It needs to ensure that momentum is maintained and provide an assessment of how much more needs to be done in order to achieve the objective of creating an EHEA by 2010. It also has to provide a review of progress since the last Ministerial conference and set out the agreed priorities for the next two years.”

“The Government’s intention is to make the event as forward looking and as participative as possible, and to minimise the time spent reporting progress. The Government is therefore seeking to use the conference as the basis for a first discussion of what the EHEA might look like post 2010 and to provoke more of a

17 Q 135

18 The Bergen Communiqué 2005. http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf

discussion about HE reform in Europe beyond Bologna, setting the whole conference in the context of the challenge of the internationalisation of higher education”.¹⁹

28. Progress reports from each of the signatory countries can be read on the Bologna Secretariat web-site.²⁰ Papers and documents for the London meeting in May 2007 are not likely to be available until nearer the event.

29. The importance of the outcomes of the London meeting for higher education in the UK should not be underestimated. To take a single example, that of Engineering, the Engineering Council have told us:

“Because of the role which the MEng [degree] has as a preparation for professional practice, ECUK and the professional engineering institutions are seen by many in universities as the bodies which should make a decision about the future of the MEng. We are currently considering the matter, but would prefer to await the outcomes of the London ministerial meeting in May 2007 and of the review of ECTS before making any firm recommendations to universities”.²¹

30. Although the main topics of the agenda may be pre-determined, this does not mean that the UK will not be able to influence the next steps in the Bologna process. As the UK HE Unit have said, “As hosts of the summit in London... the UK has an invaluable opportunity to further influence developments over the coming months and years.”²²

31. This inquiry has taken place over the last 6 months in order to facilitate broad discussion of the UK position in advance of the London Summit in May, with the intention of making a constructive contribution to the negotiations at the 2007 Summit and beyond.

19 Ev 31

20 National Reports/National Action Plans for Recognition, Bologna Secretariat website. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/index.cfm?fuseaction=docs.list&DocCategoryID=17>

21 Ev 86

22 UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

3 Purposes and action lines of the Bologna Process

Comparability v. standardisation

32. It is clear that in principle the Bologna Process is not intended to be about creating a standardised higher education system across the European Higher Education Area. The DfES set out the Government's understanding that:

"[...] the Bologna process is not intended to lead to the standardisation or greater uniformity of European higher education provision. It is more a framework designed to ensure the highest level of quality, consistency and coherence between Europe's respective national systems and between individual institutions."²³

33. The Minister for Higher Education reinforced this position:

"(Bologna) is about comparability and compatibility of higher education qualifications across the broader Europe. It is about mutual recognition and it is about aiding mobility, both of students and academics."²⁴

"[...] it is about recognition, it is not about standardisation."²⁵

"[...] we need to ensure it is not about standardisation, it is not about uniformity, it is about translation."²⁶

34. The manager of the UK HE Europe Unit told the Committee that:

"[...] certainly among the European stakeholders involved in the process there is a consensus that it remains about broad principles at European level rather than detailed, top-down, rigid recommendations."²⁷

35. Lord May, former President of the Royal Society emphasised that:

"We should be driven not by some idealised, tidy scheme that unifies things, we should be governed by the aspiration of making it easy to move around and evaluate people, recognising that at the moment we have huge diversity."²⁸

36. This consensus regarding the intention of the Bologna Process in principle, does not altogether remove anxieties in some quarters about the risk of standardisation in practice. The concern is that despite the official intentions or purposes, there is a possibility that the Bologna Process could move towards a more typical European-style bureaucratic, top-

23 Ev 35

24 Q 132

25 Q 152

26 Q 133

27 Q 23

28 Q 32

down, rigid and legislative process which would result in higher education sectors being forced to move towards standardised or uniform higher education systems. Professor Drummond Bone, President of Universities UK (UUK), said this anxiety “[...] is well founded [...] there is always that danger.”²⁹

37. As academic studies of the Bologna Process have identified, there are “tensions at work between the domestic reform agenda and the European-wide concerted harmonisation process. In general, the UK position regarding these issues is that a diversified and flexible approach should be adopted and that higher education institutions should be free to set the duration of courses as they see fit in relation to their activities and environment.”³⁰

38. The Quality Assurance Agency suggest that concerns about this issue of standardisation might be driving behaviour at the European level as well:

“[...] concerns about the standardisation of European higher education as a consequence of the Bologna Process may well also be behind the continued push of Dutch colleagues, the OECD (IMHE) and the European Commission for projects to develop typologies and classifications of European higher education institutions, echoing the new Carnegie classifications in the USA. Pressures are mounting too for a European ranking of universities—again underwritten by the Commission— and there are initiatives at national and institutional level in some countries, notably Germany, variously to identify centres of excellence and clusters of ‘top institutions.’”³¹

39. Related to this issue about standardisation is the concern regarding the timetable set for implementation of the changes necessary to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010. Each member country completes a ‘stock-taking’ proforma that records progress in the implementation of each of the ten objectives, which is then analysed as the basis of a country-by-country ‘scorecard’. Across the 45 countries currently involved there are many differences in rates of progress. The UK Quality Assurance Agency has doubts as to whether the 2010 target is realistic and is concerned that any strict deadlines will become like a “regulatory straight jacket” and restrict the voluntary nature of the Bologna Process:

“The achievements and aims of the Bologna Process have to be set alongside the urgent need for other steps to be taken to modernise or revitalise universities in many parts of Europe.

“A key factor in the success of the Bologna Process to date has been its voluntary nature. It needs to remain thus rather than become a regulatory straitjacket to constrain innovation and change in higher education at institutional or national level. The 2010 deadline for the ‘completion’ of the European Higher Education Area is unrealistic and it is likely to take much longer for the full fruits of the Process to be borne.”³²

29 Q 21

30 Cecile Deer, *European higher education policy: what is the relevance for the United Kingdom?*, Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE), University of Oxford, Issues Paper 11, June 2006.

31 Ev 19

32 *Ibid.*

40. It is clear to us that the Bologna Process is in intention and design about comparability and compatibility and not about standardisation of higher education systems across the European Higher Education Area.

41. We commend the clarity and consensus of the Government's position on the issue of comparability versus standardisation and recommend that more is done to communicate this message to the sector and to confirm that the intention of the Bologna Process is not to create a uniform or standardised European higher education system. We have been further assured in evidence that there is currently no appetite for a homogenised European Higher Education Area amongst the 45 signatory countries.

42. Some of our evidence, however, has demonstrated that anxieties still exist, despite the formal intentions, that working to achieve comparability across the EHEA might in practice lead in the direction of standardisation or uniformity—and therefore undermine the autonomy and flexibility of the UK system. Later in our report we address some of the issues that arise from these anxieties.

43. We recommend that the Government be increasingly vigilant in guarding against a move towards bureaucratic, top-down, detailed agreements. It is of great credit to all those involved that the Bologna Process has so far maintained the pursuit of a flexible framework based on broad non-binding principles—keeping institutional autonomy at the heart of the process. This is integral to the key principle of maintaining national determination of education policy. We recommend that the Government and others work to ensure this continues—and that realistic criteria and timetables are set for the achievement of the Process's objectives to safeguard the voluntary nature of the process.

Mobility, employability, and competitiveness

Mobility

44. In 2005 the UK HE Unit described the purpose of Bologna as being about “mobility, employability, and competitiveness.”³³

45. The Minister for Higher Education, Mr Rammell, when asked about the fundamental purposes of Bologna, focused on mobility. He said that:

“I think it is about enabling a greater mobility of students and academics across that wider European area, and it is about facilitating interaction and movement between global higher education institutions [...]”³⁴

46. The DfES also described the advantages of Bologna largely in terms of increased mobility across the EHEA, with students and staff being “able to move more freely between European universities”.³⁵

33 UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process*, 2005.

34 Q 146

35 Ev 30

47. Regrettably, however, the number of UK students undertaking study and work placements abroad as part of a degree programme in the UK, or following a course in more than one country that will lead to degree awarded by two or more universities, has been declining rather than increasing.³⁶ This is against the trend elsewhere in the EHEA.³⁷ The DfES admits that:

“[...] though mobility is a priority for the Bologna Process, the evidence to date is that progress has been slow.”³⁸

48. Furthermore, mobility is still based on bi-lateral agreements between specific institutions, which requires intensive investment in time and energy by the HEIs involved.

49. Studies of student mobility carried out during 2004 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the United Kingdom Council for International Education (UKCOSA) agreed that poor take-up was due principally to a lack of recognition of the year abroad by the student's home institution; individual students' attitudes; lack of language competence; perceived financial concerns and absence of a “mobility culture.”³⁹

50. The Director of the UK Socrates Erasmus Council has told us that his experience

“[...] suggests that the key may lie in the cultural and motivational climate and, the lack of institutional incentives to support, encourage and promote student mobility. If Government policy, translated through the Funding Councils, provided financial incentives coupled with targets, I am confident that there would be a dramatic change in outward UK mobility. An increase in UK student mobility is essential for the future role of the UK in Europe.”⁴⁰

51. Among other factors affecting outward mobility are the smaller number of pupils in UK schools who continue to study foreign languages beyond the age of 14 and the closure of language departments in some universities due to shortage of applications.

52. The University of Kent reinforced these findings from its own experience:

“There appear to be several reasons for this decline. These include lack of sufficient language ability, difficulties with regard to leaving part-time jobs and accommodation for short periods of study abroad, perceived financial problems despite the availability of the Erasmus grant and, in the case of study abroad as part of a four-year degree involving a full year in another country, unwillingness to delay finishing the degree and entering the workplace.”⁴¹

53. The QAA have pointed out to us that there are also many opportunities for UK students to study in countries that are outside the Bologna Process. Increased mobility beyond Europe is to be encouraged but if, however, this is as a result of either perceived or

36 Ev 30

37 Ev 93

38 Ev 33

39 Ev 33

40 Ev 94

41 Ev 61

real reductions in opportunities for, or access to, study within Europe, then this is a cause for concern.

54. **The Committee recommends that the Government does more to tackle, and encourages higher education institutions to do more to tackle, the likely restraints on mobility for UK students, namely: lack of recognition by the student's home institution of the value of study abroad; individual student's attitudes; lack of language competence; perceived financial concerns; and the absence of a mobility culture. This will take a concerted and consistent effort by universities and by the Government to promote the benefits of mobility and to encourage a cultural change in students and across the sector.**

55. **There is an urgent need for further research to identify those subject areas and universities where mobility is low and where funding and take-up may need to be targeted and prioritised.**

56. **We support the proposal by the DfES that internationalism should become a standard part of HEI's overall strategies. We also recommend that there should be specific, targeted funding to encourage international student mobility amongst a broader range of students—especially those who choose to live at home during their courses. There should also be a greater diversity of opportunities for overseas study, with more short-term study options available in addition to the standard year abroad.**

57. **We further recommend that, whilst it will take several years for Lord Dearing's recent proposals⁴² concerning the teaching of modern languages to take full effect, the Government should act swiftly with measures that will help reverse the decline of language learning. A reversal of that decline would undoubtedly help the UK to take advantage of the opportunities for greater student mobility that are being created by the Bologna Process.**

Employability and competitiveness

58. Mobility needs to be seen as a means for the achievement of other goals, rather than as a goal in itself. The Minister suggested what some of these might be:

“[...] what will be better is that you will enable students and academics to interact and travel to other institutions. I have a very strong view that British students.. who spend some time studying abroad develop skills and competences in terms of self-reliance, language skills, appreciation of other cultures that are very beneficial in the increasingly globalised jobs market. I think it will enable a mobility of labour to take place that has an economic benefit, and crucially, it will ensure that we maintain a very competitive position [...] in terms of attracting overseas students.”⁴³

59. In this context a salutary point is made by the Director of the UK Socrates Erasmus Council:

42 DfES, *Languages Review*, the final report of the Dearing Language Review , March 2007.

43 Q 147

“Large numbers of Erasmus students are travelling from the new partner countries to Germany, France, Italy and Spain, but relatively few to the UK. The markets in the new partner countries are burgeoning and the next generation of their leaders, in all walks of life, will increasingly have had part of their Higher Education formation in countries to which they will look for partnerships, rather than to the UK.”⁴⁴

60. The UK HE Europe Unit clearly believes that increasing mobility can achieve broader purposes. They have said that “in its drive to improve the quality of higher education and, in turn, human resources across Europe, the Bologna Process will play a key role in contributing to the EC’s *Lisbon Strategy*⁴⁵ goals which aim to deliver stronger, lasting growth and to create more and better jobs.” The Bologna Process is not part of the Lisbon Strategy but is, arguably, compatible with it.

61. The DfES written submission to us went even further and said the Bologna Process was ‘fundamentally’ about responding to the Lisbon Agenda.⁴⁶ In oral evidence, however, the Minister qualified this emphasis:

“This is where I run the risk of contradicting something we may have sent you in writing. I would not use the words that Bologna is fundamentally about implementing and achieving the Lisbon goals. I think it is an important contribution, but I think this [i.e. the Bologna process] is much more important and much wider than just the European Union.”⁴⁷

62. We welcome the Minister’s caveat. The objectives of the European Community in the field of education⁴⁸ are consistent in many respects with those of the Bologna process, but there are important differences which need to be respected.

63. There are three principal reasons why the Bologna Process cannot be ‘fundamentally’ about implementing and achieving the Lisbon goals. First, the Lisbon agenda is much wider and more comprehensive than that of Bologna; second, the constitutional status, membership and governance of the Bologna Process are distinct from those of the EC, and third, the success of the Bologna agenda depends on the willingness and cooperation of institutions which enjoy varying but always highly valued measures of autonomy in decision making. We therefore welcome and support the comment made in evidence to us from the UK HE Europe Unit that:

“Bologna can complement Lisbon and support many of the reforms that the Commission is recommending within that but we wish the two processes to remain separate in their decision making.”⁴⁹

44 Ev 94

45 The Lisbon Strategy is an action and development plan set out by the European Council in Lisbon early in 2000 which committed the EU to develop by 2010 the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth. The Strategy was re-launched in 2005, with a focus on jobs and growth (see The European Commission, *General Report on the activities of the European Union 2006*, Brussels, 2007, page 31).

46 Ev 31

47 Q 145

48 The European Commission, *From Bergen to London: the Commission’s contribution to the Bologna Process*, Brussels, 22 December 2006/rev 2: <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/report06.pdf>

64. This takes nothing away from potential of the Bologna Process to contribute to increasing employability and productivity.

65. Increased mobility of high-level skills and labour can contribute to increased employment, productivity and growth. This is a major benefit of the Bologna Process that should be helping to drive it forward. These are distinct from the goals of the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process must remain separate from that Agenda. We recommend that the Government does more to communicate its position: that whilst the Bologna Process is not fundamentally about achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda, increased employment and competitiveness across the 45 signatory countries are important aims of the Bologna Process.

Modernisation

66. At the Prague Ministerial Summit of 2001, an action line was added ‘to promote the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.’ This is connected to one of the key drivers of the Bologna Process across the EHEA: to modernise European higher education systems. Professor Bone specifically described the Bologna Process as “effectively a modernisation process in Europe.”⁵⁰

67. Many of the weaknesses in European higher education which need to be addressed in modernisation agendas were set out a Communication from the European Commission entitled “Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon strategy” which was considered by the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee in 2005.⁵¹

68. Whilst the UK’s involvement in the Bologna Process has not resulted in major changes to its higher education system, “revolutionary change”⁵² has been taking place in many other member countries. University College London tells us that Bologna has had “a remarkable impact on many European countries, and has led to fundamental reforms of HE systems.”⁵³ The University of Leeds suggests that “the Bologna Process has led to a profound restructuring of higher education in many parts of Europe”.⁵⁴

69. On the basis of a detailed study of the impact of Bologna, Dr Keeling found that:

“Comprehensive stocktaking by the University Association, the student unions and many other groups has demonstrated that Bologna has initiated profound changes in the higher education systems of dozens of countries, despite lingering concerns about the speed and quality of the translation of the Bologna goals at the university

49 Q 45

50 Q 34

51 European Scrutiny Committee, First Report of Session 2005–06, HC 34–i, para 34, DfES (26525) Reform and modernisation of European universities. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmeuleg/34-i/3436.htm>

52 Professor Sir Roderick Floud, President Emeritus London Metropolitan University, Vice-President European University Association. “UK leading Europe: HE challenges in the context of European developments”, Presented at the Guardian HE Summit, February 2007.

53 Ev 111

54 Ev 57

grass-roots [...] Over the past five years, therefore, the Bologna Process has had a decisive impact on almost all aspects of higher education in Europe.”⁵⁵

70. This modernisation process is not, however, intended to create a single, standard European higher education system. As the Chief Executive of the QAA, Mr Williams, told the Committee:

“[...] the one thing it is not creating and was never intended to, except by some enthusiasts, is a European higher education system.”⁵⁶

71. The UK and Ireland are currently the only countries in the EHEA with flexible, autonomous higher education sectors. There is a very different culture across the rest of continental Europe where state-owned higher education systems are closely controlled by government through detailed legislation outlining degree structures, financial arrangements, credit systems, and even curriculum. A key part of the modernisation process will be moving towards a system that allows and encourages more flexibility and autonomy in higher education institutions across the EHEA.

72. The positive response to the Bologna Process across the EHEA suggests that other countries wish to move towards a more flexible and autonomous model of higher education but they still have a long way to go. The Minister told us that:

“[...] as I go round the European Union discussing this with my counterparts (and I do not want to over-state it), there is a degree of strong support for our model.”⁵⁷

73. It is of great credit to the Government that the Bologna framework explicitly recognises and respects institutional autonomy, but the UK still needs to work hard to foster an underlying culture of respect for institutional autonomy across the EHEA.

74. Professor Drummond Bone, UUK, told the Committee that:

“it would be [...] disastrous for the UK if we were not involved in the Bologna Process because I think then we are [...] in a position where we would lose control of what is effectively a modernisation process in Europe. I think there is some evidence that at the moment we are still in control of that process.”⁵⁸

75. The Committee welcomes the progress that has been made in many European Higher Education Area countries to modernise higher education systems in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process. We recognise the importance of promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA and the considerable benefits this will bring to all signatory countries—including the UK. Bologna itself is a reflection of the recognition and priority being given to higher education in Europe and this is an important and positive process for the UK to be involved in.

55 Dr Ruth Keeling, “The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission’s expanding role in higher education discourse”, *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, p 208.

56 Q 76

57 Q 150

58 Q 34

76. We commend the work that the Government and other agencies have been doing to help shape the modernisation process across the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process and support this continuing role in fostering a culture of respect for institutional autonomy and flexibility in higher education. We firmly believe that such modernisation is likely to be more successful and sustainable if it reflects a partnership between government and institutions within the higher education sector which encourages and enhances the innovative and creative capacities of their staff.

Life-long Learning

77. A key action line added after the Prague Ministerial summit in 2001 is the ‘focus on life-long learning.’ This is clearly in line with UK priorities. Continental Europe has quite a poor record in terms of flexible learning. A comparison of data from the EuroStudent survey in 2000, and UK HESA data,⁵⁹ found that:

“[...] our system (UK) is actually more diverse and more open than many of the continental European comparatives.”⁶⁰

78. This action line, as with all of the Bologna Action lines, is not about developing strict legislation across the European Higher Education Area (e.g. for student support arrangements) but about a general recognition of the importance of stimulating and facilitating life-long learning and establishing the conditions that make it possible.

79. The Leitch Report⁶¹ has recently emphasised the importance of a focus on life-long learning and the economic importance of developing such a culture. The action line that calls for a ‘focus on life-long learning’ is a good example of where the Bologna Process is fully consistent with existing priorities in the UK and, through a broad framework of flexible, non-binding agreements, can encourage important progress in this area across the European Higher Education Area.

59 Brian Ramsden, “Euro Student 2000 : some comparisons with the United Kingdom”, in Slowey and Watson (eds.) *Higher Education and the Lifecourse*, Open University Press, 2003

60 Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence taken before the Education and Skills Select Committee on 7 March 2007, HC (2006–07) 285-iv, Q 374

61 HM Treasury, *Prosperity for all in the global economy—world class skills*, Final Report of the Leitch Review of Skills, December 2006.

4 Why join in?

The UK's position in the EHEA

80. It can reasonably be claimed that the UK is in a unique position within the EHEA. The UK has a three-phase degree structure or cycle in place, similar in most respects to that espoused as a standard by the Bologna countries, and a global reputation for high quality HE provision maintained by a well-developed and independent quality assurance system. According to league tables such as those compiled by the Shanghai Jaio Tong University and the Times Higher Education Supplement, the UK has more high ranking universities than any other EHEA country.

81. The UK is the second most popular destination in the world for international students, behind the US. The UK model for institutional funding (both teaching and research funding) and the system for student fees and support stand up well against international comparison⁶²—the latter as a means of raising additional income for higher education and for incorporating a system of deferred fees, a graduate contribution scheme, and student support including grants and bursaries. We are told that the UK has a more diverse and more open higher education system than many of the continental European comparatives.⁶³ Perhaps most important of all, the UK has a higher education sector with significant institutional autonomy. This is recognised as the key to the UK's success. The Minister said that:

“[...] one of the reasons that. [...] we have been very successful in this country [...] compared to others elsewhere in Europe, is because of that respect and concern for autonomy of universities—that they drive their own vision, they are responsible to the market in a real sense.”⁶⁴

82. We recognise that caution must be exercised when making international comparisons. As academic studies demonstrate, there is considerable variety across Bologna member countries. The presence or absence of ‘autonomy’, for example, needs to be assessed in relation to specific areas of decision making, such as finance, estates, curriculum and academic freedom.⁶⁵

83. Nevertheless, the UK's strong position in European higher education raises questions about why it needs to be involved in the Bologna Process, what it has to gain, and why the

62 DfES, *Higher Education Funding—International Comparisons*, 2004. International praise for the UK's research funding method was referred to at HEPI's RAE Conference, June 2006 and both Australia and Hong Kong are setting up new research assessment and funding methods similar to the UK RAE. The UK's formula based, objective, data-driven funding method for universities has been well regarded by countries developing their own systems—including some of the new accession countries. Positive views about the generosity of the UK's system of deferred fees were expressed at the HEPI Seminar “How should Higher Education be Funded”, February 2007.

63 Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence taken before the Education and Skills Select Committee on 7 March 2007, HC (2006–07) 285-iv, Q 374

64 Ev 57

65 Ulrike Felt, *University Autonomy in Europe: Changing paradigms in Higher Education Policy*, Special Case Studies : Decision-Making Structures and Human Resources Management in Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom, University of Vienna. http://eua.uni-graz.at/Ulrike_Felt.pdf

UK should help other countries in the EHEA to modernise if that is going to risk its competitive advantage.

84. As a European leader in higher education, the benefits of engagement in the Bologna Process might not be as immediately obvious for the UK as they are for other signatory countries in the EHEA but this does not mean that there are none.

The minimum case for membership and the threat of complacency

85. The case for UK participation has sometimes been expressed in terms of the counter argument: the UK cannot afford not to be involved. The modernisation of European HE would continue to take place regardless of the involvement of the UK, and could have implications for the recognition of UK courses and competitive position. The DfES identifies the “[...] potential disadvantage, that, as the competitiveness [sic] of the rest of Europe increases [...], UK institutions [...] will find it more difficult to maintain their competitive position in the global HE market.”⁶⁶

86. Better, then, to engage with the Process, in the hope of influencing it. In their evidence, both the Minister and the President of UUK concurred on this point. The Minister told us:

“The problem is that they [mainland Europe] will get on with it, they will continue with this process and, given the competitive pressures that exist, over time for some of our institutions, I think that could hit them competitively in that they have ended up in a situation where a system of comparability and compatibility is developed elsewhere in the broader Europe [and] we are not a part of it [...] that is why I think the process is happening, we need to embrace it and we need to influence it in our national interest.”⁶⁷

87. Clearly, UK institutions and their staffs must avoid any sense of complacency about the Bologna Process. It would be too easy to assume that since many other countries have now adopted the pattern of a three year undergraduate course and other features of the UK system, and since demand from European and overseas students is high, the UK’s position is secure. However, if comparability and compatibility of higher education develops apace across the EHEA without efforts from the UK to keep up, it could result in reduced competitive advantage for the UK. This could be a particular problem if the UK has not taken steps to ensure that its qualifications are recognised within this broader area. This risk is exacerbated by the recent growth of courses across mainland Europe taught in the English Language. As the Minister explained, if UK qualifications are not recognised,

“[...] overseas students coming to institutions in this country [would] say [...] ‘if I get this qualification [...] and I then want to go and work in France, in Germany, in Russia or elsewhere, I am not easily going to be able to do that.’ I think that could hit us.”⁶⁸

66 Ev 30

67 Q 168

68 *Ibid.*

“[...] unless [...] we make clear, if you come here, you have a qualification that is easily translatable and comparable elsewhere within the broader Europe, given the competitive pressures that exist, I think we could begin to lose out.”⁶⁹

“[...] crucially, it will ensure that we maintain a very competitive position which is what we have at the moment, in terms of attracting overseas students.”⁷⁰

88. University College London tells us that while the reputation of UK HE remains high there is little room for complacency:

“[...] international students can now find very high-quality programmes, taught in English, at excellent universities, for little or no fee. It is true that many continental universities are beginning to charge fees, but it will be decades before their fee levels reach ours. If we want to maintain our position in the global market, a much higher level of scholarship provision has to be found.”⁷¹

89. Furthermore, interest in the Bologna Process extends beyond the EHEA. University College London told us that “the impact has been noticed in many parts of the world and is having knock-on effects from America to Asia. The process has much more than purely European significance.”⁷² Australia and China have shown particular interest. Professor Bone, UUK, told the Committee that:

“[...] everybody around the world is very interested in the Bologna Process [...]. We have had enormous interest from China, enormous interest from other Asian countries, from Australia, for the United States, there is terrific interest in what Bologna could do for higher education, and the fact is that we do actually work now in a global context.”⁷³

90. Focusing on the UK’s position as a European leader in higher education can lead to an inaccurate perspective of the UK’s relative position in the European Higher Education Area and its role in the Bologna Process. **Many countries in the European Higher Education Area have a long and proud history of excellence in higher education and many European Universities are considered to be world-class institutions. In those countries in the EHEA where their higher education systems were already admired, the Bologna Process is being used to further improve and modernise higher education.** The Institute of Education highlighted ongoing reforms in the Netherlands:

“It is important to note that even in other European countries with what (to British eyes) seem efficient and high-quality higher education systems—the Netherlands, for example—the Bologna process has been seen as influencing organisational change and encouraging developments in the direction of greater flexibility and openness. It seems to have been the case that education ministries in many countries have used

69 Q 162

70 Q 147

71 Ev 112

72 Ev 111

73 Q 6

Bologna as, in effect, an excuse to drive through what they considered to be overdue changes in university policy and management.”⁷⁴

91. In a rapidly developing global market for HE it would be a mistake to think that the UK is in a sufficiently advantageous position as to be able to stand aside whilst other countries in the European Higher Education Area make progress through the Bologna Process.

The benefits of UK participation in the Bologna Process

92. Beyond the minimum case for membership, there are genuine advantages to be gained for the UK in contributing to the achievement of the Bologna action lines that go beyond merely protecting the UK’s national interests.

93. The Committee has found that government and the organisations representing higher education in the UK are in agreement about the advantages of active involvement in the Bologna process. They are supported by university leaders and academic staff who are involved in implementing the Bologna principles and action lines. Student organisations are also supportive.

Benefits for the UK and for students

Promoting the attractiveness and international reputation of the European Higher Education Area

94. The DfES set out the basis of the Government’s belief in the value of the Bologna Process:

“The Government believes the Bologna Process presents numerous advantages—students will have a wider range of educational programmes to choose from; they will be able to move more freely between European universities; graduates will be able to enter an enlarged labour market; employers will have access to a larger pool of resources; and institutions will compete in a more challenging environment.”⁷⁵

95. A strongly positive stance is also taken by the UK HE Europe Unit, which argues that a modernised European HE system provides opportunities for UK universities:

“[...] the creation of a transparent and accessible European HE Area (EHEA) [...] will make European HE even more attractive in a global market and help higher education institutions (HEIs) compete internationally. Given its dominant position in the context of its European neighbours, this provides an opportunity to strengthen UK HEIs.”

96. It has been put to us that raising the quality and reputation of the European Higher Education Area will increase the competitiveness of European HE in relation to the US, Australia, China, and India. Professor Drummond Bone, UUK, told this Committee that:

74 Ev 59

75 Ev 30

“[...] it will be good for UK higher education in the long-term and it will help us be competitive globally.”⁷⁶

Increasing employability and competitiveness

97. Furthermore, it is widely recognised that mobility of labour and skill, and increasing competitiveness, are related. The Minister told the Committee that Bologna will:

“[...] enable a mobility of labour to take place that has an economic benefit [...].”⁷⁷

“[...] if employers better understand what the different qualifications are across the broader European area, it will give employers a wider pool of recruits to choose from. There is a lot of economic evidence that with mobility of labour, with migration, you actually add economically to your GDP.”⁷⁸

98. The Institute of Physics underlined the importance of engaging with the Bologna Process for the benefit of UK graduates. It said that not to do so was:

“[...] a risky strategy as it would invite isolation and could seriously disadvantage the employment opportunities of our graduates. Europe is important for our graduates for several reasons not least because they have the right to live and work in any EU country and they will be in competition for employment with graduates from elsewhere in Europe.”⁷⁹

Benefits for UK higher education institutions

Research collaboration opportunities and the development of the European Research Area

99. In February 2007⁸⁰ Professor Sir Roderick Floud argued that in order to be in the running for major research programmes and compete in “big science” the UK needs to cooperate and collaborate with other major players in the EHEA.

100. There are further advantages to be gained through the mobility of staff and academic expertise between signatory countries. The European Community’s exchange programmes pre-date the Bologna Process and have been facilitating the mobility of staff from the participating countries since 1987.⁸¹ Enabling a greater spread of best-practice in all areas

76 Q 4

77 Q 147

78 Q 132

79 Ev 99

80 Professor Sir Roderick Floud, President Emeritus London Metropolitan University, Vice-President European University Association. “UK leading Europe: HE challenges in the context of European developments”, Presented at the Guardian HE Summit, February 2007.

81 “Erasmus (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) is the EC’s educational programme for Higher Education students, teachers and institutions. It was introduced in 1987 with the aim of increasing student mobility within the European Community, subsequently the European Economic Area countries, and now also the Candidate Countries [...]. In 1995 Erasmus became incorporated into the Socrates programme which covers education from school to university to lifelong learning. In 2007 the new Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013 replaced the existing Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, and e-Learning programmes which expired at the end

of higher education—from pedagogy to research methodology to leadership, management, and governance—can only further improve higher education in the UK as universities learn from best practice across the EHEA.

Access to a larger market for EU and international students

101. Another major advantage of being more closely linked with other countries in the EHEA through the Bologna Process is increased access to the market for both European and international students within the EHEA.⁸² Students from countries outside the EU but within the EHEA make significant contributions through international student fees. At the Guardian HE Summit in February 2007, Europe was described as the UK's home market for higher education.⁸³ EU students do not pay international fees because they have equal access to UK HE places on a like for like basis with UK home applicants.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, calculations show that, in financial terms alone, EU students are of considerable net benefit to the UK.⁸⁵

102. According to a study by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), the UK is already the most popular country for study amongst EU students making it the largest net importer of students within the EU.⁸⁶ Students coming from other EU countries make up approximately five per cent of students in UK HEIs. Fully engaging in the Bologna Process should enable the UK to maintain this position and gain full advantage of the market for students in the European Higher Education Area.

103. The Bologna Process is a major development in the international market for higher education and is attracting significant international interest as a result. The government should be doing everything possible to articulate and promote the genuine advantages to the UK of being involved in the Bologna Process.

104. There are economic advantages to be gained for the UK through engagement in the Bologna Process: increasing employment and productivity; and increasing the competitiveness of the UK higher education sector through promoting the attractiveness and international reputation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). There are advantages for UK students in terms of increased mobility and employment opportunities. Finally there are advantages to UK universities through the increased market for both EU and international students within the EHEA, increased

of 2006. Erasmus is one of the four sectoral programmes supported under the Lifelong Learning Programme.”
<http://www.erasmus.ac.uk/whatis.html>

82 Of the 45 signatory countries in the Bologna Process, twenty-five (including the UK) are EU countries and students from these countries enter as European students on a like for like basis with UK students. Students from the other twenty Bologna signatory countries in the European Higher Education Area enter the UK as international fee-paying students.

83 Professor Sir Roderick Floud, “UK leading Europe: HE challenges in the context of European developments”, Presented at the Guardian HE Summit, February 2007.

84 EU students are eligible to the same fee conditions as UK students—they pay the same variable undergraduate fees and have access to the same system of deferred payment through income-contingent contributions as UK students. The one difference is that EU students do not, at present, have access to student financial support that is available to home students (grants, bursaries and loans).

85 Libby Aston, *Projecting Demand for UK HE from the Accession Countries*, Higher Education Policy Institute, 2004

86 *Ibid.*

mobility of staff, sharing of best practice and expertise in a broad range of areas, and increased opportunities for research collaboration across the European Research Area.

105. Thus there are significant advantages for the UK in achieving the action lines stated in the Bologna Process, which increasingly reflect the policy priorities in the UK. Furthermore, there are aspects of HE provision in other participating countries that the UK could learn from to improve its own structures and practices.

5 Role of the European Commission

The European Community's powers in education

106. It is important at this stage to outline the formal powers of the European Community in the field of Education. These are set out in Articles 149 (1), (2), of the EC Treaty, and are summarised in a European Scrutiny Committee Report from November 2004.⁸⁷

“4.3 Article 149(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community (the EC Treaty) provides for the Community to:

- contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of the education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Article 149(2) provides that Community action is to be aimed at, among other things, encouraging the mobility of students and teachers by, for example, encouraging academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study; promoting cooperation between educational establishments; and developing exchanges of information and experience.
- Article 149(4) provides that the Council may adopt incentive measures or recommendations in order to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Article.
- Article 150(4) of the EC Treaty authorises the Council to adopt measures to contribute to the achievement of the Community's objectives for vocational training”.

107. While the EC's formal competence in respect of educational matters is limited, not least because Council Recommendations do not bind Member States, the relevant articles of the Treaty are capable of being interpreted in ways that give scope for a wide range of educational activity.

108. Furthermore the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) means that initiatives can be undertaken, on a voluntary basis, that are outside the scope of Articles 149 and 150 (if the European Commission believes they would help achieve the goals of the Lisbon Agenda for economic growth and increased employment for example).⁸⁸ The OMC was introduced by the Lisbon European Council in March 2000.⁸⁹ The European Council described it as a process “designed to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies through agreeing European guidelines [...] and goals [...]”. The OMC is not underpinned by EC legislation; it is a voluntary process for sharing information and good practice,

87 Thirty-sixth Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2003–04, HC 42–xxxvi, paragraph 4, 10 November 2004.

88 See paragraphs 60 to 65 for more information about the Lisbon Agenda.

89 Lisbon European Council, 23–24 March 2000, Presidency Conclusions, para 37.

recognising that Member States have the primary responsibilities for education.⁹⁰ Member States can come together in the Council of Ministers to agree “soft law”⁹¹ in the form of agreed objectives and targets and to monitor performance.⁹²

109. We are concerned that use of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) means that the absence of a Treaty base poses little constraint on what the European Commission and Member States may do voluntarily in the area of education, and more specifically higher education. We ask the DfES to give their view on whether the European Commission are using the OMC to expand their involvement in higher education and whether this is a cause for concern.

Causes for concern

110. In the course of our inquiry we have been made aware of disquiet about how the future development of the Bologna Process might impact upon the autonomy of UK universities. In particular, worries have been expressed in written and oral evidence that the role played by the European Commission might be contrary to the principles that inspire Bologna in that it may increase bureaucracy, centralise control and encourage conformity, whilst diminishing flexibility, responsiveness and creativity. We do not wish to exaggerate the importance of these anxieties. Neither can they be ignored.

111. It appears to be widely agreed that the aspiration behind Bologna is, as Lord May described, “absolutely admirable.”⁹³ The concern is, however, that if the European Commission becomes dominant, what is currently a bottom-up process might become increasingly subject to detailed, legislative rules rather being left to operate within broad, flexible frameworks agreed and developed by the higher education sectors. Professor Drummond Bone, UUK, told the Committee that, in his view:

“[...] one of the great successes of the Bologna Process so far is that, by and large, it has been said to have been sector-led and, although there has been [...] legislation in a number of countries, it is consequent on decisions actually taken by the sector, but there is a continual danger, as it were, that the bureaucratisation [...] does actually take over.”⁹⁴

112. The current approach of the European Commission is by and large consistent with how higher education policy is determined across most of mainland Europe, described in evidence to us from the Chief Executive of the QAA as characterised by codification, legislation and state ownership. But there are indications that other European countries are

90 European Scrutiny Committee, 18th Report, Session 2005–06, chapter 18 “Streamlining the open method of coordination for social protection policies.”

91 Elsa Hackl, *Towards a European Area of Higher Education: Change and convergence in European Higher Education*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, 2001. (page 28 et seq) http://cadmus.iue.it/dspace/bitstream/1814/1718/1/01_09.pdf

92 For more information, see Amélia Veiga and Alberto Amaral, “The open method of coordination and the implementation of the Bologna process” *Tertiary Education and Management* 12:4, December 2006 <http://www.springerlink.com/content/62v2500323547212/>

93 Q 3

94 Q 4

wishing to move away from their centralised systems towards a more autonomous higher education sector.⁹⁵ This will require significant changes to be effected in some countries.

113. As Professor Drummond Bone pointed out, there is also the danger that EHEA countries might try to grant universities greater autonomy by methods which in practice result in increased bureaucracy:

“[...] one of the ironies is that Europe, I think, is learning that the UK system of autonomous universities, which are very flexible, is actually the way to go and the danger is that they will try and get there through a bureaucratic system, which is exactly the opposite of what they should in fact be doing.”⁹⁶

114. This danger has been particularly marked in the area of quality assurance. In her critical study of the development of the EC’s research policy and its relation to the Bologna Process, Dr Keeling argues that:

“[...] at the institutional level, the Commission’s proclamation of increasing ‘autonomy’ for universities disguises how tightly they are increasingly bound into quality assurance regimes, performance-based funding, and complex inter-institutional cooperation agreements.”⁹⁷

115. From his experience of working to improve quality assurance systems across the EHEA the Chief Executive of the QAA told this Committee that “the [European] Commission is using the Bologna Process for its own purposes.”⁹⁸ He gave us an example of proposals that had been made by the Commission for the establishment of a European register for all quality assurance agencies in Europe and told us that:

“[...]in its original recommendation form, it [the European Commission] was proposing that any university in Europe should be able to go to any quality assurance agency in Europe that had been approved on this register—we do not know who by—and that the decision of that agency would be binding. In effect, if that had gone through in its original form, control over higher education would have moved away from the national scene to a European scene [...].⁹⁹ That was diluted because none of the countries wanted that, but it is an indication of the way in which using Bologna tools, like standards and guidelines or the potential register, the Commission wanted to pursue its own policy objectives.”^{100 101}

95 Q 150

96 Q 4

97 Dr Ruth Keeling “The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission’s expanding role in higher education discourse”, *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2006, p.208.

98 Q 115

99 For details of the proposals access: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmeuleg/42-xxxvii/4206.htm>; <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmeuleg/34-viii/3413.htm>; and http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_064/l_06420060304en00600062.pdf

100 Q 115

101 UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006, has this to say about these issues: “The European Standards and Guidelines are, on the whole, compatible with UK quality assurance arrangements and have the potential to support the development of a quality culture and mutual trust in European HE. The QAA is working to incorporate them into the UK’s existing institutional review processes. The Standards and Guidelines will not create an additional layer of evaluation or bureaucratic burden for UK HEIs.

116. Another example was given by the UK HE Europe Unit who told the Committee about what it saw as the Commission's attempts to expand the qualification framework to cover all further and higher education, which it would prescribe and control:

“[...] the recent proposal from the Commission on the European Qualifications framework for Life-long Learning is a qualifications framework which would encompass all education in Europe from the cradle to the grave. It is described as being voluntary. The UK sector has got grave concerns about this proposal mainly because of the choice of the treaty article that the European Commission is basing the proposal on, which is that for vocational education which gives the Commission considerable powers to legislate.”¹⁰²

117. Academics at the Institute of Education are amongst those who have expressed “[...] concern about the political and (particularly) the bureaucratic momentum behind Bologna”¹⁰³ which in their view seems to be snowballing out of control with a very top-heavy structure of boards and committees.

118. The Committee is encouraged by references to increasing recognition across the European Higher Education Area, and within the decision making structures of the European Community, of the importance of each country having an autonomous and flexible higher education system. It is concerned, however, to hear reports about the bureaucratic momentum behind Bologna and of the dangers of trying to achieve progress towards greater institutional autonomy by central direction.

119. The Government should continue to encourage increased autonomy in higher education across the European Higher Education Area but must guard against growing bureaucratisation. The Government must seek to uphold that the autonomy and flexibility of institutions by ensuring the Process only pursues its objectives within broad, non-compulsory frameworks.

Relations with the EC and the Commission

120. As was made clear in section 2 of this report, the formal position is that the Bologna Process is not a function of the European Community or directed by the European Commission. Within the EC, the provision of education is the responsibility of member states. The European Commission's formal competency in education is limited.

121. Thus the legal and constitutional bases of the European Community and the Bologna process are very different. The Bologna Process has no formal powers. It has no dedicated resources apart from those which member countries may make available. The Process is 'owned' by signatories to the Bologna Declaration. As we have seen, its success depends upon the willing involvement of a large number of institutions and organisations.

“If the European Register for quality assurance agencies is implemented it will be vital that it does not become a regulatory tool or ranking instrument. There is also a need for the legal, ownership and regulatory issues linked to the development of a Register to be fully addressed.” (p.21)

102 Q 33

103 Ev 58

122. As in so many areas of government and administration, formal distinctions do not tell the whole story. Twenty seven of the 45 Bologna countries are also members of the EC. The EC plays a significant role in supporting activities within the EHEA in pursuit of Bologna 'Action lines'. The participation of EC representatives in the work of Bologna Board and Follow-up Group, and affinities between many aspects of the EC's own programmes and Bologna priorities (e.g., student mobility and quality assurance), generate many contacts between individuals and organisations concerned with carrying forward the Bologna programme and the staff of the European Commission. Many academics and some public servants in EC countries are engaged in activities which require regular interactions with both Bologna and European Commission initiatives.

123. Without financial support from the EC some aspects of the Bologna process (e.g., ENQA) would be less effective. The principal student and staff mobility programmes are EC funded. For policy makers and national bodies, however, such as those from whose evidence we have quoted, the nature and direction of the Commission's involvement raise problems which in due course could affect everyone. Hence the emphasis that our witnesses have placed on scrutiny and close monitoring of any development which seems likely to change the voluntary, bottom up basis on which the Bologna Process rests or fails to recognise the autonomy of UK universities.

Influence and constraint: the UK Government's position

124. In her critical appraisal of the EC and Bologna, Dr Keeling concludes that the European Commission:

"[...] has clearly managed to set the agenda both for the Bologna Process and European research policy, playing a central role in maintaining the momentum of current political debate in these areas, and steering their convergence in ways which have affirmed its own centrality. By drawing together these multiple policy strands, the Commission has confirmed higher education as key sphere of operation for the EU."¹⁰⁴

125. In these circumstances it is unsurprising that the UK HE Europe Unit describes the European Commission as having "considerable influence" over the Bologna Process:

"Bologna signatory countries have granted the European Commission status as a full member of the Bologna Follow Up Group and the Bologna Board. This status and the European Commission's role as a source of funding for Bologna projects give it considerable influence in the Bologna Process."¹⁰⁵

126. The growing involvement of the Commission is not just something that might be a problem in the future. As Dr Keeling has shown, it is a present reality.¹⁰⁶ But for that reason it may be less worrying than would otherwise be the case. The active participation of UK representatives in both Bologna and EC affairs provides opportunities to keep a close eye on initiatives from the Commission, and to ensure that the formal position of

¹⁰⁴ Keeling op cit. p. 215.

¹⁰⁵ UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Keeling op cit.

universities vis-à-vis the state in the UK (which is rather different from that in most other countries of the EHEA) is understood and taken fully into account.

127. This approach by the Government (described by the Minister as one of having “pushed back strongly”)¹⁰⁷ has had some success to date. Following consultations within the UK on the Commission’s 2004 proposals for the establishment of a EC-wide Quality Assurance Registry, the then Minister of State (Kim Howells) made clear that the UK had:

“[...] substantial reservations [...] and we expect to seek significant changes to the text.”¹⁰⁸

128. These views were widely shared and the proposals significantly modified. The Commission has also agreed to a review of the controversial European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS). But it is by no means certain that such moves will curtail the Commission’s growing influence. The Minister said that he had ‘hope’¹⁰⁹ for the right outcomes from the ECTS review and the President of UUK said that he had “hope” that the UK would “win the battle on quality assurance.”¹¹⁰

129. To the credit of the Government and others, the opportunity has been taken to strengthen the formal position of the signatory countries regarding institutional autonomy through seeking specific agreements in the additional Communiqués. The Communiqué following the Berlin Ministerial meeting in 2003 included a statement “[...] that institutions need to be empowered to take decisions on their internal organisation and administration.” But even when universities are legally autonomous, external regulation and supervision (to ensure their freedoms are exercised responsibly and in the public interest) can generate levels of internal bureaucracy and managerialism antipathetic to the creativity and innovation that enable research and teaching to prosper.¹¹¹

130. The Minister for Higher Education also voiced worries about the expanding role of the European Commission. He told us that:

“I do recognise what you say when you talk about the danger of mission creep. I think the Commission has a role within [the Bologna] process. It is not a leading or a guiding role and [...] we do need to monitor that role. For example, when you look at the European Qualifications Framework [...] the Commission may be attempting to overstep its competence in that area. We have pushed back strongly on that issue. Also the European Credit Transfer System [...]. I think in a number of areas [it] has

107 Q 139

108 Thirty-sixth Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2003–04, HC 42–xxxvi, paragraph 4, 10 November 2004. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmeuleg/42-xxxvi/4206.htm>

109 Q 182

110 Q 64

111 Philip G. Altbach, “Academic freedom: International realities and challenges”, *Higher Education, Volume 41*, Numbers 1–2, 2001. Altbach underlines “the notable increase in the power of administrators and other officials as distinct from the authority of professorial staff in the governance and management of academic institutions” and reaches the conclusion that this will “dramatically affect the traditional role of the academic profession—with repercussions on University Autonomy in Europe [...]”.

actually gone too far, and we have pushed back very strongly on that and we are getting a review.”¹¹²

131. The Minister summarised his position as follows:

“I think there is a legitimate role for the European Commission, but it has to be constrained and it has to be circumscribed.”¹¹³

132. In the light of all this we are sympathetic to the view expressed on behalf of the UK HE Europe Unit that:

“[...] we want the two processes [i.e. Bologna and the initiatives of the European Commission] to remain very separate, not least because the bottom-up decision-making process within Bologna has actually been very successful when you compare it with the European Commission’s top-down approach to reforming higher education.”¹¹⁴

133. The European Commission, and the European Community more broadly, play an important formal role in the Bologna Process that is welcome. The expanding role of the European Community in the field of education, however, and the belief that it is seeking to expand its role through the mechanisms of the Bologna Process, is a common cause of concern to UK organisations and institutions. It is also this Committee’s greatest concern regarding the future of the Bologna Process.

134. We recommend that the Government seeks clarification of the exact role of the Commission in the Bologna Process. Whilst the involvement of the Commission, including financial assistance, is of considerable importance for the success of the Bologna Process, a way must be found to ensure its involvement does not undermine the essentially voluntary and ‘bottom up’ approaches characteristic of its development to date.

135. It remains crucial to the success of the Bologna Process that it remains outside the framework of the EC. We agree with the Minister that the role of the European Commission must be appropriately circumscribed. This must be a priority issue for the government at the London Summit in May.

112 Q 139

113 Q 143

114 Q 33

6 Issues in need of resolution: opportunity for progress

136. Organisations and individuals submitting evidence to the Committee were overwhelmingly supportive of the Bologna Process. They did, however, identify areas or aspects of concern.¹¹⁵

Quality Assurance

137. Quality assurance (QA) is arguable the key issue for Bologna and progress in this area will largely determine the success or otherwise of the Bologna Process. The aim of putting in place a broad framework of comparable higher education qualifications in order to achieve increased mobility, employability, and competitiveness across the EHEA can only take place if it is underpinned by robust and reliable QA systems in each country.

138. As the UK HE Europe Unit explains, “the Bologna Process has worked to develop a common understanding of quality assurance to stimulate quality HE provision in Europe and to develop a culture of mutual trust across the EHEA (European Higher Education Area).” There are two key points made here: one is about the importance of trust in achieving the aims of the Bologna Process—this will be discussed further in the section on credit—and the other is to note that what is being pursued is a common understanding of QA, not a common QA framework or system across the EHEA.

Within-country systems of QA

139. The Institute of Education outlined the major issue for the UK in terms of QA which is that:

“UK higher education.. [has] quality assurance systems within institutions, allied with external inspection of these systems—as distinct from the accreditation model involving detailed state control of university curricula, student admissions finance, staffing and other matters [...] which is to be found in many other Bologna member states. The UK’s arm’s-length model of state control (often referred to in the literature as ‘state steering’) is often held to be an important contributor to the relative effectiveness and efficiency of its universities [...].”¹¹⁶

140. **The UK operates a fundamentally different approach to quality assurance to the rest of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and this external “arm’s length” approach is a major contributing factor to the success of the UK HE sector. The government and the Europe Unit, through the Quality Assurance Agency’s involvement, are working to ensure that the UK keeps control of its own Quality Assurance (QA) arrangements whilst in parallel also working to shape and influence**

¹¹⁵ Ev 50, Ev 53, Ev 57, Ev 74 and many others.

¹¹⁶ Ev 58

the development of QA systems across the EHEA. The Committee gives its full support to this approach.

141. As we mentioned above,¹¹⁷ there was a potential threat posed to the UK's capacity to keep control of its own QA system in 2004 when the European Commission published a Recommendation on further co-operation on quality assurance in HE. The European Commission proposed a European QA register that would have effectively meant that "control of HE would have moved away from the national scene to the European scene."¹¹⁸

142. There was no appetite for the European Commission's proposals amongst member states and the proposals have been diluted. In October 2004 the Commission's proposals were critically examined by the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee and on first examination were 'Not cleared', and further information called for.¹¹⁹ In March 2006 the European Parliament agreed an amended proposal which is now seen by the DfES as the basis for "a useful information tool to help identify credible quality assurance agencies."¹²⁰ The issue was successfully resolved on this occasion but it has not necessarily reduced the interest of the European Commission in centralising QA arrangements in Europe.

143. The Government and others have a continuing role in persuading the rest of the European Higher Education Area to share its position: that each country must maintain control of its own independent system of quality assurance.

144. We believe that the Quality Assurance Agency were right to resist the original plan for a European Register for Quality Assurance. If a Register is to be implemented, however, we concur with the UK HE Europe Unit that "it will be vital that it does not become a regulatory tool or ranking instrument. There is also a need for the legal, ownership and regulatory issues linked to the development of a Register to be fully addressed."

Improving QA systems across the European Higher Education Area

145. The second part of the UK's approach to QA issues in the Bologna Process outlined by the UK HE Europe Unit is to contribute to improving QA systems across the European Higher Education Area. The Bergen Ministerial meeting in 2005 formally adopted a statement of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) which the QAA tell us has become "the principal instrument for the creation of a 'European dimension' to quality assurance."¹²¹

146. The UK played a major role in developing the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for QA as part of the Bologna Process which were co-authored by the chief executive of the QAA.

117 Paragraph 115.

118 Q 115

119 See European Scrutiny Committee (26046) 13495/04: HC42-xxxvi (2003–04), paragraph 4 (10.11.2004), and HC 34-viii (2005–06), paragraph 11 (2 November 2005).

120 Ev 34

121 Ev 17

147. The ESG sets out frameworks for institutions' internal QA procedures, for external quality assurance within each country, and for external assurance of the work of the national agencies themselves. A number of countries have asked that such peer reviews be carried out, and these have been co-ordinated by ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.¹²² Established in March 2000 as a means of promoting the co-ordination called for in the Bologna Declaration and now with 46 national agencies and higher education organisations in membership,¹²³ ENQA is currently based in Helsinki, but likely in the near future to move to Brussels.¹²⁴

148. The establishment of ENQA and then the ESG, and the development under the auspices of ENQA of a register of national quality assurance agencies and scheme for peer review of their work, had sparked anxieties in the UK. As the University of Southampton said, there were fears that the "European Standards & Guidelines" might become "prescriptive standards and a compliance list to be checked."¹²⁵ As discussed in the previous section, this fear has now diminished slightly, and it appears to have been accepted across the European Higher Education Area that diversity in national arrangements is here to stay.¹²⁶

149. From its programme of work, it is clear that ENQA is providing valuable services to countries that have only lately begun to introduce quality assurance systems, but in this as in other aspects of European co-operation, it will be important to ensure that the variety of needs among the participating countries continues to be recognised and their national autonomy respected.

150. We commend the work of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in playing an active and influential role in developing the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (a broad framework for within-country Quality Assurance arrangements), and in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) where the QAA's Chief Executive is currently President, and would wish to see such active involvement continue into the future.

122 ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education: www.enqa.eu/

123 Membership of the Network is open to quality assurance agencies, public authorities responsible for quality assurance in higher education and associations of higher education institutions in the European Union. The role of ENQA is to disseminate information, experience, good practice and highlight new developments. ENQA publishes selected reports online (e.g. 'Benchmarking in Higher Education' and 'Transnational European Evaluation Project'). The list of ENQA members is a good introduction to a wide range of European quality assurance bodies. INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) is a similar body, but with global membership. <http://www.obhe.ac.uk/cgi-bin/keyresource.pl?resid=23>

124 News from the Board, ENQA, 12 December 2006: <http://www.enqa.eu/newsitem.lasso?id=116>

125 Ev 81

126 "The promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance (5) was originally identified as a potential risk, with concern that we might in due course be presented with a European QA system that was excessively bureaucratic and unsuited to British HE. Subsequent discussions, helpfully facilitated by ENQA, suggest that this is a remote possibility." Ev 96, University of Bristol. See also written submission from the Quality Assurance Agency, Ev 17

Credit and ECTS

Purpose and definition of credit

151. In pursuit of the ambition for greater mobility of students in Europe,¹²⁷ the Bologna process includes a key action line to establish a system of credits across the European Higher Education Area.

152. The recent Report by the UK's Burgess Steering Group¹²⁸ described credit as being primarily about assessing the equivalence of learning:

“[...] credit can serve a number of purposes but is fundamentally a tool for assessing the equivalence of learning and achieved by an individual. Credit points and level or qualification descriptors are often part of, or linked to, local, regional or national frameworks. A credit framework is a means of setting down the recommended overall credit requirements for specific qualifications. Framework or level descriptors outline the general outcomes of learning expected at a given level.”

153. This description of a credit framework from the Burgess Report neatly encapsulates what a report from the Higher Education Policy Institute on credit accumulation and transfer found to be the three essential elements of a credible system of credit: input (time spent); level of study; and outcome or standard achieved. The report found that “simply accounting for the time spent completing a module does not provide sufficient information to enable a student to be accepted onto another course in that, let alone another, university, and therefore [...] information is required about the levels at which the work was done and the standards achieved.”¹²⁹

154. The same HEPI report clarified the different types of credit arrangements and made clear that credit transfer is a step beyond credit accumulation and requires a level of trust and bi-lateral agreements between institutions. The report dispels the myth that credit transfer happens universally across North American Institutions—in fact it only happens where agreements are in place—“it is clear that the transfer system is not general and widely used but intensive, specific, and negotiated bi-laterally.”¹³⁰ The report found that credit frameworks need to be in place where there is a lack of trust or established agreement between institutions but that these frameworks can become very complex when taken beyond a local or regional level. The HEPI report, therefore, concluded that the first

127 The UK HE Europe Unit have explained that “the Bologna Process sees credit as a tool for removing obstacles to academic mobility.” Taken from UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

128 In response to long standing concerns about the effects of variety of practice, in 2004 Universities UK set up a “Measuring and Recording Student Progress Scoping Group” (Chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, Vice-Chancellor of Leicester University). The Burgess Group issued a final report in December 2006.

129 Bahram Bekhradnia, *Credit accumulation and transfer and the Bologna Process: an overview*, Higher Education Policy Institute, October 2004.

130 *Ibid.*

lesson to be learnt from their review of credit was that “we should be modest in our aspirations.”¹³¹

ECTS

155. The reason why it is important to establish the definition and purpose of different approaches to credit is because the Berlin summit of 2003 called for the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to be used as an academic transfer and accumulation system across the EHEA.

156. It was the European Commission that first introduced ECTS within its Erasmus programme. The Commission controls the system because it is responsible for awarding an ‘ECTS label’ to higher education institutions that are judged to be using the system correctly. ECTS is used widely across the EHEA.

157. The ECTS is “entirely input focussed at present.. and is a measure of time spent studying.”¹³² Recognition in the UK that any credible system of credit needs to be based on input, level of study, and outcomes achieved, explains why the use of ECTS across the European Higher Education Area, as supported by the Bologna Process, is of concern to the UK.

158. In its written submission to the Committee the University of Bristol has told us about some of the weaknesses of ECTS:

“We have considered the possibility of adopting the ECTS system to improve the ‘translatability’ of our qualifications, but concluded that the system was excessively crude, both in terms of its definition of ‘credits’ and in its failure to distinguish between levels of credit, in comparison to our existing credit framework [...]. As the translation at taught postgraduate level is even more inexact, we are not attempting to link ECTS with our own credits for these programmes.”¹³³

159. The Government has told us it is aware “of a number of concerns amongst stakeholders in the UK about some element of ECTS.”¹³⁴

160. The DfES points out in its memorandum that “under Bologna there is no requirement for ECTS to be the basis of any national credit system, but there is an expectation that national systems can be readily mapped onto ECTS.”¹³⁵ The fact that ECTS is non-compulsory is less re-assuring when one considers how widely it is used across the EHEA, that it is officially supported by the Bologna Process, and that it is in the Minister’s words, “the only show in town.”

161. This Committee supports the important work to develop a broad and flexible credit framework across the European Higher Education Area with the aim of both

131 *Ibid.*

132 Bahram Bekhradnia, *Credit accumulation and transfer and the Bologna Process: an overview*, Higher Education Policy Institute, October 2004.

133 Ev 96

134 Ev 34

135 Ev 34

increasing mobility and opening up a more flexible and accessible higher education system to a wider range of people. We concur with the Burgess Report that credit is a tool for assessing the equivalence of learning and achieved by an individual and, as such, requires framework or level descriptors that outline the general outcomes of learning expected at a given level. Consequently we conclude that the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS), based solely on input or 'hours studied', is not fit for purpose.

162. Whilst we recognise that the Bologna Process makes no requirement for the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to be the basis of any national credit system it does, however, carry an expectation that national systems can be readily mapped onto ECTS, and the Berlin summit of 2003 specifically called for ECTS to be used as an academic transfer and accumulation system across the EHEA. This concerns us and we urge the Government to address the problems that this may cause at the London Ministerial meeting.

The UK position on credit

163. The use of Credit Transfer and Accumulation Schemes in UK universities is of long standing (although different schemes exist in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Not all universities use them and arguably progress towards improving credit transfer and accumulation systems has been far too slow in the UK. Among those that do operate a credit system a variety of arrangements exist.¹³⁶ Over the years there have been many calls for standardisation of credit, notably in the Dearing Report on Higher Education in 1997.

164. The Steering Group on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement chaired by Professor Burgess published its final report in December 2006. The key features of the proposals were that the system of credit it suggested was outcome-focused, relatively modest in its ambition to set up a credit framework rather than a detailed credit transfer system, and was a voluntary process that respected the autonomy of institutions and their right to control their own academic standards.

165. Burgess recommended a credit system based on outcomes rather than hours studied. This model is well suited to current and emerging UK practice but, as discussed, does not easily map onto the European system of credit transfer. The Russell Group rightly pointed out that:

“[...] following upon the Burgess Reports, ECTS is unlikely to become the standard system in the UK. The credit system recommended for the UK has many benefits within the UK but does not easily articulate with ECTS because of different expectations of how student load/contact hours should translate into credit.”¹³⁷

166. Given the weakness of ECTS, it is not surprising that Burgess did not map his proposals to the scheme. Peter Williams, Chief Executive of QAA, described the ECTS as

¹³⁶ The Quality Assurance Agency, in conjunction with Universities UK and Guild HE (formerly SCOP) published a brief guide to such schemes entitled “Academic credit in Higher Education in England” Cheltenham: QAA.

¹³⁷ Ev 47

an “odd scheme” and told us why he thought the UK was right not to be moving towards the ECTS model:

“I am not sure that the relationship between credit and Europe is the most important bit of the [Burgess] credit proposals. I think it is about using credit in the UK which is more important [...] I do not think we are proposing introducing an English credit system for the benefit specifically and primarily of the ECTS. The ECTS is a rather odd scheme which is why we are hopeful that the review that takes place is fairly fundamental.”¹³⁸

167. The Burgess Report set out a model that was voluntary¹³⁹ and recommended a “permissive credit framework, one which is respectful of institutional autonomy and integrated with the existing Framework for Higher Education Qualifications’ (FHEQ).”¹⁴⁰ The Report said that “institution’s decision-making processes regarding academic standards and quality should and will remain properly and entirely the responsibility of each autonomous institution. The application of any national guidelines on credit will remain a matter for individual institutions to decide upon at their discretion.”

168. We commend the work of the Burgess Group and recommend that the UK HE Europe Unit, in partnership with the sector, work to develop proposals for an alternative to the ECTS—a broad and flexible framework for credit that takes account of input, level of study, and outcome, along the lines of Burgess’s recommendations for the UK, keeping in mind the three key principles that any framework should be as simple as possible, should be outcome-focussed, and should be on a voluntary basis in order to respect an institution’s right to control its own academic standards.

Making progress on credit and the qualification framework

Progress towards an outcome-focus

169. The UK is still calling for use of credit in the European Higher Education Area to take account of the outcomes of periods of study and not simply workload or ‘hours studied’. There had been some progress towards changing attitudes across the EHEA to adopt a more outcome-based focus. The Bergen ministerial meeting in 2005 adopted a report on the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area with an emphasis on learning outcomes, for example. We were told by the UK HE Europe Unit that:

138 Q 123

139 Universities UK, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England: final report of the Burgess Group*, London, 2006. The Burgess Report “set out a programme that would lead to English institutions voluntarily credit-rating their provision by 2009/10 and thereafter starting to include the credit value in a published description of each of the programmes they offer.” Universities UK, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England: final report of the Burgess Group*, London, 2006.

140 The FHEQ, issued by QAA in 2001 classifies the higher education qualifications awarded by universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as—Certificate, Intermediate, Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels. Further details can be accessed at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp>

“We now have a qualifications framework that has been adopted within the Bologna Process that is [...] very much focused on learning outcomes, and so we have made progress in that sense...”¹⁴¹

“[...] there was a consensus among all the ministers, among the stakeholders involved in the process.. across the 45 participating countries. They all reached a consensus on a qualifications framework based on this learning outcomes approach, so there is a deep consensus on that framework.”¹⁴²

170. There is “still a long way to go”,¹⁴³ however, because as University College London put it:

“[...] although many European countries have endorsed the importance of Learning Outcomes with enthusiasm, in practice it is often workload that is the stumbling block to recognition.”¹⁴⁴

171. The Committee agrees with the Royal Academy of Engineering that the Government should “press for the adoption of learning outcomes alone as the ultimate long-term basis for European HE Qualifications Framework.”

172. As the HEPI report on credit¹⁴⁵ made clear, the successful introduction of credit systems and the adoption of the qualification framework will depend on issues of trust and confidence and these take time to build. The Bologna Process action lines are aiming for a credit system to be in place by 2010 but the Chief Executive of the QAA has advised us that it will take much longer—around fifteen to twenty years:

“I have great hopes for the over-arching qualifications framework once it gets going. With all these things, they are very much in their infancy. The idea of 2010 is, to my mind, nonsense. This is going to take 15 to 20 years to get even an understanding of the concept and the words.”¹⁴⁶

Review of the European Credit Transfer System

173. With regard to ECTS more specifically, the European Commission have said that they will review credit transfer systems across Europe in 2007. The DfES told us that concerns amongst stakeholders in the UK about the ECTS “have been communicated to the European Commission” and that “the Commission has responded by agreeing to look again at ECTS generally and involve the Member States in the process. This review is expected to start in the first half of 2007.”¹⁴⁷ The Commission will undertake a consultation

141 Q 9

142 Q 10

143 Q 15

144 Ev 111

145 Bahram Bekhradnia, *Credit accumulation and transfer and the Bologna Process:: an overview*, Higher Education Policy Institute, October 2004.

146 Q 84

147 Ev 34

on a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning that will include proposals for an integrated credit transfer and accumulation system for lifelong learning.

174. The UK HE Europe Unit has told us that:

“[...] the UK HE sector believes that use of credit in the EHEA should be based on the learning outcomes of periods of study alongside notional workload [...]. The UK HE sector looks forward to this review and urges the European Commission to involve the widest possible range of stakeholders in the process”¹⁴⁸

175. The hope is that this review will lead to an approach based on outcome levels rather than input measure—and therefore bring ECTS closer to UK thinking on academic credit.

176. **The fact that the UK does not yet have a national credit framework in place is, arguably, not helping the case for moving towards this type of outcome-based credit framework across the EHEA.** The Minister told us that ECTS has been used by those involved in the Bologna Process because it is “the only show in town.”¹⁴⁹ He said that “arguably, as part of this process, we should develop one.” Burgess intends that credit arrangements for HE in England will be in place by 2008–09 but this may not be soon enough to give UK proposals sufficient credibility during the imminent review of ECTS.

177. **We are encouraged that the European Commission has agreed to review the ECTS but remain concerned that the outcomes of such a review are by no means certain. We ask that the Government and the UK HE Europe Unit continue to lobby for the ECTS system to be reformed and, more broadly, for a cultural change towards an outcome-focus to be adopted not just in theory but in practice across the European Higher Education Area. We hope a progress report on the review of ECTS will be made at the Ministerial meeting in May, and recommend that developing a more suitable credit system for the future should receive priority at that meeting.**

Second cycle (Master's) qualifications

178. The largest response to the Committee's invitation to institutions and organisations to submit written evidence relevant to our inquiry came from groups concerned with teaching and research in science, technology, engineering, medicine and related subjects, and emphasised the importance to these (and to other) subjects of second cycle awards—more specifically, the future of one-year Master's Degrees and four-year integrated Master's Degrees.

179. The importance of one-year Master's and four-year integrated Master's Degrees to the higher education sector should not be under-estimated. One-year Master's are well established and well respected in the UK and internationally. They are an important source of income for many universities, and are successful among European and international students and employers alike. Furthermore, the one-year Master's supports the Bologna objective of promoting non-traditional and flexible learning paths in an era of lifelong learning. Integrated Master's degrees in the sciences and technologies have been around for

¹⁴⁸ Ev 3

¹⁴⁹ Q 142

more than twenty years in the UK, and a substantial proportion of students sign up for such four year programmes (effectively five years in Scotland). About a third of all students who enter universities to study engineering, for example, are enrolled in Master's level programmes.¹⁵⁰

180. Second cycle programmes in many other European countries last two years. Many detailed and important concerns have been raised in evidence to this Committee but in summary, there is concern, expressed in evidence to us by Professor Ritchie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Newcastle, that:

“[...] the masters content might be deemed to be rather light compared to some of the things that are coming out of Europe.”¹⁵¹

181. Furthermore, there is concern that the European Commission has specified a maximum credit accumulation of 75 credits for one calendar year of study in its User Guide for ECTS. A Master's qualification requires 90 credits to be valid which puts UK one-year Master's Degrees and integrated four-year Master's Degrees outside the limits specified in the User Guide for ECTS. The Commission's guidance may be non-compulsory, but it is still adhered to, and has credibility, across continental Europe—hence the concerns within the UK higher education sector.

182. The fact that UK credit systems do not map easily onto ECTS and that the Commission has specified a maximum number of credits for one year of study is of considerable concern because of the extent to which ECTS is used across the EHEA and because it seems to be, in the Minister's words, the “only show in town.”

183. The web-site of the UK HE Europe Unit, which is an important source of reference for members of the academic community, has this to say about the position of UK Masters and Integrated masters degrees in the Bologna Process:

Master's degrees

“Second cycle programmes in many other European countries last two years. There is concern elsewhere in Europe that the UK's one-year Master's programme is ‘lightweight’ in terms of hours studied and is therefore incompatible with Bologna requirements. The UK approach however focuses on the outcomes of study programmes, rather than notional learning time or hours studied. The one-year Master's supports the Bologna objective of promoting non-traditional and flexible learning paths in an era of lifelong learning. The one-year Master's has also been successful among European and international students and employers alike. Most taught Master's degrees in the UK achieve between 75 and 90 credits (with 90 for full year Master's)”.

Integrated Master's degrees

“The compatibility of four-year integrated Master's degrees (for example, MEng, MPharm) with the Bologna Process has also been questioned. Integrated Master's

150 Ev 84

151 Q 75

degrees are popular with students and employers. They meet the second cycle (Master's level) qualification descriptor in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area adopted at the 2005 ministerial meeting in Bergen. The UK HE Europe Unit is working with Universities UK, the Quality Assurance Agency and professional, regulatory and statutory bodies to promote integrated Master's degrees. There is a need to ensure that such programmes have appropriate credit allocation at the second cycle (Master's level) in line with the typical credit range in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (90–120 ECTS, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the second cycle).¹⁵²

184. The Government has adopted a very clear position and has consistently stated that it:

“[...] does not believe that there is any reason to consider the Bologna process will force institutions to abandon Integrated Masters or one-year Masters courses.”¹⁵³

185. The Minister told us that he had “not seen evidence that actually Bologna will seriously harm, or harm at all, the one-year master's or the integrated master's programmes.”¹⁵⁴ The Burgess Report went as far as to claim that:

“[...] to be clear, UK institutional credit practice is fully compliant with the Bologna reforms and any criticisms of the one full-year master's degree should be countered with this fact.”¹⁵⁵

186. UK institutional credit practice is by no means ‘fully compliant’ with the European Commission's User Guide for the ECTS, however, and the Burgess Report admits that this issue is not yet fully resolved. Despite the User Guide being non-compulsory, it holds significant authority across the EHEA. The Burgess Report does recognise the significance of this in an earlier paragraph and says that the “UK higher education stakeholders will therefore continue to lobby [...] for the removal of this 75 ECTS/calendar year reference from new User's Guide.”¹⁵⁶

187. As Peter Williams, Chief Executive of QAA, explained:

“[...] there is a threat [...]. The department is right in saying there should be no threat but because recognition is a national thing there can be different interpretations, country to country [...]. Some countries legislate into their recognition systems a requirement that there should be a five year or three plus two [...] model. That makes it extremely difficult [...]. In theory, the rules do not say you cannot do it but local practice, especially where that is enshrined in legislation, sometimes makes it very difficult.”¹⁵⁷

152 www.europeunit.ac.uk

153 Ev 31

154 Q 181

155 Universities UK, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England; Final Report of the Burgess Group*, Annex D: Advice to HEIs, December 2006.

156 *Ibid.*

157 Q 75

188. **Because the European Commission's guidance on ECTS is non-compulsory, it is true to say that in theory there is no threat to the future of one-year Master's and four-year integrated Master's Degrees. In practice, however, the situation is very different and the Government and other agencies involved must properly engage with these issues. The Government should seek a commitment from the European Commission for the removal of the 75 ECTS per calendar year reference from the new User's Guide.**

189. The UK approach so far—focussing on the outcomes of study programmes, rather than notional learning time or hours studied—masks some of the more fundamental issues regarding the comparability and consistency of one-year Master's Degree both within the UK HE sector and with other second cycle qualifications beyond.

190. UK higher education institutions and subject organisations expressed considerable anxieties to us about the effect of current ECTS requirements on the future of the UK Master's degree. They are fully aware of the Government's position and the non-compulsory nature of ECTS requirement. Their worries focused on four main areas:

- First, is the basis on which ECTS credits are calculated (Ev 46 Royal Academy of Engineering).
- Second, on the number of such credits required (Ev 69 Imperial College London).
- Third, on the effect of the credit requirements on progression from second cycle (master's level) to third cycle (doctoral) studies (Ev 74 University of Oxford).
- Fourth, on the dangers of a piecemeal approach to these problems that may complicate mutual recognition (Ev 46, Royal Academy of Engineering; Ev 117, The Science Council; and Ev 50, Heads of Departments of Mathematical Sciences in the UK).

191. Furthermore, submissions from the Royal Society (Ev 50), the Royal Society of Chemistry (Ev 113), the Heads of Chemistry UK (Ev 89), the UK Science Council (Ev 117), the Institution of Chemical Engineers (Ev 71), and the Institute of Civil Engineers (Ev 102), all raise the issue of the comparability and consistency of the one-year Master's and the competitive position of graduates as a result.

192. **Legitimate and serious concerns remain regarding the future of one-year Masters' Degrees and integrated four-year Masters' Degrees. These issues need to be fully debated within and beyond the academic community, and representatives at the Ministerial meeting in May need to be clear as to the UK's position should such points arise in formal or informal discussions.**

Third cycle (doctoral level)

193. The third cycle (doctoral level) of the Bologna Process is being formulated at present. A number of possible concerns have been raised in evidence. The University of Bristol said "[...] the obvious risk is that European norms may be agreed which are incompatible with our current practices and which may threaten the quality, integrity and/or reputation of

our doctoral degrees.”¹⁵⁸ Overall, however, there appear to be rather fewer concerns about the impact of Bologna at the third, doctoral, cycle than at the second, master’s cycle.

194. Professor Ritchie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Newcastle University, who is heavily involved in developing the third cycle agreements as a UK representative, re-assured the Committee that progress was being made in the right direction and that there were no major causes for concern. She told this Committee that despite some initial concerns that “the principles which emerged would be running against the grain of what we were doing here”¹⁵⁹ in the UK, that the final agreement was “very re-assuring.”¹⁶⁰

195. Specific issues, such as the recognition of professional doctorates, are still being negotiated. Professional doctorates are “an award at a doctoral level where the field of study is a professional discipline [usually business, engineering or education] and which is distinguished from the PhD by a title that refers to that profession.”¹⁶¹ The European Universities Association (EUA) have said that “strong opposition” to the UK Professional Doctorate from other European partners resulted from “misunderstanding” or “lack of information” of it.¹⁶² EUA also suggested that “no other country awards professional doctorates comparable with the UK ones.”¹⁶³ Professor Ritchie argued that the UK Government must continue to lobby:

“[...] to uphold the importance of professional doctorates as being real doctorates [...].”¹⁶⁴

196. We welcome and commend the active and influential role of a number of UK academics in the development process of the third cycle (doctoral level) agreements of the Bologna Process. We support Professor Ritchie’s recommendation that the UK holds its line on two issues: first, to continue to uphold the importance of professional doctorates as being real doctorates; second, to ensure that there is no shift towards accrediting doctorates through the ECTS.

197. With respect to third cycle, doctoral level studies, as in so many other aspects of the Bologna Process, it is imperative that UK members of the Follow up Group and other committees and working groups, and UK representatives at the two-yearly Ministerial meetings, remain closely in touch with specialists in individual subjects, groups of subjects and professional fields to ensure that initiatives by other countries and international organisations relevant to UK policy and practice are identified and considered in appropriate depth at a sufficiently early stage. In this respect the efforts of the UK HE Europe Unit have already proved to be valuable, and need to be maintained and if necessary further developed as the European Higher Education Area becomes a more significant element in the academic planning of UK institutions.

158 Ev 96

159 Q 125

160 *Ibid.*

161 Stuart Powell and Elizabeth Long, *Professional Doctorate Awards in the UK*, UK Council for Graduate Education, 2005: <http://www.ukcge.ac.uk/filesup/ProfessDoc.pdf>

162 *Ibid.*

163 *Ibid.*

164 Q 125

Shorter higher education

Foundation Degrees

198. While there is no length specified for the second cycle (Master's) qualification at present, there is a required length for the first cycle; it is specified that this should last a minimum of three years.

199. This will not affect two-year Foundation Degrees, however, because the Bergen communiqué included a specific statement to allow intermediate qualifications (of which Foundation Degrees are an example) 'within national contexts'. The UK HE Europe Unit says that it is "working with stakeholders to promote intermediate qualifications and their continued recognition in the European Higher Education Area."¹⁶⁵

200. Linked to Parliament's consideration of the Further Education Bill there are, however, possible implications of proposals to give further education institutions powers to teach for and award Foundation degrees and the acceptance of Foundation Degrees within the Bologna Process. As a result the issue of Foundation Degrees is not entirely without concern in the sector.

201. The CMU point out that:

"[...] CMU universities have supported the development and delivery of foundation degrees both directly and in collaboration with colleges. However, validation by higher education institutions has been regarded as crucial both to the status of what is a relatively new qualification and also to the proposition that this was a qualification to encourage progression within a lifelong learning framework and within the first cycle of higher education. Accordingly, it is unclear what advantages will be derived for the UK or UK HEIs committed to progressing the European Higher Education Framework and the EHEA from any switch from validation of foundation degrees by universities and higher education institutions to validation by further education colleges. It is also not clear what value will be added for learners, employers and to the Bologna Process by the twin-track approach proposed i.e. some foundation degrees validated by universities with others validated by colleges."¹⁶⁶

202. It has not been possible to include a detailed look at Foundation Degrees in our inquiry, but we have noted views expressed to us and we encourage the Government to consider them—particularly with regard to proposals to give FE Colleges Foundation Degree awarding powers. We will consider this further in our inquiry into the future sustainability of higher education: purpose, funding and structures.

Two-year accelerated degrees

203. In light of the specified 3 year minimum length of first cycle (undergraduate) degrees, the new "fast track" two-year honours degrees currently funded by HEFCE through the "Flexible Learning Pathfinder Projects" would seem to be under threat. The UK Europe

¹⁶⁵ UK Response on Qualification Length, from the UK HE Europe Unit website:
http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/bologna_process/uk_position_on_qualification_length.cfm

¹⁶⁶ Ev 122

Unit have said in their memorandum that “despite UK pressure for European HE systems fully to embrace learning outcomes under the Bologna Process, it is not at all clear that European partners will be prepared to recognise a two-year bachelor degree as equivalent, in terms of learning outcomes (or credit points) to a three or four year continental first cycle qualification.”¹⁶⁷ The Chief Executive of QAA agreed that they would be “very difficult [...] to sell”¹⁶⁸ across the EHEA.

204. There are serious concerns about how such degrees might be presented at European level—particularly in the context of the UK hosting the London ministerial summit in May 2007. The UK HE sector has clear views about the best way to approach this issue¹⁶⁹ and have emphasised, with due care and caution, the importance of learning outcomes. It will be important to ensure that the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in the UK is compatible with the Bologna Process Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

205. The predicted lack of acceptance within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) of the UK’s new accelerated two-year degrees raises broader concerns about attitudes of signatory countries within the EHEA, namely that flexibility and a focus on learning outcomes have not yet been fully accepted across the EHEA as being more important than length of study.

Social Dimension

206. The ‘social dimension’ was added to the Bologna Process at the Prague summit in 2001. At first, the social dimension was about “the role of HE as a public good and public responsibility and the crucial role of students as full members of the HE community.”¹⁷⁰

207. In 2005, at the Bergen summit, Ministers described the social dimension as a “constituent part of the European Higher Education Area.” They went as far as to say that it was a precondition for the competitiveness of European HE. The notion of accessibility of HE and conditions to enable all students to participate, regardless of social and economic background was also added as part of the Bergen Communiqué. These are commendable aims of the Bologna Process—the importance of widening participation in higher education and fair access to universities has been widely recognised in the UK for many years. Ministers called for data to be collected on mobility of staff and students and the social and economic situation of students.

208. In their guide to the Bologna Process the UK HE Europe Unit explain that:

“The UK is represented on the working group responsible for preparing the report for London on the social dimension. The UK has a range of experience to share in

167 Ev 2

168 Q 94

169 Q 96

170 UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

this area, for example on widening participation initiatives and supporting part-time study.”¹⁷¹

209. There is support within the Bologna Process for the portability of student grants and loans. The UK HE Europe Unit state that “the UK would support portability of such benefits rather than host country funding.” The distinction is important for the UK: portability of student support would mean that the Government continues to offer student grants and loans when UK students study anywhere in the EHEA, whereas host-country funding would require the UK to extend its student support arrangements to all students entering the UK from the EHEA. As the biggest net importer of students across the EHEA this would be extremely expensive for the UK and is being strongly resisted.

210. The Social Dimension of the Bologna Process, embracing the widening of participation in higher education in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, social-economic origins, and level of study, is an important area that reflects existing UK priorities. We recommend that the UK continue to play an active role in defining and progressing the Social Dimension.

211. It is important that signatory countries maintain autonomy in their grants and fees policies. We support the proposals for portability of student grants and loans for home students studying abroad but urge the government to maintain its strong opposition to a system of host country funding because of the disproportionate costs this would entail for the UK as the largest net importer of EU students.

Role of Government

212. It was regularly stated to us that the Government had not done enough to give a lead, disseminate information, anticipate problems and suggest solutions. For example:

“What is needed is some leadership. The government needs to grasp the nettle of the issues of concern, and not continue to be so blasé about the implications of the Declaration, continually stating that the UK is not legally bound to adopt the Declaration, therefore no consideration needs to be given to any possible modifications in the light of the Bologna Process. It may be true, but it is the fact that other European nations will bind to the Declaration that will have ramifications for UK graduates and postgraduates [...]. It is impossible to have a sensible debate on the impact of the Bologna Process without the government or its agencies taking ownership of the key issues and showing leadership at both a national and European level” (The Institute of Physics)

“In general the Bologna Process represents a significant opportunity for enhancing the experience and employability of our students. However, we are concerned about the lack of a clear national position on certain key issues, above all on the qualifications framework” (University of Bristol)

213. The Committee shares the view expressed by Oxford University concerning the importance of a “clear national perspective” on matters relating to the Bologna Process:

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

“In relation to all the aspects of the Bologna Process, the University attaches importance to a clear national perspective on the matters of both immediate and longer-term significance to UK higher education. The Bologna Process has a growing influence not only within Europe but internationally. It is therefore of real importance that individual institutions and the UK as a whole understands the impact of that influence on the UK higher education sector. All institutions recognise this but it is particularly critical for those like Oxford whose international focus must continue to be worldwide, and whose major competitors are largely outside the Bologna framework. While welcoming the development of the Bologna Process and its principles, the University is bound to be cautious about any developments which might limit its capacity to compete with the best international universities worldwide. Without clear understanding at national level, the strategic thinking of all institutions is bound to be hindered, and international strategies which are key to the pursuit of global excellence potentially undermined. The University hopes that this can be recognised and underlined by the work of the committee.”¹⁷²

214. However, a ‘clear national position’ needs to be expressed in a way that is consistent with the equally highly valued ‘bottom-up’ character of the Bologna Process, and the subject-specific character of many of the issues that confront those engaged in implementing a policy based on broad principles. Furthermore, as pointed out earlier in this report, the Bologna Process has no permanent secretariat. **Evidence submitted to us suggests that the Europe Unit, based in London and financed by a number of higher education funding agencies, is seen to play a valuable role in dissemination. Whilst it is important to avoid adding to bureaucracy, it is important that the work of the UK HE Europe Unit is kept under review and if necessary strengthened in ways that ensure UK interests are well served.**

215. It also matters that official bodies such as the higher education funding councils, the Quality Assurance Agency and the Training and Development Agency, together with relevant directorates in the DfES and other government departments with higher education interests, should closely monitor the development of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, especially as this affects the education and training of public service professionals, for example in health and education.

216. The work of the UK HE Europe Unit is overseen by a ‘High Level Policy Forum’ (HLPF), on which sit representatives of the DfES, the Higher Education Funding Councils, the Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly, Research Councils, Universities UK, Scottish Universities and the National Union of Students, and also by an officer-led and more broadly representative European Co-ordinating Group (ECG) with some twenty-five members. Three meetings are held of each body in each year.

217. **Whether or not the Higher Level Policy Forum and European Co-ordinating Group provide sufficient opportunities for inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination is something we would be grateful for the DfES’ view on when it responds to this Report.**

Involvement and engagement of universities

218. Many academics do not appear to have a high level of engagement with the Bologna Process. The University of Leeds described the sector's involvement as "patchy at best"¹⁷³ Bologna does not feature prominently on the agendas of Councils, Senates and faculty boards or, apparently, in common room conversation. The Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) asserts that "The Bologna Process is generally little understood or discussed in the United Kingdom."

219. At managerial level, many universities and HEIs have already taken systematic steps to keep abreast of Bologna developments and to relate these to their own work. At the University of Bristol, for example a Bologna Working Group was established in 2004:

"[...] reporting to University Education Committee, with the general remit of considering the implications of the Bologna Process for the University of Bristol, of advising Education Committee and senior management on these issues, and of ensuring that staff and students were adequately informed about the Process. The Group produced an initial report [...] and has produced regular updates subsequently. In addition to reviewing relevant publications, the Chair and other members of the group have sought to keep abreast of developments by attending meetings of the European Universities Association, as well as seminars organised by the UUK Europe Unit and other such events"¹⁷⁴

220. Undoubtedly if cooperation and competition across European higher education is significantly enhanced by the progressive implementation of the Bologna Process, there will be major implications for UK universities. There could well be significant winners and losers, depending on the degree of responsiveness and we therefore recommend that representative HE bodies actively promote debate among their members about the potential outcomes.

221. The DfES has made known its intention of encouraging individual HEIs to develop strategies to ensure that:

"they provide the Diploma Supplement to all their students (currently only one in three institutions provide this as a matter of course);

they increase the use of student and staff mobility programmes;

their quality assurance arrangements are in line with the ENQA standards and guidelines;

they look for opportunities to develop arrangements for awarding and recognising joint degrees;

they create opportunities for flexible learning paths, including recognition of prior learning;

173 Ev 53

174 Ev 95

they increase the number of doctoral candidates taking up research careers”.

222. Government initiatives in this area are assisted by a 14-strong national team of ‘Bologna Promoters’, funded by the European Commission, who help UK higher education institutions with the promotion and development of student and staff mobility; the implementation of ECTS; and preparation for the ECTS label and implementation of the Diploma Supplement and Diploma Supplement label.

Diploma Supplement

223. The Diploma Supplement is a document intended to describe a qualification that a student has received in a standard format that is easy to understand and easy to compare. It should describe the content of the qualification and the structure of the HE system within which it was issued.¹⁷⁵

224. At the Berlin Summit in 2003 it was agreed that “[...] every student graduating as from 2005 [is] to receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge.”¹⁷⁶ This commitment has not been met in the UK.

225. Three-quarters of the 53% of UK institutions which responded to a survey undertaken in late 2005 were already producing transcripts which accord with the minimum requirements of the Bologna specification. Only a third were at that time issuing the Diploma Supplement to graduates, but most planned to do so within a couple of years.

226. The Diploma Supplement, which is a detailed description of a qualification gained, is an important development to come out of the Bologna Process. We encourage universities to meet the Bologna requirements and issue Diploma Supplements for all graduates and for the DfES to play a more active role in promoting the Diploma Supplement.

227. The Committee have repeatedly found that the language used within the Bologna Process (and indeed the name itself) has obscured meaning in an unhelpful manner. The lack of clarity in terms such as the ‘Diploma Supplement’ or the ‘Social Dimension’ only serves to hamper what is otherwise a good process. We urge the Government and others to be more thoughtful in their translation of such terms and suggest that ‘Diploma Supplement’ could be replaced with ‘Qualification Transcript’ as a more descriptive and easily-recognised name.

175 Information taken from UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

176 http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/qualifications/diploma_supplement.cfm

7 2010 and beyond

Future of the Bologna Process post-2010

228. Two Ministerial conferences on the Bologna Process are due to be held before the end of the decade—in London in May 2007 and in one of the Benelux countries in 2009. The discussions at these events will determine the direction of the Process into the twenty-second century.

229. The Universities and Colleges Union told us that:

“[...] Bologna has been a remarkable and rapid success, and has achieved in a relatively short time, a remarkable degree of agreement across a European region defined in far wider terms than even the expanded European Union. Further, it is now seen in the global context as a challenge to which other countries and regions need to respond. The London inter-ministerial conference in May 2007, the fifth in the sequence which started with Bologna, will start the movement towards the conclusion of the first phase of the Process. However, it is now clear that there will need to be a successor phase and in London in May, the debate on the shape of this next phase of Bologna will begin, to prepare the ground for the inter-ministerial conference hosted by the Benelux countries in 2009.”¹⁷⁷

230. The DfES states that “the Government’s intention is to make the event as forward looking and as participative as possible, and to minimise the time spent reporting progress. The Government is therefore seeking to use the conference as the basis for a first discussion of what the EHEA might look like post-2010 and to provoke more of a discussion about HE reform in Europe beyond Bologna, setting the whole conference in the context of the challenge of the internationalisation of higher education.”¹⁷⁸

231. Whilst, as the Chief Executive of HEFCE said to us, “it would be naïve to assume that a process involving 45 would involve 44 walking in lock step with the other one [the UK],”¹⁷⁹ nevertheless, the UK is in an important and influential position as host of the Ministerial Summit in May. The Government has a crucial role to play in articulating the UK position and ensuring that institutions have clear guidance on the outcomes of the discussions at the Conference. The issues we have identified are of considerable importance for the ownership and future of the Bologna Process beyond-2010.

232. The UK must take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by this year’s London Ministerial meeting to seek greater clarity among participating countries concerning the respective roles of their Ministers and of their higher education institutions in advancing the Bologna Process.

233. The UK should make it clear, both within the UK HE sector and across the European Higher Education Area, that whilst policy initiatives in this field are

177 Ev 87

178 Ev 31

179 Q 109

necessarily the responsibility of Government, operational decisions will continue to rest with institutions and will need to be discussed, stimulated and evaluated within the sector.

The London Summit, May 2007

234. The UK HE Europe Unit have said that:

“[...] in hosting the next ministerial summit in London, the UK has a unique opportunity to influence Bologna developments. As the 2010 target for creating the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) approaches, the resulting London Communiqué will set priorities for the remaining years of the Process and will consider its future beyond 2010. The UK will participate in the drafting of the Communiqué, act as Vice-Chair of the Bologna Board and provide the Secretariat of the Process until the summit.”¹⁸⁰

235. The Bologna Secretariat is to produce a paper on the UK position for the London Ministerial meeting. Although the document itself will not be available until May, the UK HE Europe Unit has said that the following issues will be key:

- It will be important that the Bologna Process remains flexible in its recommendations to accommodate the wide range of qualifications and HE systems operating across the EHEA and the autonomy of HEIs.
- European HEIs need time to consolidate and develop the reforms stimulated by the Bologna Process. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA will also require supporting structures beyond 2010. Future Bologna Process decision-making structures should build on the strengths of its voluntary partnership approach between governments, HEIs, students and other stakeholders.
- The European Commission plays an important role in the Bologna Process, notably in providing funding for Bologna activity. The EC Lisbon strategy focus on the role of HE in the competitiveness of Europe is welcome. The Bologna Process can contribute to the goals of the Lisbon strategy in modernising European HE through a bottom-up consensual approach. It will be vital, however, that the Lisbon strategy and the Bologna Process remain separate, if complementary, processes.”¹⁸¹

Flexibility

236. With respect to the first two issues identified by the Europe Unit, the written and oral evidence this committee has received shows very strong support in the UK for maintaining the principles of voluntary participation, flexibility, and institutional autonomy in the future development of the Bologna Process. There is also widespread agreement that the application of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the EHEA

¹⁸⁰ UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

¹⁸¹ Ev 3

Framework for Qualifications should be undertaken in a measured fashion, involving full consultation with both national and regional organisations. This will take time. It must not be rushed. Above all, it must not be driven by legislative pressures in individual countries which reflect domestic (and sometimes ephemeral) political imperatives.

237. It is all too simple to commit to a virtually incontestable principle, such as flexibility. It is harder, but much more useful, to identify and implement policies and actions consistent with such a principle.

238. In the remaining years of this decade, governments and institutions need to be encouraged to implement incremental changes which will ensure that rhetoric moves closer to reality. Patient, well informed, and appropriately supported efforts along these lines will be needed to advance the pedagogic reform, research excellence, compatibility, effective quality assurance, and student mobility that are central to the Bologna agenda. We hope the London Conference will provide such encouragement.

Bologna and the EC

239. We have earlier in this Report examined the increased role that institutions of the European Community have been playing in the development of the Bologna Process, and identified some of the anxieties that exist concerning the compatibility of the legislative, legal, financial and administrative processes of the EC with the voluntary, flexible and diverse character of the Bologna Process—the latter being rooted in the essential values of teaching and research in higher education.

240. We are aware that many Bologna objectives and action lines are closely intertwined with those of the EC, and that in some areas (e.g., student mobility) EC action and financial support pre-date the Bologna Agreement. We would not wish to underestimate the value of such support, and of inter-agency co-operation in the design and delivery of programmes (which benefit both EC and non-EC countries). For the Bologna objectives to be pursued in a manner consistent with the values of higher education requires clear distinctions to be maintained between the Process and the wider purposes of the EC. We hope that during the coming years it will be possible for the institutions of the EC, and the processes which have been developed following the Bologna agreement, to be related to each other in ways that minimise anxieties of the kind we have encountered in the course of our Inquiry.

Scale and 'ownership'

241. The Minister for Higher Education told us that:

“[...] at some stage I think you will have a global system of comparability and compatibility across the world.”

242. This scale of this ambition is worrying—particularly in light of the findings of research from HEPI¹⁸² and Bernd Wachter,¹⁸³ referred to previously, that modest, concrete aims are far more likely to be achieved than wide-reaching global ambitions.

182 Bahram Bekhradnia, *Credit accumulation and Transfer, and the Bologna Process; an overview*, HEPI, October 2004.

243. As we have seen earlier in this Report, there are anxieties in some quarters about the consequences of extending the Bologna Process to even more countries than the present 45. To the extent that this would increase the diversity of institutions, modes of learning and governance arrangements which need to be made compatible and subject to broadly comparable quality assurance criteria, there is the danger of diluting the core structural and pedagogic features of the Process.

244. We have not been able to explore the pros and cons of further expansion in any depth in this inquiry, but our initial reaction is that the UK Government should be cautious about any such proposals, which would need careful investigation and appraisal of costs and benefits before an informed opinion could be reached.

245. The scale of Bologna also relates to the breadth of areas covered by its Action Lines. This Committee has not looked in detail at the growing emphasis on what is referred to as the 'social dimension', embracing the widening of participation in higher education in most parts of the EHEA in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, social-economic origins, and level of study. The Bergen Communiqué called for "a clear definition of the social dimension [to be drafted], for the London summit in 2007."¹⁸⁴ We note that further EHEA-wide progress in this area would be a significant expansion of the existing scope of the Bologna agenda and, because of the complexities involved will have to be handled very carefully to minimise controversy beyond 2010.

Conclusion

246. **It is in the interests of higher education in the United Kingdom, and of the government, institutions, agencies, staff and students directly involved in funding, providing and managing such education, as well as those of employers and of the wider society, for the United Kingdom to continue to be actively involved as a lead partner in the Bologna Process.**

247. **We welcome the emphasis that we believe UK representatives at the London Ministerial Meeting intend to place on the importance of the voluntary principle in the development of the Bologna Process. We agree that there is a need to maintain a flexible and varied pattern of awards and qualifications across the European Higher Education Area, within which compatibility will be underpinned by effective within-country quality assurance systems.**

248. **The European Commission, and the European Community more broadly, play an important and welcome role in the Bologna Process. In considering evidence submitted to this inquiry, however, the expanding role of the European Commission in the Process has become our greatest concern. It is crucial to the success of the Bologna Process that it remains outside the framework of the EC. We agree with the Minister that the role of the European Commission must be appropriately circumscribed and recommend this be sought at the London Summit in May.**

183 Bernd Wachter, "The Bologna Process: developments and prospects", *European Journal of Education* 39, 3 2004, p 265-273

184 UK HE Europe Unit, *Guide to the Bologna Process, Edition 2*, November 2006.

249. We regard the creation of a European Higher Education Area as a continuing project, capable of yielding benefits at each stage of its development, and one to which adequate time must be given if the necessary basis of trust is to be established and understanding are to be both strong and sustainable.

Annex 1

The 45 signatory countries to the Bologna Process

Signatory countries:

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Albania | Latvia | <u>Additional full member:</u> |
| Andorra | Liechtenstein | European Commission |
| Armenia | Lithuania | <u>Consultative Members:</u> |
| Austria | Luxembourg | Council of Europe |
| Azerbaijan | Malta | The National Union of |
| Belgium | Moldova | Students in Europe (ESIB) |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | Netherlands | European Association of |
| Bulgaria | Norway | Institutions in Higher |
| Croatia | Poland | Education (EURASHE) |
| Cyprus | Portugal | UNESCO-CEPES |
| Czech Republic | Romania | European University |
| Denmark | Russian Federation | Association (EUA) |
| Estonia | Serbia and Montenegro | UNICE—The Voice of |
| Finland | Slovak Republic | Business in Europe |
| France | Slovenia | Education International Pan- |
| Georgia | Spain | European Structure |
| Germany | Sweden | European Association for |
| Greece | Switzerland | Quality Assurance in Higher |
| Holy See | The former Yugoslav | Education (ENQA) |
| Hungary | Republic of Macedonia | <u>Applicants to be a member of</u> |
| Iceland | Turkey | <u>the Bologna Process:</u> |
| Ireland | Ukraine | Kazakhstan |
| Italy | United Kingdom | |

Annex 2

The Bologna Process includes a number of action lines that have been agreed by all signatory countries. The 10 existing Bologna Process action lines are:

Established in the Bologna Declaration of 1999:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles
3. Establishment of a system of credits
4. Promotion of mobility
5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance
6. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

Added after the Prague Ministerial summit of 2001:

7. Focus on lifelong learning
8. Inclusion of higher education institutions and students
9. Promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

Added after the Berlin Ministerial summit of 2003:

10. Doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area

Conclusions and recommendations

Origins

1. The Bologna Process is about developing a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The Process is a non-binding inter-governmental initiative between its signatory countries. To understand this is to understand the nature of the Bologna Process as intended from its origin. It is not a European Community initiative, project, or official programme. The signatories to the Bologna Process are a voluntary collection of 45 countries (and growing). It is broader than the EC and it is a process that originated, and continues to develop, outside the EC. (Paragraph 8)

Objectives

2. The purpose of the Bologna Process, as stated in its formal priorities and “action lines”, is to create a broad framework for higher education to enable comparability within a flexible system and to promote the European Higher Education Area for the benefit of all of the countries involved—including the UK. It is not intended to create standardised or uniform higher education across the European Higher Education Area. (Paragraph 11)

The role of higher education institutions

3. It will be essential to maintain a strong focus on the importance of institutional autonomy at the London meeting whilst recognising that the variability at present in university autonomy across the EC, and even more so across the European Higher Education Area, is an issue that cannot be shirked for the future. (Paragraph 24)

The Fifth Ministerial Conference—London, May 2007

4. This inquiry has taken place over the last 6 months in order to facilitate broad discussion of the UK position in advance of the London Summit in May, with the intention of making a constructive contribution to the negotiations at the 2007 Summit and beyond. (Paragraph 31)

Comparability v. standardisation

5. It is clear to us that the Bologna Process is in intention and design about comparability and compatibility and not about standardisation of higher education systems across the European Higher Education Area. (Paragraph 40)
6. We commend the clarity and consensus of the Government’s position on the issue of comparability versus standardisation and recommend that more is done to communicate this message to the sector and to confirm that the intention of the Bologna Process is not to create a uniform or standardised European higher education system. We have been further assured in evidence that there is currently no appetite for a homogenised European Higher Education Area amongst the 45 signatory countries. (Paragraph 41)

7. Some of our evidence, however, has demonstrated that anxieties still exist, despite the formal intentions, that working to achieve comparability across the EHEA might in practice lead in the direction of standardisation or uniformity—and therefore undermine the autonomy and flexibility of the UK system. Later in our report we address some of the issues that arise from these anxieties. (Paragraph 42)
8. We recommend that the Government be increasingly vigilant in guarding against a move towards bureaucratic, top-down, detailed agreements. It is of great credit to all those involved that the Bologna Process has so far maintained the pursuit of a flexible framework based on broad non-binding principles—keeping institutional autonomy at the heart of the process. This is integral to the key principle of maintaining national determination of education policy. We recommend that the Government and others work to ensure this continues—and that realistic criteria and timetables are set for the achievement of the Process’s objectives to safeguard the voluntary nature of the process. (Paragraph 43)

Mobility, employability, and competitiveness

9. The Committee recommends that the Government does more to tackle, and encourages higher education institutions to do more to tackle, the likely restraints on mobility for UK students, namely: lack of recognition by the student’s home institution of the value of study abroad; individual student’s attitudes; lack of language competence; perceived financial concerns; and the absence of a mobility culture. This will take a concerted and consistent effort by universities and by the Government to promote the benefits of mobility and to encourage a cultural change in students and across the sector. (Paragraph 54)
10. There is an urgent need for further research to identify those subject areas and universities where mobility is low and where funding and take-up may need to be targeted and prioritised. (Paragraph 55)
11. We support the proposal by the DfES that internationalism should become a standard part of HEI’s overall strategies. We also recommend that there should be specific, targeted funding to encourage international student mobility amongst a broader range of students—especially those who choose to live at home during their courses. There should also be a greater diversity of opportunities for overseas study, with more short-term study options available in addition to the standard year abroad. (Paragraph 56)
12. We further recommend that, whilst it will take several years for Lord Dearing’s recent proposals concerning the teaching of modern languages to take full effect, the Government should act swiftly with measures that will help reverse the decline of language learning. (Paragraph 57)
13. Increased mobility of high-level skills and labour can contribute to increased employment, productivity and growth. This is a major benefit of the Bologna Process that should be helping to drive it forward. These are distinct from the goals of the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process must remain separate from that Agenda. We recommend that the Government does more to communicate its position: that

whilst the Bologna Process is not fundamentally about achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda, increased employment and competitiveness across the 45 signatory countries are important aims of the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 65)

Modernisation

14. The Committee welcomes the progress that has been made in many European Higher Education Area countries to modernise higher education systems in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 75)
15. We commend the work that the Government and other agencies have been doing to help shape the modernisation process across the European Higher Education Area through the Bologna Process and support this continuing role in fostering a culture of respect for institutional autonomy and flexibility in higher education. We firmly believe that such modernisation is likely to be more successful and sustainable if it reflects a partnership between government and institutions within the higher education sector which encourages and enhances the innovative and creative capacities of their staff. (Paragraph 76)

Life-long learning

16. The Leitch Report has recently emphasised the importance of a focus on life-long learning and the economic importance of developing such a culture. The action line that calls for a 'focus on life-long learning' is a good example of where the Bologna Process is fully consistent with existing priorities in the UK and, through a broad framework of flexible, non-binding agreements, can encourage important progress in this area across the European Higher Education Area. (Paragraph 79)

The UK's position in the EHEA

17. As a European leader in higher education, the benefits of engagement in the Bologna Process might not be as immediately obvious for the UK as they are for other signatory countries in the EHEA but this does not mean that there are none. (Paragraph 84)

The minimum case for membership and the threat of complacency

18. Many countries in the European Higher Education Area have a long and proud history of excellence in higher education and many European Universities are considered to be world-class institutions. In those countries in the EHEA where their higher education systems were already admired, the Bologna Process is being used to further improve and modernise higher education. (Paragraph 90)
19. In a rapidly developing global market for HE it would be a mistake to think that the UK is in a sufficiently advantageous position as to be able to stand aside whilst other countries in the European Higher Education Area make progress through the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 91)

The benefits of UK participation in the Bologna Process

20. The Bologna Process is a major development in the international market for higher education and is attracting significant international interest as a result. The government should be doing everything possible to articulate and promote the genuine advantages to the UK of being involved in the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 103)
21. There are economic advantages to be gained for the UK through engagement in the Bologna Process: increasing employment and productivity; and increasing the competitiveness of the UK higher education sector through promoting the attractiveness and international reputation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). There are advantages for UK students in terms of increased mobility and employment opportunities. Finally there are advantages to UK universities through the increased market for both EU and international students within the EHEA, increased mobility of staff, sharing of best practice and expertise in a broad range of areas, and increased opportunities for research collaboration across the European Research Area. (Paragraph 104)
22. Thus there are significant advantages for the UK in achieving the action lines stated in the Bologna Process, which increasingly reflect the policy priorities in the UK. Furthermore, there are aspects of HE provision in other participating countries that the UK could learn from to improve its own structures and practices. (Paragraph 105)

The European Community's powers in education

23. We are concerned that use of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) means that the absence of a Treaty base poses little constraint on what the European Commission and Member States may do voluntarily in the area of education, and more specifically higher education. We ask the DfES to give their view on whether the European Commission are using the OMC to expand their involvement in higher education and whether this is a cause for concern. (Paragraph 109)

Causes for concern

24. The Committee is encouraged by references to increasing recognition across the European Higher Education Area, and within the decision making structures of the European Community, of the importance of each country having an autonomous and flexible higher education system. It is concerned, however, to hear reports about the bureaucratic momentum behind Bologna and of the dangers of trying to achieve progress towards greater institutional autonomy by central direction. (Paragraph 118)
25. The Government should continue to encourage increased autonomy in higher education across the European Higher Education Area but must guard against growing bureaucratisation. The Government must seek to uphold that the autonomy and flexibility of institutions by ensuring the Process only pursues its objectives within broad, non-compulsory frameworks. (Paragraph 119)

Influence and constraint: the UK Government's position

26. The European Commission, and the European Community more broadly, play an important formal role in the Bologna Process that is welcome. The expanding role of the European Community in the field of education, however, and the belief that it is seeking to expand its role through the mechanisms of the Bologna Process, is a common cause of concern to UK organisations and institutions. It is also this Committee's greatest concern regarding the future of the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 133)
27. We recommend that the Government seeks clarification of the exact role of the Commission in the Bologna Process. Whilst the involvement of the Commission, including financial assistance, is of considerable importance for the success of the Bologna Process, a way must be found to ensure its involvement does not undermine the essentially voluntary and 'bottom up' approaches characteristic of its development to date. (Paragraph 134)
28. It remains crucial to the success of the Bologna Process that it remains outside the framework of the EC. We agree with the Minister that the role of the European Commission must be appropriately circumscribed. This must be a priority issue for the government at the London Summit in May. (Paragraph 135)

Quality Assurance

29. The UK operates a fundamentally different approach to quality assurance to the rest of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and this external "arm's length" approach is a major contributing factor to the success of the UK HE sector. The government and the Europe Unit, through the Quality Assurance Agency's involvement, are working to ensure that the UK keeps control of its own Quality Assurance (QA) arrangements whilst in parallel also working to shape and influence the development of QA systems across the EHEA. The Committee gives its full support to this approach. (Paragraph 140)
30. The Government and others have a continuing role in persuading the rest of the European Higher Education Area to share its position: that each country must maintain control of its own independent system of quality assurance. (Paragraph 143)
31. We believe that the Quality Assurance Agency were right to resist the original plan for a European Register for Quality Assurance. If a Register is to be implemented, however, we concur with the UK HE Europe Unit that "it will be vital that it does not become a regulatory tool or ranking instrument. There is also a need for the legal, ownership and regulatory issues linked to the development of a Register to be fully addressed." (Paragraph 144)
32. We commend the work of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in playing an active and influential role in developing the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (a broad framework for within-country Quality Assurance arrangements), and in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

(ENQA) where the QAA's Chief Executive is currently President, and would wish to see such active involvement continue into the future. (Paragraph 150)

Credit and ECTS

33. This Committee supports the important work to develop a broad and flexible credit framework across the European Higher Education Area with the aim of both increasing mobility and opening up a more flexible and accessible higher education system to a wider range of people. We concur with the Burgess Report that credit is a tool for assessing the equivalence of learning and achieved by an individual and, as such, requires framework or level descriptors that outline the general outcomes of learning expected at a given level. Consequently we conclude that the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS), based solely on input or 'hours studied', is not fit for purpose. (Paragraph 161)
34. Whilst we recognise that the Bologna Process makes no requirement for the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to be the basis of any national credit system it does, however, carry an expectation that national systems can be readily mapped onto ECTS, and the Berlin summit of 2003 specifically called for ECTS to be used as an academic transfer and accumulation system across the EHEA. This concerns us and we urge the Government to address the problems that this may cause at the London Ministerial meeting. (Paragraph 162)
35. We commend the work of the Burgess Group and recommend that the UK HE Europe Unit, in partnership with the sector, work to develop proposals for an alternative to the ECTS—a broad and flexible framework for credit that takes account of input, level of study, and outcome, along the lines of Burgess's recommendations for the UK, keeping in mind the three key principles that any framework should be as simple as possible, should be outcome-focussed, and should be on a voluntary basis in order to respect an institution's right to control its own academic standards. (Paragraph 168)
36. The Committee agrees with the Royal Academy of Engineering that the Government should "press for the adoption of learning outcomes alone as the ultimate long-term basis for European HE Qualifications Framework." (Paragraph 171)
37. The fact that the UK does not yet have a national credit framework in place is, arguably, not helping the case for moving towards this type of outcome-based credit framework across the EHEA. (Paragraph 176)
38. We are encouraged that the European Commission has agreed to review the ECTS but remain concerned that the outcomes of such a review are by no means certain. We ask that the Government and the UK HE Europe Unit continue to lobby for the ECTS system to be reformed and, more broadly, for a cultural change towards an outcome-focus to be adopted not just in theory but in practice across the European Higher Education Area. We hope a progress report on the review of ECTS will be made at the Ministerial meeting in May, and recommend that developing a more suitable credit system for the future should receive priority at that meeting. (Paragraph 177)

Second cycle (Master's) qualifications

39. The fact that UK credit systems do not map easily onto ECTS and that the Commission has specified a maximum number of credits for one year of study is of considerable concern because of the extent to which ECTS is used across the EHEA and because it seems to be, in the Minister's words, the "only show in town." (Paragraph 182)
40. Because the European Commission's guidance on ECTS is non-compulsory, it is true to say that in theory there is no threat to the future of one-year Master's and four-year integrated Master's Degrees. In practice, however, the situation is very different and the Government and other agencies involved must properly engage with these issues. The Government should seek a commitment from the European Commission for the removal of the 75 ECTS per calendar year reference from the new User's Guide. (Paragraph 188)
41. Legitimate and serious concerns remain regarding the future of one-year Masters' Degrees and integrated four-year Masters' Degrees. These issues need to be fully debated within and beyond the academic community, and representatives at the Ministerial meeting in May need to be clear as to the UK's position should such points arise in formal or informal discussions. (Paragraph 192)

Third cycle (doctoral level)

42. We welcome and commend the active and influential role of a number of UK academics in the development process of the third cycle (doctoral level) agreements of the Bologna Process. We support Professor Ritchie's recommendation that the UK holds its line on two issues: first, to continue to uphold the importance of professional doctorates as being real doctorates; second, to ensure that there is no shift towards accrediting doctorates through the ECTS. (Paragraph 196)
43. With respect to third cycle, doctoral level studies, as in so many other aspects of the Bologna Process, it is imperative that UK members of the Follow up Group and other committees and working groups, and UK representatives at the two-yearly Ministerial meetings, remain closely in touch with specialists in individual subjects, groups of subjects and professional fields to ensure that initiatives by other countries and international organisations relevant to UK policy and practice are identified and considered in appropriate depth at a sufficiently early stage. In this respect the efforts of the UK HE Europe Unit have already proved to be valuable, and need to be maintained and if necessary further developed as the European Higher Education Area becomes a more significant element in the academic planning of UK institutions. (Paragraph 197)

Shorter higher education

44. It has not been possible to include a detailed look at Foundation Degrees in our inquiry, but we have noted views expressed to us and we encourage the Government to consider them—particularly with regard to proposals to give FE Colleges Foundation Degree awarding powers. We will consider this further in our inquiry

into the future sustainability of higher education: purpose, funding and structures. (Paragraph 202)

45. The predicted lack of acceptance within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) of the UK's new accelerated two-year degrees raises broader concerns about attitudes of signatory countries within the EHEA, namely that flexibility and a focus on learning outcomes have not yet been fully accepted across the EHEA as being more important than length of study. (Paragraph 205)

Social Dimension

46. The Social Dimension of the Bologna Process, embracing the widening of participation in higher education in terms of age, ethnicity, gender, social-economic origins, and level of study, is an important area that reflects existing UK priorities. We recommend that the UK continue to play an active role in defining and progressing the Social Dimension. (Paragraph 210)
47. It is important that signatory countries maintain autonomy in their grants and fees policies. We support the proposals for portability of student grants and loans for home students studying abroad but urge the government to maintain its strong opposition to a system of host country funding because of the disproportionate costs this would entail for the UK as the largest net importer of EU students. (Paragraph 211)

Role of Government

48. Evidence submitted to us suggests that the Europe Unit, based in London and financed by a number of higher education funding agencies, is seen to play a valuable role in dissemination. Whilst it is important to avoid adding to bureaucracy, it is important that the work of the UK HE Europe Unit is kept under review and if necessary strengthened in ways that ensure UK interests are well served. (Paragraph 214)
49. Whether or not the Higher Level Policy Forum and European Co-ordinating Group provide sufficient opportunities for inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination is something we would be grateful for the DfES' view on when it responds to this Report. (Paragraph 217)

Involvement and engagement of universities

50. The Diploma Supplement, which is a detailed description of a qualification gained, is an important development to come out of the Bologna Process. We encourage universities to meet the Bologna requirements and issue Diploma Supplements for all graduates and for the DfES to play a more active role in promoting the Diploma Supplement. (Paragraph 226)
51. The Committee have repeatedly found that the language used within the Bologna Process (and indeed the name itself) has obscured meaning in an unhelpful manner. The lack of clarity in terms such as the 'Diploma Supplement' or the 'Social

Dimension' only serves to hamper what is otherwise a good process. We urge the Government and others to be more thoughtful in their translation of such terms and suggest that 'Diploma Supplement' could be replaced with 'Qualification Transcript' as a more descriptive and easily-recognised name. (Paragraph 227)

Future of the Bologna Process post-2010

52. The UK must take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by this year's London Ministerial meeting to seek greater clarity among participating countries concerning the respective roles of their Ministers and of their higher education institutions in advancing the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 232)
53. The UK should make it clear, both within the UK HE sector and across the European Higher Education Area, that whilst policy initiatives in this field are necessarily the responsibility of Government, operational decisions will continue to rest with institutions and will need to be discussed, stimulated and evaluated within the sector. (Paragraph 233)

Conclusion

54. It is in the interests of higher education in the United Kingdom, and of the government, institutions, agencies, staff and students directly involved in funding, providing and managing such education, as well as those of employers and of the wider society, for the United Kingdom to continue to be actively involved as a lead partner in the Bologna Process. (Paragraph 246)
55. We welcome the emphasis that we believe UK representatives at the London Ministerial Meeting intend to place on the importance of the voluntary principle in the development of the Bologna Process. We agree that there is a need to maintain a flexible and varied pattern of awards and qualifications across the European Higher Education Area, within which compatibility will be underpinned by effective within-country quality assurance systems. (Paragraph 247)
56. The European Commission, and the European Community more broadly, play an important and welcome role in the Bologna Process. In considering evidence submitted to this inquiry, however, the expanding role of the European Commission in the Process has become our greatest concern. It is crucial to the success of the Bologna Process that it remains outside the framework of the EC. We agree with the Minister that the role of the European Commission must be appropriately circumscribed and recommend this be sought at the London Summit in May. (Paragraph 248)
57. We regard the creation of a European Higher Education Area as a continuing project, capable of yielding benefits at each stage of its development, and one to which adequate time must be given if the necessary basis of trust is to be established and understanding are to be both strong and sustainable. (Paragraph 249)

Formal Minutes

Monday 16 April 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr David Chaytor
Jeff Ennis
Helen Jones

Fiona Mactaggart
Mr Gordon Marsden
Stephen Williams

The Bologna Process

The Committee considered this matter.

Draft Report, proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 249 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the embargoed copies of the report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Ordered, That memoranda be appended to the Report.

Ordered, That the memoranda appended to the Report be reported to the House.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 18 April at 10.00 am]

List of witnesses

Wednesday 10 January 2007

Page

Ms Jessica Olley, Acting Manager, UK HE Europe Unit, **Professor Drummond Bone**, President of Universities UK (UUK), and **Professor Lord May of Oxford**, a Member of the House of Lords, Joint Professor, Department of Zoology, Oxford University and Imperial College and UK representative on the European Research Council

Ev 5

Mr Peter Williams, Chief Executive, and **Ms Carolyn Campbell**, Head of International Affairs, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), and **Professor Ella Ritchie**, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University

Ev 20

Wednesday 31 January 2007

Bill Rammell, a Member of the House, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Ev 36

List of written evidence

| | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 1 | UK HE Europe Unit | Ev 1 |
| 2 | Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) | Ev 16 |
| 3 | Professor Ella Ritchie, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University | Ev 28 |
| 4 | Department for Education and Skills (DfES) | Ev 29 |
| 5 | The Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng) | Ev 46 |
| 6 | The Russell Group | Ev 47 |
| 7 | Amicus | Ev 48 |
| 8 | Heads of Departments of Mathematical Sciences in the UK (HoDoMS) | Ev 50 |
| 9 | The Royal Society | Ev 50 |
| 10 | University of Leeds | Ev 53 |
| 11 | Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) of the Institute of Education, University of London | Ev 57 |
| 12 | University of Kent | Ev 60 |
| 13 | London Metropolitan University | Ev 62 |
| 14 | National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) | Ev 64 |
| 15 | Imperial College London | Ev 69 |
| 16 | Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) | Ev 71 |
| 17 | University of Oxford | Ev 74 |
| 18 | The Wellcome Trust | Ev 76 |
| 19 | The British Psychological Society | Ev 77 |
| 20 | University of London Union (ULU) | Ev 78 |
| 21 | University of Southampton | Ev 80 |
| 22 | Campaign for Science and Engineering in the UK (CaSE) | Ev 82 |
| 23 | Engineering Council UK (ECUK) | Ev 84 |
| 24 | University and College Union (UCU) | Ev 86 |
| 25 | Heads of Chemistry UK (HCUK) | Ev 89 |
| 26 | UK Bologna Promoters | Ev 89 |
| 27 | John Reilly, Director, UK Socrates Erasmus Council | Ev 93 |
| 28 | University of Bristol | Ev 95 |
| 29 | Institute of Physics | Ev 97 |
| 30 | Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) | Ev 102 |
| 31 | Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) | Ev 105 |
| 32 | National Union of Students (NUS) | Ev 106 |
| 33 | University College London (UCL) | Ev 111 |
| 34 | UK GRAD Programme | Ev 112 |
| 35 | Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) | Ev 113 |
| 36 | Council for the Mathematical Sciences (CMS) | Ev 115 |
| 37 | Science Council | Ev 117 |
| 38 | CMU Universities Group | Ev 120 |
| 39 | Dr Nigel Poole, Imperial College London | Ev 122 |

Reports from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07

| | | |
|----------------------|---|--------|
| First Special Report | Government's Response to the Committee's Fifth Report (Public Expenditure) of Session 2005–06 | HC 211 |
| First Report | The Work of the Committee in 2005–06 | HC 301 |
| Second Report | Citizenship Education | HC 147 |
| Third Report | Bullying | HC 85 |

Oral evidence

Taken before the Education and Skills Committee

on Wednesday 10 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr Douglas Carswell
Mr David Chaytor
Jeff Ennis
Fiona Mactaggart

Mr Gordon Marsden
Mr Andrew Pelling
Stephen Williams

Memorandum submitted by UK HE Europe Unit

INTRODUCTION

1. The UK Higher Education (HE) Europe Unit welcomes the Education and Skills Select Committee's inquiry on the Bologna Process and has pleasure in enclosing this submission. The inquiry will raise awareness of the Bologna Process among decision-makers and the UK HE sector. It also provides an opportunity to consider the role of the European Union's (EU) Lisbon strategy and its focus on the modernisation of European HE.¹ EU activity in this area has important implications for the Bologna Process and its 45 participating countries. This submission highlights the advantages and disadvantages of the Bologna Process for the UK HE sector. It also highlights the UK HE sector's views on the approaching ministerial summit in London in May 2007. It draws on UK HE sector position papers adopted by the UK HE Europe Unit's funders and other stakeholders.²

ADVANTAGES FOR THE UK HE SECTOR

2. The creation of a transparent and accessible European Higher Education Area (EHEA), including the development of new quality assurance arrangements, will make European HE more attractive in a global market and help HEIs compete internationally. Given its dominant position in the context of its European neighbours, this provides an opportunity to strengthen UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The Bologna Process enhances student and staff opportunities for personal development through increased mobility across Europe. Improved mobility offers students and staff the possibility to acquire the experience, language skills and cultural maturity that will enhance their employability in the European labour market. It provides important opportunities for the development of networks between staff and students across Europe.

UK ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

3. The UK HE sector's awareness and engagement in the Bologna Process continues to grow. The UK currently provides the secretariat for the Bologna Process and looks forward to hosting the next ministerial summit in London on 16–18 May 2007 at a crucial stage in the Process. The summit provides an opportunity to showcase UK HE and to show leadership and commitment to the success of the Process.

4. The UK HE sector is engaging actively in Bologna Process working groups and projects and is represented at all key seminars and events.³ In July 2006, the UK held its second Bologna Process seminar on "Enhancing European Employability", hosted by the Welsh Assembly Government and Swansea University. This followed an earlier UK seminar on "Using Learning Outcomes" hosted by Heriot Watt

¹ The European Commission published a Communication on the "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation" in May 2006: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/comuniv2006_en.pdf

² The UK HE Europe Unit was launched in 2004 and is co-financed by Universities UK (UUK), the three HE funding Councils, GuildHE and the Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA). The Unit also works closely with the English government departments: Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Office of Science and Innovation (OSI); as well as the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly and other UK HE stakeholders such as the Research Councils, the British Council and the UK Research Office (UKRO). The Europe Unit coordinates the UK HE sector's engagement in the Bologna Process and other European policy debates in order to develop a UK HE sector position on key issues. The Unit influences decision-makers within the Bologna Process decision-making forums, UK government departments and the EU institutions.

³ UK experts from the QAA co-authored the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in HE which were adopted at the 2005 Bergen summit. Experts from a QAA, UUK and Universities Scotland, as well as Bologna Promoters, were members of the expert working group which developed the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA.

University in Scotland in July 2004. The Europe Unit's survey of UK HEIs in 2005 indicated considerable awareness and engagement with the Bologna process among HEIs. The UK's team of Bologna Process Promoters is active in advising UK HEIs on the Process.

5. UK students and staff enjoy mobility opportunities through participation in the EU's mobility programmes. However, they also participate in joint degrees and European collaboration which are supported and stimulated by the Bologna Process.

DISADVANTAGES FOR THE UK HE SECTOR

UK qualifications and the Bologna Process

6. Second cycle (Masters level) programmes in full time mode in many Bologna Process participating countries last for two years, while in the UK many last for one year. It has been argued that one-year Masters programmes are "lightweight" in terms of hours studied and thus incompatible with Bologna requirements. As a result, graduates from UK HEIs are experiencing difficulties in gaining recognition of one-year Masters programmes for further study and employment elsewhere in Europe and beyond. In response, we have highlighted the fact that the Bologna Process does not stipulate the length of the second cycle, and have argued that the outcomes of study are the most important measure of capability rather than rigid indicators of hours studied. The Europe Unit survey in 2005 found that there are a range of Masters programmes on offer in the UK with a duration ranging from nine to eighteen months. The one-year Masters supports the Bologna objective of promoting flexible learning paths in an era of lifelong learning and provides quick entry to the employment market. We have highlighted to UK HEIs that it is important that UK Masters programmes include a minimum of 60 Masters level European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits in line with the Bologna Process Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA.⁴ The one-year Masters has also been successful among European and international students and employers alike. It is vital that the views of employers are sought and reflected in Bologna Process developments.

7. The compatibility of four-year integrated Masters degrees (for example, MEng, MPharm) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (in Scotland, integrated Masters last for five years) with the Bologna Process has also been questioned. However, they are consistent with the second cycle (Masters level) qualification descriptor in the Bologna Process Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. UK stakeholders have stressed that integrated Masters degrees, requested by employers, are popular with students. We have worked with other UK bodies to promote integrated Masters degrees and produced guidance for institutions on this issue.⁵ The guidance recommends that UK HEIs reflect upon how these programmes align with the Bologna Process and consider how they might be more compatible with European developments.⁶

8. The Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA includes a short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) which accommodates shorter HE, such as the Foundation Degree in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs). The Bergen Communiqué stated that there is the possibility of adopting intermediate qualifications "within national contexts". We are working with stakeholders to promote intermediate qualifications and their continued recognition in the EHEA as building blocks to end of first cycle qualifications. It will be important that the perception of Foundation Degrees elsewhere in Europe is addressed during the consideration of the Further Education Bill by Parliament and in particular its proposal to introduce Foundation Degree awarding powers for further education institutions.

"Fast Track" Two-year Honours Degrees

9. The DfES has recently developed pilot "fast track" degrees of two years' duration in England.⁷ The Bologna Process states that the first cycle (Bachelor level) should last a minimum of three years. Despite UK pressure for European HE systems fully to embrace learning outcomes under the Bologna Process, it is not at all clear that European partners will be prepared to recognise a two-year bachelor as equivalent, in terms of learning outcomes (or credit points) to a three or four year continental first cycle qualification. This may well prevent graduates of two-year degrees pursuing higher levels of study in the rest of Europe. It may also create difficulties for them in finding employment in the European labour market. It is vital that evidence is gathered of national acceptance and recognition of these programmes, as well as increasing student uptake, employability and progression to postgraduate study before they are raised at European level. Promoting these programmes without such evidence could seriously undermine our negotiating position within the Bologna Process and inhibit efforts to secure recognition of other UK qualifications. This last point should not be underestimated.

⁴ Most taught Masters degrees in the UK achieve between 75 and 90 ECTS credits (with 90 for full year Masters).

⁵ See: www.europeunit.ac.uk/resources/E-05-12.doc

⁶ For example, by ensuring the Masters level element includes a minimum of 60 ECTS credits, considering the award of an intermediate Bachelor level certificate and boosting the duration of the Masters element through allocating credit to vacation learning or extending the deadline for dissertation.

⁷ For more information on the pilot projects, visit: www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible/

OTHER ISSUES

Credit issues

10. The Bologna Process recommends greater use of credit in Europe and the development of ECTS into an accumulation system for Europe. Scotland and Wales have comprehensive national qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning including national credit systems based on learning outcomes which are compatible with ECTS.⁸ In England, a steering group on “Measuring and Recording Student Achievement”, chaired by Professor Bob Burgess, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester, has recommended the development of a common HE credit system for England which would be compatible with ECTS.⁹

11. The practical implications of developing ECTS into a European accumulation system need further consideration. The UK HE sector believes that use of credit in the EHEA should be based on the learning outcomes of periods of study alongside notional workload. The European Commission has indicated in correspondence with the DfES and UK HE sector that a review of ECTS will take place during 2007. The UK HE sector looks forward to this review and urges the European Commission to involve the widest possible range of stakeholders in the process.

Quality assurance

12. The UK HE sector welcomes the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in HE adopted at the 2005 Bergen summit. The Standards and Guidelines are, on the whole, compatible with UK quality assurance arrangements and have the potential to support the development of a quality culture and mutual trust in European HE.¹⁰ As the practicalities of a European register for quality assurance agencies are developed in the lead-up to the London summit, it will be important that it does not become a regulatory tool or ranking instrument. There is also a need for the legal, ownership and regulatory issues arising from this development to be fully addressed.

Issuing the Diploma Supplement

13. The Diploma Supplement has the potential to aid the recognition of UK qualifications and mobility.¹¹ The Europe Unit survey in 2005 indicated that a third of respondent institutions were issuing the Diploma Supplement with almost 50% planning to do so in 2006–07. The survey indicated that adapting information management systems and finding resources were key challenges for institutions when issuing the Diploma Supplement. The Europe Unit has actively supported the introduction of the Diploma Supplement, notably through the production of a “Guide to the Diploma Supplement” and a national description of the HE systems in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (a required field in the Diploma Supplement).¹²

14. The Steering Group on “Measuring and Recording Student Achievement” is also looking at the Diploma Supplement in its review of the degree classification system in England. During its consultation with the sector, the Group has recommended the UK Transcript and the Diploma Supplement are incorporated in a single document, with a heading such as, “The Diploma Supplement/Transcript”. Using this approach, the Diploma Supplement would include the final Transcript, which is issued on the award of the final qualification. The Steering Group is expected to make its final recommendations on degree classification in Spring 2007.

UK HE SECTOR POSITION FOR LONDON MINISTERIAL SUMMIT

15. The Europe Unit will produce a UK HE sector position paper in the lead-up to the London ministerial summit. Initial discussions with stakeholders indicate that the following issues will be key:

- It will be important that the Bologna Process remains flexible in its recommendations to accommodate the wide range of qualifications and HE systems operating across the EHEA and the autonomy of HEIs.

⁸ The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (www.scqf.org.uk) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (www.elwa.org.uk/creditframework).

⁹ For more information, see: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/mediareleases/show.asp?MR=480

¹⁰ The QAA is working to incorporate them into the UK’s existing institutional review processes. The Standards and Guidelines will not create an additional layer of evaluation or bureaucratic burden for UK HEIs.

¹¹ The Diploma Supplement is a document appended to a final qualification providing additional information for employers about the qualification and the HE system within which it is awarded. There is a standard format for the Diploma Supplement developed by the Council of Europe and used across Europe.

¹² The Europe Unit Guide and national HE system descriptions are available on the Europe Unit’s website. Scottish stakeholders have produced a separate description for Scotland.

-
- European HEIs need time to consolidate and develop the reforms stimulated by the Bologna Process. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA will also require supporting structures beyond 2010. Future Bologna Process decision-making structures should build on the strengths of its voluntary partnership approach between governments, HEIs, students and other stakeholders.
 - The European Commission plays an important role in the Bologna Process, notably in providing funding for Bologna activity. The EU Lisbon strategy focus on the role of HE in the competitiveness of Europe is welcome. The Bologna Process can contribute to the goals of the Lisbon strategy in modernising European HE through a bottom-up consensual approach. It will be vital, however, that the Lisbon strategy and the Bologna Process remain separate, if complementary, processes.
 - As the Bologna Process develops basic principles for doctoral level qualifications in Europe, the diversity of purpose, structure and duration of doctoral level programmes in Europe must be accommodated.¹³
 - It is important that all three cycles (Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral level) address the employability of graduates.
 - The UK HE sector supports European Commission efforts to establish a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) to encompass all education in Europe. The EQF will not supplant the Bologna Process Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA or European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and should therefore make clear reference to both of them. It will be essential that the EQF remains a voluntary framework and that its distinct function from the Bologna and national qualifications and quality assurance framework is clarified.¹⁴
 - The UK HE sector looks forward to participating in the European Commission's review of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in 2007. It will be important that ECTS is based on the learning outcomes approach in future and avoids focusing on workload.

CONCLUSIONS

16. The Bologna Process and the creation of the EHEA present significant opportunities for the UK HE sector, notably continued competitiveness in the European market, staff and student mobility opportunities and the development of European networks. However, there are a number of issues to be resolved for the sector, notably related to the recognition of UK qualifications, use of credit and qualifications frameworks. The Education and Skills Select Committee may wish to consider the following conclusions in drawing up its recommendations to Government:

- It will be important that appropriate evidence is gathered of national acceptance and recognition of "fast track" two-year honours degrees, as well as increasing student uptake, employability and progression to postgraduate study before they are raised at European level.
- The perception of Foundation Degrees elsewhere in Europe should be considered in the context of the Government's proposal to introduce Foundation Degree awarding powers for further education institutions in the Further Education Bill.
- The European Commission's review of the European Credit Transfer System in 2007 will be vital for the future of the Bologna Process. It will be important that the UK HE sector and the Government engage in this review to ensure that it embraces the learning outcomes approach and accommodates all UK HE qualifications.
- As the EQF passes through the EU institutions, it will be important that decision-makers call for the EQF to remain voluntary. The EQF will not supplant the Bologna Process Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA or European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and clear reference should therefore be made to both.

December 2006

¹³ The UK HE sector position paper on doctoral qualifications and the Bologna Process can be downloaded at: www.europeunit.ac.uk/news/europe_unit_position_paper_archive.cfm

¹⁴ The UK HE sector position paper on the EQF can be downloaded at: www.europeunit.ac.uk/news/europe_unit_position_paper_archive.cfm

Witnesses: **Ms Jessica Olley**, Acting Manager, UK HE Europe Unit, **Professor Drummond Bone**, President of Universities UK (UUK), and **Professor Lord May of Oxford**, a Member of the House of Lords, Joint Professor, Department of Zoology, Oxford University and Imperial College and UK representative on the European Research Council, gave evidence.

Q1 Chairman: Can I welcome our witnesses this morning, Lord May, Professor Drummond Bone and Jessica Olley: we are very grateful for your time in coming before this Committee to answer our questions on the Bologna Process. We do appreciate the time that witnesses give to this Committee. I usually give a very brief opportunity for our witnesses to comment on where they think we are in the topic under discussion, so I will give you that opportunity. In a sense I have been waiting for a long time to meet all three of you, but Professor Drummond Bone particularly because he is the only person I know to whom I can say: “Why are there not more articles about John Clare in romanticism?”, and I knew my Committee would let me get away with that. Shall we get started? Lord May, can I start with you. We are always appreciative of members of the House of Lords being before the Committee. As I said outside, it is the one group of witnesses that can sometimes sidestep us a little giving evidence, so we are very grateful you are here. Where are we in this Bologna Process? Is it adding anything to UK higher education?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I think I should say a couple of things first. Very first, I am labelled as being UK representative on the European Research Council, and not the least of our early achievements in trying to make that a sensible entity, which is not going to be easy, is to make it clear that there are not national representatives, and one of the first achievements is that the Scientific Council that is shaping it only has 22 members, so it cannot have one from every country. There are in fact two Brits; the other one is Wendy Hall, who is senior vice-president of the engineers—a super person. Second and perhaps more to the point, I am not really all that knowledgeable about the Bologna Process as such as distinct from the European research area questions. My involvement with the European research area questions goes back to when I was Chief Scientific Adviser in the late 1990s and continued through the presidency of the Royal Society and, when (as one way of implementing that) the notion of the European Research Council emerged, it was an idea that, in its original form, did not find favour with many of the better performing, more scientifically advanced of the 25 countries, and the UK has worked particularly with the Germans and Scandinavians to reshape and try to create a European Research Council that shall be a premier league, as it were, and serve some of the functions that a premier league serves of setting standards and disseminating best practice. So, if you wish to pursue the more research oriented bits of it, I would be—

Q2 Chairman: Most of our questions will be more on the research side to you, but you are one of the very few figures in the UK university world who has a strong connection not only with Imperial but Oxford and Cambridge, and so we know that you will have a view on Bologna. We are not going to

push you in terms of being the greatest expert on Bologna, but, as someone who has that link from leading universities in our country, is the Bologna Process going to help what goes on in those universities? Is it going to help, hinder, either in teaching or research?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: Like so many of these things, I am very happy to give you my opinion as long as we understand it is an opinion.

Q3 Chairman: Absolutely.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I think the aspiration is absolutely admirable. I am a huge enthusiast for the notion of creating a common European research area with easy movement within it, and that is motivated both by philosophical belief and beneficial practice. My own research group over the 15, 16 years I have been in the UK has typically been small (six to 12 people), but at the peak they were from nine different countries, and I have benefited hugely from bright, young people from within Europe and particularly from the Marie Curie, Framework Six and previous Framework programmes which got the best young people and gave them post-doctoral fellowships to go where they wanted, and that has been a huge such success. If I may say, one index of its success is if you look at publications in science, medicine and engineering in the old EU 15, I suppose, that had joint transnational aphorial collaborations, they were 22% of all the publications 1993–97 and 29% 1997–2001, and so it was a 20% per annum increase in collaborative activity that came from that, so I am a great enthusiast. On the other hand, to put it perhaps unkindly, my view is that Brussels does not always translate excellent admirable aspiration into effective action but tends to cloud it by creating bureaucracies. If I can read you a quote I have given the officials, I am afraid I did not do it ahead of time, a two-page thing that I wrote emerging from one of these meetings with the Germans and others, I focused on the European Research Council but I did say that what we need to do is strip away some of the aspirational rhetoric that clouds discussions, the idea that we make statements like we are going to surpass the US. The truth of the matter is that there are countries in Europe—Switzerland, Sweden—who on a per capita or GDP basis outperform the USA already in science, medicine and engineering, and so do we. We tend to confuse sheer size with excellence. There are countries in Europe that spend more on basic science than the US. The US is in the bottom half of the OECD spenders on basic science, but some of these countries that spend a third as much again as the US perform very poorly; so it is not just about money, it is about how you organise things; and my worry about Bologna is it is entirely excellent that it wants to make it easier for people to be accepted, to move from one university to another, but it is not that difficult as it is. If you take particularly Oxford and Cambridge, they take kids from all over Europe, from all over the world, at

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

every level—tertiary, then masters, then PhDs, then post-doctorate. We exchange with the US. Their college system is very different from ours, but we have no problem doing it. Nonetheless, we could make it a bit easier, but I worry that what will result will be something that tries to have a common rate of progression, and there, again, one of the advantages that we and much of the Anglo-based countries enjoy is we get people to the cliff-facing research much quicker than many, if not most, of the continental European countries. We get them to the cliff face, furthermore, with curricula that are more oriented to recognising what the cliff face is, and much of the already exponentiating bureaucracy from Bologna is oriented to wanting to have common definitions of the curricula (the rates of progress, the units of three and one and stuff), which is neither necessary nor sufficient to create a common European education and research area. The idea is great, and we want to be working for it and we want to be working with the people in Brussels, but, as we have succeeded so far—there is no guarantee of eventual success—crossing with difficulty hurdle after hurdle, we need to take the idea, as we have with the European Research Council, and work with like-minded colleagues and turn it into something that is really a good idea. The European Research Council as originally proposed was not.

Q4 Chairman: Thank you for that, Lord May. Professor Bone, does your view differ from Lord May's?

Professor Bone: No, I have got a lot of sympathy with what Lord May has just said. We feel generally in the sector that Bologna is, indeed, a good idea, for all the reasons, I think, that Lord May has said: the mobility. In the context of a globalised world, I think mobility both for staff and students, has got to be a good thing. I think the modernisation of the European educational system in general is a good thing as well because it leads to increased transparency, and that, I think, is good for the way in which the UK can compete on a level playing field with Europe. I think the danger is that it gets overtaken by bureaucracy. A bit like the ERC, I think actually the Bologna Process has so far fought that off. One of the great successes of the Bologna Process so far is that, by and large, it can be said to have driven sector-led and, although there has been consequent legislation in a number of countries, it is consequent on decisions actually taken by the sector, but there is a continual danger, as it were, that the bureaucratisation that we have just been hearing about does actually take over. One of the ironies is that Europe, I think, is learning that the UK system of autonomous universities, which are very flexible, is actually the way to go and the danger is that they then try and get there through a bureaucratic system, which is exactly the opposite of what they should in fact be doing. I think that is a constant danger we have to look out for. Fundamentally, I think if we continue to manage Bologna properly (and I think, again, that is one of the things that the UK can help do by its presence in the process) it will be good for

UK higher education in the long-term and it will help us be competitive globally. We have got to make sure that it does not end up driving UK policy. While we are actually aware of the context, as it were, we must not let the cart get in front of the horse.

Q5 Chairman: Professor Bone, both of you have talked about Europe and the European Union and the link. As far as I am concerned there are not 45 members of the European Union, but there are 45 countries that have signed up to Bologna. That is more than the 42 nations that take part in the Eurovision Song Contest. What is this 45? What is the logic of 45?

Professor Bone: I do not think there is any particular logic to the number 45. I think one of the interesting things is the number of countries that actually want to get involved in the Bologna Process, and it is not just those 45.

Q6 Chairman: But the European Union being more effective and efficient and better at research and so on, why do we need these people outside the European Union? Why are we helping them to be more effective and efficient? I thought it was the European Union that centred this whole project.

Professor Bone: The European Union certainly started the whole project, that is absolutely true, but I do not think we should get hung up on a particular bureaucratic thing of the EU. The point I was going to make is that everybody around the world is very interested in the Bologna Process insofar as it actually improves mobility and could be seen to improve efficiency in higher education. We have had enormous interest from China, enormous interest from other Asian countries, from Australia, from the United States, there is terrific interest in what Bologna could do for higher education, and the fact is that we do actually work now in a global context.

Q7 Chairman: Is not that a mission creep? It starts off with one thing, you look at the relationship, and a lot of the literature says there is a link between the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy, which says it wants to deliver stronger lasting growth and create more and better jobs in a European Union, but it does not say anything about countries outside the Union.

Professor Bone: There are certainly dangers. One of the troubles, again, I think, about the enlargement to 45 is that the rate of modernisation and the extent of modernisation across the 45 is going to be very different indeed. There is no question about that. There is a huge range inside that 45, and that does not make life easy and it does lead to a temptation to impose a kind of regularity which could be at the lowest common denominator rather than at the highest common denominator; so I certainly think there are dangers there. In terms of what you call the mission creep, there, I suppose, you are absolutely right. If, strictly speaking, one is looking at economic advantage for the EU, you would have to look very carefully at what advantage could be brought by widening to the 45.

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

Q8 Chairman: Thank you for that. Jessica Olley, you have been involved in this for a very long time; you are a real European expert. What is your view of where we are? It seems to me, reading the literature to prepare for this session, that there has been a tension all the time between what we do in the UK and what happens in most of mainland Europe. One of those is about the difference between time served, hours served or put into a degree course of any kind, and outcomes.

Ms Olley: Absolutely.

Q9 Chairman: That seems to have been balanced and handled in a diplomatic way, but are not the strains going to come through at some time?

Ms Olley: First of all, thank you for inviting me to give evidence. I think, absolutely, that remains a key issue—the learning outcomes approach verses the duration or time served approach—particularly in the context of recognition of some of the UK’s qualifications, UK Master’s degrees, integrated Master’s degrees. I think we have made some progress. We now have a qualifications framework that has been adopted within the Bologna Process that is based on learning outcomes with generic level descriptors and typical credit ranges but very much focused on learning outcomes, and so we have made progress in that sense, and that qualifications framework is a key reference point in assuring the recognition of UK qualifications.

Q10 Chairman: How do we know that in the London meeting this year these 44 other nations might not gang up on us and say, “Look, you cannot any longer have a one-year Master’s degree”, for example?

Ms Olley: They may well do, but they would be in an extremely weak position given that in Bergen in 2005 there was a consensus among all the ministers, among the stakeholders involved in the process, the European University Association, the National Unions of students in Europe and, equally, the Quality Assurance Agencies across the 45 participating countries. They all reached a consensus on a qualifications framework based on this learning outcomes approach, so there is a deep consensus on that framework.

Q11 Chairman: Has it made any difference to us? We more or less do what we did from the very beginning of the Bologna Process. It is the rest of the 45 that have changed?

Ms Olley: Has the process in general made a difference to the UK?

Q12 Chairman: What difference has it made? We seem to be going our own sweet way. We have a one-year Master’s, accelerated two-year honours degrees, foundation degrees. We are doing our own sweet thing, which we hope to carry on doing, yet the rest of Europe have now three-year first degrees, two-year Master’s and three-year PhDs, as I understand it. That is the common pattern, is it not?

Ms Olley: Yes, absolutely. There is the three cycle structure, a minimum of three years for the first cycle, and that is all that is specified.

Q13 Chairman: So why does a distinguished professor like Drummond Bone and his colleagues want to spend time on this?

Ms Olley: Because, as most of the speakers have suggested, the Bologna Process is crucial for consolidating the UK higher education sector’s competitiveness, both in the European context but also in the international context. Then, on top of that, you have got all the advantages in terms of easier mobility for both staff and students.

Q14 Chairman: But Lord May just told us that there has been high mobility before Bologna. He had no problem with a good student who had research potential going to anywhere in Europe and bringing someone good from Italy or Germany to study in our universities. What we are trying to get at here is: what is the difference, what is the advantage?

Ms Olley: There has been mobility but there remain very difficult challenges in terms of recognition of qualifications in terms of collaboration, in developing collaborative programmes. There have been difficulties for UK institutions working with institutions in other parts of Europe, and the Bologna Process provides some of the answers to those issues in providing neutral reference points at European level that make it easier to compare UK qualifications, easier for UK institutions to trust one another and work together.

Q15 Chairman: But the strongest point made by Lord May is that we have actually increased by 20% out of collaboration across Europe in terms of research activity. I can see that, but in distinct areas Professor Drummond, where we seem to be getting somewhere (and you can understand the flow of this thing) when it actually comes to some really crucial areas like transferability of degrees it does not happen, does it?

Professor Bone: I think there is still a long way to go, that is clear, but I think we need to distinguish between the benefits to students while they are at university, which is one thing, and the potential benefits to them when they leave. One of the key things that I think we are fighting for is recognition for our students’ qualifications in Europe, and one of the key wins we have had is to persuade the rest of Europe that in fact output measures are the sensible way to go. It is to do with persuading employers to recognise UK degrees as well. They have got terribly used to the same kind of bureaucratic processes that their own native universities got used to—if you do not have such and such you are rubbish—and we have got to persuade European employers, in persuading the universities, that our way is best because that is what is best for UK students.

Q16 Chairman: Professor Bone, are you saying that well qualified people with UK degrees at the moment find a barrier to job opportunities in Europe because our degrees are considered second-rate to others?

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

Professor Bone: It depends on where you are. I expect that people from Oxford and Cambridge would not find that barrier, but there is quite significant anecdotal evidence, and it is something that we actually want to firm up a little. We would like to do a little bit of work to see what the real evidence is, but there is evidence that, in fact, UK degrees are not being recognised easily by European employers, that they ask questions about these degrees.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I give you an amusing anecdote of this kind, it is a little beside the point. When I first came here about 16 years ago I was for a few years President of the British Ecological Society. It was the oldest ecology society, and it was at the time decided it might be good to have a certifying system like the engineering people have. I did not think it was a good idea, but I thought it was not my place to quarrel with it, and, obviously, if we are going to do it, the President ought to be one. Then we discovered I could not get a certificate as an ecologist, despite my distinction in the field, if I may say, because there were EU rules about this, and one of the rules was that you had to have done the subject as an undergraduate. Of course I was a physicist. I fear that is the sort of thing that mars the good intentions. We have talked about differences in the temporal structure and the definition of courses. There are huge differences among universities, not least the average person coming into a British university, in all their diversity (which is the strength), and we ought to be encouraging it further. The research assessment exercise problem is it cuts against that—it is one of the advantage the States has—but one of the other factors is that in this country the average person entering will emerge with a degree. We have a low drop out rate; we select the students. In a large number, including major countries like France, if you want to go to university, you go to university, and you handle that by having completion rates that are well below 50%. You are dealing with this complex array of things, and if you start putting in place rules about the number of units and the number of years structure, they do not take into account the really important differences.

Q17 Chairman: Lord May, is that a case against Bologna or for it?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I am for the idea of making it easy to recognise the differences among places and, against that background, remove such barriers as there are—and it is not obvious to me there are many—to movement among them. Oxford has no trouble. I have had no trouble in the department, whether we are talking under graduate or graduate students. We have people who put time into making judgments—and it is the only way you can do it—on the day they are available, which is tricky sometimes to get the best people. The colleges do a good job. I think Britain demonstrably does a good job at that. They do not do it by box-ticking or by looking at the date.

Q18 Chairman: Professor Bone, when you say that there is anecdotal evidence about this, is not one of the worries when you read all the literature that you would have thought that the whole Bologna Process would surely have been about, as Jessica Olley talked about, mobility. Actually there are declining numbers of British students going to mainland Europe and studying. Would not one of the problems be something that we have looked at in this Committee in past years, that actually it is the lack of experience in Europe and the lack of languages other than English that inhibits job opportunities across Europe rather than the quality or structure of the degree that they have taken?

Professor Bone: Again, I think there is no question that language is a factor. It certainly is a factor in the shortfall and it is nearly double, the mismatch in input and output, and so I think language clearly is a problem, and it probably is a problem too in terms of acceptability, but there are suggestions from some of the learned societies as well that their members find it difficult, for the same kind of absurd reasons that Lord May has just suggested, in actually getting jobs and posts in Europe. If I can answer the question you put to Lord May, to me that is an argument for us being engaged in Bologna because it is through Bologna that we can actually persuade Europe to see what we see as commonsense.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I am not arguing against that. I believe, just as in the ERC, we have got to be engaged.

Chairman: Let us move on then. Thank you very much for those introductory responses. Fiona.

Q19 Fiona Mactaggart: What you have said to us actually chimes with the written evidence that we have received, which I could sum-up as Bologna is a wonderful idea in theory but in practice we are in a panic about X, Y or Z, is what I read from the evidence. I think that is what you are saying, that in theory it is excellent and it is the only way of doing this thing that we want to do but in practice it is not necessarily. Am I right in believing that that is the kind of view across the higher education sector or is there something more positive or more negative?

Professor Bone: I think we are maybe more positive than you suggest. I certainly would not like the word “panic” to be used.

Q20 Fiona Mactaggart: By “panic” I meant a number of organisations said that a particular kind of degree is at risk from the year counting.

Professor Bone: There are a lot of issues, and that is one of the absolutely key issues, there is no question about that. I think the key thing is to keep chipping away at it. Again, I think the decisive thing (and I would like this to be something which is foregrounded in the May ministerial meeting) is that it is the sector which actually keeps control of the process. The danger is that the EC, as it were, takes over—Brussels, to use the term more loosely, actually takes over the process—because then we could be on the slippery slope to a sort of bureaucratised process, which I think would be a cause for panic and a nightmare. At the moment the

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

sector is still in control, and I do not just mean the UK sector but our colleagues across Europe as well, and I think it is just a question of chipping away at all these issues. There is a remarkable amount of agreement across Europe in the sector about the way to go; that is not necessarily the case at governmental level across Europe.

Q21 Fiona Mactaggart: Are you saying that the anxiety that I have detected in some of the evidence that I have received on the Bologna Process about a kind of standardised system is not well-founded, that actually it is about a shared understanding and equivalents rather than standardisation?

Professor Bone: I think that the anxiety that it could become a process about standardisation is well founded. I do not think it is at the moment, but there is always that danger.

Q22 Fiona Mactaggart: In the memorandum from the DfES they said that it is not intended to lead to standardisation or greater uniformity of European higher education provision, it is more a framework designed to ensure the highest level of quality consistency, and so on, and yet in all sorts of areas—length of degrees, quality assurance mechanisms, and so on—there seems to be a very widespread anxiety that it is not a framework but a standard system. What I want to know is are you confident that around Europe there is a shared view that this should be a framework rather than a standardisation and that there is a common ambition to create that across Europe?

Q23 Chairman: Ms Olley, would you like to start?

Ms Olley: Absolutely. Certainly among the European stakeholders involved in the process there is a consensus that it remains about broad principles at European level rather than detailed, top-down, rigid recommendations. Absolutely. That is certainly the case. If I may take the opportunity just to underline Professor Bone's point about UK engagement, there has been a real increase in the sector's engagement in the Bologna Process. As you know, we are hosting the next summit, we currently hold the secretariat for the process, but experts from across the UK—from Scotland and Wales as well as England—have been members of key working groups that have developed this Bologna qualifications framework, the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance that we have adopted, and were co-authored by Peter Williams who you are speaking to later, and so there is real, solid evidence of how engaged and how influential the UK sector is in the process.

Q24 Fiona Mactaggart: Are all of you confident that in research as well as in other areas you can get a greater level of consistency and coherence across Europe without standardisation—that it is achievable?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I do not think it is easy, and I certainly want to say again I think we have got to be engaged in the process, but one of the problems, amongst others (and I think it is one of

our faults) is that we take very seriously any regulations that are put in place. If you would not minute this story, please! One morning of the Permanent Secretary's meetings when they used to get together and complain about their ministers, Terry Burns, who was then head of the Treasury, was saying there are advantages in having a uniform taxation system within Europe, and I said, "Absolutely. I would be very happy to pay the higher Italian taxes, provided it was consistently uniform and, like the Italians, I did not pay it." We tend to forget that many of the places we are talking about, the education system we are talking about, are unrecognisably different from our own, not in the year structure so much as in the way the students are treated and the way the courses are taught, and, talking of the research qualifications, Italy is still a nepotistic mess in appointments of people at the faculty level, despite the fact that it is full of brilliant people. We have got to be engaged trying to push it in the right direction, but I would hope that we would also have at the back of our minds that maybe, just for once, if there are things that end up through our wishing to participate, being things we think are silly, we leave the universities alone and DfES is a more bit more relaxed about not requiring them all to tick all the boxes. We should remember, if you look at any of these surveys of what are the world's best universities, of the top 10 European universities in any such survey, we own five of the top six, and the sixth is the ETH, Zurich, in Switzerland, which would agree with everything we are saying because it is like a British university. We run a serious risk, if we take this too seriously, and I do not mean this disrespectfully, but the Civil Service culture is rather different from the higher education culture in many ways. I do not 100% trust DfES, even though I have absolute confidence in the good intentions and the conscientious diligence of the people in that excellent Department. It is a delicate trick to be heavily engaged while at the same time recognising that that engagement is likely to lead to commitments that are not going to be great, and I draw in saying that on my eight years of experience in this European research area, the European Research Council, and seeing the terrain and the battlefield being fought out of trying to take the European Research Council idea, which was essentially initially proposed as a welfare agency, having a fair chance of being turned into a premier league that helps everyone. There is no guarantee it will yet, but it is in the right direction, and that is what I hope we can do with Bologna, but it is not going to be easy.

Q25 Mr Marsden: I wonder if we could turn to the scale of Bologna and what the implications of it might be. We have already heard it is going to be a purely EU thing and clearly the numbers are post the numbers of people in the EU. Perhaps I could ask you, Professor Bone, do you see Bologna getting bigger and bigger and eventually turning into an international set of principles and standards and, if so, would that be a bad thing?

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

Professor Bone: It depends what that would look like. I think increased transparency in terms of the way in which universities function, which is one of the outputs from Bologna, would be good thing for international trade in higher education, and I include research in that. One of the things that we are facing at the moment, for example, is a very uneven playing field in the way in which the state actually subsidises research activities in universities across Europe; so anything which leads to greater transparency, whether it is transparency in terms of qualifications requirements, whether it is transparency in the way in which universities are funded, I think would be a good thing internationally; but if what you are envisaging, Gordon, is a kind of huge pan-national WHO in international education, then that would not be a good thing. Clearly that would be a nightmare.

Q26 Mr Marsden: Presumably, apart from anything else, our North American colleagues would be very reluctant to go along with it?

Professor Bone: Indeed. One of the nightmares as well, and it is something we have heard quite a bit about (and we might come back to that again in our discussion specifically about Europe) is international quality assurance agencies.

Q27 Mr Marsden: Let me explore with you a bit more the push-pull factors here. Some of the countries that are wanting to join up to Bologna, frankly, in my view, are doing it in some respects as a proxy for EU membership, and that is perfectly understandable and laudable from that point of view. Is it our job to help them along that road?

Professor Bone: I do not think it is necessarily our job. As I have said, I think there is an argument that there is a longer-term gain in actually improving the standard of higher education globally.

Q28 Mr Marsden: So that is what it is there for, or part of what it is there for?

Professor Bone: It is a small part of it, but it is certainly a part of what it is there for, yes.

Q29 Mr Marsden: There was reference earlier to the issue of how easy is at the moment or not, as the case may be, and one of the crucial backgrounds to this, of course, is programmes like Erasmus and Socrates and Da Vinci. If we are going to move down a route which says these things are a good thing and we want more of them—and I do not know whether this is something you would be able to comment on, Lord May—has there been any assessment as to how valuable in terms of impact the structures of what is already there (Erasmus, Socrates and Da Vinci) has been?

Ms Olley: In the context of preparing the European Union's new mobility programme, which is beginning this year—their new integrated life-long learning programme which will replace Erasmus, Socrates, Leonardo—there has absolutely been a review and a close look at how they were working.

Q30 Mr Marsden: I am particularly interested in the whole issue of student impacts. Not the bureaucracy of it, not whether all the boxes have been ticked and everything has flowed properly, but have the students who have gone through those programmes benefited themselves, particularly UK students, from what they have done. Is there any hard evidence on that?

Ms Olley: I can certainly look to provide you with hard evidence after this session, but my impression is that Erasmus is absolutely beneficial to those students who participate.

Q31 Mr Marsden: With respect, Jessica, that is an impression. What I am asking about (and I do not know if our other colleagues have anything to say on this) is have there been any surveys of the students? Those programmes have been going for several years now. What has the feedback been in British universities? Have they all come back and said, "Yes, we want more of this", or what?

Ms Olley: There have been surveys and my understanding is that the feedback was positive, but I would like to confirm that.

Professor Bone: To the best of my knowledge, there has been no overarching cost-benefit analysis, if I can put it that way, under Erasmus, as far as I know, but, again, I think there have been individual surveys and I am sure we could supply you with the outcomes of these.

Q32 Mr Marsden: My last point, and this is perhaps one that Lord May may want to comment on, should we not be trying to proceed on the basis of empirical evidence from the benefits of existing EU cooperation before we actually propose structures and systems that expand?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: My answer is simply, "Yes". We should be driven not by some idealised, tidy scheme that unifies things, we should be governed by the aspiration of making it easy to move around and evaluate people, recognising that at the moment we have huge diversity. Some of it is good, as within this country of different emphases in different areas, and so on, and some of it is a diversity of the actual standards, and we should be trying, as we look at trying to make it easier to move around, at the same time to do it in a way that raises standards by acquainting people with the models that by various objective measures work better, producing better educated people.

Q33 Mr Carswell: I wanted to talk a bit about the Lisbon Agenda and mobility across Europe. Do you agree that the Bologna Process is fundamentally about responding to the Lisbon Agenda on competitiveness and making European higher education world class?

Professor Bone: I do not know that it is linked necessarily to the Lisbon Agenda in its entirety. I think it has relevance to the Lisbon Agenda clearly, and I certainly think that fundamentally it is about competitiveness, yes, and competitiveness in

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

the widest possible sense, not just economic competitiveness narrowly defined but social benefit which would lead to a better environment overall.

Ms Olley: I would agree with Professor Bone. I would just add that the sector is concerned that the whole Bologna Process can compliment many of the reform processes within the Lisbon strategy. There is a sense that we want the two processes to remain very separate, not least because the bottom-up decision-making process within Bologna has actually been very successful when you compare it with the European Commission's top-down approach to reforming higher education. If I may give you an example, the recent proposal from the Commission on the European Qualifications Framework for Life-long Learning is a qualifications framework which would encompass all education in Europe from the cradle to the grave. It is described as being voluntary. The UK sector has got grave concerns about this proposal mainly because of the choice of treaty article that the European Commission is basing the proposal on, which is that for vocational education which gives the Commission considerable powers to legislate. So there is a concern about the level of detail, the division of responsibility between the European Union and Member States in that respect.

Q34 Mr Carswell: Building on that, is the Bologna Process needed to achieve the agenda goals in the UK, do you think? Do you think it is central to it?

Professor Bone: I certainly think the facilities are. There is no question about that. If I catch the drift of your question, it would be, I think, disastrous for the UK if we were not involved in the Bologna Process because I think then we are, as I say, in a position where we would lose control of what is effectively a modernisation process in Europe. I think there is some evidence that at the moment we are still in control of that process.

Q35 Mr Carswell: Some might say that the Lisbon Agenda has not been wholly successful. Could it be that the Bologna Process is perhaps a solution in search of a problem? Could it not be that the intention is to Europeanise higher education and that Lisbon and all that baloney is simply the justification?

Professor Bone: One can speculate that that is the case. I do not think from the sector's point of view that is the case. I will repeat what I said earlier on: I think the sector is still in control of the Bologna Process. The idea of autonomous universities having their own ends and their own aims is actually at the moment driving Bologna. There is always a danger that the whole thing flips upside down and there may be people who have malign motives, if I can put it that way, but at the moment that is not the way it is going.

Q36 Mr Carswell: Lord May, is the Lisbon Agenda a solution in search of a problem?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: The bit I know the most about of the Lisbon and the subsequent Barcelona thing is indeed what gave rise to the

European Research Council. The discussion there is a new one, again, both for the sensible aspiration and the uninformed nature of the dialogue about it: because the thing that continues to be repeated is if we look to tomorrow's knowledge economy. If we look at the United States (and they spend 3% of GDP on research and development, a similar figure for Japan) the EU—that was then the EU 15 when this figure was quoted—has spent 1.8% of GDP on R and D and, now that we have got the EU 25, it will be a smaller proportion. The Lisbon declaration then says, in the most astonishing *non sequitur*, "Therefore we need a European Research Council (ERC) to provide more basic research." The fact of the matter is that 96% of the difference between the American 3% and the European average of 1.8% comes from private spending by business and industry on development rather than basic research, and, in fact, there are many countries in Europe that spend significantly more. Germany spends more like point 8% of GDP on basic research compared to the United States. They are tricky figures to get actually, but there was a neighbourhood of point six, point seven, and there is also a great difference between what people get for what they spend. Nonetheless, that was then enshrined as an aspiration with even a date (2012 I believe) when Europe was going to match that, and, again, in this article in *Nature*, just rereading it—I enjoy my own prose—I said, "I do not believe there is a snowball's chance in hell of this happening, but whether or not this improbable ambition is fulfilled lies entirely in the hands of the industry not Government." Again, we come back to Lisbon. They have identified a problem. It is a problem in Europe of under-investment in basic research, in applied research, in translational research, and it is another reflection of the more risk-averse culture for much of Europe. It is a fundamental problem. But, instead of thinking of how you address the problem, you move off to do something that is beside the point. I digress for a moment to say, nonetheless, I think a good point with the ERC and the shape it has been given encourages one to believe that, if we participate in a more sympathetic way in these processes, we can help reshape them. In short, Lisbon identified the problem excellently and it said silly things about what it wanted to do about it; whereas it ought to be saying: "Finland, Sweden spend more than 3% of GDP; Switzerland spends more than 3% of GDP, most of it, of course, from private industry. What are they doing right? What can we learn from them rather than just making declarations?" That is what I say about education. They should be asking what can they learn from the really successful countries like us, rather than trying to create some tidy scheme.

Q37 Mr Carswell: Did you want to add something?

Professor Bone: I wanted to add another example, and that is the European Institute of Technology's proposal, which is another example (a classic example) of what Lord May has just said. They identified the problem correctly, which is the

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

problem of translation between university research, action and business and then come up with an absolutely insane solution?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: Based on a total failure of what MIT was like.

Q38 Chairman: Based on?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: It was based on a romantic delusion about what the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was like. Everything you have said is right.

Professor Bone: But the key difference, again, goes back to what Jessica was just saying. The difference there is that that was EC led, whereas the Bologna Process at the moment is being controlled by the sector.

Q39 Mr Carswell: I have two final questions on the question of mobility specifically. I am sceptical. Degrees from good universities around the world gain recognition; excellence speaks for itself. Why do we need a technocratic process to do what could happen and has happened organically by itself?

Professor Bone: I think the trouble is that what tends to happen is that by word of mouth—and word of mouth may well be right—excellent universities, their degrees are accepted everywhere globally, but there are many other good universities who, for one reason or another, do not have that kind of street credibility, if I can put it that way, and that is where the trouble starts. What Lord May was saying about Oxford and Cambridge is absolutely clear.

Chairman: I think Steven wants to come in on mobility. Can I bring Stephen in here.

Q40 Stephen Williams: The written evidence that has been presented to us suggests that with the Erasmus programme at least the mobility of UK students going into Europe has actually declined. Is Bologna actually failing in its primary objective of increasing mobility of students and academics?

Professor Bone: It has certainly not been successful yet, I think it would be fair to say. Some of that is down to UK universities, some of it is down to a language problem, as we have already said, some of it is perhaps down to UK universities not being energetic enough in pursuing an international strategy which in their head they think is a good idea but they have not actually operationalised on the ground. I think too, for all the reasons that we have heard earlier on, that there is a fear—in some sense a justifiable fear—that if you move from an efficient UK university you may well find yourself in a highly inefficient continental university. So the modernisation process that we have been talking about I think will have to run for a few years before our students have got confidence to move. I think we all know about what can happen with arrangements in Italy which are not properly monitored. I think bilateral arrangements, as we have already heard, are still the way to go. Bilateral arrangements take a lot of energy; they take a lot of commitment; and there is not that sort of general level of confidence yet in the Bologna Process, which will take time.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: Turning it round the other way, if I may, movement into Britain from the rest of Europe, I see, from my own experience and my own research group and from undergraduates I know, I think works admirably well here. We do a good job, there are plenty of them and they benefit and then they can go back and help spread it.

Q41 Stephen Williams: Is that because the UK higher education sector has concentrated on getting international students, whether they are from the EU or the rest of the world, into this country with great success—the second largest market after the US students—but what we have not concentrated on so much is making sure that our students and academics spend time abroad, whether it is Europe, or China, or Australia, wherever? Is that a fair point to make?

Ms Olley: I think that would be a fair comment. If I may add to what Professor Bone and Lord May have said on the mobility programmes, I think there is an issue about the structure of the existing mobility programmes and the nature of students in the UK. It is not always appropriate for UK students to take part in a year-long period of study abroad. That is not always appropriate for a part-time student, for example, who may have a family. There are some issues about the structure of the programme and how appropriate they are for today's student cohort.

Q42 Stephen Williams: So it is the structure programme rather than the Bologna Process that is the problem?

Ms Olley: I would not go that far, but I think the structure of the programmes is part of the picture.

Professor Bone: I would, through you, Chairman, accept the criticism that perhaps UK institutions have to try a bit harder in getting students overseas.

Q43 Stephen Williams: One last question on this particular section directly to Lord May about research and on Bologna. A lot of what we have talked about is about students, undergraduate study. Should Bologna concentrate more on the third cycle of research so that post-doctorate people transfer around Europe or, indeed, to Japan, China and elsewhere?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I think at the research level it has been a happier story. I gave you the earlier statistic. If you go back to framework, much of the money for driving some of these initiatives comes out of the framework programmes. During the five years when I was Chief Scientist our position was to resist expenditure on framework, any form of framework expenditure, unless it was something that was addressing a need. So that things in development, rather than basic research, like the Airbus or vaccines, where you have to need a European scale to compete with the United States, we were enthusiastic about and the things we were unambiguously enthusiastic about were the human capital mobility programmes at the post-doctorate level—the Marie Curie things. As I said to you, that has been a remarkable success in bringing people

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

together and there really is a one Europe in that already, although, understandably, it is not a homogeneous flow, it is a flow from students from the less scientifically developed places to the more scientifically developed places, and that is as it should be. There were conflicting motives, in my opinion, in wanting to form the ERC and some of them confusing it with another vital need, which is to use the structural funds to build scientific capacity in the accession countries and some of the scientifically less developed countries in Europe, but that is a task for structural funds. It is even more important than building roads. Some people had the original conception of the ERC that it would be a substitute for structural funds in helping build capacity. With the result of deliberate and energetic engagement in that, deliberately co-operative with others in countries in Europe who have shared that view, we have succeeded in creating a European Research Council which I think is going to be what it must be, based on peer review and excellence, but it has not been easy. We have done several of the good first steps, with 22 members, so it is not one for each country. We have a wonderful chairman in Fodos Kafadis who has spent most of his life in America. He is Greek and is now in retirement from running the European Molecular Biology Organisation, EMBO, and is at Imperial College. He is an immensely wise, patient and good person who has steered this collection of 22 people, some of whom from the more northern countries are people who have for many years moved at the highest levels on these kinds of stages and some from other countries who are good people who are still a little bit concerned that money be in fair shares and so on. I have hopes. It has crossed three or four tricky hurdles successfully that I will not bore you with in creating something that looks as if it is going to be really independent and is going to give a post post-doc, *ad personam* to bright young people.

Q44 Chairman: Why have not European universities got better at research? You just said that six of the top European universities were in the UK. Why are they not improving?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: They are all improving but so is everybody. This is a red queen problem. You have to run fast to stay in the same place. It is interesting. Someone just did a survey of Oxford and Cambridge compared to Harvard on geometric indices across all fields and showed that over the last decade they have significantly improved. Of the other 10, there is none in France, one in Germany, Holland and Sweden. They are northern places but in research I have an up-beat view of these kinds of initiatives.

Chairman: I am sure we will get you back when we look at the Research Assessment Exercise which we are going to do shortly.

Q45 Jeff Ennis: We have mentioned already the next ministerial conference that is going to be held in London in May of this year. Can you outline the key

points of the UK HE sector position paper which has to be produced for the conference? What will you be looking for?

Professor Bone: One of the key things that we are interested in is to underline that question of the ownership by the sector. We need to emphasise the fact that we must not slip into a bureaucratic position. When we are trying to envisage what happens after 2010, that is absolutely key. There will be issues about the third level provision as well and it is absolutely key that we get that right and keep that flexible, which I am sure is what Lord May wants as well. That is also crucial. Also, there are issues that we would like to stress about looking at the external dimension. How do we relate to the wider world outside of the EU and the 45? There is considerable interest in the Bologna Process, but how do we do that? How do we manage the kind of thing that Gordon Marsden was suggesting?

Ms Olley: That covers many of the issues. Continued flexibility in the process is linked to the importance of autonomy. We hope that the process will remain principles based rather than rules based. Bologna can complement Lisbon and support many of the reforms that the Commission is recommending within that but we wish the two processes to remain separate in their decision making. There is an important point about credit and the European Credit Transfer System. We have not touched on that. This is linked to the learning outcomes point. The European Credit Transfer System that is currently in use across many European countries is very much focused on workload, on hours of study, and the UK has great reservations about that. The Commission has indicated informally that it is going to review the ECTS in 2007 so we would like to press the Commission on that in London.

Q46 Chairman: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have signed up to it.

Ms Olley: They have credit systems which are compatible with the ECTS. They have not adopted it wholesale.

Q47 Jeff Ennis: Many of the points that the witnesses have referred to are already incorporated to some extent in what is known as the 10 Bologna Process action points. The original six were agreed at Bologna in 1999. Three were added at the Prague ministerial summit in 2001 and the last one to do with doctoral studies was added after the Berlin summit in 2003. Do you anticipate any further action lines being added to the 10 principles that have already been agreed or can the 10 that have already been agreed now encompass all the points that we need to make?

Professor Bone: Our position in principle is that we would like the process to settle down as it is without adding extra action points.

Ms Olley: Absolutely. A time for consolidation is going to be key.

Q48 Jeff Ennis: In some of the evidence we have had the Royal Academy of Engineering believes that the UK should press for the adoption of learning

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

outcomes alone as the ultimate long term basis for a European HE qualifications framework. Is that too simplistic or should that definitely be our grand objective?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I thought the document from the Royal Academy of Engineering—and I declare an interest as both being an undergraduate engineer and a Fellow of the Academy—was just excellent and I agreed with it point by point.

Q49 Chairman: Can you do an honours degree in two years, in your opinion?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I have lived my life in three countries for roughly equal times in Australia, 20 years in the States and 16 years here. They are superficially different and even in Australia the different states are different. New South Wales is very like Scotland.

Q50 Chairman: The Committee has just come back from a visit to Australia.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I was an undergraduate. I started as an engineer and I ended with a science degree. It was a three plus one for an honours year at which point, in those days because it was always better in the old days—we can all agree that—I was well ahead of most Americans who had graduated with a PhD with exam components. By the time I was 23 I was a lecturer at Harvard. I just like the fact that I got that quick start. It gave me time to do more different things with my life. I do not think these questions of whether you can do something are meaningful. It is a question of who are the teachers, who are the students and how is the curriculum organised and the trade-off between stuffing stuff in and getting stuff out. Higher education is about learning how to learn. It is not about stuffing things in a bottle.

Q51 Chairman: You would like the flexibility to do a fast degree if it was appropriate?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: Yes.

Q52 Chairman: In the London meeting later this year you will stand up, Professor Bone, with your colleagues against moves to—

Professor Bone: I guessed that was coming.

Q53 Chairman: I have a vested interest. I am governor of the London School of Economics. One of our great incomes is from one year masters. Are we going to defend one year masters? Are we going to defend the possibility of fast tracking two years honours degrees? Are we going to defend the three year case?

Professor Bone: We are going to defend flexibility and learning outcomes as the absolutely key and only sensible way to measure the efficacy of higher education. It becomes much more difficult when you choose something which has not been traditional. You have to be very sure that you can defend the position. Defending two year honours degrees will

require a lot of proof, a lot of evidence, a lot of convincing other people but if we have the proof and the evidence—

Q54 Mr Marsden: What about one year's as well?

Professor Bone: One year masters I do not see as a problem.

Q55 Chairman: You are with Lord May? You are an outcomes man?

Professor Bone: I am.

Q56 Chairman: Are you, Ms Olley?

Ms Olley: Absolutely. I concur with Professor Bone on how we present this at London. We need to be very careful about how we play this in the European context. I agree that talking about flexibility in delivery is key.

Q57 Mr Pelling: I am still not entirely sure why the Government is involved in this process at all.

Professor Bone: In some ways, the sector still feels itself to be in control. You are talking about the ministerial context. Perhaps you should ask Government that question rather than us. I think it is helpful for the Government and the sector to work together but I think the sector should remain pushing and pulling.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: It had to be a minister who signed Bologna. It was Tessa Blackstone, so there was no choice.

Q58 Mr Pelling: The HE sector itself has said that its involvement is patchy at best. How do you think the level of debate and consultation about Bologna can be encouraged?

Ms Olley: There has been an issue about the Government's engagement with Bologna, particularly in the past but, to be fair to our DfES colleagues, we are hosting the next ministerial summit. We do currently hold the secretariat of the process and, as acting manager of the Europe unit, I have noticed an increase in the Government's engagement. We have much greater contact now. There has definitely been a shift there.

Q59 Mr Pelling: the DfES have said that as a UK Government it is their intention to make that event that you are talking about as forward looking as possible and set the whole competence in the context of the challenge of internationalisation of higher education. Do you think you can make that competence forward looking in that way? With so many different countries involved, how successfully do you think it is possible for the UK Government and the DfES to direct that discussion in that direction?

Ms Olley: I am optimistic. The UK's voice is a strong one within the process. We are seen as an example of good practice in many areas, mainly because we have implemented many of the reforms already.

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

Q60 Chairman: Which reforms?

Ms Olley: The main one is the introduction of the three cycle system. That is the most obvious one.

Q61 Chairman: We already had that. We have not introduced it.

Ms Olley: That is what I am saying. That was already in place.

Q62 Chairman: You said you have introduced reforms. The original point I made was that we are asking everyone to catch up with us.

Professor Bone: A slip of the tongue, I think.

Ms Olley: Yes, I think it was. We already had the three cycle system in place. Our quality assurance arrangements have been very influential in the discussions on European standards and guidelines. There are a number of other areas: qualifications frameworks, and the whole learning outcomes approach where we are seen as examples of good practice, which puts us in a strong position in influencing the debates at London.

Professor Bone: We know from evidence that is to be given to the OECD review of tertiary education, which is not due to be published until the end of 2007, just what a leading position the UK has. We are in the driving seat and we are perceived to be in the driving seat. That can make us optimistic.

Q63 Chairman: What would make us pessimistic surely would be something that Jessica Olley just mentioned? In terms of quality assurance and other aspects, that is the area where we have a quality assurance system that is pretty government hands off, is it not?

Professor Bone: Yes, I agree.

Q64 Chairman: There is a mainland Europe tradition that is very much more centralist and government interfering. That would be a worry to us if we started a much more state-ist approach to that quality assurance.

Professor Bone: It would indeed. One of the worries is the effect which the new European quality assurance register will have and how *dirigiste* that is going to be. We are winning the battle on learning outcomes at the moment so let us hope we can win the battle on quality assurance.

Q65 Chairman: What does that mean: "learning outcomes"? If you go to a Bologna university, you are likely to go into undergraduate lectures with 300 or 400 people or even 600.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: Half of whom will not be there next year.

Professor Bone: You are absolutely right but nevertheless it is very striking at European University Association Council meetings that the leaders of these universities realise they have got it wrong.

Q66 Chairman: You can see why our students do not want to go to 600 people lectures.

Professor Bone: I can.

Q67 Chairman: Lord May, are there any implications? We have had a lot of foment and discussion around the Research Assessment Exercise. Is the initiative we are getting from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in response to that European dimension that you were pointing out that came out of Lisbon, the 3%? You quite rightly identified that a lot of that is development, taking research and developing it. You said the difference between the United States and Europe was that development bit which was funded by the private sector, by industry. Is what the Chancellor is after in terms of changing the RAE to a metric system trying to push research in the UK in that direction?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I do not think that is the primary motive. I could be wrong. Certainly the primary motive that I have had consistently on this derives from the 11 years I spent as the vice-president for research at Princeton which created, just after World War Two, the American indirect cost system. There is a feeling that while both our research council competitive grant awarding system and separately the Research Assessment Exercise in its early days were useful. We are almost unique in having two separate processes, one looking forward and not inhibited by collaborations across departmental or institutional lines, the research councils, and another which looks backward and is based on a bureaucratic fiction. Departments do not do research; groups do research. It demonstrably somewhat inhibits certain kinds of collaboration. Having two things, one of them becoming increasingly rigidified and bureaucratic, is just not an efficient thing to do. I would like to think that looking partly towards the way these things are done in the United States and the fact that the outcome of the two separate processes is very highly correlated anyhow, the Treasury is motivated to think: could we lift some of the growing burden and cost, because they both cost to administer and they cost even more to help central, administrative, bureaucratic growth at universities. Could we simplify?

Q68 Chairman: You are more of a metrics man?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I do not want to do it by metrics either. I would attach it to the outcome of a research council and charity and other grants, competitively gathered by peer review, the way it is done in the States largely. The attempt to address the adventure of taking the new knowledge and cashing in on it is something that has right from the beginning of this government been high on their agenda. They have done a lot of imaginative things in universities that have been very useful. You can demonstrate they have borne fruit in just counting the more than doubling of the number of courses taught jointly with people from industry or the research collaborations and publications and so on. There is still more that you could do. I do not think it is directly connected with that particular—

10 January 2007 Ms Jessica Olley, Professor Drummond Bone and Professor Lord May of Oxford

Q69 Chairman: One of the reasons for getting rid of the RAE is it takes so many academics' time. How much time does all this palaver around Bologna take, with people going internationally, the committees, the commitment? It must take a lot of academic time that could be used for teaching, researching or even administering back home.

Professor Bone: I am not saying it does not take any time at all. It does. There is no question about that but it is certainly not comparable with the RAE or anything of that sort.

Q70 Chairman: Not now.

Professor Lord May of Oxford: One of the other problems with the RAE is that it creates a single yardstick of esteem, research excellence. It has been abused as such. That was not its purpose. It is an inappropriate single totem pole because it discourages diversity of aspiration. We want to be more like the States with some universities taking particular pride in being useful to local business and community. You can construct a totem pole like that which is an interesting collection of universities at the top: Herriot Watts, Strathclyde, Cambridge, or universities whose graduates are sought. You find places like Luton at the top of that.

Q71 Chairman: You were going to mention Huddersfield?

Professor Lord May of Oxford: I am out of date but that is another separate problem that goes much wider than what we are talking about.

Q72 Mr Chaytor: Coming back to the negotiating position at the conference this May, is there anything in the UK universities' negotiating position that is not designed to protect the status quo in the UK as of now?

Professor Bone: I do not think that is why our negotiating position is designed. What it is designed to do is to protect flexibility.

Q73 Mr Chaytor: Is that the outcome of the negotiating position?

Professor Bone: It may look as if what we are doing is defending the status quo in the UK. What we are trying to do is promote flexibility and the principle of autonomy. That is the key negotiating position. That allows us to change as well, whether it is two year honours degrees or whatever. It is not a question of defending the status quo; it is a question of putting in place some kind of framework which allows the systems to be flexible and yet in some sense also facilitate movement between them.

Chairman: It has been a privilege to have Lord May, Professor Bone and Jessica Olley in front of the Committee. We have learned a lot. Thank you for your contribution.

Memorandum submitted by The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The principal purposes of the Bologna Process are to increase student and staff mobility, simplify and improve the recognition of qualifications and enhance the attractiveness of Europe as an international study destination. The extent of structural reforms at national level and the development of the Bologna instruments at European level are, even now, impressive, but it is too early to judge how far the overall aims have been achieved.

2. In the UK, higher education has been subject to continual reforms for nearly 20 years and these are progressing in parallel with the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda. These developments have not always been specifically labelled as "Bologna compliant". This has, perhaps, contributed to both the feeling often expressed abroad, and the misconception encountered within many UK higher education institutions, that the UK has done little to engage seriously with the Bologna Process and has, at best, been semi-detached from it.

3. Assertions and assumptions that the implementation of the Bologna instruments will (or should) result in the homogeneity of the quality of higher education and academic standards of qualifications in Europe are misplaced and potentially dangerous for the reputations of individual institutions and national higher education systems. The achievements and aims of the Bologna Process have to be set alongside the urgent need for other steps to be taken to modernise or revitalise universities in many parts of Europe.

4. A key factor in the success of the Bologna Process to date has been its voluntary nature. It needs to remain thus rather than become a regulatory straitjacket to constrain innovation and change in higher education at institutional or national level. The 2010 deadline for the "completion" of the European Higher Education Area is unrealistic and it is likely to take much longer for the full fruits of the Process to be borne.

INTRODUCTION

QAA and its role in the Bologna Process

5. QAA was established in 1997 and is an independent body funded by subscriptions from UK universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main UK higher education funding bodies.

6. Our mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. We do this by working with higher education institutions to define academic standards and quality, and by reviewing institutions' effectiveness as guardians of these important facets of higher education.

7. QAA performs important international functions. It is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and the Chief Executive is currently President of the Association,¹⁵ in which capacity he participates in the meetings of the Bologna Process Follow-up Group. QAA is also a member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) and a formal observer at the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) in recognition of the fact that the international activities of UK higher education institutions extend well beyond the boundaries of Europe.^{16,17}

8. QAA has provided, and continues to provide, experts for the development of the two key Bologna instruments—the overarching framework of qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)—and our staff have participated in many of the seminars and workshops associated with the process.¹⁸ We have also taken part in projects funded by the European Commission to explore other aspects of the Bologna Process. We support the UK Europe Unit and participate in its activities, including the development of UK higher education positions on European matters. We also support the higher education sector by, for example, holding workshops on specific topics related to quality assurance and Bologna lines of action, including joint degrees.

Quality Assurance in the UK and compatibility with systems in Bologna

9. The autonomy of UK higher education institutions over their affairs is much more extensive than that of universities in most other Bologna Process participating countries. UK higher education institutions with degree awarding powers can design, approve and monitor their own programmes without having to seek external approval. They can and do deliver their awards in many different modes (for example through partnerships with other bodies) and locations, both within and outside the UK. They select and appoint their own staff, set their own admissions criteria and select and recruit their students. External involvement in universities, however, tends to be greater in the UK; for example, a wider range of stakeholders participates in institutional governance than is commonly the case elsewhere in Europe, and the use of external examiners in the assessment of student learning is unknown except in two other Bologna countries (Denmark and Ireland). The UK's particular approach to autonomy and regulation in higher education has influenced strongly the external quality assurance processes employed in its four national systems and has been one of the reasons behind QAA's reluctance to endorse calls for a single European quality assurance system.

10. *The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* have become the principal instrument for the creation of a “European dimension” to quality assurance. Born of a recommendation in the 2003 Berlin ministerial communiqué, and adopted at the subsequent 2005 Berlin ministerial meeting, they provide a text to facilitate “the establishment of a widely shared set of underpinning values, expectations and good practice in relation to quality and its assurance, by institutions and agencies across the European Higher Education Area”. The ESG comprises of three parts, covering institutions' own internal quality assurance practices, external quality assurance as practised by quality assurance agencies, and the external quality assurance of the agencies themselves.

11. QAA has carried out an intensive internal exercise mapping of all of its current audit and review processes and the UK's national external reference points for quality and academic standards against the ESG. In respect of the ESG for internal and external quality assurance, no gaps or omissions have been found. As QAA carries out the revision of its processes and manages the revision of the national external reference points, including its *Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality and Standards in Higher Education*,¹⁹ explicit references to Bologna and other appropriate European instruments, such as the Diploma Supplement are being made. In this way, alignment with the ESG will be made more transparent and institutions can be re-assured that no additional regulatory burden will need to be imposed on them in respect of quality assurance as a result of the Bologna Process.

12. However, there remains a tension between the “principles-based” regulatory approach to quality assurance used in higher education in the UK and the tendency towards a “rules-based” approach widely adopted elsewhere in Europe. This latter way of thinking, linked as it is to the widespread continental European tradition of legal codification, has led to expectations in Europe that the ESG should be enshrined in law as a demonstration of their implementation. The approach also encourages a rigid interpretation of the guidelines as a checklist of rules to be adhered to, rather than as examples or illustrations of how the

¹⁵ www.enqa.eu

¹⁶ www.inqaahe.org

¹⁷ www.apqn.org

¹⁸ http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050221_ENQA_report.pdf

¹⁹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp>

standards might be achieved. There is also a danger that adoption by ministers of the ESG is either interpreted or presented as evidence that there is homogeneity of academic standards and quality across Europe. We have already seen examples of this outside Europe, for example at a recent symposium in Washington on the recognition of three-year degrees from Europe for the purpose of admission to US graduate schools. At that event, a European representative, in an interview with the press, stated that “European higher education is more homogeneous such that the rigor for a bachelor’s degree from a ‘top’ university isn’t that different from one at a less prestigious institution”.

13. A further area where a well-intentioned Bologna initiative appears to be in danger of developing in undesirable directions is the proposed “Register of European quality assurance agencies”. This was initially envisaged as a simple information source, listing all quality assurance agencies operating in Europe, categorised by their distinguishing characteristics. It is now, however, rapidly turning into a European accreditation system for agencies, in which national interests and practices will be rendered subservient to the need to comply with the ESG. Current proposals also envisage a new European body to run it, and a self-appointed committee to decide which agencies can be on the Register and which cannot. Although envisaged at present as a voluntary instrument, many commentators assume that the combination of national legislation involving the ESG in some countries, and the central role envisaged for the Register in the recent EC/European Parliament Joint Recommendation on Quality Assurance,²⁰ will quickly turn the Register’s voluntary nature into the normative and ultimately the normative into the regulatory.

Advantages and disadvantages of the Bologna Process

14. The main intended advantages of the Bologna Process include enhanced student and staff mobility and simpler and improved recognition of qualifications. Despite this, however, UK student participation in the EU HE mobility programme has continued to fall throughout the period of the Bologna Process. Perhaps it is simply too soon to see whether the introduction of the three cycles of “Bologna awards” (equating to bachelor’s, master’s, and doctor’s degrees) will have an effect on this. But it is also necessary to recognise that there is now greatly increased international competition for UK students’ attention and interest, presented by study abroad opportunities that are (or are perceived to be) more exciting or potentially contribute more to employment prospects than the existing European schemes. The US, Canada and Australia are becoming more popular locations for UK study abroad students and new, even further flung, destinations such as China and India are emerging. The formation of global consortia of universities such as Universitas21 and World Universities Network and the emergence of UK university campuses abroad are also offering new and different types of study abroad opportunities.

15. The closer alignment of qualifications structures amongst the countries of the EHEA does, however, offer greater opportunity for institutional cooperation in curriculum development and joint programmes of study. There is now clear evidence of some UK universities taking advantage of this through participation in the EU’s Erasmus Mundus programme for joint master’s degrees which, although not part of the Bologna Process is, like many other EC initiatives, closely allied to it. The ESG also offer a useful and neutral negotiating tool for (often tricky and sensitive) discussions between institutions to establish quality assurance processes in joint programmes.

16. The improved recognition of UK degrees in other European countries, resulting from a better understanding of national HE systems, is still to come. Long existing problems have not gone away: in at least one case they appear to be escalating. The introduction of the three cycles of qualifications has not led to the ready convergence of qualification frameworks. In many countries the strategy of establishing the bachelor/master degree structure has simply led to the division of the existing five-year first degrees into two parts—either “4 + 1” or “3 + 2”, thus leaving the UK’s typical “3 + 1” looking lightweight and out of kilter with general EHEA practice. The perpetuation of the “3 + 2 Bologna myth” is putting new pressure on the recognition of the UK’s one year full-time master’s degree in Europe. The evidence of problems is as yet anecdotal and not quantifiable but it is an aspect to watch. It is to be hoped that this may turn out to be a passing phase until there is more experience of offering the three cycles of awards elsewhere. There may then be more awareness that at the second cycle there needs to be greater diversity in design, delivery mode and structure of programmes than simply a two year full-time model; however, as many international students in the UK come specifically to study on a one year master’s degree programme, we would not in the interim want the recognition of them to be undermined in Europe or beyond.

17. Many of the recognition problems stem from a continued reliance in the EHEA on the duration of studies as the sole or “real” indicator of the level of student achievement rather than an appropriate emphasis on learning outcomes (what students emerge from their studies knowing, understanding and being able to do). While there is much talk of learning outcomes in the Bologna Process there seems as yet to be little real understanding or acceptance of them as the main measure of achievement.

²⁰ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/L_064/L_06420060304en00600062.pdf

18. One European recognition measure that has attracted significant international interest and currency, however, is the Diploma Supplement, which was again adopted at the ministerial meeting in Berlin in 2003. From Australia to the United States there have been many recent references to the usefulness of it, so much so that the Australians intend to adopt a version for themselves. It is important that UK universities take cognisance of this and produce accurate and complete Diploma Supplements for their graduates.

19. Allied to the recognition issue is the continuing debate as to whether the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)—which was developed 15 years ago—remains fit for purpose. Some ECTS counsellors in other European countries have commented publicly and consistently (while also extolling the virtues of learning outcomes) that UK awards are deficient in time and workload hours. QAA is pleased that the European Commission, the only “owner” of ECTS, is undertaking a review of it. We hope that the review process will be transparent and far reaching and that it will consult extensively a wide group of stakeholders, including some from the UK. Effective guidance on the use of ECTS should in future focus at the level of principle, rather than on narrow compliance with specific rules, a lesson for success learnt from the development of other Bologna instruments.

The broader impact, including standardisation

20. The creation and use of European higher education structures and frameworks through the Bologna Process, or even the adoption of the ESG (which are principles-based standards), must not be used as evidence that all higher education in Europe is of the same quality and academic standard. This is not the case now and is unlikely ever to be so. The real value of using the Bologna instruments will lie in the greater transparency and comparability of national structures that it will permit, and which may in the longer term serve to highlight the strengths of individual institutions and/or systems. Indeed, the whole credibility of the Process may be put at risk if assumptions and assertions about the standardisation and acceptability of current levels of quality across the EHEA are allowed to go unchallenged.

21. This danger has been highlighted in a series of high profile articles, presentations and communications from the European Commission among others, in parallel with Bologna Process activities, which have highlighted serious structural problems in higher education in Europe. The Commission’s 2006 *Communication: Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities, education research and innovation*,²¹ for example, points out that European universities are not currently in a position to achieve their potential in a number of important ways. As a result they are lagging behind in the increased international competition for talented researchers and students and are not generating the critical mass, excellence and flexibility needed to succeed. These shortcomings are said to be compounded by a combination of excessive public control coupled with insufficient funding. Elsewhere, the OECD is carrying out a Thematic Review of Tertiary Education in which the UK, along with 23 other countries worldwide, is participating. This will not report until late 2007 but may present some novel views of higher education in those European countries participating in the review.

22. Concerns about the standardisation of European higher education as a consequence of the Bologna Process may well also be behind the continued push of Dutch colleagues, the OECD (IMHE) and the European Commission for projects to develop typologies and classifications of European higher education institutions, echoing the new Carnegie classifications in the USA. Pressures are mounting too for a European ranking of universities—again underwritten by the Commission—and there are initiatives at national and institutional level in some countries, notably Germany, variously to identify centres of excellence and clusters of “top institutions”.

23. A slavish following of the Carnegie approach, however, is unlikely to be appropriate for Europe. While the US may have 4,000 universities and colleges that share some common features such as “the credit hour”, the Associate degree, the four-year baccalaureate degree, and the use of institutional and specialist accreditation, no-one claims that all US universities are the same in terms of mission, quality or standards. The Carnegie classification suggests that there are fewer than 50 research intensive universities in the US, in stark contrast with Europe, where it appears that a very large number of universities responding to a questionnaire about their Bologna activities see developing research as their major mission. Europe needs much greater diversity in terms of types of institutions, programmes and modes of delivery in order to offer opportunities to a wider community of students and support lifelong learning, a shared interest between the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda.

24. From QAA’s experience of international education, including 10 years of auditing the overseas partnership links of UK universities—most recently those in China—we see that UK higher education institutions have a very high level of engagement in international activities beyond Europe. Many UK universities appear to regard themselves as serving international communities rather than prioritising Europe. This has been demonstrated by significant growth in the development of UK cross-border education through the establishment of branch campuses in China, the Middle East and Malaysia but also through many partnership links, especially in the Asia region, and the delivery of on-line education programmes on a global basis. Others may have greater interest in the European research framework programmes.

²¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/comuniv2006_en.pdf

CONCLUSIONS

25. The Bologna Process is important to the UK as it provides a structure for a greater understanding of European higher education systems and the development of common instruments to make that understanding useful in practice. It has also demonstrated what can be achieved through voluntary cooperation. The achievements so far are significant but implementation at national level is very uneven across the EHEA. There is no “European higher education system” or “European quality assurance system” in place, even though some would wish to see these. The 2010 deadline is unrealistic for the “completion” of the EHEA. Much more time is needed for the full impact to be realised and for effective evaluation to take place. We believe that the UK should continue to support the voluntary nature of the Bologna Process and that UK higher education institutions should be encouraged to engage more fully with the process, but in the expectation that—apart from requirements such as the Diploma Supplement—the extent of engagement will vary according to their individual missions and international strategies and interests.

December 2006

Witnesses: **Mr Peter Williams**, Chief Executive, and **Ms Carolyn Campbell**, Head of International Affairs, QAA, and **Professor Ella Ritchie**, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Newcastle University, gave evidence.

Q74 Chairman: Can I welcome Carolyn Campbell, Peter Williams and Ella Ritchie to our proceedings? You have heard much of what we have been discussing. Starting with Professor Ritchie, Bologna and all that: what is your opinion of it?

Professor Ritchie: My opinion of it is that it is an important process which is one of the reasons I am here representing the sector, academics down on the ground if you like. It is something we need to keep a close eye on. I was interested in the debate at the end about our position in the ministerial summit. Whilst it is true that we have not had to make many changes compared to most other European countries and that we are, particularly in the doctoral area which I know we are coming to, a benchmark for other systems, it is important nevertheless that we are not complacent about Bologna. Although of course it is an intergovernmental, volunteeristic process and it does not have a legislative effect, it is very important that policy makers keep their eye on the detail. I think the devil is in the detail in the negotiations on the summit. It is important to engage effectively in it, to recognise the benefits but also recognise the challenges which it might pose for our sector as a whole.

Mr Williams: I largely agree with that. If you look at the history of Bologna, it started off with the Sorbonne Declaration and then moved to Bologna. It was originally a process designed to try and get greater understanding, but it has moved on from there and this notion of the higher education space described it quite well in the early 2000s. There was nobody in charge of it. There was a vacuum and a lot of people jumped into that vacuum with their own personal agendas. Those are now many and various. There is a structure for dealing with it now that is the Bologna follow-up group but when one attends those meetings which have 50 or 60 people now involved you see both how many different agendas are running and how many different local interpretations there are of what Bologna is across the 45 Member States. I take the view now that it is potentially a very useful way of understanding the European scene and it provides a number of tools which will allow interactivity between them, which is helpful, but there is a danger that the existence of those tools will be seen as an opportunity to create

the European higher education system. There is no other way of that happening. That is why for example in my own area of quality assurance there are people who have advocated a European accreditation system of one sort or another or a European quality assurance system of one sort or another. I have had to work quite hard to try and stop that because I do not think it is appropriate. It is a complex area now and it is one where the more countries there are the more difficult it is to see anything that is going to come out of it, certainly in the short term, which we are going to be able to say quite clearly is a major advantage for everybody.

Ms Campbell: I endorse what has been said. We are dealing with a reality here. It is a process now which has momentum and an identity beyond Europe, which means it is something that cannot be ignored. It is something that we must participate in and contribute to.

Q75 Fiona Mactaggart: The Government states in its memorandum that it does not believe there is any reason to consider the Bologna Process will force institutions to abandon integrated masters or one year masters courses and yet the Royal Academy of Engineering in the first line of its evidence to us says it is becoming increasingly concerned by reactions which could jeopardise the current international standing of the UK integrated masters degree. The Europe Unit which, as you know, is a higher education, sector wide body points out that graduates from the UK and higher education institutions are experiencing difficulties in gaining recognition of one year masters programmes. Is there a threat to these programmes or not?

Mr Williams: There is a threat, I think. Both positions are right. The department is right in saying there should be no threat but because recognition is a national thing there can be different interpretations, country to country. For example, Greece is going to introduce a new law which is going to make it extremely difficult for some engineering departments to take new students because the Greeks are saying that, unless the university that the students are going to has a grade four in the RAE, their degrees will not be recognised. There are very important questions here of public

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

recognition and private recognition. Private companies do not have to worry about these things. If they think the students are good, they will take them. For public recognition purposes, for purposes of progression within higher education in those countries or for taking jobs in the public sector, the national recognition system kicks in. Some countries legislate into their recognition systems a requirement that there should be a five year or three plus two or four plus one model. That makes it extremely difficult. The French did that but they realised that they would be cutting themselves off from interaction with the UK so they have a derogation that you can take students from the UK with three year degrees and so on. The four year masters degree, because we have an undergraduate masters degree—it is only four years—is very difficult for some of these countries to get a handle on. They say, “If it is only four years, it cannot be a masters degree, especially if it is an undergraduate degree.” Both sides are right. In theory, the rules do not say you cannot do it but local practice, especially where that is enshrined in legislation, sometimes makes it very difficult.

Professor Ritchie: Because of the looks of slight puzzlement, I wondered whether it might be helpful to briefly say what the undergraduate, now renamed integrated masters, are because I think it is quite confusing. There are differences across the sector. This is a programme where the choice is usually made by the student at the end of the second year—sometimes at the end of the first year—to go into essentially a four year degree. By the end of it they will have acquired both an undergraduate degree and a masters qualification. Some degrees have masters teaching in the third year and some undergraduate in the fourth year so in that sense they are integrated. I believe there is a trend that more and more of the masters goes into the four year. They are generally professional type programmes and they are recognised by the professional bodies who incidentally are key players in this because they have a key role in regulating that part of the sector, such as the MEng, MPharmacy, MPhysics. These degrees are very popular with students who are intending to go on to a masters because they have access to student loans on them. It means they get funding for their fourth year in a way that they would not if they were applying for a stand alone masters. I do think that the funding framework is generally very important in the UK and it is particularly, specifically important in discussing the integrated masters. The worry about them is that the masters content might be deemed to be rather light compared to some of the things that are coming out of Europe, but I hope that is helpful.

Q76 Fiona Mactaggart: It is but if we are in a situation where some countries are legislating for the tick box, year length type approach that is in a way opposite to what we have been hearing. Have we just been given too positive a gloss on the Bologna Process and the fact that it is protecting flexibility and so on? Do you think your experience is that that is not the case?

Mr Williams: We and probably Ireland are unique in having the kind of setup we have. Everything else is codified, legislated or state owned. Most of the systems are state owned, whereas in the UK higher education is not technically state owned. They are state degrees and state approvals ultimately. There is a sense that the higher education system is a national good and it is owned by the community together. Accepting things from other places, even on local terms, sometimes can be quite difficult for some countries. In 45 countries you have a lot of different reactions. In some countries you have to homologise your British or foreign degree to make sure that it has covered everything that the local degree has covered, which is quite counter to the intentions of Bologna. Many countries are looking at Bologna. They are interpreting it locally and sometimes that works to our advantage; sometimes it does not. The one thing it is not creating and was never intended to, except by some enthusiasts, is a European higher education system. Unless you have a single system you are going to always get these local/national variations. One of the ironies of Bologna is that, while it has set up a system which we recognise as being bachelors, masters and doctors, each country has interpreted what a bachelors and masters degree is largely locally, so we are using the same words but in fact they are all doing something different. Until the bits are in place—the qualifications framework, for example, and not every country by any means has one—and until they have them with their descriptors of levels, until those descriptors map onto the European framework, there is going to be a lot of confusion as to what these degrees mean.

Q77 Fiona Mactaggart: Can we be confident that the London communiqué is not going to come up with something which is a tick box type approach? Can we be confident that the flexible direction is the direction in which everything is going?

Mr Williams: The London communiqué, as I understand it, is being drafted at the moment and my understanding is that there is not going to be any proposal for prescriptive requirements. Indeed, there is not an appetite amongst the governments for that, although there might be an appetite by the Commission for that.

Q78 Stephen Williams: I want to go to the first cycle, a little bit earlier in the academic journey. Where do foundation degrees sit within the Bologna Process? Are they part of the first cycle which recommends a minimum length of three years, or are they an intermediary qualification?

Mr Williams: They are technically short cycle qualifications within the first cycle. That means they are intermediate. They fit within the Bergen communiqué.

Q79 Stephen Williams: The Bologna Process does formally recognise the concept of a foundation degree?

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

Mr Williams: A qualification within the first cycle.

Q80 Stephen Williams: Do other countries within the Bologna Process have this or is the UK standing alone on this?

Ms Campbell: Since Bergen some countries have indicated that they are going to develop associated degrees which would be two year, full time programmes. The Netherlands is one. Denmark is another. There is an interest in that sort of model.

Q81 Stephen Williams: In their language they will call them associate degrees, not foundation degrees, which sounds slightly different?

Ms Campbell: For short cycle qualifications within the first cycle of Bologna, they are national qualifications so they will have national titles.

Q82 Stephen Williams: I want to introduce a hot topic in the UK at the moment because of the FE Bill that the House of Lords is considering at the moment. If the clause within that Bill goes through to give further education colleges the power to award their own degrees, will that cause a problem within the Bologna Process in terms of recognition, do you think? Does that power exist anywhere else amongst the other 44 members?

Mr Williams: I am not sure we know the answer to that. For the most part, most countries' degrees are awarded by the state, not by individual institutions. It does not arise in most countries. There may be some examples in Scandinavia but I am not sure.

Q83 Stephen Williams: Even if in the UK degrees are awarded by higher education institutions at the moment, if foundation degrees were to be awarded by further education colleges, do you think that would be questioned, that fellow members of the Bologna Process would scratch their heads and wonder what on earth was going on?

Mr Williams: It would be another instance of the UK doing it rather differently.

Q84 Chairman: We should be quite relaxed about the fact that there may be some sort of structure that people interpret differently in different countries. We should welcome that?

Mr Williams: Yes, I think we should. However, on the one hand I want to defend the autonomy of the UK system so that we are not being hamstrung or forced into modes of behaviour which are not appropriate for this country and for our education system. On the other hand, I do not want our students to be disadvantaged because the interpretation in other countries is different, which is why I have great hopes for the over-arching qualifications framework once it gets going. With all these things, they are very much in their infancy. The idea of 2010 is, to my mind, nonsense. This is going to take 15 to 20 years to get even an understanding of the concept and the words.

Q85 Chairman: "Over-arching qualification framework" fills me with dread.

Mr Williams: I can understand that but the idea is that it is a generalised description of degrees at each level. Each country has its own qualifications framework which relates to it, so they do not all have to be the same but they do have to be able to demonstrate that they meet the expectations of the generic, over-arching structure.

Q86 Chairman: What do people in that group in the 45 nations say about things like the Scottish MA and the Oxford and Cambridge MA?

Mr Williams: In so far as they are aware of them, we would suggest to them if they came and asked us that they read the QAA's work on that which makes quite clear that the Oxford master degree, the one you get by paying money, is not an academic qualification. It also makes reference to the existence of this small number of Scottish MAs which are not end-on to bachelors degrees. It describes and explains them.

Q87 Chairman: You said Oxford and Cambridge as well?

Mr Williams: Those are not academic degrees because you do not have to do any work for them.

Chairman: It has always been a sense of irritation that I worked for my masters and three of my children did very little.

Stephen Williams: I paid £10 for my MA.

Fiona Mactaggart: Some of us earned it with harder work.

Q88 Chairman: Scotland is different though, is it not, with a four year degree? They work over the four years and get an MA?

Professor Ritchie: Yes.

Q89 Chairman: You mentioned the amount of MA type tuition stretching parts of the curriculum. You are happy with the Scottish MA, are you?

Mr Williams: The MA is more complicated now.

Professor Ritchie: That was the case but it has now changed.

Q90 Chairman: Tell us how it has changed.

Mr Williams: Many of the Scottish degrees are now BAs and BScs and they do a masters degree as well. In some subjects in some universities, their first degree is an MA. In one or two universities, I think it is fair to say, there is what we would call an intermediate degree which is an MA. It is very complicated.

Q91 Chairman: I know it is complicated. In Edinburgh, if you take a four year degree so you have done an extra year and you get an MA, not a BA, how is that regarded?

Mr Williams: Carolyn will know better than I because she has one.

Ms Campbell: The learning outcomes are not masters level learning outcomes. They are bachelors level learning outcomes and this is why learning outcomes are so important, because of local difficulties over titles which are ancient and historical.

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

Q92 Chairman: A Scottish MA is not an academic qualification?

Ms Campbell: It is a qualification but if you look at the learning outcomes you will see where it can be placed.

Mr Williams: It is a first cycle qualification.

Q93 Chairman: It is not a proper MA in the normal sense?

Mr Williams: No. There are some MAs in Scotland which are.

Chairman: That is very interesting because it does unlock that kind of diversity that there is even in our own country.

Q94 Jeff Ennis: Turning briefly to the new, fast track, two year honours degree, is it true that these degrees cannot be accepted under Bologna because of the required minimum three years of study for a first cycle degree?

Mr Williams: If one says it cannot be accepted by Bologna, there is no body which says yes or no. It is a question of whether anybody who needs to use that degree or needs to verify it or recognise it is going to be prepared to do so. Of course, we do not know. The general view is that it is going to be very difficult, irrespective of the innate virtue of a two year, fast track bachelors degree, to sell a masters degree that has been built on to that as a second cycle qualification, not least because while a three plus two or three plus one or four plus one is accepted, although in some places with misgivings, the idea of two plus one I think probably for most countries is going to be a step too far.

Q95 Jeff Ennis: Does this not underline the point that we have been discussing in the earlier session, that one of the broader concerns is that learning outcomes have yet to be fully accepted across Europe as being more important than the length of study?

Mr Williams: Yes. Lip service is paid to learning outcomes. There is beginning to be an understanding of what they mean but they are in a sense so counter to the prevailing tradition that it is going to take a long time for them to be both understood and embedded.

Q96 Jeff Ennis: It is going to be quite a long time frame to get this message across?

Mr Williams: Yes.

Professor Ritchie: My personal view is that I hope we do not press too hard for discussions around the two year undergraduate because I think it is much more important to ensure that we get our masters level qualifications properly accepted. My worry is that if we push that on that agenda it contributes to a feeling that somehow we are a bit lightweight over here and that might have a general impact.

Q97 Jeff Ennis: It is quite low down in rank order?

Professor Ritchie: That is my personal view.

Mr Williams: Universities have always been allowed to fast track individual students if they have wanted to, if their internal regulations permitted it. There is

a distinction between allowing the occasional fast student to go through and creating a new part of the national structure.

Q98 Chairman: Lord May apparently got a PhD at 17, did he not?

Mr Williams: Yes.

Mr Carswell: I am not convinced that you need the quality assurance to be managed in this way and I do not buy into that whole presumption behind it.

Chairman: Does that lead to a question?

Mr Carswell: No.

Q99 Mr Marsden: On this issue of the two year honours, not pushing it and all the rest of it, surely the problem is that at least in framework this is a ministerial conference. It is a DfES led conference. Are not DfES going to want to push the two year thing?

Mr Williams: Our understanding is they might.

Q100 Mr Marsden: You are going to have a position where the academic community for understandable reasons, as you have just outlined, want to keep this low down on the agenda and DfES want to push it up?

Mr Williams: All we can do is explain clearly the possible consequences of doing so.

Professor Ritchie: It would be disastrous if the one year masters was not accepted as meeting the relevant learning outcomes because of the funding regime in the UK. We would see the complete collapse of the UK MA market for UK students if we moved to a two year model.

Mr Marsden: That is a point that ministers and officials need to be very well aware of before they say anything.

Q101 Chairman: Is not the heart of all this though that the mainly European universities are very much more related to state interference? There is a much more autonomous system of higher education in this country. That is a basic divide. That seems to be added to by the fact that in Europe they still seem to think it is length of time, almost like our traditional apprenticeships. You did so many years and you became an apprentice. There were no exams involved. They are the big chasms, are they not, between the two? Are they capable of being bridged really, except by agreeing to disagree?

Professor Ritchie: Another key difference which is changing but still pretty much a dominant model in many countries is that if you take a first cycle degree it is through credit accumulation. In many systems there is much less of a structured programme and possibly less coherence in what the students take. It would depend a bit on the discipline, whereas in the UK programmes are laid out. You know what sorts of modules you are going to do, what the choice is going to be and what you have to do as building blocks. That is also a key difference because, for example, in Germany people accumulate credit and historically they might wait quite a long time to get their degree—seven years, say, for an undergraduate

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

degree—so for other European countries moving to this first cycle of three years is involving massive changes.

Q102 Mr Chaytor: Why is it that English universities have been much less enthusiastic about credit transfer systems than Welsh, Scottish or universities in Northern Ireland?

Mr Williams: I can only surmise. I think probably there are a large number of universities that are very keen on credit transfer that have been using it for a very long time under various regional consortia. For them there is no difficulty. It is just the way they have always operated. Some of the older, more traditional universities have not seen a need for credit transfer. They have taken the view that their courses are integral, you start from the beginning and you go through to the end of that course. The notion of breaking it up into sub-bits which can then be used elsewhere I think they have seen as interfering with their notion of integrity and the holistic approach to learning and the kind of programmes they are offering. Ella comes from an old university. I am not sure whether you are now credit based or not.

Professor Ritchie: Yes, we are.

Mr Williams: We now have this new credit proposal from the Burgess Group on recording student achievement, which is introducing proposals for an English credit system. The other thing to bear in mind is that both Scotland and Wales are very small systems compared with England. You could break up the English system and say there is an equivalent to the Scottish one operating informally.

Q103 Mr Chaytor: Professor Burgess's final report came out just a few weeks ago.

Mr Williams: On credit, yes.

Q104 Mr Chaytor: What status does that have because he has produced a recommendation that says that all universities should adopt a credit transfer system by 2009–10? Will that happen?

Mr Williams: It will happen I think in most universities. There will be some who may say, "This is not for us" and of course they are autonomous. Therefore, they will not take part in that. They may find themselves disadvantaged; they may not as a result of that but that will be their decision.

Q105 Mr Chaytor: Under the Bologna Process will those universities who resist Professor Burgess's report be required to comply in some form of credit transfer system to be compatible with the ECTS?

Mr Williams: No, because you cannot force them to comply. Bologna is not a prescriptive form. In some countries they have legislated it so there it is but in the UK it is a permissive approach rather than a prescriptive approach. If they say, "Look, we do not have this system. Our major activity internationally is not in Europe; it is in the States", Australia or whatever, "we work perfectly well without having to worry about these European structures so we do not think we need to do it. Our graduates get jobs and they do not seem to be disadvantaged", et cetera, they may come to the conclusion it is not for them;

but they may say, "No, we have now got to a position where it will be an advantage to the university and to our students and graduates to move to a credit based system."

Q106 Mr Chaytor: From the QAA's point of view, what is your view about the merits of credit transfer? If a student goes to university in Germany and can slowly build up their package of credit over a longer period of time, surely that must be an advantage for certain kinds of student who cannot guarantee to do it all in three years?

Mr Williams: I am sure it is an advantage to certain kinds of student. Our system in the UK is sufficiently wide and diverse for those students to be able to find a home to study quite happily.

Q107 Mr Chaytor: Except that those students cannot easily go to certain universities who resist credit transfer systems.

Mr Williams: I do not know. Carolyn knows better than I. I am not sure that many countries have introduced a requirement that every student in the university is on a credit transferable programme.

Ms Campbell: The fact that programmes are offered on a credit basis, that students accumulate credit and then they want to transfer, does not mean that institutions are required to accept transfer students. There is a long tradition of credit in the United States and of credit transfer but also huge debates in the Futures Commission about the lack of credit transfer or the barriers to credit transfer. That is partly to do with the fact that institutions are autonomous, make their own selection of students and set their own admissions criteria. It may be that the student has accumulated credit. It is not to say that it is not recognised but it may not be appropriate to be transferred into a particular programme.

Q108 Mr Chaytor: I am still unclear about this. If an essential part of the Bologna Process is to consolidate the European Credit Transfer System amongst all the participating countries—you are going to challenge whether that is the case—those are all the action lines in the project.

Mr Williams: Or compatible.

Q109 Mr Chaytor: Surely that implies that all universities should have some form of compatible credit transfer system and there can be no opting out. What is the point of the Bologna Process if universities can still opt out?

Mr Williams: Apart from the UK and Ireland you are right but in the UK and Ireland institutions are autonomous and they cannot be made to do it. The Bologna Process is voluntary; it is intergovernmental and therefore, if the government of a country says it will happen, then it will happen but in this country it is much more difficult for the government to say that it will happen because a university might say, "Not here it will not."

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

Q110 Mr Chaytor: Can I pursue the more detailed questions of credit and particularly come back to the issue of the one year masters? The issue here is the number of credits that would be included for a one year masters degree. The guideline is 60 to 90 but the European Commission is suggesting that there should be a minimum of 75. It is unclear what the role of the Commission is as against what the role of the body that is advancing the Bologna Process is. We seem to have two separate processes, the Commission's role and the Bologna Process itself. How is this contradiction going to be resolved?

Mr Williams: You have picked on the use of the ECTS for that as an example but what you have just raised is a much broader question about what is the role of the Commission. The fact is that education is outside the terms of the Treaty and therefore is not within the competence of the Commission, although it is seeking ways of gaining competence indirectly.

Q111 Mr Chaytor: The Commission has published a user guide for the ECTS. Why has it done that if it does not have any competence in this field?

Mr Williams: That is a very good question.

Professor Ritchie: We are talking here about Bologna and we have gone on to look at the qualifications framework but another dimension that sometimes people forget about is that under the internal market legislation and free movement of workers the Commission has introduced, as you know, a whole raft of legislation, including a qualifications directive which is about professional qualifications that, say, a planner might get or a pharmacist and the mutual recognition so that there can be mobility across countries for that. There is a bit of policy creep there onto Bologna.

Q112 Mr Chaytor: How do these two mesh? From the outsider's point of view, it would be rational and logical that the qualifications directive and the Bologna Process were absolutely integrated.

Ms Campbell: There is a difference in that the directive is a European law, an EU law. That means that there is an appeals process and judgments can be made. The Bologna Process is a voluntary, intergovernmental agreement.

Q113 Chairman: Our former witnesses were celebrating that.

Ms Campbell: Indeed.

Chairman: Professor Bone kept saying, "Look, we still have a handle on this. Universities across Europe still have a handle on it. The ministerial thing intervenes but we are still driving it."

Q114 Mr Chaytor: The issue from our point of view is what is the status of the Bologna Process if some countries can so easily opt out and what is the role of the Commission given that the Commission is engaged in very similar work in the qualifications directive?

Ms Campbell: The directive is about the recognition for professional purposes. The Bologna Process is about higher education. It may be that the

recognition under the directive is of higher education qualifications for professional purposes but it falls under the internal market part of the European Union, not the education part of the European Commission, the directive. Where there is some synergy between the two is this idea of creating transparency, of making it clearer what skills and knowledge the holders of qualifications have and for what purpose they are going to be recognised.

Q115 Chairman: Is that worrying, what you said almost as an aside, that there is a mission creep of the European Commission getting into education even though it is not part of their remit? We have just come back from Australia where the federal government does not have a remit certainly in higher education but uses all sorts of strategies to have greater leverage over the states and the universities. If this is a parallel and the European Commission and the European Union have mission creep in education, that is of some concern, is it not, Professor Ritchie?

Professor Ritchie: Yes. I was not saying that in a necessarily conspiratorial way. I think it is something to watch. One can already see the intermeshing of lots of EU initiatives, specifically coming out of the now 27 around the Bologna Process, linking in, even though they do not have policy competence generally over higher education. I mention it because I think it is an important area to watch.

Mr Williams: As an example of the way in which the Commission is using the Bologna Process for its own purposes, about 18 months ago the Commission introduced a draft recommendation on quality assurance. Of course it is a recommendation because it does not have competence but that draft recommendation which went through as a codecision with the European Parliament recommends to all the 27 countries to adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance and also that there should be this register for quality assurance agencies. In its original recommendation form, it was proposing that any university in Europe should be able to go to any quality assurance agency in Europe that had been approved on this register—we do not know who by—and that the decisions of that agency would be binding on the government of the country in which the university being accredited came from. In effect, if that had gone through in its original form, control over higher education would have moved away from the national scene to a European scene because there would have been a market for quality assurance and some of the funding decisions at least would have moved away from the national scene to a European scene of some sort. That was diluted because none of the countries wanted that, but it is an indication of the way in which using Bologna tools, like standards and guidelines or the potential register, the Commission wanted to pursue its own policy objectives.

Q116 Chairman: Who initiated that?

Mr Williams: The Commission.

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

Q117 Chairman: What bit of the Commission?

Mr Williams: Education and culture.

Q118 Chairman: Can you let us have the documentation on that?

Mr Williams: Yes.

Q119 Mr Marsden: Mr Williams, I wonder if I can come back to you on this vexed question of the tensions between autonomy, credit transfer and things around that? What you have told us already is pretty disturbing. On the one hand, we are trying as a broad policy objective to get, under Bologna, European universities to accept an outcome based attitude towards credit transfer but these things are always a matter of horse trading. Leave aside for the moment the changing structure of the university, education and life long learning, the desirability of there being more compatibility within the UK system. I accept the autonomy issue. If we cannot get a more agreed, common approach among UK universities to the principle of accepting credit transfer, is it not going to make our horse trading in respect of the ECTS much weaker?

Mr Williams: I think it might for individual institutions but as a whole the Burgess proposals are likely to be signed up to by a very large percentage of universities and that will then be the English system. As so often with these things, once it is seen to be working and it has not caused the end of civilisation, others will join it. My guess is that in a relatively short time the argument will have gone away.

Q120 Mr Marsden: Will Burgess be in place? Will this process of signing up have taken place by the time of the conference in May?

Mr Williams: No, but it will be by the presumed end of Bologna in 2010.

Q121 Mr Marsden: I know you are not plenipotentiary in this respect but what are you and your colleagues going to do to try and make sure that there are not some rogue UK universities who say something unhelpful and then undermine the overall position?

Mr Williams: It depends what it is they say if they say something unhelpful. I am not sure that it is QAA's job to try and muzzle institutions in the free expression of their views.

Q122 Mr Marsden: I was not suggesting it was a question of muzzling. I was suggesting coordinating.

Mr Williams: In the Burgess proposals there is a role for QAA doing precisely that. It is the mapping of what actually happens.

Q123 Mr Marsden: Do you agree that it is essential, if we are going to persuade other countries in the Bologna Process to sign up to roughly speaking our version of the ECTS, that British universities themselves have to be more communitaire in the way in which they approach credit transfer?

Mr Williams: Yes. I think that is fair, although I am not sure that the relationship between credit and Europe is the most important bit of the credit proposals. I think it is about using credit in the UK which is more important. Yes, this will be a useful byproduct of it but I do not think we are proposing introducing an English credit system for the benefit specifically and primarily of the ECTS. The ECTS is a rather odd scheme which is why we are hopeful that the review that takes place is fairly fundamental.

Q124 Mr Marsden: Is it not important that, if we want the ECTS scheme eventually to resemble more something that we would have in the UK, what we have in the UK is both signed up to by as many people as possible and compatible with what those other Bologna countries might take on board?

Mr Williams: Yes, but the timing there is not May, I think. It is the EC review of the ECTS which is taking place probably over the next two years. I do not think May is a key date on this one.

Q125 Stephen Williams: To return to the third cycle, Professor Ritchie, what progress has been made under the Bologna Process on developing a framework for evaluation of third cycle doctoral programmes?

Professor Ritchie: Quite a lot of progress. It has been about a two and a half or three year negotiation culminating in a conference that you will have seen referred to in the paperwork in Nice in December. Unfortunately, the final, final recommendations coming out of Nice have not come out yet but the broad ones came out and then we were allowed to comment. The UK was very well organised and vocal during that whole process and presented a good front. I have been involved at different stages. We in the sector in the UK did have some worries initially about some of the ways in which we thought the recommendations for the doctorate at European level might be moving because there are quite a number of differences between doctorates in the UK and other European doctorates. For example, we have a large number of professional doctorates which are not well known in other countries. We have a large number of part time students. Our doctoral candidates, are students rather than staff as they are in many European countries. There are lots of points like that where we were worried that the principles which emerged would be running against the grain of what we were doing here. The near to final agreement is very reassuring on most of those points. Another thing that concerned us was flexible points of entry into a doctorate because in the UK people go into doctorates through lots of different routes. They might do a masters, then work and go in. In some disciplines—and this could be an issue—they go in directly from an undergraduate programme which again would be pretty unheard of in the rest of Europe. There has been agreement under Nice that the masters is the preferred but not the only route into a doctorate. That would be in response to the UK position. The issue of whether the candidates are students or staff has been left open for countries to agree on. There is still an

10 January 2007 Mr Peter Williams, Ms Carolyn Campbell and Professor Ella Ritchie

independent element in the examination of the point that we were pressing and the length of time for a doctorate is in line with what the research councils are recommending here. In general, we are relatively pleased. It is an area where we really have served as good practice in bench marking for other European countries, particularly in the area of transferable skills, research training and the quality assurance of doctoral programmes. I do not think there are any key issues particularly that would be worrying on that. It is quite important to hold the line on two things. The first is the discussions to continue to uphold the importance of professional doctorates as being real doctorates and, secondly, to ensure that there is not a shift to accrediting doctorates through the ECTS. At the Nice summit, there was pretty much consensus amongst the academics across Europe that it should not be done under the ECTS as with the other cycles, but I have in the back of my mind a slight worry that the Commission might see that as a neat way to weigh and measure the doctorate like they do other degrees. That might also be something to watch but in general we in the sector feel quite comfortable about the emergence of the doctoral guidelines.

Q126 Stephen Williams: I can see that there would be merit in having an agreed entry point into a doctoral thesis which you say would be the masters second cycle. Is that correct?

Professor Ritchie: There are other entry points because, as I explained in the UK, we might have professionals going in to do doctorates who might get there through a professional qualification, not an MA, so we have kept the flexibility of entry points in the doctorate in the final communiqué.

Q127 Stephen Williams: If I want to do a thesis on taxation because I am a member of the Chartered Institute of Taxation, that is protected under the Bologna Process?

Professor Ritchie: You might be able to persuade the LSE to take you, yes.

Q128 Stephen Williams: It is probably worth more than an MA anyway. Do we need this standardisation? I can see why you want a bachelors degree in history from Bristol University to stand alongside a bachelors degree in history from Bordeaux or Hanover University but at the doctoral level, if I am doing a PhD thesis on Henry Austin Bruce's Gladstone's Home Secretary and the Chairman is doing one on John Claire and somebody else is doing one on conductivity of copper or something, they are all fundamentally different, narrow things. Do we need this comparability?

Professor Ritchie: You would be able to carry on doing those specific things. The idea is that if we have a more common framework it is more possible for doctoral students to have a bit more mobility around Europe. Through that, it is hoped that we will increase their experience and their research capacity.

Q129 Chairman: Is the third phase a recommendation of a minimum of three years?

Mr Williams: Three to four.

Q130 Chairman: Why should you not take six if you want to?

Mr Williams: That is a minimum of three to four.

Q131 Chairman: You are the QAA. If students in any of our constituencies want to go to Europe, why do we not think more about them? There is a resistance to go to Europe. It has plateau-ed and is declining. Is not part of that your responsibility? Quite honestly, the clarity of what the quality is in different universities in different parts of the 44 other countries is not very good, is it? What is the quality? What helps my students in Huddersfield make up their mind that the quality of something in Barcelona, Budapest or Bologna is worth them going to?

Mr Williams: The QAA view on that would be that any student wanting to go to one of these places should do so through their own institution. Their own institution should have processes in place to check out what it is that their students are proposing to do. That is to say, there should be a good international office in the university which takes these things seriously. It is not just about the quality; it is also about the health and safety and so on, as we saw in a case in Russia a few years ago. These are serious responsibilities that institutions have to take if they are going to encourage their students. As far as we are concerned, that is part of our code of practice, that we encourage them to do that. We do suggest to them that it is part of their responsibility to do it. As we go round auditing institutions, that is one of the things we might look at, to see how well they are advising their students about where they might take opportunities overseas.

Professor Ritchie: Universities do try very hard to get students to participate in Socrates and Erasmus exchanges but it has become increasingly difficult. It is partly a financial issue and partly a mindset. Students want to go on and get their upper second and they think that is going to be a diversion; whereas in reality employers really value the sorts of skills that students acquire who do that sort of exchange. The QAA has tried to get a good framework for us to do that.

Chairman: We have learned a lot from this session. Can we thank you for your time? If, on your way back to your point of work, you think of something that this Committee should know that we did not extract from our questions, will you continue to be in communication with us? Thank you very much.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by Professor Ella Ritchie

Thank you for asking me to give oral advice to the House of Commons Select Committee on Bologna and for the offer of submitting further information. Having read through all the evidence there are three points that I would like to stress.

Firstly, it is important to remember the context within which Higher Education in the UK operates—that is an increasingly competitive, international market where students are becoming more selective. UK universities deliver high quality but high cost programmes (and are seen as becoming more difficult in terms of visa requirements). The growing number of international providers (both public and private) and the increasing number of Masters programmes which are taught in English across Europe and beyond are threats to our international student base. UK recruitment to Masters programmes is also becoming more difficult. Incidentally, the differential fee regime in the UK means that it is often difficult to negotiate and agree exchange programmes, such as the ERASMUS/MUNDUS programmes. I make these points not to argue for some form of protectionism for the UK but to stress the importance of understanding the financial framework within which we operate.

A second, more specific observation, is the importance of preserving the UK one year Masters programme. We discussed the ambiguities surrounding the Integrated Masters in the Committee, but one issue which we did not touch on was the need to ensure that 90 ECTS, which is the typical length of a one year UK Masters, can be taken in a year. I have seen in a document (Educational structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits prepared by the Tuning Project) the suggestion that 75 ECTS should be the maximum allowed in any one year. As I said in my evidence, you have to be careful that small changes don't creep in at the last minute!

Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance of not agreeing to a system of ECTS for Doctoral Programmes. The majority of academics from across Europe at the Bologna discussions took this view, however there is a certain neatness to delivering all three levels of the Bologna cycle in ECTS which might appeal to some policymakers.

March 2007

Wednesday 31 January 2007

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Mr David Chaytor
Jeff Ennis
Paul Holmes
Helen Jones

Fiona Mactaggart
Mr Gordon Marsden
Stephen Williams

Memorandum submitted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Bologna Declaration is an intergovernmental agreement dating from 1999 to establish a world-class European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. It followed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, which was the first step in agreeing that European higher education systems should be coherent and compatible to strengthen recognition of qualifications and the international competitiveness of European higher education. The UK was one of the four original signatories of the Sorbonne Declaration, along with France, Germany and Italy.

2. The broad objectives of the Bologna Declaration were to remove obstacles to student mobility across Europe; enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide; and establish a common structure of higher education systems based on two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate), which would lead to greater transparency and recognition of qualifications. The four main priorities of the process have evolved and are:

- A degree system based on three cycles—Bachelors, Masters and doctoral studies—that are easily readable and comparable.
- Developing a credit system, such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), that can be used for the purposes of transfer and recognition.
- Measures to favour mobility, transparency and readily comparable qualifications.
- European co-operation in the field of quality assurance and evaluation.

These are underpinned by other action lines that cover:

- (a) The promotion of the European dimension in higher education.
- (b) A focus on lifelong learning.
- (c) The inclusion of higher education institutions and students.
- (d) The promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.
- (e) Doctoral studies and the synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

3. The process is intergovernmental, operating outside the framework of the European Union. Progress is made through a common agreement to act by Ministers of the (currently 45) participating countries. The participants are looking to align their systems of higher education to facilitate greater transparency, increase mobility, and make degrees more comparable while preserving the autonomy and diversity of higher education provision in each country.

4. The most important forum in the decision-making progress is the two-yearly Ministerial Summit, when the Ministers of Higher Education from each participating country meet to assess the progress that has been made and to set out the priorities for the work programme for the following two years. Each Summit results in a communiqué which sets out future priorities. Ministers entrust the implementation of all the issues covered in the communiqués, the overall steering of the process and the preparation of the Ministerial meetings every two years to the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG).

5. The BFUG meets approximately once every six months, but somewhat more frequently in the run up to each ministerial conference. The BFUG consists of representatives of all the participating countries, as well as the European Commission. In addition, there are several consultative members—the European University Association (EUA), the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the Council of Europe, UNESCO-CEPES, Education International (EI) and the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Europe (UNICE).

6. The stocktaking exercise that took place before the last Ministerial Summit in May 2005 in Bergen, Norway, was an important milestone in the process. It marked the halfway point in the development of the European Higher Education Area by 2010 and reported an overall positive message that real progress had

been made. The stocktaking report noted that more than half of the participating countries had quality assurance structures in place; at least 55% of countries had the two cycle degree system in place; and the Lisbon recognition Convention had been ratified by the great majority of countries.

7. The Government is fully committed to the process and strongly supports its aims. The process is a key means of achieving the Lisbon goal of making the EU the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy. The process also contributes to the Government's international education and skills strategy by helping to prepare all learners for life in a global society and work in a global economy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

8. Implementation of the Bologna principles is primarily a matter for the higher education sector itself, but the UK's leading role in influencing and shaping the process from the outset means that the Bologna objectives correspond closely to existing practices in British Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Indeed, given that the degree structure model that Europe is moving towards is in practice the British model, the Government believes that the process means our institutions are well placed to make the most of the opportunities it provides to develop closer links with European institutions and increase mobility for students, researchers and staff.

9. The stocktaking report produced for the last ministerial conference in May 2005 in Bergen and the accompanying Trends IV report (a survey of European institutions providing an in-depth view of the state of implementation of the Bologna reforms) both provided an overall positive message that real progress had been made.

10. The stocktaking reported that the UK's overall performance was very good—the basic structure of UK degrees already conforms to the Bologna model of three main cycles and we have a well developed system of quality assurance. The areas where further progress was needed were in relation to the implementation of the Diploma Supplement and a national system of credits.

11. A copy of the UK's last national report (from January 2005) is attached for information. The Government will be producing an updated stocktaking report in early 2007 in readiness for the May Ministerial summit.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

12. The Bologna Process is an important mechanism for enabling the EU to achieve the Lisbon goals and for taking forward the modernisation of higher education agenda.

13. The Government believes that universities and colleges should enable our society to deal with the economic and social challenges posed by the increasingly rapid process of global change. Higher education institutions should play to their strengths in research, teaching and knowledge transfer, not only in the UK but across Europe. The Bologna Process is about supporting European universities and colleges, helping them play their part in meeting this challenge and contributing to the Europe of Knowledge. The Bologna Process is thus an impetus for countries to drive forward reforms of higher education systems which are no longer competitive.

14. The Government believes the Bologna Process presents numerous advantages—students will have a wider range of educational programmes to choose from; they will be able to move more freely between European universities; graduates will be able to enter an enlarged labour market; employers will have access to a larger pool of resources; and institutions will compete in a more challenging environment.

15. Increased mobility opportunities for students will help equip graduates with the skills they need to succeed personally and professionally, to develop as critical, reflective, life-long learners. As more countries move towards a common classification of Bachelors and Masters qualifications, this will help employers to understand what each qualification represents in terms of learning outcomes, and therefore promote graduate mobility throughout Europe.

16. There are also significant benefits in terms of developmental opportunities for all HEI staff. These include: greater scope for interaction and collaboration with colleagues and institutions in other countries; more opportunities to spend time in other European HEIs; and more incentives to introduce an international dimension to the curriculum. All of these will enable people to learn new ways of living and working and provide skills and good practice that individuals can take back into their professional life.

17. However, it will be important to ensure that the Bologna Process remains dynamic and does not become a rigid set of static rules. The UK will therefore continue to ensure that the Bologna Process takes place in the context of higher education modernisation and will seek to promote further innovation and liberalisation whenever it can. We will emphasise that any advantages will only be realised if institutions engage with the process and make the most of the opportunities it presents. The potential disadvantage is that, as the competitiveness of the rest of Europe increases and awareness of other countries' provision is raised amongst international students, those UK institutions that do not take up the opportunities offered by the process will find it more difficult to maintain their competitive position in the global higher education market.

AGENDA FOR 2007 CONFERENCE IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

18. The London conference, to be held on 17–18 May 2007, will be the fifth ministerial conference in the Bologna Process. It follows the conference held on 19 and 20 May 2005 in Bergen, Norway. That conference marked the first stocktaking exercise of the process at the halfway point in the development of the European Higher Education Area by 2010 and set the priorities for action over the following two years. The communiqué signed by the 45 countries involved was a reaffirmation of their commitment to the process. It also set out areas for future work and noted that the next stage in the stocktaking process would be in 2007.

19. As a clear sign of its commitment to the process, the UK agreed to host the next ministerial conference in 2007 in London. As a result, the UK took over responsibility for the Bologna Secretariat from Norway for the two-year period between the 2005 and 2007 ministerial conferences and has been responsible for moving forward work in the areas identified in the Bergen communiqué. The main areas of work have been:

- the next stocktaking exercise in 2007;
- the development of a strategy for the external dimension to the process;
- the exploration of data on the social dimension of the process;
- the implementation of the proposed qualifications framework; and
- the drafting of the 2007 London communiqué.

Each working group and project will prepare a report which will feed into the London communiqué.

20. The London conference will be hosted by the UK, in conjunction with Germany as holders of the Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers. We expect there to be delegations from 46 countries (the current 45 and Montenegro), the European Commission and the eight consultative members—the European University Association (EUA), the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the Council of Europe, UNESCO-CEPES, Education International (EI) and the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Europe (UNICE). Each country's delegation will have five members, ideally comprising the Minister; a senior official; the Bologna Follow Up Group member; a university rector and a student representative.

21. The conference has to satisfy a number of objectives. It needs to ensure that momentum is maintained and provide an assessment of how much more needs to be done in order to achieve the objective of creating an EHEA by 2010. It also has to provide a review of progress since the last ministerial conference and set out the agreed priorities for the next two years.

22. The Government's intention is to make the event as forward looking and as participative as possible, and to minimise the time spent reporting progress. The Government is therefore seeking to use the conference as the basis for a first discussion of what the EHEA might look like post-2010 and to provoke more of a discussion about HE reform in Europe beyond Bologna, setting the whole conference in the context of the challenge of the internationalisation of higher education.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE TO ONE YEAR MASTERS AND INTEGRATED MASTERS PROGRAMMES AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

23. There are concerns within the sector that Masters level courses across Europe are falling into a two-year pattern and that this could threaten the continued existence of both the UK's one year Masters course and the different Integrated Masters programmes (four year courses leading directly to a Masters qualification, eg MEng, without a break at the undergraduate award level), particularly as the latter do not fit into the three cycle model.

24. The UK has consistently argued for an approach that ensures that credit for assessing the equivalence of learning achieved by an individual is based on learning outcomes rather than on course duration. This approach has gained widespread acceptance under Bologna and the Bergen communiqué re-emphasised its importance by adopting the Framework for Qualifications in the EHEA, comprising generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes that focus on credits rather than time periods.

25. The Government therefore does not believe that there is any reason to consider the Bologna Process will force institutions to abandon Integrated Masters or one-year Masters courses. The process does not require a Bachelors degree of three years followed by a Masters degree of two years. The basic model that Bologna seeks to promote is rather of a minimum period of three years for the first degree; there is no further definition of course lengths. Institutions are therefore free to offer the courses that they choose, provided that courses meet the requirements for learning outcomes like any other course.

26. Given that the Bologna Process is fundamentally about responding to the Lisbon agenda on competitiveness and making European higher education world-class, it has to be about enabling individual countries to have degree structures that are designed to meet the needs of the international students market and the competitiveness agenda. It therefore needs to be sufficiently flexible and dynamic to allow for a diversity of models that will enable different students to attain equivalent learning outcomes within different time-frames. UK one-year Masters are rigorous and highly valued by international students, and clearly meet this requirement.

27. We similarly believe that Fast Track degrees, which are currently being piloted in four institutions, have an important role to play in this agenda. One of the aims of the Bologna Process is to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education. Fast Track degrees are a good example of this as they will provide a quick entry into the employment market and will help to meet the need for higher skills as set out in the Lisbon strategy. Provided that these programmes delivered over two calendar years can demonstrate that they are comparable in terms of learning outcomes and credit accumulation with more conventional programmes delivered over three academic years, their academic integrity will be clear.

28. When Foundation Degrees were introduced (in England), there were questions as to whether they would be acceptable under the Bologna Process. In practice, we believe that Foundation Degrees are consistent with the Bologna principles for three reasons:

- they were brought in alongside, not to replace, traditional Bachelors (BA or BSc) at undergraduate level;
- the majority of students can progress from a Foundation Degree to a Bachelors degree with an extra three or four terms of study (sometimes longer where a licence to practice is involved); and
- it is not possible to move directly from a Foundation Degree to a Masters degree without first achieving a Bachelors.

The Bergen communiqué accepted the principle of Foundation Degrees within national systems by adopting an “overarching framework for qualifications in the European Higher Education Area, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications).” A number of other countries, including Denmark and Belgium, have similar arrangements.

29. Foundation Degrees are employment-related higher education qualifications just below honours degree level, designed in conjunction with employers to meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional level. They are high-quality courses, delivered in innovative and flexible ways to reduce the practical barriers to learning and to make them accessible to people of all ages and circumstances, many of whom might not otherwise have considered higher education. They are thus an important stepping stone to higher education and particularly useful in the context of widening access.

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

30. The UK HE Europe Unit undertook a survey in July 2005 of UK HEIs and their implementation of Bologna Process reforms. The results of the survey showed that:

- 99% of institutions are aware of the requirement to issue the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge to graduating students, but that only around one third currently do issue it. However, almost 50% have plans to do so in the next couple of years.
- 66% of institutions make some use of a credit system and many have internal credit systems that are broadly compatible with ECTS.
- 73% have the power to award joint degrees.

The Europe Unit is to undertake a further survey in 2007 to see what further progress has been made.

31. The Europe Unit, in the recently published second edition to its Guide to the Bologna Process, makes it clear that the UK HE sector has been involved comprehensively, allowing the sector and individual HEIs to help shape ongoing debates and share experiences and best practice. This engagement is being encouraged by the sector and the Government in the run-up to and beyond the London summit.

32. Other examples exist of individual bodies and institutions engaging in the process in a variety of ways. Professional bodies, such as the UK Engineering Council, participate in projects related to the process at the European level, and monitor the effects of the process on its professions. Some bodies have also participated in pilots, such as Universities Scotland, which has been working to help ensure a complementarity between the process and the work of the European Commission in developing a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

33. Many institutions are thus already very committed to the Bologna Process, but it is clear that all UK universities and colleges need to be alert to the reforms that are taking place if they are to maintain their attractiveness to students across the globe. One of the remaining challenges for the Government is to widen and deepen the involvement and understanding across the sector, so that individual institutions develop strategies accordingly, particularly in introducing comprehensive use of the Diploma Supplement. In this particular area, the Europe Unit produced a guide to the Diploma Supplement for institutions in July 2006.

34. Given that the Bologna Process is likely to have an impact on international recruitment, as not only European students but those from further overseas look to ensure that their qualifications are recognised across Europe, institutions should as a matter of course review their European and international strategies. The Government is therefore looking to individual HEIs to develop strategies to ensure that:

- they provide the Diploma Supplement to all their students (currently only one in three institutions provide this as a matter of course);
- they increase the use of student and staff mobility programmes;

- their quality assurance arrangements are in line with the ENQA standards and guidelines;
- they look for opportunities to develop arrangements for awarding and recognising joint degrees;
- they create opportunities for flexible learning paths, including recognition of prior learning; and
- they increase the number of doctoral candidates taking up research careers.

35. The Government continues to work with its stakeholders, especially the UK HE Europe Unit, to explore how best to work with the sector to make further progress in the implementation of Bologna Process reforms. A national team of 14 Bologna Promoters, funded by the European Commission, assist UK higher education institutions with:

- The promotion and development of student and staff mobility.
- Implementation of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and preparation for the ECTS label.
- Implementation of the Diploma Supplement and Diploma Supplement label.
- General information about the Bologna Process.

MOBILITY

36. One of the aims of the Bologna Process, reflected in the Department for Education and Skills' international HE strategy, is to promote close collaboration between HEIs across Europe and increased mobility for students, researchers and staff. To prepare all learners for life in a global society and work in a global economy involves ensuring there are opportunities for an international dimension to become a real part of every young person's learning experience. This is based on the growing recognition that, if students want to improve their career prospects, it is increasingly important that they are able to demonstrate their skills and experience in an international context.

37. The UK is traditionally a net importer of students in mobility programmes. The main reasons for this are the high quality and international reputation of our provision, the UK's popularity as a study location, the advantages of learning in English and our cultural and regional diversity. Many UK students consequently choose to stay in the UK to pursue their studies.

38. A study of international student mobility by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in July 2004 showed that the main reasons for the decline in outward UK student mobility were language barriers and financial issues. These findings were confirmed by the UKCOSA (UK Council for International education) study of November 2004, which suggested outward mobility was hampered by the following main factors:

- Lack of recognition of year abroad by the student's home institution.
- Individual students' attitudes.
- Lack of language competence.
- Perceived financial concerns.
- Lack of a mobility culture—curriculum design does not include mobility element.

39. Though mobility is a priority for the Bologna Process, the evidence to date is that progress has been slow. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) is starting to look at additional action that could be taken to remove obstacles to mobility and to promote the benefits of periods of studying and teaching abroad.

40. Not only do students need to be made more aware of the academic and economic benefits, institutions also need to play a stronger role in promoting awareness of and interest in and being prepared to recognise study abroad. One way to achieve this would be for internationalisation to be part of HEIs' overall strategies. The Council for Industry and Higher Education is undertaking a study into how UK universities are "internationalising" and is due to report in July 2007.

41. If mobility is to increase, the key factors would seem to be:

- Institutions need to have proper international policies covering all aspects of internationalisation, including outward mobility of home students.
- Institutions need to have the internationalisation of the student experience featured in their strategic teaching and learning management plans.
- Programmes need to be designed to include "international" element involving a period of mobility that prepares students to operate internationally.
- Academic recognition of periods of mobility.
- Raising student awareness of the benefits of mobility.

42. One further way to increase mobility may be to enable more portable student support. Further exploration into the issues around the portability of student grants and loans is being actively pursued. A working group of the BFUG (chaired by the Netherlands) began work on 16 June 2006 to identify the scope for actions to facilitate portable grants and loans. The results of the working group are intended to assist countries by providing practical advice on the implementation of the portability of available student grants and loans. The group will report its results before the London Ministerial conference.

ECTS—NATIONAL CREDIT ARRANGEMENTS

43. A key element of the Bologna Process is to establish credit-based higher education as a means of promoting student mobility. The 2005 stocktaking exercise showed that the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) has been introduced in a majority of countries. Scotland and Wales have credit transfer and accumulation systems in place within integrated credit and qualifications frameworks—the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). In England, however, there is no national credit framework, although there is a range of regional arrangements. This was thus one area that the stocktaking suggested we needed to do more on in terms of developing a system that is ECTS compatible.

44. ECTS was initially established under the Erasmus programme (1988–95) and was tested over a period of six years in a pilot scheme involving 145 higher education institutions in all EU Member States and EEA countries, operating in five subject areas: Business Administration, Chemistry, History, Mechanical Engineering and Medicine. Based on the results of the pilot scheme, ECTS was considered to be an effective instrument for creating curricular transparency and facilitating academic recognition. As a consequence, ECTS has been included within the higher education component—Erasmus—of the Socrates Programme. Its promotion within higher education institutions has taken place within the framework of the Institutional Contracts drawn up between the Commission and the institutions.

45. In 2003, the Government's Higher Education White Paper asked HEFCE to work with partners in the sector to build upon best current practice and to extend this so that there was widespread and consistent use of credit across the HE sector. The Government recognises the importance of credit systems to learners that make it possible to take a break in studies and start again without having to repeat learning, and acknowledges that many institutions already have internal credit systems and that a number of consortia of institutions have shared systems.

46. This formed part of the remit that HEFCE invited Universities UK to take forward through a scoping review led by Professor Bob Burgess, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester. That scoping review recommended that the sector should work towards a common credit system for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, compatible with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the European Credit Transfer System. Since then, on behalf of Universities UK and GuildHE, Professor Burgess' Steering Group has undertaken extensive consultation on practical proposals for implementing that recommendation. The final report from the Burgess Steering Group was published in December and sets out a programme that would lead to English institutions voluntarily credit-rating their provision by 2009–10 and thereafter starting to include the credit value in a published description of each of the programmes they offer. This is welcome progress.

47. The Burgess Group has been considering how a national credit framework could link with the ECTS initiative. Under Bologna there is no requirement for ECTS to be the basis of any national credit system, but there is an expectation that national systems can be readily mapped onto ECTS. The Government is aware however of a number of concerns amongst stakeholders in the UK about some elements of ECTS. These have been communicated to the European Commission.

48. The Commission has responded by agreeing to look again at ECTS generally and involve the Member States in the process. This review is expected to start in the first half of 2007.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

49. Quality assurance is key to enhancing the attractiveness of the EHEA and making it more competitive in an international market. In February 2006 the European Union adopted a recommendation on further co-operation in higher education quality assurance that encouraged:

- all HEIs to have internal quality assurance systems;
- a common set of standards and guidelines; and
- the establishment of a European Register of quality assurance agencies.

50. This led to an increased focus on quality assurance within the Bologna Process. One significant outcome of the Bergen conference in May 2005 was the formal adoption of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance. Quality assurance arrangements in the UK are compatible with these European standards and guidelines.

51. Current discussions in the Bologna Process are focused on the practicalities of implementing a European Register for quality assurance agencies and proposals will be presented to the Ministerial conference in London. The Government believes that a register could be a useful information tool to help identify credible quality assurance agencies.

52. The last stocktaking exercise suggested however that progress needed to be made as regards the involvement of students in quality assurance arrangements in England and Wales (the Berlin communiqué committed national quality assurance systems to include by 2005 participation of students in evaluation of programmes or institutions).

53. Students already play an important role in the quality assurance processes in the UK—both within institutions and at national level. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the representative student body within an institution is invited to make a separate written submission to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) audit team prior to audit visits and meetings with students form a part of all reviews—at subject or institutional level.

54. The QAA has a dedicated member of staff for student matters and has been working with student representative bodies to inform and train students on quality assurance matters. Students are also represented on the Board of Directors of QAA.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM

55. The Burgess Group has also been considering issues relating to degree classification, assessment and the presentation of information on achievement. The issues addressed relate to higher education institutions throughout the United Kingdom and are relevant to implementation of the Diploma Supplement.

56. The 2003 White Paper *The future of higher education* raised the need to evaluate recent research on the honours classification system and to consider possible alternative methods for presenting the overall achievement of students. In September 2005, after considerable debate, the Group issued a consultation paper that proposed a pass/fail approach with the use of distinction to mark outstanding achievement. (*The UK Honours Degree: Provision of Information*, UUK/SCOP 2005).

57. Responses to the consultation signalled a clear unwillingness to move to a pass/fail/distinction honours classification system. Respondents wanted more work on a range of issues including: the evidence relating to assessment and the formulation of the summative judgement; and on the presentation of information through the Diploma Supplement/Transcript.

58. After considering the consultation findings, the Burgess Group examined additional research work on the classification of honours degrees in the US, Australia and the UK (commissioned through the HE Academy). They also examined QAA evidence on assessment and classification (from Institutional Audit) and reviewed empirical research in Scotland under the Assessment Quality Enhancement theme. The Group also commissioned the University of Sussex to research into employer needs about the quality and standards of HE provision and student achievement.

59. The Group sought advice from the UK HE Europe Unit on the use of ECTS and on the presentation of information in the Diploma Supplement. It used the HE Academy to explore how institutions could move from the existing HE Transcript to a document meeting the requirements of the Diploma Supplement.

60. The Group concluded that any move at this stage from the classification of honours degrees to a pass/fail approach would be a move too far. This proposal had failed to win the support of the majority of institutions, still less that of employers and related bodies.

61. The Group therefore proposed an incremental approach to change and a further consultation on its thinking to date and preliminary conclusions—to provide an opportunity for discussion and reflection by the sector as a whole and to seek a mandate for further collective work. The areas covered by the latest (September 2006) consultation covered the following areas: Institutional Autonomy; Classification of the Honours Degree; Possibility of Additional Bands in the Classified Honours Degree; Nature of classification; Clarity and Transparency; Presentation of Information; Information for Employers and Other Stakeholders. The Group's final report is due in March 2007.

THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE

62. The Bologna Process is not intended to lead to the standardisation or greater uniformity of European higher education provision. It is more a framework designed to ensure the highest level of quality, consistency and coherence between Europe's respective national systems and between individual institutions. The Government firmly believes that the process should continue to embrace the diversity and autonomy of all systems and institutions, and use examples of best practice to facilitate the modernisation and reform of European higher education.

63. In the UK, these reforms and the process will enable the UK HE sector to maintain and further develop its position as an attractive provider of higher education to students and staff across Europe and the world. As competition for international students grows, institutions will need to work harder to maintain their competitive edge. The Government's aims for the Bologna Process echo those encapsulated in the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI phase 2), launched in April 2006, which is designed to ensure that UK provision retains its position as a leader in international education.

64. Further UK action has been focused on promoting awareness and understanding of what is being achieved under the Bologna Process so that other countries can judge for themselves what the implications may be for them.

CONCLUSION

65. The Government believes that the Bologna Process offers a unique opportunity to implement lasting fundamental reform in European higher education. For the European Higher Education Area to be successful, it needs to build on the strengths and traditions of each country's higher education systems. It should continue to promote and celebrate the diversity of higher education provision, increasing the learning opportunities available to staff and students throughout Europe. The process should develop and implement a flexible framework to offer students what they need and to allow universities and colleges to respond to the needs of the 21st century knowledge economy as part of the Lisbon goals to create a competitive, knowledge-based economy.

December 2006

Witness: **Bill Rammell**, a Member of the House, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills, gave evidence.

Q132 Chairman: Can I welcome the Minister to our proceedings, but also say, and it is a fine point, that to be honest about this, I started off thinking that looking at Bologna was not going to be that interesting, but as we take evidence I think it gets more and more interesting and quite concerning too. This is a very serious challenge for higher education. I confess, as a sinner, I have repented and I find it very interesting. What do you think Bologna is going to achieve for UK higher education?

Bill Rammell: I do not think we should overstate it, but it is an important process. It is about comparability and compatibility of higher education qualifications across the broader Europe. It is about mutual recognition and it is about aiding mobility, both of students and academics. It will give students, importantly, a wider choice of course programmes, if we get this right, and particularly through the Diploma Supplement, if employers better understand what the different qualifications are across the broader European area, it will give employers a wider pool of recruits to choose from. There is a lot of economic evidence that with mobility of labour, with migration, you actually add economically to your GDP. If I look at it exclusively from the UK perspective, if we do not properly engage with this process, given the significant benefit that overseas students have brought both to our universities and to our economy as a whole, if we are not demonstrating that people who come here get a qualification that is recognised throughout the broader European area at a time when there is increased competition internationally for overseas students, I think we could face some worrying competition. So, I think it is necessary, I think the process has moved in the right direction, but we certainly need to see further progress.

Q133 Chairman: Are there any threats to UK higher education that perhaps when we started this process we did not perceive that we have to guard against?

Bill Rammell: I think the positive is that actually if you look at the detail of Bologna, certainly, for example, in terms of the three-cycle framework, it is very much moving to the system that we have got. The increasing focus (and this was explicitly made clear in the Bergen Communiqué two years ago) is on learning outcomes and not time served, and that has been one of the historic debates about this, where elsewhere in the broader Europe it is almost

the number of months and years you have undertaken a qualification rather than the level that you have actually achieved. So, I think all of that is positive. I think the risks are that if we do not continue to take it seriously, in the long-run (and I do not want to over-state it) our institutions could become less competitive internationally and in an increasingly globalised environment I think that would be a concern. I think as well we constantly have to monitor and watch to ensure that this does continue to be bottom up with strong engagement from universities themselves, not top down, and that it is about comparability and it is not about standardisation. For example—I am sure we will come on to this—I think there are some concerns in the way that the European Credit Transfer System operates. We have made representations to the Commission. Those are currently being looked at, but I think we need to ensure it is not about standardisation, it is not about uniformity, it is about translation: if you have undertaken a higher education qualification in the University of London, that it is actually comparable in terms of what it means with the Sorbonne or elsewhere in the broader Europe.

Q134 Chairman: Even those of us who are pretty strongly pro European are aware that education is not part of the Commission's remit. You have just said you have written to the Commission. What the hell has it got to do with them?

Bill Rammell: In terms of a formal and over-arching role, the Commission does not have that; nevertheless it is represented within the Bologna Process. Bologna is much wider. After this year's conference it is likely to be 46 countries as compared to the 27 within the European Union, but the Commission does have a role. The overarching qualifications framework within the European higher education area is agreed at the Bologna Conference. One of the things that was first raised in the Berlin Conference and then reinforced at the Bergen Conference was that it would be useful to have a system of credit transfer to apply to that overall framework. The only credit transfer system that is in existence at the moment is the European Credit Transfer System, which originally arose out of the Erasmus Programme. I think that one level can be useful, and certainly a majority of UK higher education institutions do use it as a translation

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

device, but I think there are a number of areas where that goes too far, it moves in the wrong direction, and we have made representations, as indeed have other Member States, and very welcome the Commission is looking at that in the first part of this year and has agreed, importantly, to involve Member States within that.

Chairman: We are going to drill down on that. Stephen.

Q135 Stephen Williams: Good morning, Minister. When we had Universities UK in last week they said that the Bologna Process was a sector-led initiative, a bottom up process. Is that how you see it?

Bill Rammell: Yes, I do. Let me be clear from the beginning. At an important level it is inter-governmental, in that the signatories on the document are governments, it is the Minister responsible for higher education who applies for their country to become part of the Bologna Process, but the Bologna Declaration itself makes explicitly clear that the involvement of higher education communities is crucial for the success of the overall process. I think, thus far, a major part of its success has been that it has been bottom up and voluntary and respectful of higher education autonomy. At the Bologna level universities are involved, for example through the European Universities Association. Within this country the major driver of this is the UK Higher Education Europe Unit, which is owned by Universities UK and the funding councils. For example, at the Bergen Conference two years ago, in negotiating the detail of this, I sat side by side with Drummond Bone, the President of EU UK, and that will be the case in London this year, and we do work hand-in-glove with our universities in this country.

Q136 Stephen Williams: If what you said is right, that there will be 46 higher education ministers taking part in this conference in May in London later this year, is that a model that all your fellow higher education ministers adopt across the Bologna area?

Bill Rammell: I would be stating the obvious if I said that working in any arena where you have got 46/47 higher education ministers or, indeed, any ministers, is a challenge, and, bluntly, that is a challenge that we face in the European Union at the moment. When we move to a Europe of 27 it is even bigger within the larger number of countries that we have got. However, in terms of this being bottom up, there are different systems of higher education across the European Union. One of the reasons that, I think, we have been very successful in this country, arguably, compared to others elsewhere in Europe, is because of that respect and concern for autonomy at universities that they drive their own vision, they are responsive to the market in a real sense. That is less so elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless, the framework that we have all signed up to does respect that autonomy. What we need to do is to watch it very carefully and monitor it and ensure that at that supra-national level that respect for autonomy is maintained.

Q137 Stephen Williams: What I would like to get at, Chairman, is the UK's model of higher education institutions being autonomous bodies that jealously guard their independence and that you are, therefore, a light-touch higher education minister, perhaps, compared to your European counterparts. Is there scope for tension within the Bologna Process because of that if overseas universities are a little bit more state-controlled?

Bill Rammell: As long as we watch it carefully, I do not think that that difference in cultural approach to this affects the over-arching international framework. However, there is a difference in terms of the way these issues are delivered within nation states. For example, the Diploma Supplement (which I am sure we will come on to), we are strongly urging the UK higher education institutions to use that supplement as a key means of translation across the broader Europe. However, we cannot stipulate that. In some countries the Ministry for Education will simply say every university has got to sign up to this. They are able to do that. That is a different kind of system. I happen to think our system is preferable; nevertheless I do not think it impedes the way that we are addressing these issues.

Q138 Stephen Williams: Whatever the outcomes of the ministerial conference later this year be, you might seek such a clarification that broad policies are the responsibility of the team of ministers but the actual implementation and detail of the degree programmes, and so on, is fundamentally a matter for the on-the-ground institutions?

Bill Rammell: In terms of the importance of reform, more generally, of higher education within Europe, that is something that we have strongly argued for, and we will use opportunities within the conference to pursue that argument. The model that we have in this country of autonomy, of mission specialisation, of a broader funding base, a close connection with the economy, we started that debate at the Hampton Court summit when we had the EU Presidency. We will continue that and we will look for opportunities within the Bologna Conference to put those views forward. Nevertheless, I would not want to create an impression that the fact that not everybody is yet at that position within other European countries actually imposes a burden on us in the way that we take these things forward, because I do not think it does.

Q139 Stephen Williams: I know Fiona wants to ask about the EU, so I will lead her into that and then hand over. The Minister mentioned the role of the Commission. When we were in Australia looking at higher education over there, there was a real tension in between the federal governments that constitutionally had no remit over education and the state governments that did. Bologna has a wider family membership than the EU. Nonetheless, the Commission appears to be getting involved in it. Yesterday the Minister and I were discussing the European Institute of Technology, which appears to be another area where the EU is getting into

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

education which constitutionally is supposed to be outside its remit. Is there a danger here of mission creep by the Commission in Brussels?

Bill Rammell: As a convinced, constructive pro European who sees the benefits of nation states across Europe working together where you can achieve more together than you can achieve on your own, nevertheless I do recognise what you say when you talk about the danger of mission creep. I think the Commission has a role within this process. It is not a leading or a guiding role and there are all sorts of other issues, but this is much wider than the European Union. Nevertheless, we do need to monitor that role. For example, when you look at the European Qualifications Framework—it is a separate issue but it links into Bologna—which covers qualifications much wider than just higher education qualifications, I think there is sometimes tension that the Commission may be attempting to overstep its competence in that area. We have pushed back strongly on that issue. Also the European Credit Transfer System which I talked about, the credit transfer translation device, I think in a number of areas has actually gone too far, and we have pushed back very strongly on that and we are getting a review. I think, as is often the case within the European Union, you have to watch this issue very carefully and where you have a concern you have to intervene on it.

Q140 Chairman: Australia keeps being mentioned. We learnt a lot in Australia. Can I just make the point to you, Minister, that when all select committees now travel we do pay into off-set to do something about our impact on global warming and climate change.

Bill Rammell: I take that point, Chairman. My Australian counterpart has actually gone out of her way to discuss Bologna with me, which I think is an indication that this process is being viewed seriously and on a much wider basis.

Q141 Chairman: That is really worrying in terms of mission creep, is it not?

Bill Rammell: It is better than discussing cricket!

Q142 Fiona Mactaggart: You are saying to us that the anxiety which has been expressed to us, by quite a large number of people who have given evidence, that the European Commission is using this as a bit of a Trojan Horse to see whether it can extend its competence is well-founded and that you are firmly pushing back. I am glad to hear you are firmly pushing back, but is it going to work? There have been previous examples of Britain firmly pushing back and the mission creep resulting. The Commission is still doing this review of the European Credit Transfer System. Is it any business of theirs?

Bill Rammell: We do not have another credit translation device in existence. I think arguably, as part of this process, we should develop one, but that is the only show in town at the moment. It is used by our institutions and ones elsewhere, and it is about getting it into the right shape. I actually think that, in

terms of all the debates we have about the European Union, we have a much better track record of pushing back and asserting our national priorities than any of the coverage in our newspapers would suggest. I do think, for example, on the ECTS we have had particular concerns that, although it is moving towards a system that recognises learning outcomes rather than time served, there is still too much of an emphasis on time served. I think, in some areas, it attempts to be too prescriptive and regulatory in specifying credit systems where this is not a top down approach and an individual country or a university does not have to have of itself, even though I think there are arguments that it is desirable, a credit system, and there is a particular problem as well. They have recently published a user's guide which gave credit levels for different qualifications including master's, and it made a statement within that document that the maximum credit that you could get for a one-year masters programme was 75 credits. Once you translate our master's programme into the ECTS framework you come up with 90. If you are only going to give a maximum of 75, that could create the impression (which I think would be wholly erroneous) that our master's qualifications are of less value than those elsewhere within the European Union. We have pushed back very strongly on that issue. We have recognition and a commitment from the Commission that they are going to look at this again. They are doing that in the early part of this year, they are consulting with Member States, and we will push as strongly as possible. If we take that particular example, when we bear in mind we have 18,000 European Union students undertaking the one-year masters programme within this country, 62,000 non EU overseas students undertaking a one-year master's programme, students internationally are voting with their feet in favour of our qualifications and we should not be constrained or under-represented by a framework which misrepresents the picture. So, on those issues we do push back strongly, and I think we will achieve results.

Q143 Fiona Mactaggart: In many ways rightly, you focus there on the content of what the Commission are doing, but I am still quite interested in the fact that they are doing it and the process. Do you think that in the meeting in May there should be a key priority of the role of the European Commission in keeping it separate from the Bologna Process? Do you think that that meeting can do something to achieve that and, if so, what?

Bill Rammell: It could. Because this is a bottom up approach, everything is possible. However, since the beginning of this process, if you go back to the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 and then the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the Commission has played a role; it has not played a role in the follow-up group from the conference, which is about monitoring what is being done across the European Union to implement the principles that we are aspiring to. There are other areas where there are interconnections between what the European Union does and what the broader Europe does. For

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

example, in terms of professional qualifications, there are currently 15 directives that govern professional qualifications and the readability across the European Union. I think it is important that there is an interplay and relationship between that process and what happens within the broader Bologna Process. So I think there is a legitimate role for the European Commission, but it has to be constrained and it has to be circumscribed, and that is what we do on an on-going basis. If you actually went round the country and talked to our universities and said: "Do you see evidence of the European Commission doing things in relation to your courses that they should not be doing?", I am not sure you would get a lot of feedback saying, "Yes, that is the case."

Q144 Fiona Mactaggart: It takes a bit of time to feel that kind of feedback. One of the reasons I am pushing at this is because of the differences that I have seen in the evidence which we have had from the universities themselves. Of course, we talk about a bottom up process. In Britain we do have a bottom up system, whereas in most other European countries the sector is not as autonomous and as independent as here, the person who is doing your job is actually the top and the bottom in much of the rest of Europe; but Universities UK specifically disagreed with you about the Bologna Process being fundamentally about responding to the Lisbon Agenda, and I wondered what you thought about that?

Bill Rammell: I am sorry, I did read the evidence, but can you remind me of specifically what they said?

Q145 Fiona Mactaggart: When they were asked if they agreed with the DfES that the Bologna Process is fundamentally about responding to the Lisbon Agenda on competitiveness and making European education world-class, they said, "No".

Bill Rammell: This is where I run the risk of contradicting something we may have sent you in writing. I would not use the words that Bologna is fundamentally about implementing and achieving the Lisbon goals. I think it is an important contribution, but I think this is much more important and much wider than just the European Union. I think there is a process of globalisation that is taking place within the world of higher education that mirrors that which is happening elsewhere in our society. Increasingly there are links with countries right the way across the world at a higher education level, whether it is Africa, whether it is Russia, whether it is India, whether it is China. I think that can be a positive process, and I think that by embracing the Bologna Framework we can place ourselves in the strongest position to be able to do that. In the bargain, I think this can make a contribution towards achieving the Lisbon goals, but I would not use the words that this is fundamentally, or by implication exclusively, achieving the Lisbon goals.

Q146 Fiona Mactaggart: What do you think it fundamentally is about?

Bill Rammell: I think it is about enabling a greater mobility of students and academics across that wider European area, and it is about facilitating interaction and movement between global higher education institutions. There is a debate to be had about whether this would ultimately end up as a global system. I think that is pushing it too far at this stage. If you asked me really to project in the longer term forward, at some stage I think you will have a global system of comparability and compatibility across the world, but it is important that you do not run before you can walk and we actually get this right, and that is wider than just Europe. I made the point earlier, we are talking about, after this conference, 46 countries compared to 27 in the European Union.

Q147 Fiona Mactaggart: You have done the opposite of what you did at the beginning. At the beginning you were looking at the content of what this was trying to be about and you have moved into the process. If you are talking about what it is fundamentally about, and you have described the process, what is the aim of that process? What would be better as a result of that process?

Bill Rammell: What will be better is that you will enable students and academics to interact and travel to other institutions. In the process, I have a very strong view that British students (and let us look at it from the British perspective, because that is what we are responsible for) who spend some time studying abroad develop skills and competences in terms of self-reliance, language skills, appreciation of other cultures that are very beneficial in the increasingly globalised jobs market. I think it will enable a mobility of labour to take place that has an economic benefit and, crucially, it will ensure that we maintain a very competitive position, which is what we have at the moment, in terms of attracting overseas students. We have fought very strongly, particularly through the Prime Minister's Initiative, to get to a situation where we are second only as a destination for overseas students to the United States. It is getting much more competitive out there. The Australians, the Canadians, the New Zealanders are, rightly, promoting their systems of education; we have got English language delivery elsewhere in the European Union; we need to ensure we have a global system that enables us effectively to compete.

Q148 Chairman: I am getting more and more worried. There is all this talk about globalisation. One thing about UK higher education is that we are a totally different edition; we are unique. Not only unique, certainly in terms of the rest of Europe, we have institutions that are proud of their independence. There really are some very independent strands. We have a system of incomes, which many of us celebrate, that the more independent an income a university can have away from the Department the better, and that is from someone who has supported variable fees. The tradition of independence is very important, and it is totally different to so many other countries in the

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

mainland part of Europe. Long-term that is worrying, is it not? The long-term shift may gradually give you more power over universities. That is horrific, is it not? I do not mean you personally, I mean the Government. We do not want to be a centralist government. Governments interfere too much in universities as it is. We do not want to get like rest of the world, do we?

Bill Rammell: No, we do not, and although in my more frustrated moments sometimes you look at systems elsewhere and you think, "Would that be attractive?", actually much more on balance, no, it would not be. I think our system has got real merits and advantages, and I think if you look at the evidence rather than the speculation around this process, actually the broader Europe has been moving towards our system of higher education.

Q149 Chairman: At the same time, Minister, you are describing this as long-term. The unintended consequences of political and social action are sometimes the ones that really count long-term. What you do not even predict, or we do not predict now, might actually be the result. I think, in a sense, some of the stuff that is coming out in the evidence is an arrogance that, "They are all going to be like us." Some of us fear, from the evidence that we have taken, that there will be a kind of slow movement to be more like them.

Bill Rammell: The process of globalisation, not only in higher education, is a reality, it is happening. My view is that it is a bit like trying to push water back up hill. You have got to embrace it; you have got to try and influence it to the benefit of the people that you represent.

Q150 Chairman: But there is no sign of European universities becoming more like our universities in their independence. When you go to these meetings it is all governments talking to us. We are the unusual ones because you go along with Universities UK?

Bill Rammell: Two things. Firstly, as I go round the European Union discussing this with my counterparts (and I do not want to over-state it), there is a degree of strong support for our model, even if it is said behind closed doors sometimes. Sometimes it is said overtly, sometimes it is said behind closed doors. Secondly, look at the evidence of what is happening. This is a process where the Bologna Declaration explicitly makes clear that this has to respect university autonomy; that it has to be bottom up. If you look at the Bologna Framework, it is based explicitly on learning outcomes, not on time served. There are a number of different ways. If you look at the three-cycle situation, whether that is national arrogance or not, and I am not instinctively nationally arrogant, if you look objectively at the way we manage our affairs within our universities, the Bologna Framework, in terms of the principles it has established, is moving towards our situation rather than the historic European situation.

Chairman: We are going to move on and look at the purpose and broader impact of Bologna. It sounds like we have been talking about that all the time. Gordon is going to lead us.

Q151 Mr Marsden: Minister, in the written memorandum your Department gave us you said, "Bologna is not intended to lead to standardisation or greater uniformity of HE provision across Europe. It is more a framework designed to ensure highest levels of quality, consistency and coherence." So why do you think Lord May, who after all is a very significant figure in the higher education community (scientific adviser to previous governments, et cetera) said it would be not easy to achieve that level of consistency and coherence without it leading to standardisation or greater uniformity?

Bill Rammell: I have got the highest regard for Lord May's academic credentials, but I think I am right in saying, from reading his evidence, he queried at the beginning why you had invited him.

Q152 Mr Marsden: I think that was academic modesty.

Bill Rammell: Okay. When you are reading it off the page it sometimes comes across differently. I think, again, you have to look at the evidence of what has actually taken place under this process. Let us look at what has actually changed as a result of Bologna? (1) More than half of countries have developed quality assurance structures and put them in place, something that we believe very strongly in this country. I do not think that is a process of standardisation. (2) The two-cycle degree system. 55% had the system in place on a wide scale, 21% in a more limit capacity. Again, I do not think that is standardisation; it is simply putting your system of higher education into an internationally recognisable format which, by the way, happens to mirror the practice that we have always had here. The great majority have ratified the Lisbon mutual recognition convention which is manifestly in the interests of every institution, and it is about recognition, it is not about standardisation. The Diploma Supplement is simply a descriptor of your qualification; it is not saying that the Diploma Supplement has to specify what is within that qualification. If you look at the tangible changes that have taken place, they are about comparability and compatibility, they are not about standardisation. Whilst we constantly have to monitor this process, in all the discussions I have, particularly with UUK, we do believe that we are making progress and ensuring that we get the benefits out of this.

Q153 Mr Marsden: So you think we in Britain, your Department, Universities UK and other players, are doing enough to stop this framework becoming a straightjacket?

Bill Rammell: I think we are, but we constantly need to monitor that process. My experience, having been in this job for almost two years—I was at the last conference in Bergen and, having sat through a few European Councils, it was probably more

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

challenging and frustrating than a European Council when you are dealing with that number of countries. Nevertheless, because we keep at this, because we watch the detail, I do not believe it is becoming a straightjacket.

Q154 Mr Marsden: Without being complacent, we have given ourselves a few pats on the back there as a country. Let us take ourselves out of that position and perhaps look at it from the point of view of other people who may be turning up in May in London and let us ask ourselves about what we do about credit transfer. Here we are talking about the importance of ECTS. What do we do about credit transfer? We have just had the Burgess Report, which has obviously made a number of recommendations towards progressing towards it, but it did not even look at compatibility with the ECTS. How are you going to convince your fellow education ministers in May that we should be taken as an authority in this area when we have not even engaged with ECTS?

Bill Rammell: In a sense, we cannot have this both ways. The critique comes from one point of view that this cannot be about standardisation and then, in the next breath, hold on a minute, you are not actually moving to standardisation. If you look at what the declaration actually says, and I think this was first featured in the Berlin Declaration and then was reinforced in Bergen, it expresses a desirability to move towards a system of credit transfer, it does not stipulate it, and probably it does not stipulate it because it cannot and it should not stipulate it because that is a matter for national discussion. However, if you asked me: "Do we want in this country to move towards a better system of credit accumulation and transfer?", my answer to that is, "Yes", and I welcome the progress. It might be described as faltering progress, but I think it is a movement in the right direction that the Burgess Group has undertaken. For the first time in many, many years we now have a timetable and a framework of how we can get to a system of credit transfer.

Chairman: You are not answering the question. You are not answering the Burgess point.

Q155 Mr Marsden: I accept all of that and, for what it is worth and for the record, I share your enthusiasm for that development of the UK system, but the point I am making is a negotiating point. Should not the Burgess Report have given you a little bit more ammunition to go to the conference in May by at least examining whether ECTS is feasible, working or what our contribution to it should be? Otherwise, someone once talked about socialism in one country, we are talking about credit accumulation in one country, are we not?

Bill Rammell: Forgive me, I was not deliberately trying to avoid the question. This has been a difficult process for higher education institutions in this country. I think some progress has been made, but I think there is an argument that, as this develops,

there does need to be a link into a wider European credit transfer system, and I would hope that that is picked up and addressed by the Burgess Process.

Q156 Mr Marsden: So accepting that you are not a Stalinist education minister and would not wish to be so, what oomph can you give between now and May and subsequent to May to universities in this country to say: "How do we improve our own act? How do we improve our own credit accumulation?", so that when we go to the rest of Europe and the rest of the world and say, "Our way of doing this is slightly better than the ECTS", we have got a little bit of beef to back it up with?

Bill Rammell: I am reminded that the Burgess Report does specifically say that the credit system should be compatible with the ECTS, and I think that is welcome. I think it is both important to reinforce that but also, at the same time, I set out some of the limitations that I think surround the current ECTS at the moment, and it is a bit chicken and egg. Yes, we need to ensure that the system we develop in this country is compatible with the ECTS, but we need changes in the ECTS as well.

Q157 Mr Marsden: I appreciate that and I hope you will make that point, not least to the Burgess Group, next time you see them. Can I ask you about what you said earlier about globalisation and mobility? I agree with you in terms of that overall agenda, but the fact of the matter is that in terms of UK students there has been a very significant decline in the number studying in Europe. Are we doing enough to look at whether the present initiatives to get UK students overseas (Erasmus and Socrates) are actually working. When we had people here from the universities before, they admitted, I think, that there had not been a comprehensive assessment as to how successful Erasmus and Socrates had been in achieving the sorts of aims you have described.

Bill Rammell: Two things. Before I come on to actually say I agree with you, there is a real concern about the downturn in numbers of British students participating in Erasmus. Firstly, there has been research on the benefits of Erasmus. 90% of the participants, and this is across the European Union, actually rate the experience as very high or of high quality.

Q158 Mr Marsden: That is across Europe, not in the UK?

Bill Rammell: Yes, but it covers students within the UK as well. There is also evidence of getting you into a job quicker. There is more recent Australian research underlining the benefits of international student mobility. However, I do think we have an issue in the UK. I have been conducting a series of meetings with Vice Chancellors and I am shortly going to be publishing some proposals about how we try to do more to incentivise British students travelling overseas, both within Erasmus and more broadly. Partly it is about language competence, partly it is about demonstrating that the experience that you get whilst you are abroad is a quality one, and I think, if we are honest, that is not always the

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

case, partly it is about recognition within your home institution, that it actually contributes towards the qualification you have got, and partly it is about mobility of student financial support. Those are all areas that I am looking at.

Q159 Mr Marsden: That is well put. Can I ask one final supplementary on that. Again, accepting that you do not want to be top down, is it enough simply to rely on the current system of bilateral agreements between universities and is not the danger, as we move more into the Bologna agenda, that universities in this country find themselves in perhaps an unequal situation because they are effectively, in some cases, negotiating with national governments and that produces all sorts of discrepancies? It is not necessarily like with like.

Bill Rammell: That is an argument. For example, where we get particular problems, and let us talk about the Greek experience as an example where there is some resistance towards the recognition of our higher education qualifications, we do not have institutions going in on their own to bat with the Greek authorities, we are there with them. I have met my Greek counterpart, Alan Johnson has discussed it with his counterpart, the embassies are involved, we do push very strongly, but I do not think that is an argument for saying we can take over the process.

Q160 Mr Marsden: It does suggest that perhaps in the future you are going to need to put more resources in (and I mean no disrespect) via your Department to supplementing and supporting those initiatives, does it not?

Bill Rammell: Yes, I do think we need to be alongside the universities supporting them within this process, and that may have resource implications.

Q161 Jeff Ennis: In his opening remarks, the Chairman mentioned the fact that in evidence that we have taken some institutions see Bologna as an opportunity, others see it as a threat. Where do you stand on this?

Bill Rammell: As long as we get it right, it is an opportunity. I think it is moving in the right direction. I think we need to ensure that all universities in the UK do take this seriously because ultimately it will affect our competitiveness. Let me give you an example of what I mean by that. If you look at the number of UK institutions that have taken on the Diploma Supplement, we have got about 50% who either have done it or are in the process of doing it, but there are some significant variations between different elements of the sector. For example, in the 1994 group of universities, 67% of those who replied to the survey have taken on the Diploma Supplement, only 32% of the coalition of modern universities. I think there is a real interest for every university institution to embrace this process.

Q162 Jeff Ennis: It appears to me, Minister, you are implying that some of our institutions are being a bit complacent on this. If that is the case, what do you

see is the scale of complacency and what would you like to do about that to make sure that we have got the complexity edge, as it were, when Bologna unfolds?

Bill Rammell: I do not want to overstate it, but I think there is a risk of complacency. We bank on the fact that generally we are rightly regarded as having high quality and therefore we think this process is going on but it should not concern us. I said earlier, one of the real benefit, both financially and for a whole series of other reasons, that has come in recent years is the expansion of overseas students coming to this country. Unless, as this process goes forward, we make clear that we are embracing it and we make clear, if you come here, you have a qualification that is easily translatable and comparable elsewhere within the broader Europe, given the competitive pressures that exist, I think we could begin to lose out. I am determined that that does not happen, and with Universities UK we are arguing that whilst we cannot stipulate it, it is important that every university embraces this process. For example, the UK Higher Education Europe Unit, which is governed by universities, has repeatedly, I think, produced some very impressive material getting across the arguments to institutions.

Q163 Jeff Ennis: So you do not think any of our institutions need a kick up the backside on Bologna then?

Bill Rammell: I am not a Stalinist in higher education terms, and it is not my role to kick them up the backside. It is my role to actually say: "This is important. It is happening. You need to embrace it", and that is something that I and the Department constantly do.

Q164 Jeff Ennis: In many respects we have got more to lose being at the top of the league in attracting Western European students and other international students into our country if the Bologna Process becomes successful. How do you see the trends unfolding in that regard? We are very good at setting targets as a government, I think currently 5% of the student intake is foreign students into the UK. Have we got any target figures as we go down the Bologna track?

Bill Rammell: We have.

Q165 Jeff Ennis: To maintain that or to increase, or decrease, or whatever?

Bill Rammell: Under the first phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative we not only met our target, we exceeded it in terms of attracting overseas students to both further and higher education. Under the second phase of the PMI that we launched last April, it is much better funded than the first phase, and we have set ourselves a target by 2010–11, an additional 100,000 overseas students. I think that is achievable. If you look at all the evidence, actually the market is growing in that there are more people from different countries throughout the world who are aspiring to higher education but the pressures are more competitive, and that is (1) why you need initiatives like PMI, and (2) you need to ensure that the

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

opportunities that students get when they come here are as competitive as possible. For example, the change we made last year to allow all post-grads and many under-grads to work for 12 months after they complete their studies made us much more competitive.

Q166 Jeff Ennis: So the addition of another 100,000 students to 2010, I guess you are basing that increase on the total increase in the number of international students across the whole piece, shall we say, rather than taking them from any other individual European institution?

Bill Rammell: We have broad planning assumptions about where those students are most likely to come from, but that is going to be across the globe. The biggest single element of the growth in overseas students in this country has actually come from China, not Europe.

Jeff Ennis: Yes, I am aware of that.

Q167 Chairman: Minister, there is one worrying thing about all of this. It is almost like an Alice in Wonderland picture for me. Let us be chauvinist. We have the best higher education system in Europe. It is the most attractive to foreign students. Would we in financial services say, "We are the centre for financial services in Europe, if not in the world. We are going to try and help the rest of Europe be as good in financial services as we are so Europe becomes more attractive to financial services"? I have not heard that argument. I have not heard it in steel making, I have not heard it in any other sector, but here we have a process that says, "Let us go out and make the rest of Europe more competitive as an attractive higher education destination because that will do us good." Quite honestly, Minister, in any other industry that would have been laughed out of court.

Bill Rammell: I am not sure the analogy is correct, and the alternative is that we step away from the process.

Q168 Chairman: No, we do not. We are successful now.

Bill Rammell: Absolutely. Can you let me finish. We step away and we say, "We carry on as we are. You do what you will." The problem is that they will get on with it, they will continue with this process and, given the competitive pressures that exist, over time, for some of our institutions, I think that could hit them competitively in that they have ended up in a situation where a system of comparability and compatibility is developed elsewhere in the broader Europe, we are not part of it and just at the one level of overseas students coming to institutions in this country say: "Hold on a minute. If I get this qualification and I have no particular link with the United Kingdom and I then want to go and work in France, in Germany, in Russia or elsewhere, I am not easily going to be able to do that." I think that could hit us, and that is why I think the process is happening, we need to embrace it and we need to influence it in our national interest.

Q169 Chairman: Is there any limit on how many international students we want in the UK?

Bill Rammell: In terms of capacity there would ultimately be a limit. I do not think we are anywhere near that limit yet. I think it is important to make clear, because sometimes when I read some articles in national newspapers an impression is created, or a statement is made, that actually overseas students are a drain on our resources and undercut the opportunities to British students, and nothing could be further from the truth.

Q170 Chairman: We are not making that point. I am not making that point.

Bill Rammell: No, but for the record, because this will go elsewhere, I am making that point, if I can, because actually they add about five billion to our economy and create other opportunities for British students.

Q171 Chairman: They do. I know you are a fantastic Member of Parliament for Harlow, everyone knows that, but some of your constituents in Harlow, and mine in Huddersfield, might say that the core remit of UK higher education is to educate UK citizens and their children. Is that not true?

Bill Rammell: Of course it is, but there are examples course by course where, were it not for the participation of overseas students, because of the economics of this, that course provision would not probably take place for British students. So this is actually bringing something to the table that benefits students in my constituency and in yours.

Q172 Chairman: Good, but there is no institution in this country which has got so many overseas students that you think they are vulnerable financially in terms of viability if markets changed?

Bill Rammell: Whilst we have certainly promoted the recruitment of overseas students, we have also made clear to institutions that, in terms of your overall strategic financial plan, you need to watch this very carefully, and if you are over-exposed in one particular market and there is a sudden downturn in that market for economic reasons or for geopolitical reasons, you might find yourselves over-exposed. I certainly say to every institution I deal with, and I say this corporately, "You need to monitor that and watch it very carefully so that you are not over-exposed."

Chairman: We want to go on to the last section and talk about the 2007 ministerial meeting. David is going to lead us on this.

Q173 Mr Chaytor: Minister, at the ministerial meeting in May, who takes the lead? Is it the Government or is it the universities? Who is negotiating on Britain's behalf?

Bill Rammell: It is ultimately an inter-governmental process. I said at the beginning of this discussion that in order to become part of the Bologna Process, the minister responsible for higher education has to apply, but I will certainly do it side by side with Universities UK, and literally, as at the last

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

conference and at this one, Drummond Bone and I will be sitting side by side and we do agree and we will agree common positions.

Q174 Mr Chaytor: You do agree and you will agree. So what are those common positions?

Bill Rammell: Very much what I have talked about today, that we want a system that follows the practice in this country of three cycles, a system that is based on learning outcomes rather than time served. We will use the opportunity to argue for more a generalised reform of the higher education process so that it moves more towards the system of university autonomy that we have within this country. We will seek to resist some of the protectionist instincts that sometimes come forward from some of the participants in this conference, and we will seek to ensure that it continues to be a light-touch, bottom up approach that is based on comparability and not on standardisation.

Q175 Mr Chaytor: Is there anything that takes place elsewhere in the European Union that we can learn from? Are you rejecting the model of HE that applies in all the other 26 European Union countries?

Bill Rammell: No, I am not.

Q176 Mr Chaytor: What can we learn from the French, the Germans, the Spanish, even the Azerbaijanis?

Bill Rammell: One example was the point that Gordon made that, in terms of a system of credit accumulation, I think in a number of broader European countries they are further down that track than we are and I think part of what works in this process is not just that supra-national framework but it is actually just the discussions you have one to one with counterparts who are dealing with some of the similar challenges that you have got and you learn from that experience.

Q177 Mr Chaytor: Earlier you were a little bit sceptical about a top down approach for a credit transfer system. The Burgess Report reckons that by 2009 English universities should have in place a voluntary credit system whereby their degrees will be described in credit terms. Is that target likely to be met and how important is it that that date is met?

Bill Rammell: I think we have got the best chance of meeting it than we have had for a generation in this debate. I think there has been progress. We have now got a timetable, and although it is not my decision—this is a decision for English universities—nevertheless, I think it is in their interests and the interests of students, more broadly, that they sign up for that process within the time span.

Q178 Mr Chaytor: If some universities resist, does the Government not have a view of that? The Burgess Report came directly out of the 2003 White Paper; so what is the point of publishing a White Paper which stresses the importance of credit transfer systems, setting in motion a process that leads to that, and then finding that a number of universities just do not play ball at all?

Bill Rammell: Bearing in mind the previous comments we have made that there is real benefit in not having a Stalinist minister of higher education who just says, “Do this”, and you do it, nevertheless there is the power of persuasion, there is the power of financial incentives, there is the monitoring of best practice so that we show that for those institutions where it has developed there are real and tangible benefits. I think that is the way to go rather than me or the Secretary of State just prescribing this from the centre. When I travel to some other European countries and talk to my counterparts about the way that works, actually that centralised system of planning does not work desperately well on the ground, because they might actually give the fee out from the Secretary of State’s office but it often does not happen.

Q179 Mr Chaytor: Do you think HEFCE should be incentivising credit transfer systems?

Bill Rammell: I think it is one of the issues that we will look at as this process develops.

Q180 Mr Chaytor: Can I explore a little bit this debate between learning outcomes and time served because you do not get a degree from the Sorbonne just by turning up, do you? The time allocated is actually related to a body of knowledge and the acquisition of skills. Is this not a bit of a false dichotomy, setting in opposition the concept of learning outcomes and the time involved in acquiring the degree?

Bill Rammell: I am not suggesting that all you have to do is to turn up for lectures and seminars and you automatically get a qualification at the end of it. However, in establishing the Bologna Framework there was certainly a drive to actually say that you could not have reached X level of competence within a certain period of time, and the fact that we have ensured, through the Bologna Framework, that we do have generic descriptors of levels of outcome rather than time served I think is extremely important. I also think it is extremely important to recognise that the only time stipulation on the cycles is the minimum of three years for a bachelor’s qualification; there is no time specification for either the master’s or the doctoral cycle. I think sometimes that gets confused within this debate in that there is a suggestion that there is a stipulation for a two-year master’s, and there is not.

Q181 Mr Chaytor: In respect of the concerns about the future of the one-year master’s or the two-year fast-track degrees or even the integral four-year master’s that we have, is it not absolutely in the interests of preserving that aspect of our system that a credit transfer scheme is in place, because that would enable the learning outcomes to be clearly described to justify the continuation of the Bologna master’s or to justify the expansion of two-year fast-track degrees? Is it not in the interests of Government policy that we get a credit transfer system in place in English universities as quickly as possible?

31 January 2007 Bill Rammell MP

Bill Rammell: For all sorts of reasons, I think it is in our interests that we do get a credit transfer system in place—it has long been my view and it has been the view of this Government—but, because we are not centrally driving this, we have to persuade people. I know there are significant debates about this, but I have not seen evidence that actually Bologna will seriously harm, or harm at all, the one-year master's or the integrated master's programmes. As long as the quality is of the right standard I think we will continue to flourish. I made the point earlier, the fact that we have 18,000 European Union students undertaking one-year master's programme, 60,000 non-EU students, students are voting with their feet. There is a perception of quality in this country that we need to ensure that nothing within the ECTS or elsewhere actually undermines.

Q182 Mr Chaytor: Finally, what would you hope to come out of the review of the ECTS, which starts this year?

Bill Rammell: I think if you look at it, at the moment they face in two directions in terms of time served and learning outcomes. I think it needs to be much clearer it is about learning outcomes. I hope that they will make clear (and we will push for this very strongly) that they should not specify, because they cannot specify, that you have to have a credit transfer system, even though, as I have made clear, I think it is desirable, and I certainly want them to deal with this issue of the maximum number of credits being 75 for a one-year master's programme. I do not think that is justifiable, and we need to ensure that we rectify that.

Q183 Chairman: What about foundation degrees? Is that going to be acceptable to our colleagues in Europe?

Bill Rammell: Yes, we spent a lot of time at the Bergen Conference discussing this, not foundation degrees explicitly but intermediate two-year higher education qualifications, and it was probably the most detailed debate that took place and there was a lot of toing and froing, but if you look at the Bergen Communiqué it explicitly refers and endorses the concept of the two-year intermediate higher education qualification, which I think is a demonstration that we can do within these arguments.

Q184 Chairman: Was Universities UK at Bergen with you?

Bill Rammell: Yes.

Q185 Chairman: Is it not surprising that you did not at that time discuss with them that you were going to allow FE colleges to authenticate their own degrees, the two-year degree? Universities UK say you never mentioned it to them before it was announced.

Bill Rammell: I have been discussing this issue up and down the country for a long time, both with universities and further education institutions. There is a piece of legislation going through the House at the moment that, in my view, is very properly about ensuring that, given the skills challenge we face, the system as a whole is as responsive and as flexible as possible. Nothing we are doing, however, will undermine the quality of higher education. We have published the framework for this, which will be equally robust and will involve the QAA. We have set out very clearly that we are listening to concerns about whether institutions should be able to award on to others, particularly overseas. We are receptive to arguments about a probationary period.

Q186 Chairman: So Universities UK would be misleading the Committee if they said that you never consulted them?

Bill Rammell: Once we published the Bill we have gone through a formal process of consultation.

Q187 Chairman: After you published the Bill.

Bill Rammell: Yes, and informally. Chair, this issue, as you will know, has been around for some significant time and I certainly had discussions with both universities and further education colleges about it. But on the principle of is this a sensible change to make, I think emphatically it is, as long as the quality threshold is justifiably high, and it is and it will be.

Q188 Chairman: What about diplomas? What are the universities saying about the acceptance of the new diplomas?

Bill Rammell: I know that you are going to discuss with Jim—

Q189 Chairman: But you are the university man.

Bill Rammell: Absolutely, and let me make clear I think we need to ensure that all universities are engaged with the development of the diplomas—and by all universities I mean all sectors—and one of the decisions that we took recently was to appoint one of the Russell Group Vice-Chancellors, Michael Arthur, from Leeds, as a champion for this process because unless every university institution, including those at the research intensive end of the spectrum, actually embrace and, in a sense, own the diplomas, ultimately they will not succeed.

Chairman: Minister, thank you very much. You have had a full hour so you will not go away saying you did not have enough time. It has been a good session and we have learnt a lot. Thank you.

Written evidence

TAKEN BEFORE THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

Memorandum submitted by The Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng)

1. The Academy (Note 1) is becoming increasingly concerned by reactions to the Bologna Process, which could jeopardise the current international standing of the UK integrated Masters degree in Engineering (MEng) by denying it recognition as a fully fledged first and second-cycle qualification.

2. Our position is that UK engineering degree programmes are more intensive and fast paced than in Europe enabling us to deliver the academic outcomes required to support professional recognition in four years while the majority of European engineering diploma courses take five or more years. One concern is the continued emphasis by our continental colleagues on use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This promotes student workload, and hence course length as the main criterion for comparability of programmes. It would be preferable to use the more rational approach of assessing the learning outcomes themselves, based on agreed benchmark statements, which are independent of the mechanisms, academic or vocational, used to achieve them.

3. In preparation for the EU Ministerial Meeting in London next May it is hoped that the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) Secretariat will take full advantage of this opportunity to press for the adoption of learning outcomes alone as the ultimate long-term basis for the European HE Qualifications Framework.

4. Meanwhile, Universities UK have reminded universities (Europe Note E/05/12) that the current Ministerial agreement regarding minimum levels of ECTS Credits specifies a minimum of 270 credits, of which a minimum of 60 must be at second cycle level (Masters) which integrated Masters degrees such as the MEng to qualify as first and second cycle combined programmes. Their advice is inter alia to restructure the programme to extend the fourth year to a full 12 months, which may include placements. The (as yet) small number of UK degrees which have done this can boost the ECTS second cycle rating to 90 credits within a total of 270.

5. From our recent *Engineering Education in the 21st Century* (Note 2) survey the Academy is aware that there is some strong opposition in many of our university engineering departments to our taking this route. They argue as follows. First and foremost the UK currently achieves an equivalent (if different) route to professional formation by teaching a more compact syllabus in an integrated manner. This position should be defended. To divide this into two cycles is unnecessary and inefficient. It also requires extending our courses to meet the ETCS requirements at the minimum level. This will give the impression that the UK considers that its courses need modification (ie are not of the same standard as European degrees) and even then do not meet the fully fledged Bologna requirements (of 120 ECTS second cycle credits) of the continental university courses. The universities are particularly concerned that this will affect their ability to attract overseas students in future.

6. More significantly it is clear from our latest follow up questionnaire to every university engineering department in the UK that few intend to take any positive action to conform to the Bologna Process until they receive specific directions from either their university (through QAA, UUK or HEFCE) or from the engineering institutions licensed by EC^{UK} to accredit engineering degrees. Currently all Engineering degrees are accredited in accordance with UKSPEC and the EC^{UK}/QAA Engineering Degree Benchmark Statements in order to gain professional recognition (Note 3). It is, therefore, a matter of paramount importance to issue detailed advice on how to present these requirements in such away as to be “Bologna compliant”. Currently no UK body has been specifically tasked, or made accountable, for ensuring that this is done.

NOTES

1. The Royal Academy of Engineering [RAEng] brings together over 1,200 distinguished engineers, drawn from all the engineering disciplines. Its aim is to promote excellence in engineering for the benefit of the people of the United Kingdom. (www.raeng.org.uk)
2. See (www.raeng.org.uk/henleyreport).
3. Responsibility for UK engineering qualifications (and their international recognition) rests with the Engineering Council UK (EC^{UK}). The UK-SPEC, the UK Standard for Professional Engineering Competence, lays down the standards for Chartered Engineer (CEng), Incorporated Engineer (IEng) and Engineering Technician (EngTech). As regards Chartered Engineer status this requires either a (nominally four-year) Integrated MEng degree or a three-year BEng(Hons) with further learning at the Masters level. These are based solely on output standards laid down in the EC^{UK} Engineering Subject Benchmark Statement (which has also been adopted by the Universities UK (UUK) Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for UK engineering degrees). The UK graduate then follows a course of approved industry based Initial Professional Development prior to being granted CEng status. International

recognition is gained through the Washington Accord, Sydney Accord, Dublin Accord, the International Register of Professional Engineers, the APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Engineer Register, the Transatlantic Economic Partnership and in Europe through FEANI (European Federation of National Engineering Associations) which accords professional recognition to members' qualifications including qualifications required by the European Mobility Directive.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by The Russell Group

The Russell Group is pleased to provide this evidence to the Select Committee's Inquiry into the Bologna Process. The Russell Group consists of the Universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Imperial, King's College London, LSE, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Queen's University Belfast, Sheffield, Southampton, University College London and Warwick. Many of the issues raised by the Bologna Process are generic throughout HE and the Russell Group is aware that Universities UK is responding to this inquiry on behalf of the sector generally. Therefore in this evidence it wishes to emphasise particular aspects of importance to research-intensive universities, which provide for a significant volume of the UK's international research collaborations and which recruit a significant proportion of students from Europe and of course further afield. The paragraph numbers below correspond to the order of the issues set out in the terms of reference for the inquiry.

1. The Bologna Process should provide for a greater collaboration with and understanding of continental systems of HE and should assist with personal development through student and staff mobility. It should be recognised that it will also help to create much increased competition in HE provision within Europe both for home and international markets. It is also possible that, de facto and perhaps inadvertently, there might be some increased difficulty for the recognition of UK qualifications in some countries (see 3 below).

2. The agenda for the 2007 meeting in London will cover issues of importance to UK HE, including consideration of basic principles for doctoral level qualifications in Europe—of especial concern to the Russell Group—and quality assurance arrangements. Such arrangements will need to be flexible and light-touch.

3. There are important matters still to be addressed with regard to one year Masters degrees and Integrated Masters within the three-cycle system. It is important to acknowledge that this is not because of Bologna requirements in themselves, or indeed because of any Ministerial determinations. Rather it is because of the manner in which Bologna policies have been interpreted by some of the national legislations. The UK can help matters by making appropriate adjustments to academic programmes (eg with regard to credit), but any clarifications on the application of Bologna requirements and expectations would be helpful in resolving some of the recognition problems that our students can now encounter in Europe.

4. No Comment.

5. No Comment.

6. Credit systems are one of the central issues when considering the recognition of qualifications. Most continental countries use ECTS. Following upon the Burgess Reports, ECTS is unlikely to become the standard system in the UK. The credit system recommended for the UK has many benefits within the UK but does not easily articulate with ECTS because of different expectations of how student load/contact hours should translate into credit.

The UK has rightly championed an emphasis on learning outcomes rather than inputs throughout its engagement with the Bologna Process. However, it will be important to ensure that outcomes do not come to be expressed too rigidly or formulaically.

7. No Comment.

8. The Russell Group would support the maintenance of the present UK degree classification system, supported by UK Transcripts which fully meet the criteria for the Diploma Supplement.

9. The impact of Bologna has been perhaps been greater in Europe than the UK, but it has still been considerable. In seeking greater integration through Bologna, it must be ensured that the objective is to maximise flexibility and mobility and that Bologna does not ultimately become a threat to the diversity that is valued within the UK HE system.

Bologna has brought with it greater competition within Europe in the global market for students, but this is more to do with the consequent development of new programmes on the Continent taught in English and by the fee differential between the UK and many Continental competitors. This is a serious issue which will only be addressed through more scholarship monies being made available to UK universities.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by Amicus

Amicus is the UK's second largest trade union with 1.2 million members across the private and public sectors. Our members work in a range of industries including manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction and not for profit sectors, local government, education and the NHS.

Amicus is one of the biggest trade unions working in the sector with 15,000 members working in higher education institutions. Amicus welcomes the chance to respond to this consultation and would be willing to make further written and verbal submissions about any of the issues raised.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- (i) Amicus broadly welcomes plans to harmonise the European higher education system in so far as it will benefit British society, the British economy and deepen European integration.
- (ii) Amicus is especially supportive of the inclusion of social concerns about access to education and life-long learning into the process.
- (iii) Amicus is opposed to the commercialisation of higher education and believes that education is a social right not a commodity.
- (iv) Amicus is concerned that the process does not seem to have involved much consultation with support staff or their Unions.
- (v) Any changes made to the structure of UK higher education needs to be adequately funded and Amicus would strongly oppose any attempts to raise funds by cutting jobs and staff terms.
- (vi) Quality Assurance systems should not burden staff with extensive amounts of bureaucracy and further expensive quangos.

THE AMICUS CASE IN DETAIL

1. Amicus supports the aims of the Bologna Process in as far as they are beneficial to the British higher education system. Higher education has many societal roles which are relevant both to the economy and to society as a whole. UNESCO describes "the core missions and values of higher education", as "to contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole [. . .] educate highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens able to meet the needs of all sectors of human activity [. . .] to provide opportunities for higher learning and for learning throughout life [. . .] to educate for citizenship and for active participation in society [. . .] advance, create and disseminate knowledge, help understand, interpret, preserve, enhance, promote and disseminate national and regional, international and historic cultures [. . .] and help protect and enhance societal values"¹ Amicus fully supports this position and calls on the Government to promote higher education in this light.

2. Higher education plays a vital role in developing the British economy. As the UK's leading manufacturing union Amicus supports the Government's aim to produce highly skilled workers, value-added workplaces and increased investment in research and development. A highly skilled workforce requires an effective higher education system and is crucial in maintaining Britain's position as a world leader in the knowledge economy. The creation of a European Higher Education Area will improve the interaction of Europe's higher education systems as well as the ability of British workers and employers to take advantage of the employment opportunities created by the European common market.

3. Amicus is strongly committed to Article 26 in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that declares that "Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."² It is therefore welcome to see the inclusion in the Bergen communiqué of the commitment to make "quality higher education equally accessible to all" and support for students to "complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background".³

4. There are still major barriers to merit based access to education in the UK. Research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) suggests that over 50% of people from affluent backgrounds go to university while in some poorer areas it is less than 10%. This inequality is compounded by non-completion rates.⁴ HEFCE also reports that these trends are contradicted in parts of Scotland where the use of alternative paths such as HNDs are more common and tuition fees do not exist. This suggests that these statistics can be improved. We are also yet to see the long term effects of the implementation of variable-top-up fees. Amicus urges more work to be done to remove barriers to education, both in the UK and across the proposed European Higher Education Area.

¹ "World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action" adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education, 9 October 1998.

² "United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights" December 1948. <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

³ "The European Higher Education Area—Achieving the Goals, Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education," Bergen, 19–20 May 2005.

⁴ "Young participation in higher education," HEFCE, January 2005/03.

5. Amicus reaffirms its belief that education should not end when people enter the workplace. Education and development provide people with choices, and hence control, over the way they earn a living and the way they live their lives. The increased recognition of lifelong learning in the various Bologna Process Communiqués has been welcome, however Amicus notes with dismay that lifelong learning “has been very much neglected so far in the Bologna discussions.”⁵ Amicus urges the UK Government to put more emphasis on this during its tenure as Secretariat to the Bologna Follow Up Group and its Board.

6. Amicus is opposed to the commercialisation of higher education and supports the view of the European University Association (EUA) that: “higher education exists to serve the public interest and is not a “commodity.”⁶ The Bologna Process should view its mission for education in this light and not seek to use the project to further extend the market in higher education. The introduction of profit motives, competition and an increased reliance on corporate funding to the sector could further reduce the independence of academic research⁷ and skew funding away from courses that have more of a social benefit than a financial one.⁸

7. The Bologna process should not have a major impact on the growth of foundation degrees. Amicus believes that these are a useful gateway to skills and employment as well as broader higher education. Amicus would stress though that foundation degrees need to become better integrated into the whole higher education system. They should provide opportunities to widen educational choices rather than corralling students down specific career paths.

8. Amicus is concerned about the level of consultation that has been taking place on this process. Decisions on the future of UK higher education need to take into account the views of all stakeholders including students, academic, administrative and support staff. The whole process needs to be made far more transparent and visible. These developments will have an effect on the work of all staff in higher education and they should be adequately consulted on all changes. Trade unions should be central to this process.

9. Any changes made to the structure of UK higher education system need to be adequately funded. Even with recent increases, salaries of all staff in the higher education sector have fallen considerably behind those of comparators in other sectors. For example technicians in the aerospace sector earn a minimum of about £21,000⁹ where as starting salaries in higher education are around £12,000.¹⁰ The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) claims that if “pay is to increase at rates which enable it to keep pace with other professions, there will need to be substantial increases in expenditure on pay in the second decade of this century”.¹¹ The OECD claims that the UK spends 1.1% of GDP on tertiary education. This is lower than the figures given for the US (2.9%) and Scandinavian countries (1.8%) although it does recognise that significant improvements have been taking place.¹² Amicus supports the Government aims to continue to make further significant and sustained increases to the budgets for higher education and research councils, but stresses the need to invest more into higher education staff.

10. Plans under the Bologna Process that could lead to increases in the length of degrees and more teaching and supervision will inevitably increase the costs for universities. Unless funding is increased this added cost would inevitably be made up through higher fees and cost saving such as cuts in support staff or their terms and conditions. Amicus is concerned about the impact of higher fees on equal access and would strongly oppose any attempts to balance the books by cutting jobs or staff terms and conditions.

11. Amicus is in favour of harmonising and improving quality assurance systems internationally across the sector. This should be an opportunity to reduce the burden on staff of extensive amounts of bureaucracy and streamline the numbers of expensive quangos that exist across the UK and European Higher Education Area. Amicus believes that quality assurance guidelines need to be clear and simple if they are to be effective. They also need to be agreed through consultation with staff and their unions in order to make sure that they are appropriate.

December 2006

⁵ “Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna,” Sybille Reichert & Christian Tauch, European University Association, April 2005.

⁶ “Joint Declaration on Higher Education and the General Agreement on Trade in Services”, signed by European University Association (EUA) and various North American bodies.

⁷ “Is corporate funding steering research institutions off track?” Dan Ferber, *The Scientist*, February 2002 and “Exposed: the secret corporate funding behind health research” G Monibot, *Education Guardian*, 7 February 2006.

⁸ “University courses face closure under Gats” Polly Curtis, *Education Guardian*, 29 October 2002.

⁹ “Amicus Aerospace pay survey” 2006.

¹⁰ “Pay in the public services 2006,” Incomes Data Services.

¹¹ “The prosperity of English universities: income growth and the prospects for new investment” HEPI, September 2006.

¹² Ibid. <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/downloads/26Incomeandexpendituregrowthexecutivesummary.pdf>

Memorandum submitted by Heads of Departments of Mathematical Sciences in the UK (HoDoMS)

HoDoMS was represented on the Council for the Mathematical Sciences (CMS) working group which produced the report *The Bologna Process and Master's Courses in the Mathematical Sciences* in October 2006, available from various places including <http://www.mis.coventry.ac.uk/HODOMS/>

HoDoMS endorses the report and the submission to the select committee from the CMS. In this brief submission I shall just emphasize four key points. Note that *Mathematical Sciences* encompasses mathematics, statistics, operational research, and often mathematical or theoretical physics, and HoDoMS represents university departments throughout the UK.

1. Mathematics is an international discipline. We therefore welcome cooperation with our colleagues abroad, including Europe, and we welcome mobility of staff and students. We also note that the Bologna Process extends well beyond the European Union.

2. We hope that the agenda in London will include:

- (i) resolution of the conflicts that exist between ECTS, study hours and CATS; and
- (ii) clarification of the position on *Learning Outcomes*.

We support the move to *Learning Outcomes*, but emphasize that these must be appropriate to the discipline and that this can only be guaranteed by consultation with experts within that discipline. In general terms, we support the Dublin Descriptors as realistic expectations for the Second Cycle.

3. We see a central issue for Second Cycle qualifications as one of funding. The present Integrated Master's degrees (MMath etc) serve a very useful purpose, and receive the same "support" from the DfES as normal undergraduate honours degrees. At present other Second Cycle qualifications (MSc etc), which are also crucial to the UK's science base, are almost all self-funded. This raises concerns about equal opportunities for Second Cycle qualifications in the UK, especially if for any reason Integrated Master's degrees cannot be accommodated within the Bologna Process in the longer term. (For example, we see no prospect of increasing the number of credits in the final year of an Integrated Master's degree without significant additional funding for students and universities.)

4. The UK's imbalance between outgoing and incoming European students (roughly one to two) will only be redressed if there is more, and more effective, language training for students at school. University students can benefit from learning mathematics at a European university, but only if their language skills are adequate. This need not require joint degrees in the language and mathematics.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by The Royal Society

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- As a signatory to the Bologna Process, the UK Government must engage seriously with the implications of Bologna for the UK higher education (HE) system. An in-depth and holistic consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the present Bologna proposals and full involvement in the ongoing Bologna negotiations are imperative if UK HE institutions are to be actively involved in implementing Bologna reforms.
- We believe that the Bologna Process has the potential to act as a driver for change more generally in UK HE: the process provides an opportunity for the UK to consider more broadly whether our current system is delivering what students, employers, the economy and wider society need from its graduates.
- It is essential that the Government consults widely with the learned societies and professional bodies that are considering the place of the UK integrated masters courses and one-year masters courses on a subject-specific level and works to clarify the status of both these qualifications within the Bologna Process.
- The Bologna Process could have profound consequences for the flows of students and graduates within Europe and beyond. It is important that consideration is given to how the UK engages with the Bologna developments to maximise these opportunities for the nation.

1. The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee inquiry on The Bologna Process. This submission has been prepared with the advice of the Society's Higher Education (HE) working group and has been approved by Professor Martin Taylor FRS, Vice President and Physical Secretary, on behalf of the Council of the Royal Society. We are also submitting evidence to the Committee's inquiry on *The future sustainability of the higher education sector: purpose, funding and structures*.

2. HE is a vital component of the UK's education system and plays a major role in maintaining the nation's intellectual vitality and culture, preparing its students for their future contribution to society and building a leading knowledge-based economy. The Society's HE working group has recently published a report entitled, *A degree of concern? UK first degrees in science, technology and mathematics* (Royal Society 2006), which emphasises the need to place UK HE developments in a European and global context, and from which many of the points in this submission are drawn.

3. The working group is currently engaged in a broader study considering the fitness for purpose of UK science, technology and mathematics (STM) HE into the middle of the next decade and beyond, *Science HE 2015 and beyond*.¹³ One issue that the group has identified for consideration is the structure of UK HE studies in the light of the Bologna Process. This response is informed by the group's thinking on these questions to date and the input from various organisations to the group's call for evidence on this subject. However, the study will not report until autumn 2007 and the group will be developing its thinking on questions related to the Committee's inquiry over the coming months. We would be happy to expand further on the points in this submission or to give oral evidence to the Committee, and we hope to stay in close contact with the Committee as our respective studies develop.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

4. The Bologna Declaration, signed by European Ministers for Education in June 1999, expressed the goal of developing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Through specific objectives, the Bologna Process is working towards developing a coherent European HE environment to foster employability and mobility in Europe. It also aims to increase the competitiveness of European HE in the world. We strongly support these broad aims.

5. We believe that, as a signatory to the Bologna Process, the UK Government must engage seriously with the implications of Bologna for the UK HE system. An in-depth and holistic consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of the present Bologna proposals and full involvement in the ongoing Bologna negotiations are imperative if UK HE institutions are to be actively involved in implementing Bologna reforms.

6. The UK is currently responsible for providing the Secretariat to the Bologna Follow Up Group and its Board prior to the next Ministerial Summit in London in May 2007. This should provide the impetus for the Government to raise the profile of the Bologna Process and stimulate UK HE institutions to engage fully in the key debates surrounding Bologna compliance.

7. We fully support the efforts of those learned societies and professional bodies that are considering the effects of the Bologna Process for their relevant disciplines. We are concerned that many of these bodies do not believe that the Government is exploring the detailed implications of the Bologna Process for specific subjects in sufficient depth. We also welcome the efforts of the Europe Unit, jointly funded by Universities UK and the three higher education funding councils of England, Wales and Scotland, in raising awareness of the Bologna Process and strengthening the position of the UK HE sector in debates over the Bologna Process.

8. We believe that the Bologna Process has the potential to act as a driver for change more generally in UK HE. Aside from the opportunity the process provides for the UK to consider how the structure, content and purpose of the different stages of our current HE system compare to the arrangements in other countries, we should anyway be exploring more broadly whether our current system is delivering what students, employers, the economy and wider society need from its graduates and how this will evolve over the next decade.

EDUCATIONAL INTERFACES

9. There are different 14–19 education systems across Europe. The Bologna Process must take account of these different inputs to HE and allow signatory countries to maintain the necessary flexibility to meet the educational needs of those students entering HE.

10. Within the UK too, there is increasing student choice within the 14–19 curriculum. Although secondary school rolls are predicted to fall over the next decade, which may in time affect the number of options available, it is imperative that universities recognise the multiplicity of entry qualifications and subject combinations with which students are starting their courses and actively work to help them bridge the gap between the skills, knowledge and experience they have already gained and degree-level study.

¹³ Further details of the *Science HE 2015 and beyond* study are available at www.royalsoc.ac.uk/policy

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND THE UK

11. The UK, unlike many other signatories to the Bologna Declaration in 1999, already had a two-cycle (bachelors, masters) degree structure as an integral part of its HE system. However, other countries have moved quickly to embrace the opportunities for structural and curricula reform presented by the Bologna Process. For example, Germany started the process of introducing two-cycle qualifications in 2002 and will complete nationwide introduction by 2010 (BMBF 2005) and France has been gradually implementing a two-cycle system since 2002 (BFUG 2005). It is important for both the UK Government and HE institutions to appreciate the extensive changes that other countries have made to their HE systems to accommodate the Bologna Process.

12. While the Bologna Process Stocktaking Report (BFUG 2005) presented to Ministers at the 2005 Bergen conference shows the UK in a broadly favourable position with regard to the main Bologna Process actions, there are still areas of potential conflict such as those discussed in paragraph 13. The UK risks falling behind other countries and thereby losing competitive advantage unless it addresses these issues.

13. There are two specific areas of concern that we would highlight as being of particular importance for the science, engineering and mathematics communities: integrated masters courses and one-year masters courses. The Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA adopted at the Bergen summit in 2005 stipulates that first-cycle qualifications should typically include 180–240 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits and second-cycle qualifications should typically include 90–120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle. Currently the European Commission's User Guide for ECTS states that one calendar year can only be allocated 75 ECTS, leading to concern that the UK's masters and integrated masters programmes are incompatible with Bologna requirements and might be regarded as "lightweight" compared to the second-cycle programmes in many other countries which last two years.

- (a) *Integrated masters courses.* The introduction of four-year integrated masters programmes in science and engineering (for example, MSci and MEng degrees) during the 1990s was motivated principally by the difficulty of fitting all of the work believed to be necessary in a first degree into the already heavy workload required of science and engineering undergraduates. The implications of the Bologna Process for these degrees is considered in a note published by the Europe Unit (UUK 2005) in consultation with the Quality Assurance Agency, the HE Funding Councils and the Standing Conference of Principals, which gives guidance on how such courses could be made Bologna compliant. The suggestions made within the note include teaching students over the summer vacation—which would have serious implications for the staff time available for research and international collaboration—and incorporating industrial placements into such programmes—which would be easier in disciplines such as engineering than in, for example, mathematics or theoretical physics.
- (b) *One-year masters courses.* One-year taught masters programmes in the UK often achieve more than 60 ECTS (EUA 2005) and are considered by many universities to be a particularly attractive part of the UK HE system, especially to overseas students. They also generate a significant income stream for many institutions. However, there remains the danger that if graduates from longer European masters courses are considered to be more attractive by employers, the UK one-year system and its graduates would lose their competitive advantage. For example, there is growing evidence that firms and elite academic research teams have found that, in general, UK PhD graduates are not as mature or well-rounded as their French, German or US counterparts, due to the shorter overall length of the UK HE system (see, for example, EPSRC 2002, 2003, 2005). While length alone is not the most important measure of a course, it is clear that there is a limit to the amount of work that can be done in a fixed time.

14. It is essential that the Government consults widely with the learned societies and professional bodies that are considering these questions at a subject-specific level and works to clarify the status of both these qualifications within the Bologna Process. One of the aims of the Bologna Process is to enhance the employability of graduates and it is therefore vital that the perspective of employers is also sought on these questions.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

15. Countries from elsewhere in the world are becoming increasingly interested in the Bologna Process and its implications for the international competitiveness of their own HE systems. Australia was invited to attend the 2005 ministerial meeting in Bergen as an observer, and China is seeking observer status for the 2007 ministerial meeting in London.

16. The Department of Education, Science and Training in Australia consulted in early 2006 on Australia and Bologna (DEST 2006), highlighting the risks of Bologna incompatibility for the country. They saw these risks as including: other countries or regions following the Bologna route, resulting in an increased tendency for relationships between aligned systems at the expense of less compatible systems; and, Europe becoming a more attractive destination for overseas students at the expense of Australia. It is clear that these risks could equally apply to the UK should it choose to not fully engage with the Bologna Process.

17. UK science cannot flourish in isolation from the rest of the world. Science is a globally competitive business, and UK scientists must be able to engage with the best scientists throughout the world if they are to remain at the forefront of science. There are considerable benefits to increasing the mobility of students in Europe and beyond. Both UK students who choose to complete a part of their HE studies outside the UK and UK students studying within the UK who are joined by students from other countries will build linkages and relationships which may prove valuable whatever their future career. The Bologna Process could have profound consequences for the flows of students and graduates within Europe and beyond. It is important that consideration is given now to how the UK engages with the Bologna developments to maximise these opportunities.

REFERENCES

- BFUG (2005). *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report from a working group appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19–20 May 2005*. Bologna Follow Up Group: Bergen. Available online at www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Bergen/050509_Stocktaking.pdf
- BMBF (2005). *Status of the Introduction of Bachelor and Master Study Programmes in the Bologna Process and Selected European Countries Compared with Germany*. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung): Berlin. Available online at www.bmbf.de/en/3336.php
- DEST (2006). *The Bologna Process and Australia: next steps*. Department of Education, Science and Training: Canberra. Available online at www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/Bologna—Process_and_Australia.htm
- EUA (2005). *Trends VI: European universities implementing Bologna*, Reichert S and Tauch C. European University Association: Brussels. Available online at www.eua.be/eua/en/policy_bologna_trends.aspx
- EPSRC (2002). *Chemistry at the centre: an international assessment of university research in chemistry in the UK*. EPSRC: Swindon. Available online at www.epsrc.ac.uk
- EPSRC (2003). *An international review of UK research in mathematics*. EPSRC: Swindon. Available online at www.epsrc.ac.uk
- EPSRC (2005). *International perceptions of UK research in physics and astronomy: the second international review*. EPSRC: Swindon. Available online at www.epsrc.ac.uk
- UUK (2005). *The Bologna Process and UK's integrated Masters programmes*. Europe Unit, Universities UK: London. Available online at www.europeunit.ac.uk/resources/E-05-12.doc
- Royal Society (2006). *A degree of concern? UK first degrees in science, technology and mathematics*. Royal Society: London. Available online at www.royalsoc.ac.uk/policy

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the University of Leeds

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A.1 The University of Leeds has for some five years been, through a small specialist senior group, monitoring and attempting to influence the Bologna Process.

A.2 Drawing from this experience, the University presents its comments and evidence on the Bologna Process under the main headings of the Consultation's *Terms of Reference*.

A.3 The University is generally very supportive of the advantages the process offers to its graduates, the UK in general and itself. However it draws attention to the elements on which it considers action is desirable to ensure that the UK, its citizens and UK HEI are not disadvantaged. The principal of these elements are:

- the position of the one-year Masters degree;
- the desirability of avoiding the implementation of the ECTS system unless it is substantially redeveloped to be based on learning outcomes rather than crude and unverifiable input measures; and
- the need to review funding arrangements particularly in relation to the Masters degrees (in all the forms to which they have currently evolved).

B. BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

B.1 As a leading research-intensive university, the University of Leeds is equally committed to ensuring that its learning and teaching provision provides its students with the best possible educational and developmental experience. It has a long “international” track record and a strategy designed to ensure that it increases its international recognition. As part of this strategy it has, for some five years, been monitoring

Bologna Developments—for the last four years through a specially constituted group drawn from senior members across its faculties appointed through its Learning and Teaching and Graduate Boards. This Group is also charged with ensuring the University's views are appropriately represented in the Bologna Process and that it is in a position to consider and act appropriately on the implications of developments. Members of that Group have represented the University and national bodies such as the EJNI Credit Forum at a number of Bologna Seminars and other associated events across the spectrum of Doctoral Degrees, quality enhancement and recognition/credit/qualifications frameworks developments.

B.2 This response to the consultation has been prepared by that Group and is intended to convey our comments and concerns. We have presented these under the main headings of your consultation's terms of reference.

C. COMMENTS, INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Implications of the Bologna Process for the UK Higher Education sector: advantages and disadvantages*

1.1 The creation by 2010 of the European Higher Education Area (the "Bologna Process") has been described as "embracing a diversity of national education systems which [are] learn[ing] to interact". Viewed on this basis and taking account of the principal tools (the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Frameworks) that were agreed at Bergen in 2005, it can be argued that the Bologna model is close to the models already operating in the UK. The UK has not had to undertake major structural revision of its HE qualifications and its qualifications assurance structures as has been the case in some European countries. English has emerged as the language of the Bologna Process and representatives from England and Eire have taken leading roles in many of the developments. Indeed, an unanticipated consequence of the Bologna Process has been to cast the UK Higher Education system in a very favourable light. We are seen by many continental colleagues as having travelled along paths, particularly in the quality assurance area, that they are only now beginning to negotiate.

1.2 There are obvious advantages from the process to the missions of UK HEI in opening up opportunities for co-operation and the development of common approaches. The Ministerial meetings are to be congratulated for having been effective in ensuring that the process remains developmental without the imposition of the highly bureaucratic and resource- and time-consuming approaches favoured by some (such as some of the proponents of the Tuningⁱⁱ approach as funded by the EC).

1.3 The two Frameworks referred to in 1.1 above, possibly together with ECTS, may well be the only tools that are agreed amongst the currently 45 Member States as being required to promote the desired interaction. If this is indeed the case the principal economic disadvantage that is likely to accrue to UK education from the Bologna Process alone is greater competition in the market for international students. However, the UK will remain attractive to those students who only have English as a second language, which may offset the effects to some extent.

1.4 Increased competitiveness is however relatively simple to spot. There are already rumours of a growth in the number of doctoral candidates across Europe but this growth is understood to be coming from international rather than European students. There are other more elusive disadvantages perhaps not stemming directly from the Bologna Process but from the way in which individual European countries may seek to interpret the main tools of the process to their own competitive advantage and to the UK's disadvantage. In this they may be being assisted by the utilisation of the Bologna Process by the European Commission in pursuit of the European Union's Lisbon Strategy and its desire to achieve a "Europeanisation" of Education with the stated aim of increasing the mobility of citizens for employment and educational purposes. Funding is being selectively applied to programmes such as the "European Joint Masters degree" which must include study in at least two European countries and great emphasis is placed on two-year Joint Masters developments. The recent Bologna Seminar on Joint Degreesⁱⁱⁱ in Berlin in September continues to promote the ideal of the European Masters degree seemingly regardless of the obvious reluctance of many Member States to enable their introduction through changes in legal arrangements and the huge complexity and expense of establishing the necessarily highly complex quality assurance arrangements.

1.5 In the future it is conceivable that our most able citizens may well need a Masters level qualification to achieve mobility of employment and access to doctoral/research training in Europe. Tensions arise between the three principal functions of the Masters degree namely as a demonstration of the achievement of the higher professionally and academically orientated skills, as a focus for interdisciplinary studies and developments and as the preparative route to the doctoral level degrees.

1.6 In the UK taught and research programmes fall under different ministerial arrangements with an appearance of insufficient attention being paid, particularly in funding mechanisms, to the importance of the Masters level degree. It can also be argued that the EC's funding models, preferentially in support of the Lisbon Strategy, are insufficiently supportive of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences—disciplines which are crucial to cultural and social well-being across Europe and which are also crucial in an economic sense.

1.7 It is too early to draw any conclusions about the effect of the UK's change in the funding regime for UG students particularly in respect to their future willingness, and indeed financial ability, to continue their studies to the Second (Masters) and Third (Doctoral) cycles. Our continuing competitiveness is likely to depend heavily on the extent to which our main potential European competitors go down the same funding route albeit that there are, of course, different arguments about competitiveness for EU students and non-EU students.

2. *The Agenda for discussions at the 2007 meeting in London—clarifying the UK position*

2.1 The Bergen Communiqué set out the main agenda for the London meeting. The UK's position *vis-à-vis* that agenda has been admirably set out in the recent UK Europe Unit's Guide.

2.2 Of significant concern to us is the need for clarity about the agenda that needs to result from the London meeting. Have we reached, in the two overarching frameworks on qualification and quality assurance agreed at Bergen, as far as the Bologna Process can go in agreeing common tools? We would argue that this is now likely to be the case and that it should now be down to individual countries to implement the process in accordance with these arrangements. Unless there is a fundamental rethink of ECTS, we would wish to downplay its role (as a principal or supportive tool in "regulating" the Bologna Process) in favour of learning outcomes as indeed has been stressed in the recently published Burgess Group's *Proposals For National Arrangements for the Use of Academic Credit in Higher Education in England*.^{iv} HE and the Bologna Process must continue to concentrate on learning outcomes and competencies and not get side-tracked into the highly contentious minutiae of credit systems such as ECTS (see below).

2.3 We cannot stress too strongly our view that the future agenda needs to take more firmly into account the EC's development of the European Qualifications Framework for Life Long Learning (EQF)^v and the European Credit Transfer System For Vocational Education And Training (ECVET):^{vi} the former has the intention of covering both HE and VET (FE) whilst the latter is being developed as an essential tool of the EQF but purportedly only applicable to VET (FE).

3. *The implications of a three-phase structure of higher education awards for one-year Masters and short undergraduate courses (HNCs, HNDs, and Foundation Degrees)*

3.1 The UK Masters degree is in great danger of being "lost in the middle" of the three phases. It is likely, in its one year discipline/profession specific form, to be the key to greater mobility throughout Europe despite the EC's promotion of two-year forms. EU/EC and some countries have an agenda that each phase of education should cover generic skills including languages, citizenship and a European dimension. There is a limit to how much can be done by way of developing generic skills if the focus of the academic or professional discipline is not to suffer. It is difficult to do this within the constraints of a UK three-year Bachelors degree in many disciplines and almost impossible within a one-year UK taught masters. UK HEIs have achieved international recognition of their ability to develop high-level discipline/academically specific skills within the confines of the calendar year Masters degree and their ability to continue to offer and develop the degree in this form must be defended and enhanced.

3.2 Although perhaps not apparent from the "official" governmental responses which have fed into the reports prepared under EC-funded projects for previous Ministerial meetings,^{vii} the evidence continues to mount that one year Masters degrees are becoming more common in continental Europe and are apparently also gaining ground in Ireland. There is also a move to "fast-tracking" in Germany, so that good candidates do not need to complete their Masters qualification before embarking on a Doctorate.

3.3 The University, following the advice of the UUK Europe unit, will make its four-year integrated Masters degrees (MEng, MChem, MGeol, MMath etc) compatible with Bologna by requiring at least 120 out of the total of 480 credits to be at Masters level, and awarding both a Bachelors and Masters degree at completion of the programme of study. (cf also the Council for Mathematical Sciences report: www.cms.ac.uk/CMS_Bologna_Report_nov06.pdf where the issues are discussed in more detail.)

3.4 We do not perceive any significant issues with the concept of Foundation Degrees as "short cycle" awards within the First Bologna cycle. However there is a problem of acceptance of the "degree" nomenclature—both within the UK itself and in Continental Europe. It remains to be seen whether this issue will decline with the passage of time.

4. *Awareness and engagement in the Bologna Process within HEIs*

4.1 We acknowledge that awareness of and engagement in the Bologna Process within UK HEIs is patchy at best—but this is perhaps not surprising given that many of the key decisions in earlier years (eg the UK's commitment to the Bologna Process and indeed the Lisbon Strategy) were political decisions, taken without consultation with HEIs and apparently in the belief that the Bologna Process would have minimal impact on UK HEI arrangements. A number of individuals from the UK HE sector have engaged very actively with the details of the process. They have been very influential in keeping the process moving ahead in UK terms in particular in avoiding the return through Bologna of some of stages we have already gone through in

developing our understanding of the advantages of Quality Enhancement approaches and in highlighting the need for sophisticated approaches to credit. We acknowledge without reservation the principal role that the UK's QAA has played in the former respect.

4.2 There is a limit to the extent that UK HEIs can themselves engage in and influence the process without engagement, consultation and promotion from those better placed to influence its outcomes—particularly when the process is not itself directly funded. There are indeed other changes that could be made nationally which would assist UK HEIs in adapting not only to Bologna but to the changing expectations and demands made of and upon them by students, employers and society in general. In this respect your parallel wider consultation is to be welcomed in the hope that it may result in changes including more (better targeted?) financial support.

4.3 HEIs in other countries have engaged more with the process: some enthusiastically seizing the chance to embark on radical reforms, while others have done the minimum necessary to comply with new legal requirements stemming from the process. There is a need for a long process of development of mutual understandings of the educational and pedagogic approaches underpinning the Bologna instruments. We commend the work being undertaken by the European Universities Association (EUA) in progressing such understandings—particularly in relation to the development of a more consistent approach to the Doctoral degrees. However the resistance evident in some quarters to the necessary fundamental redevelopment of ECTS to take into account learning outcomes rather than crude input measures is perhaps the greatest evidence of the length of the journey that needs to be travelled by some of those who wish to influence developments in Europe.

5. *Opportunities to enhance the mobility of students from the UK*

5.1 The Bologna Process does not seem to us in itself greatly to enhance the prospect of increased mobility for UK HEI students. UK HEI would be better placed to encourage access by their students to any funding for such mobility available from the EC if the underpinning UK educational structures (at primary and secondary level) themselves reflected the sort of Europeanisation being sought by the EU/EC ie we would recommend that the UK Government needs to seek to increase the commitment to foreign language tuition in the secondary school curriculum in order to give our citizens greater confidence in their abilities to survive where English is not the first language.

6. *The possible implementation of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and a focus on learning outcomes and competencies*

6.1 As should be evident from the foregoing, we strongly believe the UK should resist any attempts to impose ECTS as a credit and transfer enabling tool. We fully support the arguments articulated by the UK Europe Unit in the recently published Burgess report on credit.^{iv} ECTS's development as a useful aid to the mobility of Socrates/Erasmus students only provides the most basic measure of comparability with no account being taken of the length of the "educational year" concerned or the level at which any learning was achieved. Learning outcomes and competencies are likely to prove a more fruitful development provided a commonality of understanding can be reached about the concept of "level".

7. *Quality Assurance systems in HE (teaching and research): the compatibility of UK proposals and Bologna*

7.1 The UK's QAA together with its colleagues from Eire has already been highly influential in ensuring that the Bologna Quality Assurance Framework is compatible with UK arrangements. It should be encouraged to continue its work through ensuring that the Bologna arrangements embrace the important concept of Quality Enhancement as a means of avoiding the bureaucratic, tick-box approach to quality assurance which is emerging in some quarters.

8. *Degree Classification Reform in the light of Bologna*

8.1 Many European countries appear to grade summatively their final awards by some means or other and we have found nothing in the Bologna Process which is inimical to current UK arrangements. It could indeed be argued that the current introspective self-critical review of the UK's long-established and internationally accepted classification arrangements have betrayed uncertainty at a time when no adequate alternatives are available for effective comparison.

9. *The broader impact of Bologna across Europe: a more standardised Europe and the consequences for the UK's position in the global market for HE (Bologna and the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI 2))*

9.1 The Bologna Process has led to a profound restructuring of Higher Education in many parts of Europe. The impact has been most keenly felt in Germany, where there has also been the greatest resistance to change from the Humboldtian model of university education.

9.2 Most countries have now instituted a first cycle leading to a Bachelor degree or equivalent in three or four years. (Possibly the only significant exception is the Grandes Ecoles system in France, which continues much as before.) It remains to be seen how many students will complete their studies in the intended time frame.

9.3 So far, in countries where a five year degree was the norm, the labour market has not responded by employing first-cycle graduates as graduates, and able students expect to go on to a Masters degree. There has been a growth in one year Masters courses, but also a tendency in the Nordic countries for the second year of a Masters to become, in effect, the first year of Doctoral training. This poses a challenge for mobility of students, who, however well qualified, may still have to do the second year of a Masters degree to be accepted on a Doctoral programme at an institution (in those countries) other than their own.

9.4 Though, by and large, no extra money has been forthcoming from governments for the first (undergraduate) cycle, many European countries have been putting money into doctoral training as a spur to reorganising that too. In some cases, this has involved supporting Masters courses as a prelude to Doctoral training.

9.5 Some of the common instruments inspired by Bologna Process and the EC—such as Europass with its inclusion of the Diploma Supplement are likely to prove beneficial in the longer term for the mobility of graduates of UK HEI. Any such benefit perhaps needs to be balanced by recognition that such “bureaucratic” instruments need to be developed in conjunction with HEIs in general (as opposed to a relatively few professionals some possibly not engaged actively with the way in which HEIs are changing in response to the development of electronic means of communication). We have ourselves devoted considerable effort to developing an approach to the Diploma Supplement, with future digitisation in mind, which combines the Diploma Supplement requirements with the more internationally established transcript and statement approaches for, respectively, taught course and research degree graduates. Through this we hope to provide our graduates with documentation which is of real value to them in the global employment market they are entering.

December 2006

i Kirsten Clemet, Norwegian Minister of Education and Research, October 2004.

ii http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning_en.html

iii http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna/uploads/documents/Kurzversion_BFUG.pdf

iv http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess_credit_report.pdf

v http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

vi http://ec.europa.eu/education/ecvt/index_en.html

vii http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Bergen/050509_Stocktaking.pdf

Memorandum submitted by the Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) of the Institute of Education, University of London

1. The Institute of Education welcomes the intention of the Committee to investigate the implications of the Bologna Process for UK higher education. The broad convergence which, in our view, is taking place across European higher education, allied with the rapid expansion which has taken place in the Bologna Process membership, makes this review timely.

2. This submission is from the Institute's Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES), which has contributed to research and development in the field since 1985. The Co-Directors of the Centre are Professor Ronald Barnett and Professor Sir David Watson.

3. CHES is making a separate submission to the Committee's parallel inquiry into the future sustainability of the higher education sector.

4. There are several areas in which CHES believes it can assist the Committee by drawing on research conducted by members and others in order either to confirm or challenge commonly-accepted ideas. CHES members have, over the last few years, been involved in a number of research projects focusing on various aspects of European higher education and the internationalisation of higher education more generally, including a large-scale multinational project under each of Framework Programmes 5 and 6. More such work is planned under the forthcoming FP7. This work has provided us, we believe, with a strong conceptual and empirical basis from which we can assist the Committee.

5. The terms of reference for the inquiry identify most of the key issues arising from the Bologna Process for UK higher education. From the standpoint of higher education and policy studies, Bologna offers a fascinating case study. What began as a limited exercise in cooperation among a handful of Western

European countries has become an almost defining feature of higher education organisation across a large number of states with widely differing histories, political and economic circumstances, and current policies. Bologna has, in a sense, become the only game in town.

6. However, as Guy Neave, of our sister research centre, CHEPS, at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, has remarked, “Bologna, because it is a process and therefore ‘on-going’, has no end either. It merely adds to itself ‘new areas’ of activity in the curious belief that the dynamism of the ‘process’ is the same thing as the spiralling length of its agenda [. . .] [this] has nothing whatsoever to do with the substance of higher education” (Neave 2005). We share this concern about the political and (particularly) the bureaucratic momentum behind Bologna: as well as the biennial Ministerial summits, the structure now includes the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), the Bologna Board, and the Bologna Secretariat. The European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO are also involved in various ways. This top-down approach, involving a range of international bodies with their own agendas, may mean that certain realities of European higher education, at the institutional level, become overlooked. We draw attention to some of them below.

VARIATION AMONG BOLOGNA MEMBERS

7. UK higher education has, historically, had a strong international dimension, reflecting Britain’s imperial past and links with (particularly) other English-speaking countries. The quality of UK university research (as objectively assessed through international citation rankings, for example) has also indicated the existence of strong international networks and a competitive outlook. By contrast, many continental university systems have, again historically, been more inward-looking, some having been key participants in 19th and 20th century nation-building projects, for example. For them, there is the sense that Bologna offers an international standard of comparison that UK universities have for long tended to take for granted.

8. This applies particularly to the newer members of the Bologna Process. The universities of countries such as Albania and Georgia badly wish to obtain international recognition, despite having serious problems about, for example, academic standards, curriculum content, physical facilities and (importantly in this context) corruption. There is a belief in these and other similarly-placed countries that Bologna offers the key to the international recognition of their degrees and of their academic standards generally; actually, it does not.

9. There seems to be a parallel here with the “widening versus deepening” debate around EU enlargement. The harmonisation proposed between the universities of the four signatory countries of the original 1998 Sorbonne Declaration (France, Germany, Italy and the UK) raised one set of arguably manageable issues; harmonisation among universities spread between Reykjavik and Vladivostok is a very different matter.

10. The Committee may therefore wish to probe how the expansion of membership of the Bologna Process has affected the likelihood of achieving the original goals of enhanced comparability and cooperation between universities.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF QUALITY

11. UK higher education was a European leader in introducing quality assurance systems within institutions, allied with external inspection of these *systems*—as distinct from the accreditation model involving detailed state control of university curricula, student admissions, finance, staffing and other matters, which is to be found in many other Bologna member states. The UK’s arm’s-length model of state control (often referred to in the literature as “state steering”) is often held to be an important contributor to the relative effectiveness and efficiency of its universities.

12. The role of the Bologna Process in quality issues has therefore always been a matter of concern for UK universities. The 2003 Berlin Communiqué considered quality issues, and called on members “to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines [. . .] to ensure an adequate peer review system [. . .]” It is not clear what this actually means, nor what benefits might follow from it. Perhaps the important point from a UK perspective is that a Bologna area-wide external quality or accreditation system was resisted. Such a system would impose the costs of a further bureaucratic layer, without, we may be reasonably confident, leading to significant improvements in the quality of teaching or research.

13. It seems likely that there is a continuing confusion in this debate about the meaning of “quality assurance” in higher education. The usual UK view is that it means an external review of institutional systems—so that it can say nothing about academic standards, as institutions with very different standards can have equally effective quality assurance systems. This reflects the UK situation in which a diverse group of institutions teach a more diverse student body than is often the case elsewhere. In many other Bologna states, however, external review of universities is taken to mean ensuring that certain prescribed standards are being achieved everywhere (defined, say, in terms of teaching staff qualifications, student contact hours, or library and laboratory provision), or that externally-defined curricula are being followed. These two quite different models are not always distinguished sufficiently; and the possibilities for confusion explain the sensitivity of UK universities in this area.

14. It seems to us, from our work with universities across Europe (and beyond), that the UK model of publicly-accountable universities, but operating with a high degree of autonomy from the central state, is becoming increasingly attractive to many countries. As they seek to expand participation in higher education while containing its costs, and at the same time improving the quality of teaching and research, the limitations of the state-control model become increasingly apparent. A transnational agenda of convergence is emerging. It would thus be paradoxical if Bologna appeared to be imposing restrictions on the freedom of manoeuvre of individual universities at a time when national governments were moving in the opposite direction.

15. The Committee may therefore wish to examine the views of Member States on common quality processes, and to reaffirm the importance of the Bologna Process not introducing an area-wide quality assurance or accreditation process.

THE BOLOGNA TWO-CYCLE PATTERN

16. The basis of the Bologna approach is the two-cycle (or three, counting doctoral degrees separately) degree pattern; the undergraduate (three to four years) programme, leading to a master's or subsequent doctoral programme. UK universities, which of course in any case broadly conformed to this pattern, have been anxious to maintain the one-year full-time master's degree, which is possible under the Bologna wordings, but which is out of line with offerings elsewhere. Similar problems arise with UK "undergraduate master's" degrees, where four years of study leads directly to a master's degree such as an MEng. UK universities argue that the intensity of their one-year (or four-year) master's courses contrasts with the more relaxed approach found in some other European universities—where, for example, the definition of "contact hours" can be variable.

17. This raises questions about the "readability" of degrees in Action Line 1 of Bologna. The assumption here is that all universities covered by Bologna are essentially the same, and that comparisons between them of contact hours can lead to meaningful conclusions about learning, quality and standards. We think that this view is misguided.

18. It is important to note that even in other European countries with what (to British eyes) seem efficient and high-quality higher education systems—the Netherlands, for example—the Bologna Process has been seen as influencing organisational change and encouraging developments in the direction of greater flexibility and openness. It seems to have been the case that education ministries in many countries have used Bologna as, in effect, an excuse to drive through what they considered to be overdue changes in university policy and management. The very large amount of organisational change that UK higher education has experienced since the 1980s, particularly through the development of reasonably effective, and certainly competitive, markets in teaching and research, has, in contrast, meant that here Bologna-related change has already been implemented.

19. The Committee may wish to consider stating that the Bologna Process must not of itself become a driver of future change in UK higher education, unrelated to national (arguably, international) needs in learning and research.

CREDIT TRANSFER

20. A credit transfer system, based on the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) model, is the basis of Bologna Action Line 3. Most UK universities operate some form of credit accumulation and transfer system internally, and are usually open to the import of credits from recognised universities in the UK and elsewhere. But as ECTS deals only with the volume of work undertaken by a student, and can say nothing about its standard or quality, ECTS credits on their own are of limited value. Again, a mistaken view has grown up in some countries that simply adhering to ECTS protocols will allow the free international movement of students without further ado—often, ironically, in places where movement of students between faculties in the same university is often virtually impossible.

21. While credit transfer systems and enhanced student mobility are important, and are generally welcomed by UK universities, it should be emphasised that such systems cannot over-ride institutional decisions about student admissions. Given the range of university systems now covered by Bologna, bilateral understandings between universities are likely to offer the best way forward in this area. It will be important to ensure that any European "qualifications framework", designed to enhance mobility, does not place procedural obstacles in the way of creative and flexible developments in teaching and learning.

22. In considering credit transfer issues, the Committee will wish to be aware of the practical limitations of these approaches.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Dow, E (2006). Britannia meets Bologna: still making waves? *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 10(1), 9–14.
- Huisman, J and van der Wende, M (Eds) (2004). *On co-operation and competition: national and European policies for the internationalisation of higher education*. Bonn: Lemmens.
- Keeling, R (2006). The Bologna Process and the Lisbon Research Agenda: the European Commission's expanding role in higher education discourse. *European Journal of Education*, 41(2), 203–223.
- Kettunen, J and Kantola, M (2006). The implementation of the Bologna Process. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 12(3), 257–267.
- Morgan, A (2006). Pushing through Bologna reforms: the Hungarian case. *International Higher Education*, 42, 12–14.
- Neave, G (2005). Euro-philiacs, Euro-sceptics and Europhobics: higher education policy, values and institutional research. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 11(2), 113–129.
- Reichert, S and Tauch, C (2005). *Trends IV: European universities implementing Bologna*. Brussels: EUA (European University Association) Available at www.eua.be
- Scott, P (Ed) (1998). *The globalization of higher education*. Buckingham: SRHE/Open University Press.
- van der Wende, M and Huisman, J (2004). The EU and Bologna: are supra- and international initiatives threatening domestic agendas? *European Journal of Education*, 39(3), 349–357.
- Wachter, B (2004). The Bologna Process: developments and prospects. *European Journal of Education*, 39(3), 265–273.
- Witte, J (2004). The introduction of two-tiered study structures in the context of the Bologna Process: a theoretical framework for an international comparative study of change in higher education systems. *Higher Education Policy*, 17(4), 405–425.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the University of Kent

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The University of Kent is fully committed to implementing policies and procedures in accordance with the Bologna Process. Our institutional strategy of seeking close ties with HE institutions in mainland Europe has encouraged the introduction of a large number of partnerships and activities with European partners, including double degree initiatives with a number of French universities under the banner of the University of the Transmanche. The University is also strongly involved in promoting student mobility under the Erasmus programme, achieving a position in the top 10 UK institutions in terms of outgoing student numbers, in competition with universities with higher overall student numbers. We adopted the European Credit Transfer System from its inception and were the first in the country to introduce the Diploma Supplement. In 2004 Kent was in the first group to be awarded the European Quality Label for outstanding quality in Erasmus activities, an achievement shared by only 12 other UK universities to this date.

We attract a high number of international students, some 10% being from other EU Member States and 16% from outside the European Union.

In view of this background and experience, we have been prompted to submit written evidence to the Committee on issues in connection with the Bologna Process:

1.2 The issues to be addressed are:

- (a) A more standardised Europe and the consequences for the UK's position in the global market for HE.
- (b) Opportunities to enhance the mobility of students from the UK.

2. A MORE STANDARDISED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK'S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE (PMI 2)

2.1 The aims of the second phase of the Prime Minister's initiative are to:

- position the UK as a leader in international education;
- increase number of international students in UK;
- ensure that international students have a high-quality experience;
- build strategic partnerships and alliances; and

- maintain the UK's position in major education markets, while achieving growth in student numbers from a wider range of countries.

2.1.1 Harmonisation of degree structures, use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and increased international recognition of qualifications will lead to increasing numbers of students from mainland Europe seeking to study in a country other than their own. High-quality students from the signatory countries will seek to combine studying for a degree with improving their English language skills by enrolling for a degree at a UK university. It should be noted that 20 of the 45 signatories of the Bologna Declaration are countries outside the European Union whose nationals pay tuition fees at the “overseas” rate.

2.1.2 Mobility of students across the EHEA has been made simpler through the use of ECTS and the increased compatibility of degree structures. In addition to traditional student exchange programmes, mobility is increasingly available through double or joint degree programmes developed by two or more European partners. In these programmes students have the opportunity to study a jointly developed curriculum in universities in two or more countries and to be awarded a qualification by each institution. With the aim of attracting international students to European HE, the European Commission offers generous scholarships and grants through the Erasmus Mundus programme to Masters students from countries outside the European Union applying for double/joint degrees.

2.1.3 There is concern that continuing differences in the length of Masters degrees across Europe could be problematical for the UK degree. The 12-month duration of the UK degree, contrasted with the longer programme of up to two academic years in other countries, may lead to a perception in other parts of Europe that the UK Masters is of lesser quality. It is important for institutions to recognise and broadcast the fact that flexibility is encouraged by the Bologna Process. In terms of ECTS, UK programmes lie midway in the permitted range of 60 to 120 credits with 90 credits.

The University of Kent has been able to achieve a successful international compromise in its double Masters degrees, through use of ECTS, by agreeing with French partners to award 120 credits to programmes with a duration of just 15 months. Students have the benefit of achieving a Masters degree from France in a shorter time than the normal two academic years as well as an English Masters of only slightly extended duration.

3. OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

3.1 Mobility of students from the UK falls into two categories:

- (a) Study and work placements abroad as part of a UK degree programme.
- (b) Students studying in more than one country in the course of double/joint degree programmes devised by UK universities in collaboration with partners in Europe.

3.1.1 Despite the facilitating measures and encouragement afforded by the Bologna Process for studying abroad under the Erasmus programme, numbers of outgoing students from the UK have been declining dramatically, in contrast to those of other countries whose numbers are steadily rising.

There appear to be several reasons for this decline. These include lack of sufficient language ability, difficulties with regard to leaving part-time jobs and accommodation for short periods of study abroad, perceived financial problems despite the availability of the Erasmus grant and, in the case of study abroad as part of a four-year degree involving a full year in another country, unwillingness to delay finishing the degree and entering the workplace.

3.1.2 The change in the National Curriculum under which schoolchildren are able to give up studying modern languages at the age of 14 is bound to have a serious effect on exchange programmes in which students study in the language of the host country. Many universities, including the University of Kent, are trying to address this problem through the introduction of partner universities on mainland Europe where teaching is offered in English. However the long-term effect to student mobility of the decrease in numbers of students taking a modern language at GCSE or “A” level is extremely worrying.

In addition, many institutions (not including Kent) are being forced to close language departments as a consequence of the falling numbers of applicants to degrees in Modern Languages. This is having the effect, not only of fewer students following the traditional Language and Literature degrees, but also of traditional language departments no longer being able to service the language teaching requirements of programmes such as “Law with a language” whose students go abroad to study Law in another language and culture.

The introduction by UK universities of more *ab initio* “pure” language modules taught within dedicated Language Centres, to combat falling numbers of students registered on traditional language/literature degrees would help to address the decline in outgoing mobility.

3.1.3 In the case of double/joint degrees there are the same concerns regarding the language ability of UK students. The University of Kent has a successful double undergraduate degree which recruits in France as well as the UK. Very high numbers of high-quality students are recruited from France through a competitive examination and interview. By contrast only a handful of students are accepted each year from the UK due to the fact that many do not reach the high level of French that is required for this prestigious programme.

3.1.4 The tuition fee waiver for students studying abroad under the Erasmus programme for a full year is a substantial aid in the efforts to maintain outgoing student numbers at their present level or above. However this financial incentive is not offered to students going abroad for less than a full academic year. A similar offer to these students, proportional to the number of months spent in the host country, would help to overcome concerns about increased loans and part-time work in connection with study abroad.

3.1.5 The University of Kent, along with many other institutions, devotes a great deal of resource to the preparation of incoming and outgoing Erasmus students. Mindful of quality assurance of the placements, students benefit from extra tuition aimed at preparing them for different study methods, mentoring schemes, and many other initiatives provided by dedicated administrative staff. In order to underline the UK's support for the Bologna Process we believe that there should be financial recognition of these activities.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by London Metropolitan University

London Metropolitan University is grateful to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee for inviting comment on the Bologna Process.

The University has over 3,000 international and over 4,000 EU students. Many of its home (UK) students are recruited in the wider London region from ethnically diverse communities, originating in all parts of the world. Of necessity it has a strong interest in developments in the higher education sector at global and EU levels. It has offices in China, India, Nigeria and Pakistan, as well as a significant presence in Athens and Moscow.

London Metropolitan is the only UK HEI to maintain a dedicated office in Brussels. As head of European development, my role is to advise senior management on the impact of the Bologna Process and of EU legislation on the University's operating environment. I liaise with the EU institutions and with sectoral bodies such as the European University Association. I am a UK Bologna Promoter and am familiar with a significant sample of UK HEIs.

The comments in this memorandum follow the list of the Committee's terms of reference.

1. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

1.1 The Bologna Process presents an important opportunity for the UK to maintain its position in the international and European student recruitment and knowledge export markets.

1.2 It allows UK HEIs to locate their provision within a framework that promises to extend far beyond the boundaries of the current 45 signatory countries. The ASEAN countries, the Latin American countries, Australia—all are closely following developments. It is not fanciful to think that the Bologna Process might one day offer a global template for qualifications frameworks, cooperation between quality assurance agencies, and student mobility. Many in the sector—notably students—will regard it as a factor relevant to the consideration of what represents value for money.

1.3 Compliance with Bologna norms significantly facilitates UK HEIs' delivery of joint transnational degrees, as well as their activities as partners in the EU-funded programmes which link with third countries: ACP-Edulink, ALFA, ERASMUS MUNDUS, EU-Australia, EU-Canada, EU-US, TEMPUS, etc.

1.4 Within the EU, it strengthens the platform from which UK HEIs can engage, on a consortial basis, in inter-regional development and knowledge transfer. It allows core teaching and executive training to be more coherently linked to research and innovation, whenever these extend beyond UK borders.

2. THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

2.1 The UK position is now being elaborated—as a synthesis of the views of the devolved administrations and stakeholders. An external view of UK performance will be provided by the Trends V report currently being drawn up by the European University Association. Preparation of the agenda for the summit, meanwhile, is essentially a function of the ongoing stocktaking, managed by the countries sharing the steer of the process, including the UK as host. Stocktaking will show how far signatory countries have advanced in creating the European Higher Education Area, scheduled for completion in 2010.

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF A THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS FOR TO ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES (HNCs, HNDs, AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

3.1 There is no reason why sub-degree courses cannot sit within the Bologna three-tier structure, provided that they are clearly designated, appropriately credit-weighted, accurately located in the national qualifications framework and described in Diploma Supplements.

4. AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

4.1 Awareness and engagement are patchy—and such awareness as exists does not necessarily trigger engagement. Essentially, this is due to the tendency within HEIs to dichotomise their non-UK recruitment, collaborative links and revenue streams. The “European” is routinely distinguished from the “international”, to the detriment of the former. As a result, many universities regard the Bologna Process as relevant only to European activities and as financially insignificant. It does not sit, as it should, at the centre of medium-term academic and marketing strategies.

5. OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

5.1 Bologna greatly enhances mobility opportunities for outgoing/departing students, but these should be backed up—at HEI level—by systematic use of the instruments bundled into EUROPASS: the CV, the mobility pass, the Diploma Supplement and the Language Portfolio. Students, rightly, will want study undertaken in UK to retain its currency in whichever country they subsequently seek higher degrees and/or work. British universities tend to think that their awards, of themselves, are universally transparent, credible and good value for money. However, as a competitive global HE system begins to take shape, these qualities have to be demonstrated in terms of compliance with emerging norms.

6. THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

6.1 ECTS is already implemented, and has been for many years, as a credit transfer system. Discussions are under way at EU-level to re-engineer it as a credit accumulation system, one which can be reliably used in a lifelong learning context. England has no national credit system—something which hampers HEIs operating outside such regional or sub-sectoral systems which do exist. The recent Burgess Group proposals on “national arrangements for the use of academic credit in HE in England” correctly recommend a close watching brief on the evolution of ECTS.

6.2 The European Commission is now persuaded of the importance of competences, and of output rather than input models of learning. The pedagogical advantages of this approach are real, and UK experience in the field is rapidly being adopted by other HE systems. The EU’s Tuning Project has achieved a great deal in building subject-based consensus on the competences appropriate to qualifications at the three Bologna levels.

6.3 UK HEIs hope that the focus on learning outcomes will help justify what are often perceived to be “short” Masters programmes. Duration, together with perceived quality, credit rating and price, plays a part in the estimation of value for money, since it impacts on accommodation and subsistence costs and timing of entry into the labour market. The wider context, that of the HE services market, is unstable. Bologna seems bound to impel a movement towards price convergence, by increasing transparency and comparability, but at what speed and to what extent is difficult to foresee.

7. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE (TEACHING AND RESEARCH): THE COMPATIBILITY OF UK PROPOSALS AND BOLOGNA

7.1 Quality assurance at European level is evolving in a manner compatible with UK practice; indeed, the UK has played a significant role in the process. EU legislation encourages HEIs to seek—from agencies in other countries (if their own country permits)—accreditation and quality assurance services capable of enhancing their international projection. The Bologna Process will facilitate such initiatives.

8. DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM IN LIGHT OF BOLOGNA

8.1 Degree classification, as practised by UK HEIs, is essentially opaque to foreign students, partner institutions, regulators and employers. If and however it is reformed, the transparency required by all parties will be best provided by use of the Diploma Supplement.

9. THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE: A MORE STANDARDISED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK’S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE (BOLOGNA AND THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PRIME MINISTERS INITIATIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (PMI 2))

9.1 For the extent to which Bologna will reinforce PMI, see the response in para.1 above. It should be noted that the UK’s European competitors will use Bologna to break into the lucrative student recruitment market for English-language-delivery courses. UK HEIs that eschew Bologna compliance are likely to be placed at a serious disadvantage.

9.2 Bologna does not “standardise”: it allows a wide diversity of provision to enjoy equal recognition in a global context, equal facilitation of student mobility, and equal utility in the international labour market.

9.3 There are two important respects in which Bologna will impel changes, the extent of which cannot be measured at present: (a) the portability of grants and loans, to which all signatory countries are committed; (b) the effect on the content and duration of the professional qualifications which fall within the scope of EU Directives and Regulations. Both of these are likely to present UK HEIs with a significant strategic challenge.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bologna Process was created as a 10 year programme which it is nearing its completion. The NPC urges more dissemination of information on the process to staff, institutions and importantly students to engage them in the process. The UK offers diverse and varied higher education experiences through student experience and higher education opportunities. The Bologna Process offers an opportunity for education to benefit society through access and its importance as a public good. Higher Education mobility must be protected to enrich the European knowledge economy.

THE NATIONAL POSTGRADUATE COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

The National Postgraduate Committee (NPC) represents over 500,000 postgraduate students. It is the principal representative body of postgraduate students in the UK. As a registered charity (no SC033368), our aim is to promote, in the public interest, postgraduate education in the UK. We share best practice through publications and meetings, respond to consultations, address conferences and take on casework. In the furtherance of our aims, we co-operate with other like-minded democratic student bodies, professional associations and trades unions.

THE NPC AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The National Postgraduate Committee has been a supporter of the Bologna Process both nationally and through EURODOC, the European Council of doctoral candidates and young researchers federation of which the UK is a member (<http://www.eurodoc.net>). The NPC has also been involved in the sector working group on the implementation of the European Charter and Code of Conduct for Researchers in the UK (<http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/resources/gapanalysis.pdf>). The Bologna Process is nearing its completion and the NPC agrees it is timely to reflect on the project and its achievements thus far to ensure its outcomes in making research an attractive career prospect and creating a knowledge economy with the support for all parties involved is achieved.

The NPC welcomes the Bologna Process as it promotes mobility and therefore emphasises the importance that education plays in the social dimension. The process sees Higher Education as a public good and co-operation rather than competition as a part of being a public responsibility.

As part of the NPC's involvement in the Bologna Process we are hosting the Eurodoc Annual Conference which seeks to produce policy outcomes and shape the student led agenda in postgraduate and postdoctoral education. The conference will be taking place between 15 and 17 March in London as a precursor to the next intergovernmental ministerial conference.

The NPC is however concerned that the awareness of the process by students, institutions, staff and employers has not increased during the process. The NPC would welcome a mapping exercise, similar to the UUK European Charter and Code of Conduct, to evaluate the embedding and output of the Bologna Process for stakeholders involved in the UK. The NPC would support the National Union of Students call to establish research into the implementation of the Bologna Process and how for example institutions would pass the Diploma Supplement test and the Credit Test for example.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process has been a massive success, resulting in agreement throughout Europe and opportunity to develop a knowledge economy, social mobility and sustained public good through investment in Higher Education. The process has furthermore set a standard in a global context which highlights the importance of Higher Education but which presents the process with a need to develop the opportunities for participating countries to remain competitive against other global schemes. This offers a real chance of engagement with all parties in the process and particularly students to ensure that the attainment of learning objectives is facilitated holistically.

MASTERS DEGREES

The question of duration of Masters programmes has been a key issue in considerations of the implications of the Bologna Process. The issue of Masters Degrees in relation to the Third Cycle—Doctoral Programmes will be outlined further below. The National Postgraduate Committee recognise the variety and range of Masters’ degrees in the UK as offering different learning outcomes which offer the opportunity to enrol in doctoral studies programmes. Masters degrees should offer learning outcomes and a variety of opportunity for career development and lifelong learning opportunities but ensure there is an ability to enrol in doctoral programmes.

The National Postgraduate Committee believes it is important that Masters fees are not left to market intervention due to their importance in relation to first and third cycle degrees. While institutions should seek to address the costs of providing Masters programmes, Masters programmes should be regulated to ensure those choosing courses are able to do so based on suitability rather than cost and to ensure that the widening participation agenda is emphasised through all three cycles for the benefit of society and the public good.

THE THIRD CYCLE

The National Postgraduate Committee strongly welcomed the introduction of the action line recognising the Third Cycle and welcomes the strong relationship to the first and second cycles.

Doctoral education must be considered in relation to the three Bologna cycles wholly but also to subsequent career stages; research is a core component of the doctorate but there is also a need to consider the development of transferable skills.

We recognise the importance of the link between all cycles and the importance for students of the ability to undertake the third cycle after finishing first or second cycle degrees. The National Postgraduate Committee recognises and welcomes the diversity and opportunity other forms of doctorate offer and will subsequently use the term Doctoral or PhD to represent all doctoral degrees by research or otherwise.

The great diversity of PhD programmes emerging from the changing labour market and employability issues within and external to academia provides a valuable opportunity for societal development and as a catalyst to develop other innovative doctoral programmes such as “professional” doctorates. This diversity within the aim of mobility within Europe offers great scope to institutions to consider internationalisation within their programmes and institutional development.

The importance of the link between the three cycles extends most importantly to the social and student dimension of the third cycle. There needs to be a link in investment between the three cycles and targeted investment in the third cycle is clearly needed alongside and to support greater equity in challenging gender balance and financial disadvantage. The Second Cycle cannot be left to market forces if the development of equity in gender and finance are to be addressed and the development of new forms of PhD with associated societal benefits are to be seen.

Higher Education Institutions’ roles

HEIs are aware of their responsibility to ensure doctoral programmes are developed which are of high quality. The Salzburg Principles recognise the key to this ambition is achieving critical mass which requires institutions to develop strategies and policies to create a framework for such a mass.

Institutions must promote attractive career routes for doctoral candidates alongside nonacademic sectors to encourage pathways within and outside academia and between academia and non-academic sectors of employment which should support societal and economic development and further strengthen the three cycles. Institutions should also provide information about the requirements of pursuing an academic career if it requires the attainment of further skills such as teaching requirement training. This information and information on doctoral programmes should be available through both preceding cycles.

Furthermore institutions must create attractive conditions to support research by using the European Researchers Charter and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The development of European Quality Assurance alongside such conditions to ensure attractive research needs to be balanced however by support for institutional staff using such processes and the increased pressures for students engaged in more levels of quality assurance.

Institutions can also support new doctoral students by creating good quality effective PhD training. Institutions creating critical mass should consider other factors that add to the value for the institution and support the student in the third cycle. The National Postgraduate Committee understands that different solutions may be appropriate for different contexts but these should seek to:

- avoid the isolation of the young researcher, from other disciplines, or from the larger peer group, or the larger scientific community;
- establish transparency of expectations, quality and assessment standards through supervision and viva assessment; and

- create synergies regarding generic skills training (at institutional or at interinstitutional level).

The NPC notes the creation of successful, high quality graduate school structures in Europe. There are two variations in such structures but which both provide valuable institutional support for doctoral programmes and students:

- structures including master and doctoral candidates with crosscutting administrative support; or
- structures including doctoral candidates only, around a research theme, possibly including several institutions.

Access and admission

The increasingly competitive environment for institutions means it is essential to maintain flexibility in admissions to doctoral programmes. Further flexibility is required due to institutional autonomy itself with the variety in institutional missions and context. There are also initiatives such as Lifelong Learning that compound the need for variety and difference in entry requirements.

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that flexibility of entry requirements is important in addressing the issues of equity in gender and finance together with moving towards a learning outcome based approach for first, second and third level cycles. We support the Bologna commitment that the second cycle gives access, or a right to be considered for admission, to the third cycle but also note that it is important that there should be access possibilities in place for graduates of first cycle programmes if they have the necessary competencies and have met the learning outcomes to continue onto the third cycle.

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that doctoral students should be given the same rights to participation as students in other cycles and the social protection of those employed in respect to pension provision. Doctoral students are both students and also early career stage researchers. As such they should all have the benefits of access to the facilities of the HEI and to social welfare. The NPC strongly wishes to avoid a two-tier doctoral community of those who are funded receiving more benefits than those selffunding. All doctoral students should have access to secure funding for their studies and living costs, social and health assurance together with student benefits.

Masters degrees

Second cycle studies should equip students with the necessary competencies in order to undertake research activities and enrol in doctoral studies. These programmes should be learning outcome based, like all three cycles, and should not stipulate the required duration of the programme.

The range and diversity of Masters' degrees in the UK should be seen as an example of the variety of the learning outcome of the second cycle to positively develop career development and lifelong learning opportunities. As outlined earlier, this cycle should not be solely left to market intervention due to its role as part of the first and third cycles.

Improving the quality of doctoral programmes

All awards described as Doctorates should, regardless of type or form, be based on a core minimum level of process and outcomes, and there should be no doctorate without original research. Doctoral programmes should however cater for a variety of purposes.

Two of the goals of the Dublin Descriptors desired outcomes are that students "have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field", and "can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society". The research required of a doctorate can be either basic or applied. The NPC welcomes the diversity that professional doctorates offer as part of the application of research.

Supervision, monitoring and assessment

Institutions must be encouraged and supported in the development and dissemination of good practices in the management of research degrees. Supervision, monitoring and assessment are fundamentally important to the success of research and the student experience, as recognized in the Salzburg principles.

Supervision, monitoring and assessment arrangements should be based upon a transparent contractual framework of shared responsibilities between candidates, supervisors and the institution and where appropriate, partners. These guidelines are crucial to ensure the student is aware of what to expect from supervisor and to create structures to protect the student from maltreatment.

Students should have more than one supervisor to allow for more contact and engagement in research. They should also have the right to change supervisor without prejudice through restarting research and that they are able to access both male and female supervisors.

Supervision should be competent and supervisors should be trained. There should be mandatory training and performance review of supervisors and continuous professional skills development of academic staff. Supervision is so integral to the success of doctoral programmes that training should be the responsibility of the Government or agency and the HEI. Supervisors should be supported and dialogue created to enable facilitation of situations arising as well as to ensure the workload of supervisors is appropriate.

The assessment of doctoral studies should be done by a team that are not those who supervise the doctoral student. The viva should be recorded or independently chaired to support fairness and transparency in the process and aid any complaints or appeals. Assessment by publication should not be a requirement for assessment and should not be required before the assessment.

Generic skills training

Generic skills training is an important part of the third cycle together with the first two cycle study programmes. It should be developed as part of an institutional support structure at doctoral level. The primary goal of institutional structures should be to raise awareness amongst doctoral candidates of the importance of acquiring and communicating such skills, improving their employment prospects. It should also recognize previously acquired skills and seek to highlight how to make them visible in the labour market.

Public responsibility

Doctoral candidates are early stage researchers who are vital to Europe's development, as stated in the Salzburg principles, and should have such rights together with academic structures and career perspectives to enable them to continue to post-doctoral research.

If the number of researchers is to rise and be covered by appropriate salaries, the Government should invest more into research and social infrastructure for researchers in order to make the UK more attractive within the European Research Area.

Funding

The tenth Salzburg principle is ensuring appropriate and sustainable funding of doctoral programmes and candidates. This is crucial given the crucial role of doctoral research within global research output, the formative stage of a research career in both academia and non-academic sectors of employment and that the attractiveness of a future career in research is determined largely at the doctoral stage.

Doctoral students require social security and a stable financial situation in order to be able to concentrate on their work and successfully complete it. Specific attention should be paid to visa and permit procedures for families of doctoral students.

It is important that funding for doctoral candidates should cover the full period of the doctoral programme and the full extent of doctoral training including related courses. It is important to indicate a certain timeframe for the duration to support students with non-traditional backgrounds and also to develop the possibilities for part-time doctoral studies and the possibilities to combine doctoral studies with another work. Funding should be sufficiently attractive to encourage suitably qualified candidates from lower income groups as well as sufficiently flexible to support the needs of part-time doctoral students and others within the context of lifelong learning.

Funding is however a long-term investment that requires stable and unconditioned funding. A commitment must be recognized and followed by the HEI and government. The Government should recognize the link between first and second cycles to the third cycle and research elements being present in all three cycles requiring investment in students from the first day of their studies.

MOBILITY

Mobility is a key feature of Bologna. UK student mobility is affected by factors including language and student finance but there are also concerns on the mobility of staff and postdoctoral researchers.

Mobility issues particularly affect third cycle students who are not able to gain funding possibilities for research in other countries and research council funding is only available for domicile students in the UK.

Mobility is also a concern for addressing issues of widening participation and gender. All doctoral students should have access to secure funding for their studies and living costs, social and health assurance together with student benefits. The commitment to widening participation and promoting equality of opportunity might also present problems as high quality students are forced to exit in order to provide for themselves financially.

Alongside financial issues in widening participation there is also a need to address social and cultural barriers, particularly with access to doctoral studies. Training for supervisors to make them aware of biases and other perspectives should be mandatory. Students with disabilities should also receive support and individual assessment of needs by the HEI must be undertaken.

DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

The National Postgraduate Committee welcomes the introduction of the Diploma Supplement as a tool for students to recognise their achievements and credits and as a tool to aid mobility. We believe however that employers and institutions need to liaise to recognise what achievement is measured including other holistic information, particularly for postgraduate second and third cycle degrees.

FUNDING THE THREE CYCLES

Undergraduate Funding

There is a need to consider the three cycles funding relationship and not rely on the market to provide for second cycle programmes and limited financial support for third cycle programmes.

At undergraduate level there are opportunities for horizontal mobility with programmes provided by a students home country allowing for part of to be studied in another. The awareness of this ability is limited and more UK students would benefit from the mobility experience. Associated funding issues such as childcare grants and other national benefits like social security benefits can be an obstacle as they cannot be paid abroad. Other EU countries, such as Ireland, offer maintenance for those studying elsewhere and such scheme should not be administratively burdensome (http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobervlet/student_financial_support.pdf?language=EN). Alternatively, an ESIB supported idea is for the host country to finance the fees and living costs of students. This would be dependent on reciprocal agreements with other EU countries and issues such as social security benefits to be addressed.

Masters funding

As noted previously, leaving Masters fees to the market is undesirable due to their importance in the three cycles and as a link to both third cycle programmes but also to life-long learning and continuing professional development. The National Postgraduate Committee would recommend the extension of the undergraduate loans scheme to enable those with competencies to be able to complete Masters programmes.

There are also increased concerns on fees at Masters level and combined undergraduate and masters programmes to enable students to continue onto third cycle programmes. The EPSRC notes the potential impact of accumulating 'undergraduate debt in engineering which it estimates to be 20% higher than the average and substantially higher than the arts' presumably reflecting the length of programmes.

The common perception that most postgraduates come straight from their undergraduate courses is misleading. Most entrants to all types of postgraduate course are older than 22 and there are more first-year postgraduates above the age of 30 than below the age of 25. Part-time students tend to be older still, most being over 30. The over-30s constitute a substantial majority among part-time students starting every type of postgraduate course.

Doctoral programme funding

The appropriate and sustainable funding of doctoral programmes is a principle of the Salzburg principles. It is integrally related to the earlier two cycles with growing student debt and increases in undergraduate fees placing a renewed emphasis on financial rewards as an attraction to careers in research. Ackers 2006 report on *Assessing the impact of the Roberts Review Enhanced Stipends and Salaries on Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Positions* noted that pay is a dimension shaping the relative attractiveness of academic research careers and is concerned primarily to encourage researchers to progress and remain within the UK academic sector (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/researchcareers/summary-stipend.pdf>).

Furthermore as noted above, Doctoral students require social security and a stable financial situation in order to concentrate on their work and successfully complete it. Funding should be sufficiently attractive to encourage suitably qualified candidates from lower income groups as well as sufficiently flexible to support the needs of part-time doctoral students and others within the context of lifelong learning.

Research in the UK shows that students from groups at a disadvantage tend to enrol in lower level, shorter or more vocational courses, and closer to home. (Callender, 2003 and 2002; M Farr "Home or Away"? 2001 quoted in Callender, 2003).

A large proportion of postgraduates are self-funding and prospects for growth amongst home students depends on this number increasing. An extension of the students loans scheme to cover those not able to gain funding and Research Council Funding for students for EU study would seek to address the decline in domicile students.

CONCLUSION

The Bologna Process has been successful and the UK Government must continue to play a leading part in the successor development from the process. There must however be a greater dissemination of the process to and engagement with all stakeholders.

To facilitate the development of the process we would argue that the successor process establishes a permanent secretariat and widens its participation and transparency to make substantial developments on the knowledge economy and social development through Higher Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Agency led training co-ordination for supervisors and recognition of importance of supervision to successful completion of doctoral research.
- Increased awareness training and publicity for Higher Education Staff about the implications of Bologna.
- Institutional evaluation of Bologna Implementation, specifically on Diploma Supplements and Credit worth.
- Extension of scrutiny by Select Committee on lifelong learning and its concern with student funding, accreditation of prior learning, and student participation.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by Imperial College London

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. It is important that the UK HEI are aligned to Bologna.
2. The UK first, bachelors, cycle is already aligned, giving 180 ECTS in three academic years (AY).
3. The UK third, doctoral cycle is already Bologna aligned, providing a training by research, with transferable skills, during a period of three to four calendar years (CY). It is inappropriate to introduce credits to this third cycle.
4. However, the second, masters, cycle is problematic for the UK, affecting both the four-year (4x AY) integrated (eg MEng) and the 12 month (1 CY) freestanding masters programmes.
5. Our detailed analysis of masters courses at Imperial College London supports the allocation of 90 ECTS to teaching of a full CY duration. Thus a masters qualification with 90 ECTS can be gained in one calendar year (freestanding masters). An integrated masters, which at present accumulates only 240 ECTS in 4 AY, can be aligned to Bologna by enhancing the fourth year giving a structure of 3 AY + 1 CY (180 + 90 ECTS = 270). Alternatively the additional three months could be more spread (eg longer academic years, summer vacations).
6. Based on the situation at Imperial, we therefore consider it critical that:
 - (a) 90 rather than 75 ECTS must be made the maximum number of credits that can be accumulated in a 12 month period of full-time education; and
 - (b) the position of no “creditisation” of the third cycle is maintained.

BACKGROUND

1. The Bologna Process aims to provide greater consistency and transferability of qualifications within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
2. The effects of this process will not be confined to Europe, as educational providers in other regions such as Asia and Australia are also taking it into consideration.
3. It is therefore important that UK Higher Education Institutions are players in this harmonisation process, and are aligned to Bologna.
4. However, it is critical that the system retains sufficient flexibility to accommodate the wide range of HEI within the UK, and more widely within Europe. The Bologna Process must not become a straightjacket.
5. The Bologna Process defines three cycles of higher education: bachelors, masters and doctoral.

6. A key aspect of enabling student mobility is the establishment of a system of credits—the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA that was adopted at Bergen (2005) gives typical credit ranges of 180–240 ECTS and 90–120 ECTS for the first (bachelors) and second (masters) cycles, respectively; for the latter, a minimum of 60 must be at second cycle level. There is no credit range for the third cycle.

7. The UK is already aligned to the first and third cycles of Bologna. However, the UK's second cycle masters programmes are of shorter duration than those of most other European HEI.

8. We consider our 12 month masters graduates are equivalent to those emerging from the longer (2AY) degrees in other countries of Europe. However, although it is learning outcomes that are the key indicator of equivalency in education, it is the much more readily measurable ECTS that will be used as the common European HE currency. It is therefore important that comparable input (ECTS) equates with learning output.

9. While quite separate from educational issues and learning outcomes, there are also serious financial implications. Scholarships are limited in number, and most students are self-funded for their accommodation and living expenses, especially on the free standing masters programmes. Any increase in course duration will render the masters programmes financially unviable, destabilising the UK HE sector. The resultant loss of masters provision would deplete second cycle opportunities in the UK, with knock-on effects for recruitment of top quality students for the doctoral cycle.

IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

10. We consider our 12 month masters graduates are equivalent to those emerging from the longer (2AY) degrees in other countries of Europe. However, although it is learning outcomes that are the key indicator of equivalency in education, it is the much more readily measurable ECTS that will be used as the common European HE currency. It is therefore important that comparable input (ECTS) equates with learning output.

11. In order to assess the teaching and learning input to our education programmes at Imperial, we have recently conducted an analysis of all our bachelors, integrated and freestanding masters courses.

12. Our data show that taking 1 ECTS to be 25 hours (the Bologna range is 25–30 hours/ECTS), 90 ECTS can be achieved within our 12 month (1 CY) masters. An example from each of our Faculties of Medicine, Engineering and Natural Sciences is given in the attached Appendix ("Imperial College London 1CY MSc anonymised returns December 2006").

13. We therefore support the model of 1 CY for freestanding masters.

14. For the integrated masters we support either a 3AY+1CY model, or one where the additional material is spread between years three and four.

15. We do, however, note that teaching styles differ between different disciplines such that the balance between contact hours and personal study can be very different. While this difference is likely to be most marked between arts/humanities versus science subjects, even across the sciences there can be significant differences between the more theoretical subjects, such as mathematics and physics, compared to those with a high practical component such as engineering. It may therefore be harder for the theoretical subjects to meet the 90 ECTS requirement within one year, using current accounting methods. Thus, the aim of the Bologna accord to achieve academic mobility may require agreement that some subjects are treated differently to others (for example, by adjusting the number of hours/ECTS).

ECTS SURVEY (AUTUMN 2006)

| Medicine | Dept A | | | | Course: MSc (1 calendar year) | | | | | | | TotalECTS | hours per ECTS | "other hours" per taught hour | hours per week (48-week year) |
|----------|---------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|--|----------|--------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Unit | Lectures | Teaching hours Lab hrs | Classes | Tutorials | Sum | Private Study inc exam prep | Other hours Project or placement work | Exams | Sum | Hours | | | | |
| | Term 1 | 87 | 70 | 42 | 27 | 226 | 335 | | | 335 | 561 | 22 | | | |
| | Term 2 Lectures | 18 | 70 | | 6 | 94 | 350 | | 9 | 359 | 453 | 18 | | | |
| | Term 2/3 Research project | | | | | 0 | 640 | 665 | | 1,305 | 1,305 | 50 | | | |
| | Total | 105 | 140 | 42 | 33 | 320 | 1,325 | 665 | 9 | 1,999 | 2,319 | 90 | 25.77 | 6.25 | 48.31 |

ECTS SURVEY (AUTUMN 2006)

| Engineering | Dept B | | | | Course: MSc (1 calendar year) | | | | | | | TotalECTS | hours per ECTS | "other hours" per taught hour | hours per week (48-week year) |
|-------------|----------|----------|---------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|-----|---------------|--|---------------------|-----|-------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Unit | Lectures | Teaching hours Lab hrs | Classes | Tutorials | Sum | Private Study | Other hours Project or placement work | Exams inc exam prep | Sum | Hours | | | | |
| | Course A | 26 | 0 | | 13 | 39 | 40 | | 30 | 70 | 109 | 4 | | | |
| | Course B | 25 | 8 | | 6 | 39 | 55 | | 30 | 85 | 124 | 5 | | | |
| | Course C | 27 | 0 | | 6 | 33 | 40 | | 30 | 70 | 103 | 4 | | | |
| | Course D | 18 | 0 | | 3 | 21 | 20 | | 20 | 40 | 61 | 2 | | | |

| Engineering | Dept B | | | | | Course: MSc (1 calendar year) | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Unit | Teaching hours | | | | | Other hours | | TotalECTS | | hours | “other | hours | | |
| | Lectures | Lab hrs | Classes | Tutorials | Sum | Private Study | Project or placement work | Exams inc exam prep | Sum | Hours | per ECTS | hours” per taught hour | per week (48-week year) | |
| Course E | 18 | 0 | | 3 | 21 | 20 | | 20 | 40 | 61 | 2 | | | |
| Course F | 18 | 0 | | 3 | 21 | 20 | | 20 | 40 | 61 | 2 | | | |
| Course G | 30 | 0 | | 0 | 30 | 30 | | 30 | 60 | 90 | 4 | | | |
| Course H | 21 | 0 | | 0 | 21 | 20 | | 20 | 40 | 61 | 2 | | | |
| Laboratory and field techniques, applied coursework | 28 | 0 | | 14 | 42 | 44 | | 30 | 74 | 116 | 5 | | | |
| Course I | 30 | 0 | | 0 | 30 | 30 | | 30 | 60 | 90 | 4 | | | |
| Course J | 18 | 2 | | 6 | 26 | 45 | | 0 | 45 | 71 | 3 | | | |
| Course K | 20 | 0 | | 2 | 22 | 35 | | 20 | 55 | 77 | 3 | | | |
| Course L | 21 | 0 | | 0 | 21 | 20 | | 20 | 40 | 61 | 2 | | | |
| Course M | 30 | 0 | | 0 | 30 | 30 | | 30 | 60 | 90 | 4 | | | |
| Advanced modelling | 3 | 18 | | 0 | 21 | 20 | | 0 | 20 | 41 | 2 | | | |
| Laboratory practical classes | 0 | 44 | | 6 | 50 | 60 | | 0 | 60 | 110 | 4 | | | |
| Fieldwork | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 40 | | 0 | 40 | 40 | 2 | | | |
| Dissertation | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 800 | 0 | 800 | 800 | 32 | | | |
| Field Trip 1 | 0 | 10 | | 0 | 10 | 10 | | 0 | 10 | 20 | 1 | | | |
| Field Trip 2 | 0 | 60 | | 0 | 60 | 30 | | 0 | 30 | 90 | 4 | | | |
| Total | 333 | 142 | 0 | 62 | 537 | 609 | 800 | 330 | 1,739 | 2,276 | 90 | 25.29 | 3.24 | 47.42 |

ECTS SURVEY (AUTUMN 2006)

| Natural Sciences | | Dept C | | | | | Course: MSc (1 calendar year) | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|-----|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----------|---------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Unit | | Teaching hours | | | | | | Other hours | | TotalECTS | | hours | “other | hours | |
| | Lectures | Lab hrs | Classes | Tutorials | Sum | Private Study | Project or placement work | Exams inc exam prep | Sum | Hours | | per ECTS | hours” per taught hour | per week (48-week year) | |
| Term 1 | Lectures | 103 | 113 | 15 | 10 | 241 | 361.5 | 0 | 50 | 412 | 653 | | | | |
| Term 1 | Seminars | 0 | | 10 | | 10 | | | | 0 | 10 | 25 | | | |
| Term 2 | Lectures | 91 | 113 | 18 | 6 | 228 | 342 | | 120 | 462 | 690 | | | | |
| Term 2 | Seminars | | | 10 | | 10 | | | | 0 | 10 | 27 | | | |
| Term 3 | Research project | | | | 38 | 38 | | 950 | | 950 | 988 | 38 | | | |
| Total | | 194 | 226 | 53 | 54 | 527 | 703.5 | 950 | 170 | 1,823.5 | 2,350.5 | 90 | 26.12 | 3.46 | 48.97 |

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by The Institution of Chemical Engineers, (IChemE)

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBMITTER

1. The Institution of Chemical Engineers (“IChemE”) is the professional body for chemical and process engineers. Originally founded in 1922, IChemE has grown continuously to its current status as a leading engineering organisation with an international membership of 27,000 across more than 80 countries.

2. As well as promoting the advancement of chemical engineering science and practice within the profession, IChemE aims to increase public recognition of chemical engineering, both in terms of what chemical and process engineers do and the benefits that their work brings to society. Central to this work is the qualification of our professionals as Chartered Chemical Engineers evaluated against the highest standards of academic formation (Masters level) and of initial professional practice (minimum four years in a role of responsibility).

3. IChemE is very active in developing and raising standards in education, accrediting Masters and Bachelors degree programmes at some 60 higher education institutions. Our chemical engineering degree programme accreditations are highly sought after by the education community worldwide. Within Europe IChemE accredits programmes in Spain, Hungary, Netherlands, Eire as well as across the UK university community. Elsewhere IChemE has accredited programmes at leading education providers worldwide.

4. IChemE is licensed by both the Engineering Council (EC^{UK}) and the Science Council to qualify chemical engineers as Chartered professionals, to register them and to conduct accreditation of relevant university degrees.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

5. IChemE welcomes this opportunity to provide input to help the Select Committee develop its report on “The Bologna Process”. The Bologna Process has substantive implications for UK higher education chemical engineering provision, as indeed it has across the broad professional engineering community. These implications are described under eight below.

6. IChemE has a vital interest in the nature of chemical engineering educational provision and in assuring delivery of high standards of academic formation for those entering the profession. IChemE pioneered the development of learning outcomes based accreditation of degree programmes. The Select Committee should note that the principle behind learning outcomes assessment is that it is what engineering students have learnt to apply that is fundamentally important and not how many hours they may have taken on a module (credit counts) or even the duration of the course. The latter two can only be considered to be indicators. As well as being embraced by educators internationally this approach of outputs-based assessment has been adopted by Engineering Council UK and the QAA and is now used across the engineering professional institutions (refer UK-SPEC Output Standards).

IChemE supports absolutely the view that a professional engineer must have strong academic formation and that the threshold for this be maintained at the Masters level. We point out, however, that academic formation is only a necessary but not sufficient condition for becoming a Chartered Chemical Engineer. Some other European countries do not undertake such a rigorous approach to professional recognition and do not have mechanisms for a review or examination of professional practice as a prerequisite for registration as a professional engineer, relying solely on academic formation.

7. IChemE is committed to the highest standards of professionalism. It has a vital interest, on behalf of its broad membership, to ensure that the international recognition, high status and respect for its Chartered Chemical Engineer qualification is maintained as the benchmark standard for professional practice worldwide. It is broadly characteristic that many chemical engineers are employed by major internationals and that many will conduct a variety of international assignments outside the UK. Such international strength is clearly evident with one third of our members resident outside the UK.

From a UK perspective chemical engineers are found in great numbers in the Oil & Gas, Pharmaceutical (and increasingly the Biotech industries) as well as the important Design Contracting sectors. All these companies recruit from an international pool and it is essential that the UK provides quality, well-qualified engineers to feed their labour demands. The UK can ill afford any real, or even perceptual, reduction in standards of academic formation from its universities.

IChemE is generally supportive of the mobility related aspirations inherent in the Bologna Declaration which in principle should help ensure a diverse supply of quality professional engineers to employers of chemical engineers. Likewise mobility of UK educated engineers must be protected so that they can compete on equal terms globally.

8. KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

8.1 *Impact on the integrated MEng Engineering Degree and Graduates thereof*

Under Bologna there is a risk that the successful UK-style integrated MEng is only regarded as an intermediate qualification in the second cycle because it is “only” a four year programme (versus the three year Bachelor plus two year Masters Bologna model) and because it contains less than the minimum permissible number of Masters level ECTS credits (60). This would mean that UK graduates would not hold the minimum necessary academic formation needed to practice as a professional engineer with consequential negative impacts on both UK academic reputation and the international recognition and mobility of UK engineers.

The UK-style MEng provides an efficient fast track to achieving the academic formation requirements for registration as a Chartered Chemical Engineer.

The primary benefit of the integrated MEng programme is that it is deliberately designed to prepare talented students for professional practice and integrates all aspects of study throughout the final two years (maths, science, design, engineering practice, business contexts) largely through deeper study plus extended individual research and group design projects. It must be understood that the four year (five year in Scotland) integrated MEng degree is a unique programme of study to that that would be followed in a Bachelors degree plus a subsequent Masters programme. The MEng educational experience is therefore fundamentally different to studying a Bachelors programme followed by a Masters in a relatively small area of focussed study.

The integrated MEng is a unique pathway to the Masters level. It has been the key, predominant, high level feature of UK engineering higher education for over 20 years.

It needs to be strongly emphasised that the integrated MEng is proven, and is recognised by employers and students as being effective and efficient.

An additional key benefit of the integrated approach is the progression of well-qualified graduates to employment one year earlier, with benefits to employers, graduates and society alike. There is no doubt that the integrated MEng has a track record in delivering high-quality graduates for major employers operating in the international chemical engineering profession.

Students entering the MEng programmes hold high standard entry qualifications, higher than those typically entering BEng(Hons) degrees. Able students may also subsequently transfer to MEng courses during their studies based upon examined results. This high quality of student cohort contributes in part towards MEng level learning outcomes being efficiently met by those on the programmes.

IChemE recognises the importance of flexibility and welcomes all graduates with Masters level academic formation including those from combined first and second cycle degrees such as a Bachelors (Hons) chemical engineering degree plus separate Masters degree route.

IChemE therefore strongly recommends that there must be a vigorous and continuing defence of the four year UK MEng based on the proven delivery of Masters-level outcomes in an efficient way.

8.2 Impact of European Credit Transfer Scheme on degree content and design

The European Credit Transfer System would require an integrated MEng degree to contain 270–300 ECTS credits with a minimum 60 ECTS credits at the second cycle level. UK four year MEng programmes do not comply with this criteria.

ECTS is the new basis for comparison of qualifications across Member States. While of value it is reliant upon a system of defining degrees by workload-based credit counts and has little regard for assessment of learning outcomes.

IChemE has participated to the EC-funded EURACE project on accreditation of (chemical) engineering degrees but there is not yet a widespread acceptance of learning outcomes assessment across Europe. Consequently, while the five year Scottish chemical engineering MEng programmes accumulate the required ECTS credits for a Masters programme as defined under Bologna those elsewhere in the UK do not, despite the similarity of learning outcome.

Some UK departments are considering inclusion of an extra 30 ECTS credits to the final years of their MEng programmes but this would still leave them open to criticism that the programmes are at the “low end” of the credit range defined under Bergen (270–300 ECTS) and therefore still at risk of being perceived to be “deficient” or “weak” within the international education market place. It is not clear whether such inclusion of credits (workload) is actually feasible.

IChemE advises that this prescriptive approach to credit counting is inconsistent with an outcomes-based approach. Outcomes assessment is accepted by ECUK, Universities and QAA alike as current best practice. It should also be noted that the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications clearly places the integrated MEng degree programmes at Masters Level.

8.3 Impact on universities

In the absence of sufficient clarity from Government about UK’s part in the Bologna Process with respect to engineering we, like our partners Engineering Council UK, have not been able to yet provide clear guidance to universities regarding the future of MEng programmes.

Generally, there is a mix of awareness and understanding of the Bologna Process amongst the university community. This is itself an issue given the immediacy of the declared Bologna implementation date. A consistency of approach is required within the community.

The IChemE also observes that it is unclear, should there be a move to attempt to integrate extra credits into programmes, how any increased credit loading on universities would be funded. It is not at all clear how credit inclusion could adequately be achieved on a practical basis within the already full engineering curriculum.

The potential impact of increased teaching on chemical engineering research activity is also unknown.

The IChemE maintains that it is essential that our engineering departments can operate on equal terms with their counterparts within Europe and elsewhere and must not be open to criticism regarding the quality of their engineering degree provision.

8.4 Impact on attracting the engineering talent of the future

Chemical engineering is a profession that requires highly numerate graduates. Such are the educational demands for the chemical engineering degree programme that only applicants with strong STEM secondary education results are likely to succeed. While successful initiatives like the IChemE’s www.whynotchemeng.com campaign have helped turnaround UK chemical engineering university applications, IChemE is concerned that should the UK MEng be dropped in favour of five year programmes this will result in decline of the numbers of students prepared to undertake an extra year of study.

It can be speculated that the extra costs incurred in a further study year will drive prospective students away, particularly as annual fees at least at the leading universities (typically where chemical engineering is taught) will almost certainly rise. UK Government needs to be aware of this risk and should be doing everything in its power to make engineering careers attractive.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

IChemE seeks as desired outcomes from this Select Committee consultation:

1. Clarity regarding the essential characteristics and the expected outcomes of the first cycle and second cycle engineering degrees.
2. Support to the position that a Masters-level qualification (integrated Masters or first cycle plus second cycle) is the appropriate, minimum basis for the academic formation of a professional engineer.
3. A vigorous and continuing defence by Government of the UK-style integrated MEng, based on the proven delivery of Masters-level outcomes in an efficient way and recognising that the MEng has a track record in delivering high-quality, well prepared graduates for an international profession.
4. Confirmation that a range of flexible pathways to meet the Masters-level is essential. The “standard” Bologna two-cycle package of (Batchelor + Master) is one such pathway.
5. Confirmation that engineering degree qualifications should be based on assessment of learning outcomes, with duration of programmes and/or credit-counts only as a guidance for programme designers.
6. A fundamental review and change to ECTS by the European Commission to reflect a more sophisticated relationship between nominal workload (credits) and learning outcomes. Without this the MEng will remain open to allegations that it is not a full second cycle qualification with the obvious reputational risks to UK universities and graduates alike.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the University of Oxford

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper identifies a number of areas of its existing educational provision which the University sees as likely to be significantly affected by the Bologna Process. It welcomes the fact that the Bologna principles have not been embodied in legislation in the UK, recognising the autonomy of HE institutions, but nevertheless draws particular attention to the areas where change and development can only sensibly be made as part of a concerted national policy, notably in relation to the funding of three-year and four-year undergraduate courses. The paper is submitted by the chairman of the University’s Educational Policy and Standards Committee, Professor Elizabeth Fallaize, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) in consultation with the Head of the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division, Professor Keith Burnett FRS. The Educational Policy and Standards Committee is responsible for the University’s Bologna strategy.

SUBMISSION

1. While welcoming the development of the Bologna Process and wishing to make a positive contribution to the issues embodied in the Bologna instruments, the University has identified a number of areas where it has concerns about a likely negative impact of the Bologna Process on its educational provision.
2. Foremost amongst these is the future position of the integrated master’s courses which are taken as a first degree by undergraduates in the Sciences and which lead, in Oxford, to a range of master’s qualifications (MChem, MEng, MPhys etc). These are four-year qualifications, which integrate the work previously offered for the bachelor’s degree (H level in the QAA Qualifications Framework) with work classified as master’s standard (M level), usually but not always taken in the fourth year. There is considerable uncertainty within the sector as to whether successful completion of these integrated master’s courses will enable a graduate to proceed to doctoral work under the Bologna Process without the need for a further master’s qualification.
3. At the same time, there has been a significant push in recent years towards increasing the length of the PhD programme in the Sciences in the UK, in response to national and international reviews (eg, Roberts, Whitesides) with research councils now routinely providing 3.5–4 years of funding. Thus a two-cycle four plus four progression to a doctorate is becoming recognised as ideal training for scientists, with a strong research-project element in the last year of the integrated component, and strong training element in the first part of the PhD. There is no clarity about the likely relationship between these various developments.
4. National guidance at an earlier stage concentrated on increasing the length of the final year of the integrated master’s course. It was suggested that a lengthened course would be more likely to meet the necessary conditions and provide the necessary credit rating (on the basis of the European Credit Transfer System) for subsequent doctoral work, without a further master’s qualification. However we do not believe that this is a satisfactory way to proceed in the long term. Unless there is greater clarity about the standing of the integrated master’s course and what is required to allow it to serve as a combined first and second cycle qualification under the Bologna Process, there will be a significant planning blight on the development of these major courses within the Sciences.

5. It is now being suggested in some quarters that the way forward is to return to the original three-year bachelor's degree and to allow those who wish to proceed to a further fourth-year at master's level to do so via a free-standing MSc. or similar qualification. This would signal a major change to undergraduate education in the Sciences with extensive implications for funding and for the level of achievement associated with a first degree. A move to a 3 + 2 + 3 cycle would have serious funding implications for students on the two-year masters training required under the Bologna proposals as preparation for doctoral training. It is not at all clear where the resources for this would come from if the UK adopted this framework. Students fund the fourth year of the Oxford four-year integrated masters programmes in the Sciences through the student loan company.

6. If the UK moved to three-year undergraduate programmes followed by two-year master's, the availability of Research Council-funded studentships would need to be reviewed. For example, in the Sciences the focus of EPSRC training funds is on doctoral studentships, with some limited funding available for MSc courses through the Collaborative Training grant scheme. There is currently little funding available to support master's students in the mathematical and physical sciences. However, if the total funding in the system is not increased, then the implication of funding two-year master's studentships is that the number of doctoral studentships available will have to be reduced, with serious implications for the UK's knowledge economy. Furthermore, the loss of the fee income and associated HEFCE teaching grant provided to university science departments in respect of fourth-year undergraduate students would have very serious financial implications for the UK's science departments, and for the sustainability of the UK's science base in its universities, if it is not replaced by the equivalent level of funding for two-year master's students. The number of two-year master's students on courses equivalent to the fourth year of integrated master's programmes is likely to be far less.

7. Even if there is a driving force towards a three-cycle 3 + 2 + 3 system across all disciplines, the future of the 4 + 4 two-cycle system in the Sciences, based on its strengths, must be considered. A key question is whether a total training/education for eight years would be regarded as meeting the requirements of the third level based on the total credit obtained irrespective of whether the eight years is broken up into two or three cycles.

8. The University does not believe that any approach adopted should be undertaken in a piecemeal fashion, dictated by the requirements of individual professional bodies. It should be part of a coherent strategy which reviews the UK structures and funding of the first two cycles under the Bologna Process. It needs to be clear as to whether the existing structure has to be developed in order to match expectations under Bologna. It should look ahead not only to the relationship between UK qualifications under the first and second cycles, but also at any new structure and the relationship between the second and third cycles. It would be extremely unhelpful, in the University's view, if significant numbers of students from outside the UK found that taking either the UK integrated master's (as a combined first and second cycle qualification) or one of the UK's existing free-standing master's qualifications (as a second cycle qualification) was insufficient to allow them to continue to doctoral studies in any of the countries which have signed the Bologna accord.

9. The University's primary concern is to ensure that the exceptional quality of educational provision which it makes at undergraduate and graduate level remains undiminished. For this reason it is extremely concerned about the implications of a system of recognition which relies on credits, like the European Credit Transfer System, rather than learning outcomes. Like Cambridge, we do not use a credit system and have major reservations about its appropriateness for the character of learning which we seek to promote. The emphasis on credits in this mechanistic fashion does not sit easily with the University's approach to its course provision, and the greater the acceptance accorded to the European Credit Transfer System the greater its influence becomes on UK patterns of provision. It is already clear that a student who wished to incorporate a UK qualification in his or her work before undertaking doctoral studies within many countries within the Bologna Process, would need to be certain that the total pre-doctoral credits achieved were sufficient to allow entry to a doctoral programme. The question of credit in relation to the Bologna Process and to UK qualifications which do not operate on a credit system is of major significance. The University is currently studying the latest proposals from the Burgess Group with this in mind.

10. The final area where the University thinks that decisions need to be considered at national level relates to the relationship between professional qualifications in areas like Medicine and Law and their mutual recognition within the Bologna agreement countries. Given that the Bologna Process places such a high premium on mobility, the fact that the UK approach to professional accreditation (with professional bodies often sitting outside HE qualifications and accreditation systems) may create recognition problems in the future is of real concern. The Bologna promoters have drawn attention to some of the potential difficulties in this area, and suggested the importance of careful monitoring at institutional and national levels.

11. In relation to all the aspects of the Bologna Process, the University attaches importance to a clear national perspective on the matters of both immediate and longer-term significance to UK higher education. The Bologna Process has a growing influence not only within Europe but internationally. It is therefore of real importance that individual institutions and the UK as a whole understands the impact of that influence on the UK higher education sector. All institutions recognise this but it is particularly critical for those like Oxford whose international focus must continue to be worldwide, and whose major competitors are largely outside the Bologna framework. While welcoming the development of the Bologna Process and its

principles, the University is bound to be cautious about any developments which might limit its capacity to compete with the best international universities worldwide. Without clear understanding at national level, the strategic thinking of all institutions is bound to be hindered, and international strategies which are key to the pursuit of global excellence potentially undermined. The University hopes that this can be recognised and underlined by the work of the Committee.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Wellcome Trust

1. The Wellcome Trust is pleased to respond to the House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee Inquiry into the Bologna Process.

2. The Wellcome Trust is the largest independent charity in the UK and the second largest medical research charity in the world. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending around £500 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing.

3. The Trust welcomes the general approach of the Bologna Process, particularly the mobility of students and researchers that it should enable. However, we do have a number of concerns which we would like to bring the Committee's attention to, which are outlined below.

“Implications of the Bologna Process for the UK Higher Education sector: advantages and disadvantages” and “The implications of a three-phase structure of higher education awards for one-year masters and short undergraduate courses (HNCs, HNDs, and Foundation Degrees)”.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENT FOR MASTERS DEGREES FOR PROGRESSION TO PHD STUDY

4. The Trust currently runs a four year PhD awards programme. These awards are made to students who have a first degree, but generally have not undertaken postgraduate study. Institutions are free to design their own study programme, however it is expected that in the first year of study students will undertake a range of activities, including taught courses and research skills development: gaining experience of different laboratories through working on a range of research projects. Some of these programmes are structured with the award of an MSc at the end of year one. This programme has been enormously successful, with very high rates of completion and progression of many on to a research career.

5. The Trust is concerned that any development which would make masters degrees mandatory for progression to PhD study may be superfluous and a disincentive for many of the highest quality students; it would affect the local flexibility of design of such successful PhD programmes and would constrain the future development of further new innovations in PhD training. We question therefore whether making an MSc a mandatory step in the progression to PhD is the right approach.

LENGTH OF MASTERS DEGREES

6. The Trust is also concerned that some degree of flexibility should remain in the length of time taken to complete a masters degree. The great majority of masters degrees in the UK are completed within one year, and to date this has proved adequate for progression on to further study or a research career. The Trust is concerned that potential students will be discouraged from undertaking a masters degree if the length of the course is increased to two years. We believe that the emphasis should lie on the content and learning outcomes rather than the volume of study. Currently UK one year masters qualifications correspond to continental two year qualifications in terms of learning outcomes.¹⁴

PHD STUDY

7. Similarly, the Trust hopes restrictive stipulations on the length, structure and assessment process for PhDs will not be introduced as part of the Bologna Process.

IMPACT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS ON UK MEDICAL, DENTAL AND VETERINARY QUALIFICATIONS

8. It is not yet entirely clear what the implications of the Bologna Process will be on UK medical, dental and veterinary qualifications. However, the Trust is concerned that any measures to determine the length, structure and assessment of these qualifications should not make the system more difficult for clinicians, dentists and veterinary students to undertake a research career. The Trust is particularly concerned about

¹⁴ Europe Unit, 2006, *The Bologna Process: Implications for dental and medical qualifications in the UK*, London, Europe Unit.

what the impact of any measures might be on intercalated undergraduate courses and MB-PhDs. The Trust believes that the UK health research base could be significantly damaged if measures further complicate the system.

“Awareness and engagement in the Bologna Process within HEIs”.

EUROPE UNIT

9. The Trust welcomes the information and services provided by the Europe Unit, based within Universities UK. The Trust supports the continued work of Europe Unit in ensuring that key stakeholders are aware of the progress of the Bologna Process and the implications of any proposals suggested and decisions made as they happen.

“Quality Assurance systems in HE (teaching and research): the compatibility of UK proposals and Bologna”.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON QA SYSTEMS FOR RESEARCH

10. There seems to be little information on the quality assurance systems for research within the Bologna Process. The Trust would welcome more effective dissemination of information on, and discussion of, this topic. The Trust is additionally concerned that a rigid, one-size-fits-all structure for quality assurance systems for research should not be introduced.

“The agenda for discussion at the 2007 meeting in London—clarifying the UK position”.

INVOLVING RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

11. There are a range of stakeholders for whom the outcomes of the Bologna Process will have a significant impact. The Trust feels that it is necessary for these stakeholders particularly research organisations to be fully involved in the development of the Agenda for the 2007 ministerial summit.

“The broader impact of Bologna across Europe: a more standardised Europe and the consequences for the UK’s position in the global market for HE (Bologna and the second phase of the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education (PMI 2))”.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

The Trust cautions that the UK’s higher education and research position globally should not be compromised by harmonisation at a European level. It is therefore important that as the detail of the Bologna Process is developed and before it is implemented, the global context is considered. Furthermore once the detail has been agreed the UK will need to consider to what extent it wishes to implement the policy, UK higher education institutions and research organisations must be involved.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by The British Psychological Society

THE PROPOSED SYSTEM

This is now a three cycle system (roughly equivalent to Bachelors, Masters and Doctorates), based on a credit system (ECTS) of 60 credits a year where a credit is 25–30 hours of student work. The cycles would be done in sequence:

- First cycle:* 180–240 credits (There is also a *Short cycle* at this level of 120 credits).
- Second cycle:* Normally 90–120 credits, minimum 60 credits.
- Third cycle:* Unspecified, but suggested three to four years.

Recording of results would be by distribution, with cut-offs as follows: A 10%, B 25%, C 30%, D 25%, E 10%, plus two levels of failure FX and F.

There would also be a “diploma supplement” giving more information on what the student had done.

COMMENTS

1. There are no substantial, potential, discipline-specific problems with conforming to these proposals apart from 4 below.

2. The traditional UK system within which psychology is taught at the HE level would fit reasonably well, albeit right at the bottom end of the suggested time spans. The Masters degree followed by PhD pattern is already being imposed by the research councils, though there is quite widespread resistance to it.

3. How easily HEIs would find changing to the ECTS system would depend on which of the varied credit systems (if any) they were currently using but, given several years' notice, it would be possible to manage the change.

4. The one potential incompatibility is the taught doctorate which is now the standard training route for clinical and educational psychologists. This fulfils most of the outcomes specified for the second and third cycles, but would not achieve sufficient credits for completion of the third cycle.

5. Foundation degrees would be "Short cycle". However, there are few of these in psychology and none which are accredited by the Society. The recent decision to allow these to be validated by FE institutions may in any case take them outside the Bologna Process.

6. The abandonment of the UK classification system in favour of a GPA-like system, together with the addition of something like a diploma supplement, would be in line with general thinking in the UK HE sector. However, the replacement proposed by Bologna is rather different from the current HEFCE suggestions because it seems to abandon the idea of uniform standards across all HE institutions in favour of percentiles.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the University of London Union (ULU)

1. INTRODUCTION

The University of London Union (ULU) is the federal students' union for more than 120,000 students at the 20 Colleges and 12 Institutes of the University of London. The trustees of the organisation comprise four elected full-time sabbatical officers who represent the views of students across the federation to the central University and act as the interface between students and local and national decision-makers to achieve improvements for students in the capital. ULU has a team of part-time elected officers each with their own portfolio in an attempt to ensure that ULU is responsible to the needs of all its diverse membership.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Successful implementation of the Bologna Process offers clear benefits in terms of facilitating student mobility. There are concerns, however, that unless efforts are made to ensure that these benefits are shared by all students, irrespective of background, current inequalities in education and in career opportunities may become further entrenched.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The potential advantages of the Bologna Process for the UK HE sector are significant in terms of the promotion of student mobility. However, the process could have an adverse affect on the widening participation agenda: greater mobility might be confined to those students who have the language skills and socio-economic advantages that would enable them to benefit most from the opportunities offered.

4. THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

The social dimension should figure prominently on the 2007 agenda. Unless this issue is addressed there is a likelihood that the Bologna Process will merely entrench present inequalities and squander the chance to widen the skills base across all social classes.

5. THE IMPLICATIONS OF A THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS FOR TO ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES (HNCs, HNDs, AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

As one of the purposes of the three-phase structure is to improve the employability of all students it appears counter-productive to impose financial barriers to access. It has, for example, become extremely difficult for students wishing to undertake a stand alone one year master's course to obtain funding from research councils, as most funding for masters is now tied to PhD study (1 + 3). Increased levels of funding for masters programmes would assist those students who are not suited to doctoral study but wish to develop their skills for the workplace.

6. AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

Greater efforts should be made to engage students with the Bologna Process. The vast majority of students have no awareness of the initiative and, similarly, amongst academic staff there is a lack of understanding of either its principles or progress made to date.

7. OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

If the aim is to enhance the mobility of all UK students, rather than a privileged few, students from disadvantaged backgrounds should be encouraged to participate and, most importantly, must be provided with the language, cultural orientation and funding support that will allow them to take advantage of the opportunities available.

8. THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

The absence of a widely accepted national credit system in the UK means that even internal undergraduate transfers between universities are problematic. The adoption of ECTS would therefore have domestic advantages in addition to promoting mobility within Europe. However, even within those European countries that have used such systems for a number of years credits are accessed differently, making comparisons and therefore inter- and intra-country transfers difficult.

At the third cycle stage the situation is exacerbated because in most UK universities credits are not applied to doctoral study. The adoption of a European doctoral credit system would be problematic because of the diversity of national doctoral programmes.

A focus on learning outcomes and competencies rather than workload is preferable in the current political climate. The implementation of workload criteria, with restrictions on the amount of paid employment permissible, is likely to have a detrimental affect on the widening access project, unless financial support for students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds is to be increased radically.

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE (TEACHING AND RESEARCH): THE COMPATIBILITY OF UK PROPOSALS AND BOLOGNA

The UK has a well established QA system in place and in this respect is ahead of most other Bologna Declaration countries. A number of countries have adopted the UK assessment format but there are concerns about the extent and weight accorded student involvement in QA processes, and the issue of transparency. Should a single framework and evaluation authority be introduced, it is to be hoped that the UK QA system would not be diluted in the interests of standardisation but rather that it would be improved upon.

10. DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM IN LIGHT OF BOLOGNA

Progress with degree classification reform within the UK has been disappointing, with little consensus on any of the proposed alternatives to the present system. However, as the information contained in the diploma supplement, which HEIs are being encouraged to introduce, is similar to that to be found in student transcripts, which detail final achievements, it would seem sensible for degree classification reform to take the route of the inclusion of transcripts. The blanket introduction of student transcripts would allow potential employers and postgraduate education providers to differentiate between the growing number of undergraduates awarded 2.1 and 2.2 degrees.

11. THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE: A MORE STANDARDISED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK'S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE (BOLOGNA AND THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (PMI 2))

The UK's position in the global market will suffer unless the necessary support mechanisms are put in place for international students. Language and cultural barriers mean that a number of students, particularly at postgraduate level where international students are most heavily represented, encounter difficulties in adapting to UK academic programmes. These students also often suffer social isolation. As the number of postgraduate international students in the UK has grown over the past decade support services have not kept pace. As a result, there appears to be a marked incidence of international postgraduates failing to make progress with their studies and being forced to withdraw from their courses, most notably at doctoral level. Greater input from universities, in terms of language support and clarification of culturally-defined expectations of postgraduate research, is therefore urgently required if the UK is not to lose ground in the international education market.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the University of Southampton

1. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages

- (i) Greater clarity of the value of UK awards throughout Europe.
- (i) Importance of having reference points of understanding in nomenclature and academic language for the interpretation of learning outcomes within and between national systems and the European framework.
- (iii) It will remove barriers to greater mobility between countries in Europe.
- (iv) The UK may be able to attract the best brains in Europe for second or third cycle degrees.
- (v) UK will be part of a greater club.

Disadvantages

- (i) Too much of a drive towards uniformity will undermine the broad aims.
- (ii) UK students may still be at a disadvantage in employability until such times as the language teaching in schools equips students to enter the European market.
- (iii) The Bologna Process for the 45 countries may be derailed by the Lisbon Strategy for the 25.
- (iv) UK's position in the global market could be severely damaged if the UK has to move from one year stand-alone to two year Masters programmes (cf US and Australia).

2. THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

- (i) One year Masters programmes—time spent or learning outcomes achieved?
- (ii) Integrated Masters.
- (iii) Integrated four year PhDs, and 1:3 PhD programmes.
- (iv) The worth of accreditation at subject level when the UK has a long tradition of external examiners that is not seen elsewhere in Europe.

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HE AWARDS FOR ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UG COURSES (HNCs, HNDs AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

- (i) The UK Masters provision has to compete with those of our European colleagues on both quality and cost. Currently UK Masters programmes are more expensive and shorter than comparators in Europe and are based on learning outcomes rather than notional hours studied, but indications are that access to international employment for UK graduates whose qualifications are not in conformity with the requirements of Bologna might be compromised unless the UK engages properly.
- (ii) The integrated four-year Masters courses in Engineering, Science and Maths do not meet the Bologna requirement for a separated two-cycle system, and, if they were made to, the way they are funded would have to change.

- (iii) To what extent is entry to Masters programmes contingent on the first subject, related material, or the graduate skills at bachelors level?
- (iv) Short courses such as Foundation Degrees (two years) would not qualify a candidate for a first cycle award, so at minimum they would need to be “topped up” by further study.

4. AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

- (i) Aware, but engagement is variable. In Southampton, we have a good level of awareness and scientific disciplines are especially engaged.
- (ii) Graduate entry to medicine across the country is through a first cycle (four year programme) that leads to a Bachelors degree and it is our belief that this is the right level. It is not PG level.
- (iii) In Physiotherapy and Nursing such programmes across the country are pre-registration programmes but are at M level.

5. OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

Yes, but only when language education at primary and secondary level prepares students with appropriate language skills as well as subject specific skills (eg science). This may change as more European Universities adopt English as the language of instruction.

6. THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SCHEME (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

- (i) A significant focus should remain on what the achievements of the students are, and not the time spent.
- (ii) The Diploma Supplement indicates the mark achieved, level and ECTS for every module taken. This is designed to indicate a level of competence which will be transparent between universities in different countries in Europe. The outstanding question is whether that equivalence can or should be established internationally given the questions raised about equivalence of degree outcomes in the UK in the recent submission of the QAA to the Burgess Committee on Degree Classification?

7. QA SYSTEMS IN HE (TEACHING AND RESEARCH); THE COMPATIBILITY OF UK PROPOSALS AND BOLOGNA

- (i) EHEA is a huge concept—the worry is that politicisation of QA in Europe in some cases is causing ossification of these into a legal code.
- (ii) There is a risk that the “European Standards and Guidelines” become prescriptive standards and a compliance list to be checked.
- (iii) Learning outcomes and credit—is the credit awarded at minimum pass, threshold etc—this would need specifying in the Diploma Supplement and there are differences across the EHEA.
- (iv) New paper on VETS from Europe strongly recommends a common credit system of values.
- (v) Confusion and complexity caused by Dublin descriptors and the new eight stages of the EQF.

8. DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM IN THE LIGHT OF BOLOGNA

The Diploma Supplement will render UK degree classification outmoded and of little value in the European job market.

9. THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE: A MORE STANDARDISED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UKS POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE

International accrediting bodies may be needed on a discipline by discipline basis to agree a common core of specific learning outcomes. The Tuning project has already made significant progress on this (Chemistry) and the other UK Professional Accrediting bodies should be encouraged to lead on this although it is not without its dangers.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Campaign for Science and Engineering in the UK (CaSE)

1. Campaign for Science and Engineering is pleased to submit this response to the Committee's inquiry into the Bologna Process. CaSE is a voluntary organisation campaigning for the health of science and technology throughout UK society, and is supported by over 1,500 individual members, and some 70 institutional members, including universities, learned societies, venture capitalists, financiers, industrial companies and publishers. The views of the membership are represented by an elected Executive Committee.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF A THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS FOR TO ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES (HNCs, HNDs, AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

2. The Bologna declaration and other ministerial statements that have followed it seem to have come from largely uninformed political imperatives on the part of politicians of various countries, aimed at satisfying their individual aims regarding public spending pressures rather than at providing international parity of outcomes at various levels of higher education.

3. Many countries contrasted the length of their first cycle qualifications with England's three year bachelor degree and believed that if they cut theirs to the same length, it would address difficulties over their costs of providing higher education.

4. However, they did tend to espouse the 3+2+3 model for bachelor's masters and doctorate. This contrasted with the UK's three or four year bachelor's degree, leading to a one year postgraduate master's level qualification. In the UK, entry to PhD level programmes is also much more flexible, with some people going on directly from a first degree.

5. The UK appeared to ignore the incompatibility of parts of our system with those of other countries, largely reacting (in a somewhat smug way) just to those other countries' desire to align the length of first degrees with ours.

6. This left the UK in a tangle. There would be enormous implications for the cost of higher education provision (both for the state and for the student) if we were to align our system with those of other countries.

7. There are two separate issues here that should not be conflated. There is nothing in Bologna that prevents the UK from operating one year postgraduate and short undergraduate courses. The problem is the nomenclature. We may no longer be allowed to award a Masters degree after one year of postgraduate study, or a Bachelor's degree after two years, as for Foundation Degrees.

8. If we believe these courses are useful in their present forms, then we should keep them, and if Bologna makes us change their names, then so be it. At present, for example, while there are one-year postgraduate diplomas (and, of course, the one year Postgraduate Certificate in Education) students prefer to have a Masters degree, especially if some other university is already offering an MA or MSc for much the same time and effort.

9. If, however, all one year courses led to a Diploma or Certificate, these would rapidly become standard and have all the status they needed. It would be quite wrong to abolish some of these courses or needlessly to extend them to two years, merely to comply with the Bologna two-year requirement for a Masters degree, and it is unnecessary—and quite possibly futile—to try to negotiate exemptions for them. Much the same applies to the Foundation Degree, HNC and HND.

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIS

10. For many continental universities, the most awkward problem they have had to solve is the move to the three-year first degree. This has not been a problem in the UK, even in Scotland. Because of this, however, there has been a tendency not to look carefully enough at the changes that will have to be made, and this can lead to unnecessary problems. In such situations as this, it is very important to consult widely and at an early stage, because any proposed change can cause problems that will not be anticipated except by people working in the area in which they will occur.

11. For example, the details of the implementation of the credit framework were largely left to "credit consortia", most of whose members were administrators. They imposed the requirement that students have to pass every module. This seems logical enough and it is what happens in many other systems, but students in the UK, especially in science and engineering have not traditionally been expected to do this, providing they demonstrated overall competence in their subject. Such students would now be deemed to have failed.

12. There are a number of ways of avoiding this outcome while complying with the requirements of a credit framework, but universities are having to devise them late in the day and after the details of the framework have been decided. Naturally, they are not all choosing the same solution. Had there been more widespread discussion of the Bologna Process at an earlier stage, a more satisfactory and preferable nationwide scheme could have been agreed.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

13. The chief barrier to mobility from the UK is language. Too few UK students can speak a European language well enough to study in it, and because English is more and more the international *lingua franca*, there is a much greater incentive for others to come to the UK and improve their English than for UK students to go abroad.

14. There is, however, a need for more UK graduates to be able to speak other languages, and measures should be taken to encourage this. The most important would be to improve and extend language teaching in schools, but universities could also include more language teaching in undergraduate courses.

15. The greater standardisation of courses will obviously make it easier for UK students to study abroad. In particular, it will be easier for them to spend a year or even a semester in another country. This would also be easier if UK degrees were less highly specialised than at present; perhaps the longer time envisaged between the first cycle degree and the PhD will lead to this.

THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

16. The ECTS is based on the number of hours of study. This is already causing difficulties in the UK, where learning outcomes and competencies have always been more important. The European system is much easier to operate in a very large and diverse system, but it leads to all sorts of anomalies. How much this matters depends on how much common sense people and institutions are prepared to use, and how much they are constrained by regulations.

17. If, for example, levels of pay are determined by the level of qualification that a person has, then there will be an incentive for people to go for those that actually reflect less in the way of learning outcomes and competences. This would be rather like the effect of league tables on the choice of GCSEs.

18. This question highlights a possibly serious problem. The ECTS is based on the number of hours of study and not on learning outcomes and competencies. This makes it different from, for example, many current UK vocational qualifications. The ECTS is easier to operate in a very large and diverse system but employers and others will have to recognise it for what it is, a very indirect and imprecise statement of a person's knowledge and skills. The ECTS should not be used as a qualification entitling a person to take certain jobs, be admitted to certain courses, or be paid more for doing the same work as a nominally less qualified colleague.

19. The solution might appear to be to standardise programmes so that credits at the same level do reflect more closely comparable knowledge and skills. Some movement in this direction would be both possible and desirable, but it would be wrong to make programmes less fit for purpose in the name of standardisation, especially when even at level 4 (first cycle university) half the age group is involved.

20. There is already a wide difference between courses in the same subject at different UK universities. This is essential if they are to suit the different students who attend them and it does not cause serious problems as long as all those concerned understand the situation.

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE (TEACHING AND RESEARCH): THE COMPATIBILITY OF UK PROPOSALS AND BOLOGNA

21. At all costs we must avoid reintroducing the intrusive, time-consuming, expensive and (as it turned out) largely useless scheme that was imposed on the universities in the recent past.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM IN LIGHT OF BOLOGNA

22. The advantage of the degree classification is that it provides a short and widely understood summary of how well a student did: "a class X degree in subject Y at university Z". That is as much information as most employers and others want to know, and if they need more, they can get it, because students can obtain detailed transcripts of their record.

23. Over the years, however, courses in most UK universities have become modular. It has become more and more difficult to compare the programmes of study of different students. Student/staff ratios have increased to the point where examiners cannot be sufficiently confident of their knowledge of the students to do more than convert marks into classes of degree by some algorithm. In any case, the great pressure for transparency has made it difficult for examiners to do anything else.

24. Degree classification would probably have been replaced by some form of grade point average even without Bologna; if there is pressure from Bologna to do this, we should not oppose it.

Memorandum submitted by Engineering Council UK (EC^{UK})

INTRODUCTION

1. Engineering Council UK (EC^{UK}) welcomes this inquiry by the Select Committee. The Bologna process and its implications for UK higher education have received very little external scrutiny in this country and EC^{UK} hopes that the Committee's Report will illuminate the issues and the policy decisions which need to be taken in respect of them. This submission, which has been drawn up in consultation with the professional engineering institutions, concentrates on two issues in particular of those which the Committee has included in its remit. These are the implications of a three-phase structure of higher education awards for UK Masters degrees, and in particular for integrated Masters degrees such as the MEng degree, and the possible implementation of a European Credit Transfer Scheme and the extent to which this recognises learning outcomes rather than workload.

ENGINEERING COUNCIL UK

2. Under its Royal Charter Engineering Council UK sets the standard of education, professional development and competence necessary for registration with it as a Chartered Engineer (CEng), Incorporated Engineer (IEng) or Engineering Technician (EngTech). The current standard, the United Kingdom Standard for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC) was published in December 2003. One part of it sets out the output standards which university engineering degree programmes must meet if they are to be accredited by one of the professional engineering institutions. EC^{UK} licenses the institutions to carry out the accreditation of degree programmes, and to assess and register individuals under UK-SPEC.

3. In addition, under its Charter EC^{UK} acts as the UK representative body in relation to the international recognition of registrants and of qualifications in engineering and related subjects. It is party to a number of international agreements about the mutual recognition of academic qualifications and professional status and plays an active role in international bodies concerned with engineering education and professional competence, both in Europe and in the wider world. It is a Designated Authority under the EU General Systems Directives on professional qualifications.

4. Engineering Council UK therefore has a vital interest in the nature of UK higher education in engineering and in its international standing. Of its nearly 250,000 registrants, around 20% are domiciled outside the UK. Many more will spend periods of time working on contracts and projects in other countries. It has been estimated that the total value of UK exports of engineering services exceeds £4 billion annually. Engineering is a global activity, and it is important that British engineers are able to operate freely and have their academic and professional qualifications recognised across the world. It is also important that the UK can continue to benefit from having high quality provision of higher education in engineering, and that engineering departments in UK universities can operate on equal terms with their European counterparts. One aspect of this will be their ability to participate in collaborative activities with those counterparts and to enjoy the benefits that these activities can bring. It is equally important that UK universities can continue to attract overseas students. This is especially the case for postgraduate courses, as European universities are increasingly providing postgraduate programmes taught in English.

5. In this context it should be noted that the British tradition of professional engineering formation differs from that in most other European countries. Here the standard pathway to professional status is through programmes of higher education, which in most of the UK are three (for an Incorporated Engineer) or four (for a Chartered Engineer) years in length, followed by a period of initial professional development (typically four to five years) and culminating in a professional review which ensures that the person can demonstrate the necessary competence to be registered. The higher education component is usually taken away from home and does of course require payment of fees, except in Scotland. Elsewhere in Europe, qualification is by way of a University Diploma, usually five years in length, with students often remaining at home and not paying fees. There are also differences in the number of years of pre-university education students will have had, and in the nature of this education. The British system has generally been found just as effective and British engineers have operated on at least equal terms with their European counterparts.

THE THREE-CYCLE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

6. Generally speaking the Bologna Declaration, with its declared aim of promoting mobility, should offer advantages to the UK as much as to the other signatories. However the aspirations may not be fulfilled, and mobility may in fact be impeded, if the implementation of Bologna results in an over-rigid framework or mechanisms for comparing degree awards in different signatory countries. We have particular concerns about this in relation to the two main aspects of the European Higher Education Qualifications Framework (EHEQF), namely the three cycle model and the use of ECTS as a basis for comparison of awards.

7. A key feature of engineering higher education in the UK for more than 20 years has been the integrated Masters degree, the MEng. About one third of the total of 17,000 home students entering engineering degree courses annually enter MEng programmes. The MEng is a four year programme (five years in Scotland)

which integrates both Honours-level and Masters-level learning. It provides a fast-track way to achieve the academic requirements for registration as a Chartered Engineer (otherwise an Honours degree followed by a separate Masters degree) and is designed as a preparation for professional practice. It is different in principle from an MSc in engineering which is generally designed as a stand-alone programme, following an Honours degree, which extends depth of study in a relatively closely defined discipline. The MEng degree achieves its Masters degree character by taking some of the areas of study found in an Honours degree in engineering to a deeper level but equally through integrating all the different aspects—mathematics, science, analysis, design, the economic, social and business context, and engineering practice. This integration is achieved in large measure through individual and group design projects. Generally the Masters level content will be distributed throughout the later stages of an integrated programme of study, rather than simply in the final year. This requires the programme to be designed as an integrated whole. UK-SPEC sets out clearly the learning outcomes which MEng programmes must deliver if they are to be professionally accredited, and these outcome statements have also been adopted by the QAA as its Engineering subject benchmark.

8. When the QAA introduced Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications in 2001 great care was taken to establish that MEng degrees could be placed within it at Masters level. In discussion it was established that the twin aspects described above—deeper study of some areas, together with integration of the whole field of study—indeed enabled the MEng to meet the Masters level descriptor. A key characteristic of the MEng is that it is designed as an integrated whole and that the Masters level nature of it is not established simply through a bolt-on final year added to a three or four year Honours degree. However, this does not accord with the three cycle system adopted under Bologna, under which the MEng would need to be separated into Bachelors and Masters degree components. This would require universities to re-design their programmes, but would remove the degree's essential programme characteristics. It would also create funding difficulties for both universities and students, since the Masters degree would be under a different funding regime, whereas at present the whole MEng programme has the same financial arrangements as an Honours degree. There are various procedural alternatives, such as awarding both an Honours degree and a Masters degree at the end of the programme, but these have an air of artificiality about them. Nonetheless they may have to be explored if the degree is to be maintained.

ECTS: TIME SERVED VERSUS LEARNING OUTCOMES

9. A much greater area of difficulty lies in the adoption of ECTS as the basis for comparison between qualifications and for helping them to be placed within EHEQF. If the general working relationship of two UK CATS points = one ECTS credit is accepted, then under the agreement reached at the ministerial meeting at Bergen in 2005 an integrated Masters degree would have to have 540–600 CATS points, of which a minimum of 120 would be at second cycle level. The five year MEng programmes in Scottish universities would indeed accumulate the required credits. However, four-year MEng programmes in the rest of the UK will have fewer CATS points (480) and therefore fewer ECTS credits (240), although they will deliver the same learning outcomes as their Scottish counterparts, as set out in UK-SPEC and the QAA's Engineering Benchmark. This is highly illogical.

10. EC^{UK} has worked with the QAA and the Europe Unit of Universities UK to produce advice to universities about how they might accumulate more credits within the final year of an MEng programme by, for example running projects and work placements over the summer vacation, or making the final year a full calendar year rather than an academic year. Changes of this nature might enhance the programmes and some universities are considering making them, but they have obvious resource implications and would require additional public funding. They would also be likely to have a deleterious impact upon research activity at a time when the Government is encouraging higher quality research. They might also be seen by those who wish to call UK degrees into question as an admission that these programmes were lacking in content. On a strict reading of the ECTS rules they would only accumulate a total of 15 extra ECTS credits, since the scheme supposes that only 75 credits in all can be amassed during one year, however intensive the learning and teaching may be. This would still leave the MEng at the lower end of the credit ranges agreed in Bergen, and open to suggestions that it was not a full second cycle qualification. It should be noted that the same difficulty affects MSc degrees which are usually twelve months in length; although the Burgess report on the use of academic credit in higher education in England, for example, suggests that these will have 180 credits or 90 ECTS, on a strict reading of the ECTS rules these could only attract 75 ECTS.

11. What is required is a reform of ECTS so that it reflects a more sophisticated relationship between workload and learning outcomes, instead of concentrating on the former. EC^{UK} strongly supports the statement made by the Europe Unit of Universities UK at Annex D of the Burgess Report, and the critique of ECTS set out there. In engineering, the UK approach is based very firmly on outcomes, and as noted above EC^{UK} has made clear statements about the expected outcomes from engineering degrees, which have also been adopted by QAA. An outcomes-based approach is much less common elsewhere in Europe, although the EURACE project on accreditation of engineering degrees, a project funded by the European Commission and in which EC^{UK} has played a prominent role, has included outcomes based on UK-SPEC within the framework which has been developed. Moreover other international agreements to which EC^{UK} is party, such as the Washington Accord which involves eight other mainly English-speaking countries, have now developed an agreed framework of learning outcomes as the main reference point for comparison of degrees.

12. Ownership of ECTS rests with the European Commission, and it is extremely difficult to identify how amendments to it may be effected. We understand the Commission may be undertaking a review of the scheme, but it is not clear how this will be carried out or what kind of consultation there will be. UK Ministers have said on various occasions that they are committed to an approach based on learning outcomes, and we hope that they will use all their influence, as the hosts for the next Bologna Ministerial meeting, to ensure that this is adopted. Unless this fundamental change in approach is brought about, the MEng and other UK Masters programmes will continue to be open to suggestions that they are not full second cycle qualifications. This could have implications for UK graduates who wish to undertake further study to doctoral level, especially if they wish to do so in another European country. It could also affect the international standing of the degrees and the universities offering them, with possible consequences for the standing of UK professional engineers. It is in the interests of UK higher education for its degrees to be seen as “Bologna-compliant”, but achieving compliance simply through length of programmes, or numbers of ECTS using the present system would be a high price to pay. This would not just be a monetary price (although the costs to government, HEIs and students would be considerable). While offering no obvious educational advantages it would put more obstacles in the way of those considering an engineering career, lengthen the period before beginning professional practice, and potentially act as a disincentive to taking up engineering with consequent impact upon the UK’s skills base.

13. Because of the role which the MEng has as a preparation for professional practice, EC^{UK} and the professional engineering institutions are seen by many in universities as the bodies which should make a decision about the future of the MEng. We are currently considering the matter, but would prefer to await the outcomes of the London ministerial meeting in May 2007 and of the review of ECTS before making any firm recommendations to universities. While we have welcomed Ministers’ statements of support for the MEng and other Masters degrees, as exemplified by Lord Adonis’ remarks in the House of Lords in July 2006, it would be beneficial to have some clearer statements from the Government about its aspirations for the future development of the Bologna Process and the UK’s place in it. While universities are autonomous institutions which make their own decisions, the responsibility cannot be entirely left to them or professional bodies. We hope therefore that the Government will fully appreciate the issues which the Bologna Process gives rise to and will accept that it has a part to play in helping universities and others associated with higher education to address them.

Memorandum submitted by the University and College Union

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Bologna Process is approaching the last phase of its original projected ten year programme and it is timely to look ahead. The unions representing academic and academic staff across Europe were admitted as consultative members of the process in 2005; in the UK, the University and College Union argues that the interests and expertise of staff must be fully engaged in the process at European, national and institutional levels if it is to be given reality. In particular, more must be done to raise the profile and awareness of “Bologna” at the national and the institutional level. There also needs to be further consideration of how best to protect and develop the range and diversity of the UK’s higher education course provision in the context of Bologna. Finally, the evolving implications of the approach reflected in the “Bologna” approach at the European level for the global higher education and research community need to be considered. We need to ensure that “Bologna” does not diminish the strong international character and collegiality of the UK and European higher education systems.

THE UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION (THE UCU)

2. UCU represents almost 120,000 academic and academic-related staff across the United Kingdom. It was formed by merger of the Association of University Teachers and NATFHE the university and college lecturers’ union on 1 June 2006. The UCU takes a leading role on higher education issues within the teachers’ global union federation Education International (EI), and provides one of EI’s two consultative representatives on the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

INTRODUCTION

3. The University and College Union, representing almost 120,000 academic and academic-related staff across the United Kingdom, welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Commons Education and Skills Committee Inquiry into the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process is generally little understood or discussed in the United Kingdom. In our view, because the UK’s higher education system appears broadly to meet the most high profile element of the process, the three phase structure of degree programmes, there has been considerable complacency about the potential impact of the Process on the higher education system and graduate employment in the United Kingdom.

4. In fact, Bologna has been a remarkable and rapid success, and has achieved in a relatively short time, a remarkable degree of agreement across a European region defined in far wider terms than even the expanded European Union. Further, it is now seen in the global context as a challenge to which other countries and regions need to respond. The London inter-ministerial conference in May 2007, the fifth in the sequence which started with Bologna, will start the movement towards the conclusion of the first phase of the Process. However, it is now clear that there will need to be a successor phase and in London in May, the debate on the shape of this next phase of Bologna will begin, to prepare the ground for the inter-ministerial conference hosted by the Benelux countries in 2009. Therefore the Select Committee inquiry is timely and important.

5. The University and College Union is a member of the global union federation Education International (EI), and the Pan-European Structure of EI argued forcefully from the start of the Process that the interests of academic staff needed to be directly represented within Bologna, on an equal footing with the university managements and the students, which had been admitted early on to the consultative structures of Bologna. Finally, at the Bergen Inter-ministerial conference in May 2005, EI was admitted as a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). One of the two EI members of the BFUG is from the UCU. It has quickly become clear that the voice of the teaching and research staff in BFUG is essential in order to establish a rounded picture of the impact of decisions taken in the Process on national systems and individual institutions.

THE UK AND BOLOGNA: INTERMEDIATE QUALIFICATIONS

6. The UK qualifications system has a number of idiosyncracies compared with the “Bachelor, Master, Doctor” model at the core of the Bologna Process. Some of these differences emerged quite sharply at the Bergen Inter-Ministerial conference. The question of HNCs, HNDs, foundation degrees and ordinary degrees has been dealt with so far by a compromise wording contained in the Bergen Communiqué, which allowed for the possibility of intermediate qualifications “within national contexts”. This would appear to mean that national systems may include such qualifications but that they are not part of the Bologna framework, which is acceptable as long as it does not inhibit their current pattern of use in the UK.

7. This is not the place to discuss the future of intermediate qualifications per se. However, the issue of sub-bachelor courses seems certain to re-open when the Government’s proposals to allow colleges to award their own foundation degrees, as proposed by the current further education and training bill, are developed. The capacity and the willingness of the Bologna Process to accommodate significant deviations from the core three phase model, or higher education courses which stand outside it, remain to be tested. UCU believes that these intermediate courses are an important part of the UK’s national higher education provision, successfully combining our vocational and higher education traditions. They are particularly important for access and progression, and valued by students and employers alike. Any developments within Bologna must not jeopardise their future.

THE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

8. The UK needs to have a clear perspective on the way in which the national and European qualifications frameworks articulate with one another but also with the Bologna Process. The much wider geographical scope of Bologna is a source of tension between it and the European Union. There have been robust exchanges in the Follow-Up Group between proponents of the Bologna model and of the EQF, and the two policy strands can generate new loyalties and tensions within national systems generally, and the issue of qualifications frameworks may bring this tension into sharp focus, but it is to be hoped that means can be found of making the different systems compatible. The UK will have a particular interest in this in view of the wide range of its intermediate qualifications and the emphasis placed on them to deliver the Government’s targets for participation in higher education. Both for the benefit of the UK higher education system and for our European interlocutors, the UK needs to make an evidence-backed case for sub-three year degree qualifications as part of the national system, on the basis of their impact on access to bachelors’ degrees and to the labour market.

9. There are a number of other issues which need to be addressed. Ordinary degrees in the Scottish higher education system do not lead to the second cycle, and in that sense the Scottish ordinary degree is also a sub-degree valuable in its own right. Another factor is the high number and wide range of essentially vocational degree programmes at sub-Bachelor, Bachelor and Master level. Similarly, “Bologna” also means that the current debate on degree classification in the United Kingdom cannot take place in a vacuum. It will need to take trends and proposed changes across the Bologna area into account. Bologna is now a system within which national systems operate, not a “bolt-on” extra.

MASTERS DEGREES

10. The range and diversity of programmes in the UK leading to Masters’ degrees, including not only variations in duration from less than one year to two or more, but also whether they are first or second cycle in Bologna terms has also been identified as an issue of difference between UK provision and the more homogeneous patterns being set up under the Bologna rubric. In Scotland the four-year honours degree and

Master degrees fits this pattern more easily. Arguably, the Masters' level is an area in which Bologna will have a major impact in the UK, encouraging some positive existing trends. These include moves towards the Masters level being used as the main route for professional qualification in some fields, or for continuous professional development as well as for more general lifelong learning. We believe it would be unfortunate if the United Kingdom's diversity of provision at this level, including the range of modes of study which reflect the lifestyles and needs of the mature student population, were squeezed out of the system. On the other hand, the requirements of Bologna could be turned to advantage in making both the objectives of study and the routes into study, at this level, more transparent, and also as a guarantor of quality and international recognition.

LIFE-LONG LEARNING

11. The Bologna Process has made strong commitments to Life-Long Learning, but this is likely to be a concept which varies widely in its application from country to country. In any elaboration of the concept, it is important that any proposals strengthen and build on the range of life long learning programmes and modes of study which have been built up in the UK, and adds new dimensions in terms of mobility and international recognition.

QUALITY

12. The BFUG appears to be moving towards a pragmatic approach to Quality Assurance, building on existing developments and particularly the work of the ENQA, which registers national agencies, rather than an elaborate reinvention of the wheel which seemed for a time to be a possibility. However the success of the Bologna Process in extending its reach so far so quickly may mean that UK institutions need to work hard within the emerging quality assurance structures to ensure the credentials of partner structures and institutions. Academic staff involved in this work will need to be supported in an increasingly complex task. Consideration may also need to be given to the needs of students if they are to fulfil the expectations on them to be active participants in quality assurance systems, and possibly training offered to students, as in Scotland. Any system adopted by Bologna needs to take account of the maturity of national systems and the potential additional costs and administrative burdens. UCU would argue that the Bologna Process should not place any significant extra quality assurance requirements on UK institutions.

MOBILITY

13. The mobility of staff and students, both for study and employment, is a key feature of Bologna, but one which the follow-up group has been handicapped by the lack of data. The UCU is working with EI to host a major seminar/conference within the Bologna official programme in London in February, entitled "Making Bologna a reality", on staff and student mobility, which is aimed at advancing the debate and providing a platform for the teachers' concerns regarding the Bologna Process. The deficiency in work and policy on staff mobility so far within the Bologna Process, can be directly attributed to the lack of a staff voice.

BOLOGNA AND THE WORLD

14. The Process is taking increasing interest in the way the Europe of Bologna relates to other regional and national developments elsewhere—what it has so far called the "external dimension". Historically the UK HE system has been both part of a European structure and tradition and, equally important, part of the global academic community. The undercurrents of globalisation and commodification of higher education and research, themselves part of the rationale for Bologna, are a challenge to the collegial model of international higher education, based on international cooperation. We see this collegial model as a key characteristic of the university. Therefore we welcome the Bologna emphases on some of the key European commonalities—the public service ethos of universities, institutional autonomy, collegiality within and between institutions, academic freedom, access and quality, even if there is an element within Bologna of recognising their market value as much as an assertion of them as intrinsic values of the university. It is essential that the protection of these characteristics is recognised as important to the goal of creating a European Higher Education and Research Area.

CONCLUSION

15. Finally, it is important for the UK Government to play a leading part in the forthcoming debate on the future of the Bologna Process after the initial phase is completed in 2010. There is still a huge job to be done in making the higher education community itself, and the wider public including in particular the employers, more familiar with the content and the goals of the Bologna Process. Further progress needs to be made to ensure that the current work on issues like quality recognition of qualifications, staff and student mobility, and labour market issues is completed and implemented effectively across the countries of the Bologna Process. There will be a need for a pro-active management of the system if it is to have an impact

on the lives of staff and students across the Bologna area. In our view this does not need to be highly bureaucratic, but should draw on the working methods which have distinguished Bologna from other European initiatives.

16. In particular this would mean keeping its core character as an inter-governmental process, while putting the secretariat on a more established footing so that it isn't the present "caravan" moving from city to city every two years. Arguably, the deepening of the process should be accompanied by a deepening of the expertise and authority of the secretariat. It must also lead to a more transparent system, making staff and students aware of the implications of Bologna in a more concrete way but also raising the awareness of employers—and ensuring that higher education institutions and policymakers in other global regions are aware of Bologna. A new phase of Bologna also needs to build on the start which has been made to bring the consultative partners (ie, the institutions, staff, students and other non-national government players) more completely within the process and the talks on what system should carry the process forward after 2010. The UCU and Education International would welcome that.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key action points to be addressed at the United Kingdom level include:

17. A programme of awareness-raising among UK institutions and academic staff, about the implications of Bologna.

18. Support for increased involvement of academic staff in the professional issues which must be addressed to make Bologna work, including mobility and career progression within a European context.

19. A serious national debate about the implications for the higher education system of the projected expansion of foundation degrees, in the context of Bologna's commitment to life-long learning.

20. Pro-active consideration of the second phase of the Bologna process beyond 2009, and the place of the UK system within the European and the global higher education and research community.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Heads of Chemistry UK (HCUK)

The Heads of Chemistry UK (HCUK) is the body that represents the interests of departments engaged in chemical education, scholarship and research in universities and similar institutions throughout the United Kingdom. Through its Standing Committee, the HCUK has considered the consultation paper carefully and the response from the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC).

The HCUK fully supports the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) response.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the UK Bologna Promoters

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 We welcome the Bologna Process and see it as a critical element of the Lisbon Agenda.

1.2 We see challenges and opportunities for the UK Higher Education sector in a more open, transparent and competitive European Higher Education Area.

1.3 We are concerned at the failure to engage with and promote outward mobility for UK students and staff.

1.4 We consider that the sector on a whole, not simply the representative bodies, need to engage actively and positively with the Process.

1.5 We welcome the development of a credit system throughout Europe although we recognise that this requires the UK to demonstrate how its credit recognition systems are compatible with ECTS.

1. This submission is written on behalf of the UK Bologna Promoters listed below.

2. The UK Bologna Promoters are nominated by the UK Government with support from the key Stakeholders and formally appointed with the approval of the European Commission, with contracts from the UK Erasmus National Agency, the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council. Each of the Bologna Promoters is active in Higher Education and has considerable experience of work and cooperation with colleagues and partners throughout Europe. They have been active in promoting and explaining all aspects of the Bologna Process to the UK Higher Education sector in a range of ways, including workshops, conferences, visits to institutions, response to telephone and email enquiries. They have all attended and contributed to Europe-wide Bologna Promoters training in:

- Learning outcomes.
- ECTS and the Diploma Supplement.
- Student mobility.
- The three-cycle system.
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

3. The comments which follow reflect their collective views arising from their experience and involvement in the process.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

4.1 The UK Bologna Promoters welcome the Bologna Process and in particular the involvement of institutions and students in its promotion and development. They see significant advantages for the UK system. The Process stresses the importance of transparency in relation to understanding and recognising qualifications, the content of degree programmes, the development of a Europe-wide credit system and increasing emphasis on learning outcomes.

4.2 The development of a three-cycle system provides considerable potential for the UK to market its second cycle Masters programmes on a Europe-wide basis. We are conscious, too, that countries and regions outside Europe, notably Australia and a network of countries in the Pacific region, are benchmarking their own systems against Bologna. Hence there is a truly international dimension to the Bologna Process, which with its emphasis on three cycle degree structures and the transparency of individual degree programmes, will be helpful to the UK.

4.3 At the same time we recognise that with greater transparency and understanding of the three-cycle system, the UK will be open to increased competition from Higher Education Institutions throughout Europe, which are increasingly offering full degree programmes taught in English for the international market. A particular difficulty in this context relates to the level of UK tuition fees in contrast to those applying in many countries which have either no or low tuition fees. It will thus be increasingly important for UK Higher Education Institutions to demonstrate the high quality and value of the qualifications which they offer and which within the context of the Lisbon Recognition Convention 1997 and the Bologna Process in general will be open to recognition procedures throughout the EU.

5. THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

5.1 We are not quite sure what the Committee had in mind in this term of reference. The agenda for discussion at the 2007 Bologna follow-up meeting, is determined in large part by the objectives set at the Bergen meeting in May 2005 and developed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group, which represents a number of European partners. The UK has stressed its commitment to work to deliver the objectives of the Bologna Process, including those established in Bergen.

5.2 We welcome the focus which we anticipate in London on the development of a common understanding of the doctoral cycle; the follow-up on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Europe; the increased emphasis on the social dimension and, above all, the concern to promote and remove obstacles to student and teacher mobility.

5.3 We are concerned about the outcome of the Working Group on the Portability of Grants and Loans, which might have serious implications in terms of student numbers for the UK, although equally, we recognise that UK students may be attracted by the relatively low cost of high quality degree programmes in other EU countries.

5.4 As far as the Bologna Stocktaking exercise is concerned, we would prefer to see a more evaluative approach to the stocktaking, which might involve a more critical and objective appraisal of where each of the Bologna countries stands in relation to the range of indicators which have been established. The current process depends on self-assessment and tends to present each country in the most positive light. The view on the ground is sometimes less confident of the achievements.

6. THE IMPLICATION OF A THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS FOR ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES (HNCs, HNDs AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

6.1 As far as we are able to judge from our engagement with the sector and on a European level, the three cycle structure of Higher Education awards does not present significant challenges to the UK. Sub-degree qualifications are now recognised in the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area and in the European Commission's European Qualifications Framework. However, questions have arisen in relation to UK integrated Masters degrees in terms of their classification as both first and second cycle degrees.¹⁵

6.2 Referring to one year Masters, we think that it is vital to stress that a UK one year Masters is normally one calendar year, often slightly more, in duration, as opposed to one academic year. Issues have been raised in relation to the number of ECTS credits to be allocated for a full calendar year Masters. The current version of the ECTS User's Guide suggests that the appropriate number of ECTS credits would be 75, whereas the UK practice since the introduction of ECTS in the pilot project, has been to allocate 90 ECTS credits for a full calendar year Masters. At the same time we are aware that in many other countries, Masters programmes continue for two academic years and are allocated 120 credits. The European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework envisages a range of credits for second level—Masters—programmes from 90–120 and therefore we do not consider that the differences should be a matter for concern. Nevertheless it is an area of debate.

7. AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

7.1 It is important to recognise that because UK Higher Education institutions are autonomous, there is no legal compulsion for them to implement the Bologna Process, such as the commitment to provide the Diploma Supplement to all students. The role of the Bologna Promoters in cooperation with the Stakeholders is, therefore, one of persuasion and encouragement.

7.2 Our experience suggests that, while the key stakeholders in the sector are aware and actively engaged in the Bologna Process, as are many of the senior managers in Higher Education institutions, the level of awareness within institutions among academic staff and students is relatively low. It is important, in our view, that the process of Bologna promotion should engage academic and administrative staff and students since over the coming years it will have an increasing impact in a wide range of ways. In this context we are concerned that the arrangements for Bologna Promoters will be suspended for seven to eight months in the first part of 2007 because there will be no Bologna contract from the European Commission and the UK Governments are unable to find bridging support for Bologna promotion during this period.

7.3 We are also concerned that there is a lack of understanding among employers about the process of radical change throughout Europe and the impact on the UK of this change. We would cite as an example the increasing use of the Diploma Supplement in other countries and the need for UK employers and students to understand that the Diploma Supplement will provide greater understanding of the qualification which an individual student obtains and set it in the context of the National Qualifications and European Qualifications Frameworks.

8. OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

8.1 It is our view that mobility is one of the driving forces behind the whole Bologna Process. The limited engagement of the UK Higher Education sector and UK students with the opportunities provided by EU mobility programme is a matter of concern. Mobility can help to enhance students academic and personal skills and competences and hence their employability. Within the Erasmus programme, France, Germany, Italy and Spain all send substantially more students than the UK. The UK has also been overtaken by Poland. We recognise that the Government has made a major contribution to encourage UK mobility through waiving the tuition fee for full year students; but it is our view that institutions, faculties and departments need to engage more actively in a European strategy which will embrace mobility within the curriculum for all subject areas. In our view, UK institutions will need incentives, through the funding system, to encourage more active participation in mobility programmes. Such incentives could be coupled with targets.

9. THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

9.1 It is important for the Committee to understand that the majority of countries within the Bologna Process have adopted ECTS as the basis for their national credit system using 60 credits as the norm for a standard academic year. In many countries this is being incorporated into the law. On the other hand, where credits are used in the UK, the unit for an academic year is 120. While this may be converted to and is compatible with ECTS (subject to the caveat in 9.2 below), it could nevertheless be seen to represent the UK

¹⁵ The degree of Bachelor is a first cycle degree and the Master is a second cycle degree. UK Integrated Masters are normally four year degrees which combine the Bachelor and Master degree in one qualification.

resisting part of the Bologna Process which has been adopted elsewhere. A number of countries which had credit systems have moved to the 60 credits. We recognise that ECTS in its current state is not a fully developed credit accumulation system, as it would be understood within the UK, but our experience suggests that it is evolving in that direction and increasingly emphasising the critical importance of learning outcomes and competencies.

9.2 An area of concern which we have voiced to the Stakeholders in the UK relates to the workload of a standard academic year. This is increasingly stated to be in the order of 1,500–1,800 hours throughout the EU, whereas for the UK the number continues to be quoted as 1,200 hours. We recognise that these numbers are notional/average and that the key dimension for comparability must be learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the public assertion of a significant differential in the stated normal and/or average workload may in the future be challenging for the UK.

10 QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE (TEACHING AND RESEARCH): THE COMPATIBILITY OF UK PROPOSALS AND BOLOGNA

10.1 We welcome the publication of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and are confident that the UK both at national and institutional level will be able to satisfy and implement the guidelines. We consider that the development of these guidelines will help in the promotion of student mobility, curriculum development and cooperation in joint degrees at first, second and third cycle. Moreover, the validation of the quality assurance processes in each of the signatory countries must be of benefit to staff and students. We hope that in particular it will facilitate the development of more joint Masters programmes. Mutual recognition of and confidence in the Quality Assurance systems of our partner institutions and countries should facilitate involvement in programmes such as Erasmus Mundus and allay concerns expressed by some institutions about how they will satisfy concerns about quality assurance.

10.2 In our view the Erasmus Mundus programme represents a real manifestation of the commitment of the European Union to enhance the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area, a key goal of the Bologna Process. UK institutions are active in this programme but it is noteworthy that in other countries the rate of participation is increasing. For this programme, the UK tuition fee remains an issue which challenges institutions in their collaborative activity.

11. DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM IN LIGHT OF BOLOGNA

11.1 We are not sure that this matter is of relevance to Bologna. We welcome the increased transparency which the Diploma Supplement and the transcript of records will give to the full range of students' performance and ability. The emphasis on the learning outcomes and acquired competences is, in our view, as significant as degree classification which, we are aware, is under review in the Burgess Group.

12. THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE: A MORE STANDARDISED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK'S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE (BOLOGNA AND THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (PMI 2))

12.1 The Bologna Process is not producing a "more standardised" Europe. It is, as we have explained, producing increasing transparency and understanding and facilitating dialogue and collaboration in curriculum development, joint programmes of study and mutual recognition. It is evident that there will remain diversity throughout Europe, at an institutional and national level within the broad framework prescribed by Bologna. At the same time, the substantial increase in transparency, the emphasis on student-centred learning and learning outcomes and competencies, and engagement with issues relating to employability give increased opportunities for the UK to attract the best and brightest students from the European Higher Education Area to courses at all three levels—first, second and third cycles, since students will be increasingly aware, as will employers, that the Bologna structure in its broadest terms operates throughout the Higher Education Area. The high fees which apply in England may be an obstacle to this process. We recognise that increasingly other countries are introducing or exploring the introduction of tuition fees; however they will for some time remain lower than the UK.

12.2 As far as the Prime Minister's initiative is concerned, the increasing attractiveness of the whole European Higher Education Area means that the opportunities for overseas (in European terms "third countries") students will increase enormously. Our partners are increasingly promoting their programmes and offering full degrees taught in English. This means that UK Higher Education may face increased competition but it also provides opportunities for partnership and collaboration which will offer students the possibility of joint degrees at all cycles.

12.3 In conclusion, as those active within UK Higher Education sector, we are committed to the Bologna Process, which we see as intimately linked with the Lisbon Agenda. We are concerned at the lack of engagement with mobility within UK Higher Education for staff and the students. We recognise the challenge of increasing competition, but also the opportunities for closer collaboration. We consider that

overall this will be of benefit to the UK, its institutions, staff and students. Above all, we recognise that this is a process which is gathering momentum throughout the EU; hence it is critically important that the UK and the UK Higher Education sector should engage in a proactive and supportive rather than defensive way.

LIST OF UK BOLOGNA PROMOTERS

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Position</i> | <i>University</i> |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Stephen Adam | Head of Undergraduate Studies, Politics | University of Westminster |
| Professor Tim Birtwistle | Professor of Law | Leeds Metropolitan University |
| Professor Malcolm Cook | Professor of 18th Century French Studies | University of Exeter |
| Dr Alan Davidson | Dean, Department for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching & Assessment | The Robert Gordon University |
| Anne Davies | Senior Lecturer, Head of International Programmes—School of Management and Economics | Queens University Belfast |
| Dr Howard Davies | Head of European Development | London Metropolitan University |
| Professor Wendy Davies | Pro-Provost European Affairs | University College London |
| James Dunphy | Project Administrator | The Robert Gordon University |
| Professor Diane Meehan | Dean of Faculty of Technology and Environment | Liverpool John Moores University |
| Huw Morris | Academic Registrar | University of Wales, Swansea |
| John Reilly | UK Higher Education Expert | |
| Professor Graeme Roberts | Formerly Vice-Principal (Teaching and Learning) | University of Aberdeen |
| Simon Sweeney | Head of Programme MA International Studies | York St John University |
| Dr Anthony Vickers | Head of Department—Electronic Systems Engineering | University of Essex |

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by John Reilly, Director, the UK Socrates Erasmus Council

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Mobility has been a neglected aspect of the Bologna Process in the UK.

1.2 The Erasmus Programme provides dramatic evidence of a serious challenge to the UK in the low number of outgoing UK Erasmus students.

1.3 UK mobility to and from the new partners and accession states—Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey—is low compared with the large member states.

1.4 UK institutions need financial incentives to participate more actively.

1.5 The European Commission has set a target for 2012 in the new Lifelong Learning Programme which requires the UK to improve its mobility substantially.

1. I am writing in a personal capacity based on my experience as Director of the UK Socrates Erasmus Council office in Canterbury. This is the UK National Agency for Erasmus, Tempus and Erasmus Mundus. Each of these programmes has a key role in the context of the Bologna Process. I have contributed as a UK Bologna Promoter to the paper prepared by the UK Bologna Promoters. In this note, I wish to focus on the issue of mobility.

2. The Sorbonne Declaration (1998) signed by Baroness Blackstone stated that—“Both undergraduate and graduate level, students would be encouraged to spend at least one semester in universities outside their own country. At the same time, more teaching and research staff should be working in European countries other than their own. The fast growing support of the European Union, for the mobility of students and teachers should be employed to the full.”

3. The Bologna Declaration, which arose from the Sorbonne Declaration, reinforced the commitment to student and teacher mobility.

4. Mobility has been emphasised at each stage of the Bologna Process. While there has been general support for the mobility of UK students, it has not been a priority either at national or institutional level, although the Government has made a major concession to full year Erasmus students in waiving the tuition fee.

5. Since Erasmus is the single largest European student and teacher mobility programme, it is appropriate to focus on it. The attached graph and statistics illustrate that while mobility from Germany, France, Spain, Italy and more recently, Poland has continued in an upward trend. UK mobility has declined steadily.

6. The HEFCE International Mobility Study (HEFCE 2004/30) suggested that the key reasons for the decline were financial pressures on students, the language deficit and cultural and motivational factors. Unfortunately the study was unable to undertake research in the major comparative European countries to explain their continued and steady growth.

7. My experience suggests that the key may lie in the cultural and motivational climate and, the lack of institutional incentives to support, encourage and promote student mobility. If Government policy, translated through the Funding Councils, provided financial incentives coupled with targets, I am confident that there would be a dramatic change in outward UK mobility. An increase in UK student mobility is essential for the future role of the UK in Europe.

8. The low level of UK mobility compounds a further problem. The ten new EU partner countries plus Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania find it difficult to send students to the UK because students from the UK are not going to them. UK institutions, understandably, are reluctant to admit more students on a non-reciprocal basis because they receive no funding for incoming Erasmus students. Insofar as exchanges are reciprocal, the funding received for the outgoing student could be said to cover the cost of the incoming student but it does not cover the additional costs of organising high quality inward and outward mobility.

9. As a result, while the UK is actively promoting the cause of Turkey's accession to the European Union, it is doing nothing to encourage and provide incentives for institutions and students to establish links with Turkish Higher Education Institutions, which are avid to establish Erasmus exchanges of students and staff with UK institutions. Large numbers of Erasmus students are travelling from the new partner countries to Germany, France, Italy and Spain, but relatively few to the UK. The markets in the new partner countries are burgeoning and the next generation of their leaders, in all walks of life, will increasingly have had part of their Higher Education formation in countries to which they will look for partnerships, rather than to the UK.

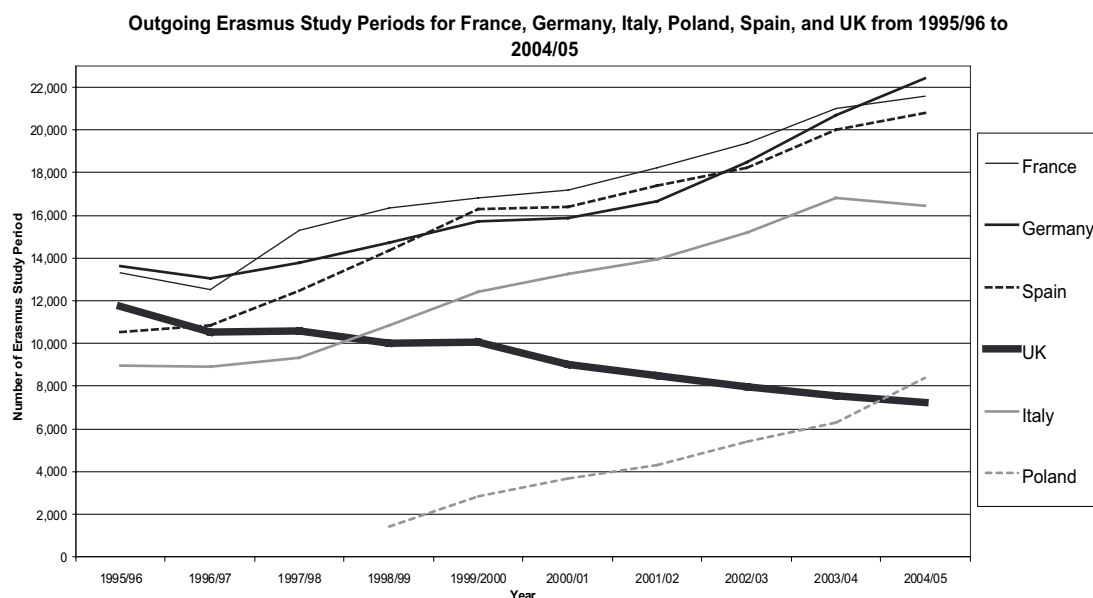
10. The low-level of UK participation and the financial costs to UK Higher Education Institutions is impeding a development which is critical to Britain's interests in an expanded European Market.

11. The Committee should bear in mind the challenging target set in the new Lifelong Learning programme of a cumulative total of three million Erasmus students by 2012, building on the current 1.5 million. While this is an ambitious target, the graph attached suggests that it is within reach for many of the countries involved. If the UK is to play its full role and secure its share of the Erasmus budget, its numbers would need to grow from the current 7,200 to 43,000 by 2012. From the total student body of a 2.3 million, this does not seem a great deal but it will not be achieved or even approached if it is not given priority.

12. The Erasmus experience enhances the academic range of students and contributes substantially to the skills and competences which increasingly employers are seeking. If we consider that it is important for the rest of the world to come to the UK, it must surely be important for a significant number of our future graduates in all walks of life to have experience of working and studying in another country as a part of their formal education.

ERASMUS INCOMING AND OUTGOING STUDENT MOBILITY

| Country | 2003-04 | | 2004-05 | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Outgoing | Incoming | Outgoing | Incoming |
| France | 21,007 | 20,249 | 21,576 | 20,512 |
| Germany | 20,710 | 16,856 | 22,445 | 17,265 |
| Italy | 16,810 | 12,706 | 16,419 | 13,373 |
| Poland | 6,278 | 1,455 | 8,388 | 2,332 |
| Spain | 20,035 | 24,039 | 20,818 | 25,501 |
| United Kingdom | 7,547 | 16,618 | 7,220 | 16,260 |
| Total | 135,388 | 135,388 | 144,010 | 144,010 |



December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the University of Bristol

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Bristol established a Bologna Working Group in 2004 to consider the implications of the Bologna Process. The Group identified the following main risks and opportunities for the University: the adoption of the Diploma Transcript, the status of one-year Masters and four-year integrated Masters programmes; the inclusion of the doctoral level within the Bologna framework; the promotion of mobility. In general the Bologna Process represents a significant opportunity for enhancing the experience and employability of our students. However, we are concerned about the lack of a clear national position on certain key issues, above all on the qualifications framework.

SUBMISSION

1. In 2004 the University of Bristol established a Bologna Working Group, reporting to University Education Committee, with the general remit of considering the implications of the Bologna Process for the University of Bristol, of advising Education Committee and senior management on these issues, and of ensuring that staff and students were adequately informed about the Process. The Group produced an initial report, attached as Appendix A,¹⁶ and has produced regular updates subsequently. In addition to reviewing relevant publications, the Chair and other members of the group have sought to keep abreast of developments by attending meetings of the European Universities Association, as well as seminars organised by the UUK Europe Unit and other such events.

2. The following points, deriving from objectives in the original Bologna Declaration and subsequent communiqués, have been identified as the main risks and opportunities in the Bologna Process for the University:

2.1 Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the introduction of the Diploma Supplement (1) This point was identified as having the potential to create greater opportunities for our students in the European labour market, as well as fitting in with our policy of providing graduates with more information on their achievements. It was originally identified as a significant risk in so far as a major effort would be required to meet the implementation deadline; however, in the event we were able to introduce the Diploma Supplement for students who graduated in 2006.

2.2 Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate (2) This was identified as the most serious risk, primarily because there appeared to be uncertainty about the status of UK Masters degrees, both stand-alone, one-year Masters and integrated four-year Masters, within the emerging Bologna Framework. There was the potential for the loss of students, above all from overseas, if our degrees were perceived as less testing, relevant or attractive than those available on the Continent and/or if they were not recognised as equivalent to European Masters-level qualifications. On the other hand, if our degrees

¹⁶ Not printed.

were to be accepted as fully equivalent this might represent an opportunity, in so far as we can offer a high-quality Masters-level qualification through one year of full-time study rather than through studying for two academic years, as is more common on the Continent.

2.2.1 The decision of the Bergen Conference to adopt graduate attributes and abilities (a “learning outcomes” based approach) rather than length of study period as the basic criterion for determining the level of a qualification was therefore extremely welcome. We are confident that our programmes do indeed produce students with the qualities and abilities expected at Masters level. Nevertheless, there remain considerable uncertainties, especially about the status and reputation of four-year integrated Masters programmes. We have taken steps to ensure that the final year of such programmes consists entirely of Masters-level units which are assessed at Masters level, and have reviewed material associated with these programmes to ensure that potential students and other interested parties are fully informed about the nature and quality of these programmes. However, our view is that this is not an issue that can be properly resolved through the actions of individual universities (see 3.1 below).

2.3 Inclusion of the Doctoral level as the third cycle (10) This objective has as yet received only limited attention within discussions of the Bologna Process; the obvious risk is that European norms may be agreed which are incompatible with our current practices and which may threaten the quality, integrity and/or reputation of our doctoral degrees. We take heart from the statement in the Bergen Communiqué, reaffirmed at the recent EUA “Doctoral programmes in Europe” seminar in Nice, that “overregulation of doctoral programmes must be avoided”, but nevertheless remain aware that perceptions of what constitutes overregulation may vary from country to country and between government and higher education institutions. We very much welcome the statements in section 2.3 of the summary outcomes of the recent Nice seminar, especially the references to “flexibility in admissions to doctoral programmes” and that access to the third cycle should not be restricted to entry via a Masters qualification.

2.3.1 In addition, we are concerned to preserve the freedom of individual countries to determine the status of doctoral candidates. Whereas in continental Europe, institutions are encouraged to ensure that their practices are similar in respect of both doctoral candidates and early stage research staff (*cf* the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers), in the UK doctoral candidates retain their status as students, giving them a number of advantages, for example, exemption from income tax and national insurance contributions.

2.3.2 At present, signing up to the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers is voluntary, and the EC has assured institutions this situation will not change. However, at the Nice seminar it was made clear that we could not rule out the possibility of the EC taking account of formal adoption of these documents when considering institutional bids for resources (although linking this with a “label” now seems not to be under consideration). This will only be a problem for the UK if the EC does not recognise that alignment with section 1 of the QAA Code of Practice: postgraduate research programmes and with UK employment law provides equivalence for UK institutions.

2.4 Promotion of mobility (4) and of the European dimension in higher education (6) Both these objectives represent significant opportunities for enhancing the attractiveness of our programmes (whether through the creation of joint programmes or through increased opportunities for students to study abroad as part of their degree), and we work to ensure that faculties are kept informed of developments in this area. While we aim to ensure that there are no barriers to student and staff mobility, there are some significant impediments that are largely beyond our control. First, the costs of travelling and living abroad for a short period of time (additional funding for the Socrates/Erasmus programme appears to be intended to increase the number of exchanges rather than the funding available to support each exchange). Second, the limited linguistic ability of some students who might otherwise wish to take up this opportunity, is such that we cannot bring them to a level where they would be capable of studying in a foreign language without an unacceptable impact on the subject-specific content of their degree programme.

2.5 We have considered the possibility of adopting the ECTS system to improve the “translatability” of our qualifications (3), but concluded that the system was excessively crude, both in terms of its definition of “credits” and in its failure to distinguish between levels of credit, in comparison to our existing credit framework. We have decided instead to record on undergraduate student transcripts that 10 credits under our system are approximately equivalent to five ECTS credits. As the translation at taught postgraduate level is even more inexact, we are not attempting to link ECTS with our own credits for these programmes.

2.6 The promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance (5) was originally identified as a potential risk, with concern that we might in due course be presented with a European QA system that was excessively bureaucratic and unsuited to British HE. Subsequent discussions, helpfully facilitated by ENQA, suggest that this is a remote possibility.

2.7 Other objectives, for example the emphasis on Lifelong Learning (7) and the involvement of students in decision-making (8), simply correspond to our existing activities.

3. The above points are likely to be relevant to all UK HEIs. However, they also raise wider issues about how the UK as a whole, both government and the higher education sector, has responded and should in future respond to the Bologna Process. In contrast to most European countries, where the Bologna Process was imposed on universities through legislation and in many cases without adequate consultation with HE practitioners, the autonomy of UK universities means that their response to European imperatives can be

properly tailored to the nature and requirements of their research and teaching activities, greatly increasing the likelihood of embedding it successfully and economically. For this to happen properly, however, it is vital that those issues which need to be resolved at national level are handled in a way that fully meets the needs of universities and is based on full consultation with them.

3.1 This issue can be best illustrated by the question of the status of four-year integrated Masters degrees, discussed in 2.2 above. The decision of the Ministerial Summit at Bergen in 2005 that each country should develop a national framework of qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA looked as if it should resolve the problem, since such a framework—which would clearly have to be developed under academic leadership in close consultation with universities and other key stakeholders—would surely include a clear statement about the status of these programmes. However, we have not as yet heard that any body is taking responsibility for developing such a framework, on which work is supposed to have commenced by 2007, and we are not aware that the Government has taken any steps to meet its commitment from Bergen.

3.2 In the meantime, we are in a position of uncertainty over the likely future status of integrated Masters programmes. The credibility of these programmes as genuine Masters-level qualifications is surely a national issue, not something confined to individual institutions. However, the only guidance available, in a briefing note produced by the UUK Europe Unit, offered a range of quite different possible responses which individual universities “might consider”, with no indication of the status of this advice or of whether there had been proper consultation with universities or the relevant accreditation bodies. In the absence of clear and credible leadership on this issue, there is a significant risk that the UK might adopt a piecemeal, institution-specific response to the problem of ensuring that these qualifications are accepted across the continent. We are aware that some institutions have indeed begun discussing the adoption of policies, such as extending the final year of study or seeking to introduce vacation work placements, which we would regard as problematic; were they to do this (which of course as autonomous institutions they are fully entitled to do) it could undermine the credibility of all UK integrated Masters programmes which did not adopt this model.

3.3 We feel that there is a need for a proper consultation, with representatives both of universities and of the various professional bodies which accredit and oversee these programmes, to develop a clear and coherent national position on the nature, credit requirements and organisation of integrated Masters programmes, to which institutions could then refer in developing their own responses in accordance with local circumstances.

3.4 It is equally important that UK Higher Education should be able to present a clear and united front in discussions of other issues, such as the future organisation of doctoral study. If the UUK Europe Unit is to continue to be the body which takes the lead in representing the UK position, there needs to be much clearer and more effective mechanisms for consultation and feedback, to ensure that it can properly represent our practices and the rationale behind them, as well as our concerns and aspirations, in Bologna-related discussions.

3.5 In the meantime, we will continue to send representatives to European Universities Association conferences and other relevant events, to ensure that we remain informed about current developments in European Higher Education and are able to contribute to discussions and debates.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Institute of Physics

HEADLINE ISSUES

- It is impossible to have a sensible debate on the impact of the Bologna Process without the Government or its agencies taking ownership of the key issues and showing leadership at both a national and European level.
- There is a real risk of our Masters, ie standalone (ie MSc) or integrated (eg MPhys/MSci), not being recognised throughout Europe as second cycle qualifications. Whereas, the Bachelors is a general qualification, the integrated Masters is the minimum for professional practice in the UK. Hence, it would be a disaster if it was only considered as a first cycle qualification throughout Europe.
- Currently, with no pressure to change, most university departments would defend the integrated Masters. They would, however, embrace the standard 3+2+3 Bologna model, provided the second cycle was properly funded. If we do keep the integrated Masters, we have to do it properly and not side-step the issue by attempting to make it compliant with the Bologna Process.

 IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The Bologna Process

The four-year integrated Masters in physics, the MPhys/MSci, is an enhanced undergraduate degree which is offered alongside the traditional three-year Bachelors (ie BSc) in many UK university physics departments. The length of time taken to undertake this enhanced degree followed by PhD study is 4 + 3 years. In some cases a graduate student may also study a traditional MSc degree, which is 12 months in length. These courses in physics produce high-quality mathematically-competent graduates who are eagerly sought by employers. The MPhys/MSci, in particular, is the requisite qualification for professional practice that leads to highly skilled researchers needed by industry and academe.

One of the key Bologna objectives is the adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate (ie Bachelors) and graduate (ie Masters). This objective is the one that requires the greatest change and which is most controversial. This represents a break with the tradition in most European countries that first degrees are at least five years long. Effectively, the objective has led to the implementation in physical science and engineering of a 3 + 2 + 3 standard higher education (HE) model across Europe.

This reform poses potential problems for the international recognition of UK Masters level degrees since this level is reached after four years (ie 4 or 3 + 1) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) rather than the five years (ie 3 + 2) expected in most other European countries.¹⁷ This particularly affects science and engineering degrees because of their international nature and because the Masters level is regarded as the minimum for professional practice throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In Europe there is a significant risk that our graduates (at Masters level) may be considered to be at a level significantly lower than the EHEA norm which will have a potentially deleterious effect on their prospects for professional employment or for progression to Doctorate programmes in other countries.

Furthermore, the EHEA qualifications framework does not refer to these integrated Masters level programmes which now only exist in the UK, Norway (NTU Trondheim) and in the French Grandes Ecoles. However, the communiqué from the Bologna Seminar on Masters Degrees (Helsinki 2003) contained a stipulation that they could continue in certain circumstances.¹⁸ The actual problem arises because of the way in which the Bologna degree structure has been implemented rather than the particular stipulations in the Bologna Declaration on the duration of degrees. It is important that these courses meet international standards, and compliance may mean that these courses undergo some amendments. However, it is imperative that generic interpretations of the requirements for compliance develop in a manner that does not lead to adverse subject-specific consequences.

Another key concern relates to the funding of the second cycle. Funding for students taking Masters level qualifications is already a problem, especially for taught postgraduate courses (ie 12-month MSc degrees) as there is usually no funding available. This demands urgent consideration at the UK government level.

The effect on the UK position

From the UK's perspective, the Bachelors/Masters structure already exists so we are not so strongly affected by the 3 + 2 + 3 proposal so long as our MSc degrees continue to be recognised in the rest of Europe, despite being only 12 months long. This is, however, unlikely to be the case. An extension of the second cycle by one year is unlikely to be welcomed by the majority of students in view of the financial implications of an extra year's tuition fees and living costs. Neither is it clear whether universities would be funded by the funding councils for the extra student numbers.

Another problem arises when we consider the effect on the four-year integrated Masters degrees since a requirement to structure studies on the basis of two cycles implies that we reconstruct these degrees as separate Bachelors and MSc degrees—a solution which is unpalatable and will lead to serious drawbacks. This solution implies a loss of coherence and efficiency in the formation of Masters level graduates. It also is likely to lead to a significant fall in the number of Masters level graduates because of the lack of financial support (eg student loans) for the fourth year, except for those MSc courses designated for advanced course studentships by the research councils. The proposal would also increase the confusion between the current MPhys/MSci and the MSc. In addition, it would probably lead to a decrease in the number of students going on to PhD courses since the new European pattern requires a Masters to be awarded before starting a PhD programme. Having a proper debate on these issues is very difficult given the current funding regime.

¹⁷ The Scottish situation is not addressed in this submission because of the differences in their educational system to that of EWNI.

¹⁸ http://www.aic.lv/ace/ace__disk/Bologna/Bol_semin/Helsinki/index.htm

UK physics degrees within the Bologna Process

The Bachelors degree in physics should have no problem in being recognised and appreciated in the new post-Bologna framework. It develops physics competences better than most new three-year Bachelors being developed in the rest of Europe. It will also enable students to get closer to the frontiers of the subject and will certainly be “relevant for the European Labour Market”, if not for high-level physics related employment. Its weakness could be that it may not provide as good a theoretical foundation for advanced MSc courses as might be found elsewhere in Europe.

However, there are some concerns about the 12-month long, specialised postgraduate MSc degrees in physics or related areas. They should be seen to meet the 90 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credit criterion, but there will be severe doubts whether the rest of Europe will accept this because the ECTS guidelines state the maximum number of credits for a 12-month period is 75. This may require pressure from the UK government in the Bologna Follow Up Group. MSc courses that are not genuinely at Masters level (eg “conversion” courses) may find difficulty in gaining recognition as a second cycle qualification.

The situation for the four-year integrated Masters degrees is still unclear. They have the advantages of integration and coherence over separate Bachelors and MSc degrees and are also more efficient because the gap between the end of the Bachelors and the start of the Masters, particularly if there is a change of institution, is wasteful. However, steps should be taken to ensure that there are at least 60 ECTS credits at genuine Masters level and also that some Masters level work starts before the fourth year. More may be needed. However, the 3 + 2 model is a possibility for a number of physics departments, but only if the second cycle is fully funded. This is the crux of the problem where we need leadership from the Government. A decision needs to be made as to whether we wish to keep the integrated Masters—if so, then we need to fight for its recognition.

Other approaches

The UK can continue to ignore the Bologna Declaration and carry on as if nothing is happening. This is a risky strategy as it would invite isolation and could seriously disadvantage the employment opportunities of our graduates. Europe is important for our graduates for several reasons not least because they have the right to live and work in any EU country and they will be in competition for employment with graduates from elsewhere in Europe. Another approach is to engage in debate with our European partners and to try to ensure that the Bologna Declaration is applied or interpreted in ways that are amenable to us.

In 2003, the Institute organised a joint town meeting with the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) to discuss alternative models to the proposed 3 + 2 + 3 in the Bologna Declaration. The main conclusion from the meeting was that both learned societies will continue to support the inclusion of their respective four-year integrated Masters degrees, ie MPhys and MChem as second cycle qualifications, and campaign for the acceptance of the 4 + 3 model.

The main outcome of the discussion on the various models was as follows:

- The 3 + 3 model is in major conflict both with the Bologna Process and practice in the rest of Europe. There are already some universities that do not allow Bachelors graduates to progress to PhD programmes. Plus, there are issues of research council funding that need to be considered. If universities continue offering the 3 + 3 model, this will seriously undermine the recognition and acceptance of the PhD as a third cycle qualification.
- The 4 + 3 model could be allowed but the final year of the first degree should be lengthened and accepted as 90 ECTS credits. There is a real danger of it being just being regarded as 75 ECTS credits, with associated funding implications. However, lengthening the final year will have implications for both students and universities.
- A better option might be the 3 + 1 + 3 model in which the “1” is a 12-month MSc degree, but there are questions about the funding of the second cycle which need to be addressed, and also the uncertainty over European and other overseas students fitting into this model.
- The 3 + 2 + 3 model is the standard system in Europe post-Bologna and would be the best solution to achieve harmonisation with the rest of Europe, but will require a substantial change to the current funding model (for the second cycle) if it is to be implemented. This model does permit more flexibility in terms of access. In addition, any gaps in a student’s knowledge of the subject can be addressed in the second cycle.

A further consideration which affects the third cycle is the increasing length of UK PhD programmes. PPARC are now funding some PhD students for up to four years, and EPSRC for three and a half years with the flexibility within a university to use funds to provide four years of support. This could mean that a programme of study involving an MPhys/MSci followed by a four-year PhD results in a 4 + 4 system, or it possibly could be 3 + 1 + 4 if the first cycle is a three-year Bachelors degree. Some thought needs to be given to allowing a flexible approach to the organisation and length of Doctoral programmes.

THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

The core Bologna objectives are all linked. Thus, the overarching aim of mobility of graduates and students is helped by “a system of readable and comparable degrees”, which in turn is helped by a two-cycle system, by a credit system and by co-operation in quality assurance. There is a particularly important link between the use of ECTS credits and the notion of comparable degrees. ECTS credits are defined so that an academic year contains 60 ECTS credits. It is deceptively easy to make the jump from “comparable degrees” to “equal numbers of ECTS credits”. But it is also naive, especially when applied across the range of very different educational approaches and routes found across Europe. ECTS credits are measures of student workload but many factors determine the level reached by a degree programme, not just the amount of work done by the student.

The norm for the student workload corresponding to one ECTS credit is 25–30 hours per week corresponding to 1,500–1,800 hours per year. The typical UK student workload is significantly less than this (and this is fairly well known in the rest of Europe) so that our ECTS credits are regarded as light measures. This exacerbates the credit range problems listed in this section.

Moreover, there are significant differences across Europe in teaching methods and also differences in starting points and preparation. The crucial criteria for comparing degrees should be “learning outcomes” achieved, not time spent. The problem is that learning outcomes are difficult to specify clearly and are usually qualitative. Adding up ECTS credits is easy and their numerical nature gives a false sense of precision. The use of ECTS credits appears to be better than simply counting years but in practice it differs only in the fact that it is able to handle the over-run problem by allowing students more time to accumulate sufficient credits.

So, the 3 + 2 + 3 system becomes 180 + 120 + 180 ECTS credits. Assigning credits for PhD programmes is dubious in the extreme, and should not be implemented. But for the Bachelors and Masters stages, specification in terms of ECTS credits is probably unavoidable as a great deal of momentum for its use has been acquired and there is no doubt that it is useful. Sufficient flexibility in its application so that important differences can be taken into account is needed.

The limits for first cycle degrees have been set at 180–240 ECTS credits, so we must require each graduate to have “passed” at least 180 ECTS. In practice this means no failed units are allowed.

For the second cycle or Masters stage, the range is 90–120 ECTS credits with a minimum of 60 at second cycle level. So the UK MSc could be compatible with the Bologna Process allowed range since it can be argued that they should be assigned 90 ECTS as they represent about 50% more work than a normal undergraduate academic year. However, it remains out of line in terms of European wide expectations for physical science and engineering (ie 75 ECTS credits).

The four-year integrated Masters courses still have a problem with the ECTS count. The two problems which affect the MPhys/MSci etc. are firstly, that they are only four years/240 ECTS long and therefore are 30 ECTS short of the framework stipulations for Masters level but are within the range for first cycle degrees; and secondly, the expectations of students, universities and employers throughout Europe are that students with a second cycle degree will also have a first cycle degree. However, any step to increase the final year of the MPhys/MSci by 30 ECTS will have implications for both students (ie finance) and universities (ie staff having to teach over the summer, at the expense of their research).

Thus, our MPhys/MSci graduates risk having their degrees regarded as being first cycle and not real Masters degrees, and this is completely unacceptable.

THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE: A MORE STANDARDISED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK’S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE (BOLOGNA AND THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PRIME MINISTER’S INITIATIVE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (PMI 2))

The UK hope is that the process of modernising Europe’s universities (greater autonomy, better governance, tuition fees, more competition etc) will lead other European countries to copy the UK system and so reduce the length of time to reach Masters level to four years. But many universities in the rest of Europe are reluctant to accept that the UK reaches Masters level after four years as that puts pressure on them to reduce the length of their programmes, which they do not want to do. This pressure mainly manifests as a requirement for students to be able to finish their university studies with a Bachelors degree which leads to employment.

A shift to the UK system could be done for economic reasons (to reduce costs for students and governments) and will be based on a judgement that in the rest of Europe there is at present an overly academic emphasis, much redundant content and insufficient attention to the needs of employers. There is some truth in this but it is overstated. A change of paradigm to a student-centred educational approach based on learning outcomes is assumed to lead to this reform. However, although this shift to a learning outcomes approach and greater attention to the needs of employers is well underway in the rest of Europe (led by the Tuning Project) there is no sign of it leading to a reduction from five to four years for Masters level.¹⁹ Indeed the Tuning Project has been the main origin of the 90 ECTS lower limit on second cycle

¹⁹ <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

degrees and the norm of 120 ECTS. However, the Bologna Process is leading to an appreciation of the employability of first cycle graduates and may lead to fewer students staying on for Masters degrees, but all our partner nations are assuming (and most are finding in practice) that the vast majority of their first cycle graduates will stay on for a second cycle.

The other hope is that the forces of competition will give us a market advantage since our shorter courses will be more attractive to students and are of high quality. Thus, the UK has an opportunity to increase its enrolment of students on MSc degrees. We also have an advantage in having great experience of operating MSc degree programmes, particularly in adjusting them to the graduate employment and student market. In this respect, we are closer to the US and we could act as a bridge between the US and Europe. This advantage should not be overplayed, however, as there are rapidly growing numbers of students from Asia (particularly China and India) taking MSc degrees taught in English in other European countries. The numbers probably already comfortably exceed those in UK universities. But this advantage is only true if they are fully recognised and accepted in the rest of Europe as at least of equal value on the labour market and are not regarded as inferior in level.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

The main issue is one of language, ie most UK students are not multi-lingual. Hence, not enough UK students go to study in Europe, something from which they could gain financially. There are also problems of degree recognition, ie in terms of assessing the year abroad, learning outcomes and the qualifications framework. Paradoxically, the Bologna Process will probably inhibit “horizontal mobility”, in which students spend a period from three months a year at a university in another European country and transfer credit back to their home university degree, since it would be harder to fit this into a 3 + 2 structure.

The Bologna Process mainly aims to promote mobility between cycles, so that a UK student might do a Masters degree in say, the Netherlands in English, and vice-versa. This is so-called “vertical mobility” and should definitely increase under Bologna to our advantage, but only in the sense of more students coming to the UK and if our degrees are in line with the rest of Europe. However, there are serious fees issues here in the UK context.

Furthermore, a similar concern relating to postdoctoral research assistants (PDRAs) was expressed by an international panel of physicists who recently undertook a review of the quality of the UK’s research efforts,²⁰ and offered comments on mobility stating that:

“EU networks offer unique opportunities for UK PDRAs. To the Panel’s surprise, it found that many students and PDRAs were hesitant to apply for positions at EU universities because of a perceived language barrier. UK participation in international projects (eg CERN) is important because these institutions are at the cutting edge scientifically. The Panel found clear evidence that the large influx of non-UK PDRAs had been very beneficial for the competitiveness of physics and astronomy research in UK universities.”

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

The Institute, in collaboration with the RSC has raised the issue amongst the physical sciences academic community, with the publication of reports, and organised meetings etc. However, in spite of this HEIs overall are not taking the implications of the Bologna Process seriously enough, as there has been no ownership, leadership or funding, thus, there is no impetus for them to be sufficiently engaged.

The Institute notes the laudable efforts of the Europe Unit that is funded by Universities UK and the funding councils,²¹ to raise awareness of the issues, but would like to see them tackle more of the awkward, core issues that have been raised in this submission, in addition to providing background information on the Bologna Process.

UK universities need guidance on what is acceptable and desirable in the post-Bologna era. Are any changes needed in our degree programmes? Do they need to be enhanced in any way? If so, what are the time and credit ranges which are acceptable for MSc and MPhys/MSci degrees? Would the Government support such changes financially?

What is needed is some leadership. The Government needs to grasp the nettle of the issues of concern, and not continue to be so blasé about the implications of the Declaration, continually stating that the UK is not legally bound to adopt the Declaration, therefore no consideration needs to be given to any possible modifications in the light of the Bologna Process. It may be true, but it is the fact that other European nations will bind to the Declaration that will have ramifications for UK graduates and postgraduates. The Government needs to consult more with those in universities actively involved in European developments in the Bologna Process, particularly those in science, engineering and mathematics departments. In addition, the views of employers also need to be sought.

²⁰ <http://www.iop.org/activity/policy/Projects/International—Review/index.html>

²¹ <http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/home/>

THE IMPLICATIONS OF A THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS FOR ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES (HNCs, HNDs, AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

How is a unilateral move by the UK to shorten undergraduate courses consistent or compliant with the Bologna Process?

THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

This meeting provides an ideal opportunity for the Government to ensure that the UK is seen to be taking a lead in shaping European HE policy. This certainly has not been the case, as evidenced by the omission of the implications of the Bologna Declaration in the 2003 HE White Paper.²²

Based on all of the above evidence, it is imperative for the UK to have a well recognised second cycle qualification system, whether that is the four-year integrated Masters or a properly funded 3+2 system. There can be no doubt that the MPhys/MSci is an excellent, well respected qualification, but that is not up for debate. The issue is whether it will be accepted as a second cycle qualification throughout Europe—having it recognised as first cycle would be a disaster. This is where the Government needs to show some leadership, by taking ownership of the issue and making an informed decision as to whether we keep the integrated Masters in its current form, make it compatible with the rest of Europe, or embrace the 3+2 model with appropriate funding for the second cycle. Universities themselves cannot unilaterally initiate a move to a two-year second cycle system, because of the funding implications. In addition, consideration in this model will have to be given to universities not to charge top-up fees for the second cycle, as many students would not be prepared to incur the increased debt associated with a fifth year.

To make the integrated Masters degrees compatible with the rest of Europe they would need to be lengthened by about 30 ECTS or about half an academic year and also they should be configured so that both a Bachelors degree and a Masters should be delivered with students having the option of leaving with a Bachelors degree after three years. However, such changes in duration would bring severe problems for students (in terms of funding) and universities. For instance, requiring academic staff to teach over the summer would have a devastating effect on the research output of HEIs as the summer is the period when staff involved in collaborations with other institutes can have a period of concentrated research. It is also the period of the major international conferences.

In addition, the long established three-year Bachelors route to PhD level is explicitly prohibited by the Declaration. Unless the Government effectively raises awareness of the issues, many UK universities will continue to adopt the 3+3 model, which will seriously undermine the recognition and acceptance of the PhD as a third cycle qualification in Europe. It would help if the research councils would recognise this and stipulate a Masters level qualification as requirement for PhD student funding.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)

INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS

The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is a UK-based international organisation with over 75,000 members ranging from professional civil engineers to students. It is an educational and qualifying body and has charitable status under UK law. Founded in 1818, ICE has become recognised worldwide for its excellence as a centre of learning, as a qualifying body and as a public voice for the profession.

ICE has close links with the HE sector, for example through the Joint Board of Moderators' (JBM) accreditation—jointly with three other professional bodies—of a wide range of degree programmes, including four year MEng, three year BEng and foundation years.

Under the UK Standard for Professional Competence (UK-SPEC) (2004) published by the ECUK, the educational base for registration as a Chartered Engineer (CEng) can be achieved by successful completion of an integrated MEng degree.

INTRODUCTION

The ICE is concerned about the impact of Bologna on the integrity and viability of the MEng beyond its role in professional qualifications. The MEng is an integrated undergraduate programme normally of four years duration (five in Scotland) with a credit rating of 480 (UK CATS points)/240 (European ECTS credits). This is higher than that for the UK bachelor degree (360/180). The MEng also differs significantly from the UK bachelors degree in depth of understanding, the learning outcomes and the amount of M level work (as defined by the National Credit Framework). The MEng is respected amongst employers.

²² <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/White%20Pape.pdf>

The Bologna Accord model is for a first cycle/second cycle system of 3+2 years with the first cycle attracting a minimum of 180 European credits and the second cycle 90 European credits. This makes a total of 270 ECTS (minimum). Thus, the four year integrated undergraduate MEng programme sits uncomfortably between the first and second cycles of degree as defined under the Bologna Accord.

There are conflicting reports about whether or not the four-year integrated MEng will be recognized as a second cycle qualification under the Bologna Accord. This uncertainty is not helpful and ICE believes that the Government has a key role to play in ensuring that UK qualifications are recognized. It is imperative that the UK has a robust, properly funded, recognizable and defensible second cycle qualification in civil engineering

MOBILITY

We feel that there are huge advantages for the UK in complying with the Bologna Accord especially in respect of enabling student mobility and encouraging students from outside the UK to study here. It would be to the detriment of the UK higher education system if such students were discouraged from studying here because of a fear that their MEng qualification would not be recognised as a second cycle qualification once they returned home. It is important that HEIs offering civil engineering programmes have a defensible and recognisable second cycle qualification. Failure to ensure this will damage the reputation of the UK amongst the Bologna signatories (and future signatories), and will have an adverse impact on the recognition of UK Graduates within Europe (and the wider International area represented by the Bologna signatories), as well as the attractiveness and ongoing viability of the UK to attract students. It is crucial that graduates from the UK system are internationally recognized.

THE MENG AS A SECOND CYCLE QUALIFICATION

Based on the proposed first cycle/second cycle 3+2 years model, the ICE recently supported a recommendation from the Joint Board of Moderators (the degree accrediting body for civil engineering) to universities that for their MEng they increase the number of ECTS (European) credits from 240 to 270. It was felt by ICE that this was a responsible course of action by the accrediting body in an attempt to safeguard the status of the MEng and its future graduates. This was felt to be the minimum step that could be taken. However, there is an increasingly despondent view amongst academics whom we have consulted that the MEng is not defensible under the Bologna Accord, notwithstanding an increase in ECTS credits.

It is important that the UK continues to benefit from having high quality provision of civil engineering HE, and that such departments in the UK can operate on equal terms with international counterparts. There is some support amongst academics whom the ICE has consulted for utilising structured and assessed work placements and vacation experience as credit-bearing course components thereby increasing the number of MEng credits as described above. This is not viewed as being too difficult to achieve (examples of 2 x 10 week placements have been suggested). Some universities are moving, or planning to move, in this direction. However, there are severe resource implications and it is clear that not all universities would be able to implement such changes without additional funding from government. If a few elite universities—perhaps those with a high dependence on overseas students—make such changes, this could result in a two-tier system that we would not wish to see.

Whilst it is often reported that there is a relationship of 2 UK credits to 1 European credit, ICE is not aware of definitive work in this area, nor of a definition of a credit in terms of Output Standards. This would be an appropriate topic for a Bologna Accord Study Group.

FUNDING ISSUES

As we understand that the UK Government is defending the Integrated Masters as being second cycle compliant, ICE would like an assurance that Government will underwrite the financial support to UK students studying engineering to second cycle in whatever form that might subsequently have to take.

The issues raised by the Bologna Accord requires a re-thinking of the whole basis of HE funding at both bachelors and masters level.

PROGRAMME LENGTH

We have assumed that the length of first and second cycles (3+2) as defined in the Bologna Accord is non-negotiable. If not, then we would urge the UK Government to pursue this with the other signatories.

If the length of the UK MEng programme has to move to become five years, ICE supports the view that the fifth year could be spent in industry. This would deepen the link between HE and industry. Issues of assessment of work-based learning, quality assurance, equivalence and recognition/reward for industry would have to be addressed.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION—CHARTERED STATUS

Although, the recognition of professional qualifications is addressed under separate EU arrangements, there is a risk that losing second cycle status for the MEng might adversely impact the recognition of Chartered Engineer (CEng). When according professional recognition to other EU nationals we use the education level to determine whether the recognition should be accorded at Incorporated Engineering (IEng) or CEng. Even though our professional qualifications address experience and competence beyond academic qualification, we would be concerned if other EU States were to use Bologna Accord compliance, or lack of, for recognition purposes.

SUB-FIRST CYCLE QUALIFICATIONS

The proposed three-phase structure of HE awards (first cycle—Bachelors; second cycle—Masters; third cycle—PhD) means that those exiting with, for example, a Foundation degree are unlikely to find this internationally recognized.

LEVEL OF AWARENESS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

The level of awareness of the Bologna Accord has been poor amongst HE but is now escalating. ICE is very concerned about this and strongly urges some clear leadership at the centre. It has not been clear who/ which government department is taking the lead beyond the first cycle ie first degree phase.

The Government's Science & innovation framework 2004–14 opens as follows: “The nations that can thrive in a highly competitive global economy will be those that can compete on high technology and intellectual strength—attracting the highest-skilled people [. . .]” The framework's ambitions for UK science and innovation include the following:

“World class research at the UK's strongest centres of excellence.”

“Sustainable and financially robust universities and public laboratories across the UK.”

All of this would indicate a need to ensure that care and focus is directed to qualifications at second and third cycle, and a clear recognition of the impact of failing to do this. To date this has been lacking with the impression given that focus has been on access to first cycle qualifications at the expense of the others.

We recently learnt from the Europe Unit of UUK that the impact of implementation in 2010 is immediate and therefore those students who entered four-year MEng degree programmes in 2006 risk graduating with a degree that is not Bologna compliant. Anecdotally we know that companies may operate a “play safe” policy and prefer to employ those with internationally recognized qualifications rather than UK MEng graduates. Non-UK graduates who return to their own country on graduation may find themselves disadvantaged.

THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON

We do not believe that the focus should be on defending the MEng. It is not clear to us how the Government can continue to defend heavily the MEng whilst still ensuring that the UK has an internationally recognized second cycle degree.

The Government should stress the UK's strong position on second cycle degrees. We offer a range of diverse provision at Masters level that is meeting the changing needs of industry.

The UK has moved to an educationally strong position where the focus is on learning outcomes rather than inputs (such as credits). The Government should encourage the other signatories to move to this position of focus on learning outcomes.

A Working Group should be proposed to look at defining “credit” in terms of learning outcomes and at the relationship between UK and European credits.

SUMMARY

The UK needs its graduates to be internationally recognized.

Defending the current four-year MEng (without modification) as second cycle is not tenable.

The Government is urged to underwrite the compliance of the MEng with the second cycle qualification as defined by the Bologna Accord.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the link between HE and industry in order to deliver extra learning to ensure that the MEng is recognized as equivalent to other non-UK second cycle degrees.

There must be a clear single point of ownership in government for the whole spectrum of Bologna Accord-related issues to ensure directional leadership.

The Government should give an assurance that an internationally recognized UK second cycle degree will be funded.

Universities, students (especially those graduating in 2010), their parents, employers and accrediting bodies urgently require clear confirmation from the Government about its aspirations for the future development of the Bologna process and the UK's place in it.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Although UCISA (the Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association) has sought to raise awareness of the Bologna Process amongst its members by including presentations at its conferences, a straw poll carried out by the JISC infoNet service in late 2005 indicates that few UCISA members have confidence that their institutions are prepared for Bologna. UCISA is seeking to assist its membership in addressing this through involvement in a number of initiatives. UCISA is a partner in a JISC infoNet project to build a resource to assist institutions to prepare for Bologna and is also a partner in two further projects being proposed by European University Information Systems (EUNIS) and KION,²³ the software development arm of a consortium of Italian universities. All initiatives are at an early stage. UCISA can, as partners in all three initiatives, look to ensure that the outputs from each project are aligned to a common objective but there is still scope for different interpretations of the same aspects of the Bologna Process. UCISA would therefore recommend that a central agency, whether in the UK or cross Europe, would be in a better position to commission work rather than rely on individual initiatives to provide their own interpretation.

2. UCISA has worked with the European Unit of UUK and others on the definition of the Diploma Supplement. UCISA is pleased to note that the Diploma Supplement does now appear to be embedded in most institutions' working and believes that the collaboration has played some part in this success. UCISA notes that, in addition to there being implications for student and course related processes within institutions, there are also implications for the student records systems on which many of those processes rely, particularly with regard to the transfer of credit related data. UCISA is able, through having both institutional and corporate members, to assist the implementation of systems changes required as a result of the Bologna Process by bringing all relevant parties together as part of the development. This model has worked successfully with other agencies such as UCAS.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

3. UCISA is a membership organisation that represents those responsible for delivering information communications technology (ICT) systems and services in universities and colleges. UCISA has practically 100% coverage of the HE sector with over 140 universities and colleges as members. In addition, UCISA includes in its membership, organisations such as HESA and UCAS and systems and software suppliers. This has allowed UCISA to act as a broker to bring together agencies such as HESA with student records systems suppliers to ensure proposed changes are discussed at an early stage with suppliers and that appropriate development and testing schedules emerge to the satisfaction of all parties.

4. This response has been composed by the UCISA Executive Secretary, Peter Tinson, and has been circulated amongst members of the UCISA Executive for comment before submission. Peter has over 20 years' experience of working in the HE ICT sector. He has led projects to implement administrative computing systems, managed departments responsible for the delivery of both administrative and student computing systems and has been responsible for the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to ICT use. In his current role, Peter leads the sector response to consultations as they arise from various organisations, including the Funding Councils, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and government departments. He is currently a member of the HEFCE Shared Services Advisory Group and has been a member of a working group looking at the implications of the introduction of digital television on the HE sector.

FACTUAL EVIDENCE

5. A straw poll of computing professionals in the Higher Education sector carried out by the JISC infoNet service at the end of 2005 noted that 88% of respondents believed that their institutions were not well prepared for Bologna. The poll was used as part of the initial request to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for funding for the JISC infoNet project to assist institutions to prepare for Bologna. UCISA is a partner in this project which has now been funded by HEFCE's Leadership, Governance and Management fund.

²³ See http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bologna/index_html/view

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

6. The Bologna Process has implications for the development of student records systems since these systems underpin the business processes at all institutions. Changes that are required to those systems, particularly relating to credit transfer, need to be defined clearly and unambiguously across Europe. It is our belief that this is best achieved by a central agency commissioning work in this area and that the UK, through having mature student records systems in the community, is well placed to lead on this work. There is a need to engage with the suppliers of student records systems to ensure that those systems can support the changes in business processes that the Bologna Process will require. UCISA is willing to work with the Europe Unit of Universities UK, software suppliers and other agencies, on the development of clear standards and their subsequent implementation.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the National Union of Students (NUS)

INTRODUCTION

1. *The National Union of Students (NUS)*

1.1 NUS is a voluntary membership organisation comprising of a confederation of local student representative organisations in colleges and universities throughout the United Kingdom which have chosen to affiliate. The organisation has nearly 750 constituent members (CMs)—virtually every college and university in the country.

1.2 NUS is one of the largest student organisations in the world and provides research, representation, training and expert advice for individual students and students' unions.

2. *NUS' support for the Bologna Process*

2.1 NUS welcomes the Education and Skills Select Committee's inquiry into the Bologna Process and are pleased to present this submission to a timely and much needed review of the UK's current engagement with Bologna and the future direction of the Process.

2.2 NUS is a strong supporter of the Bologna Process and this submission focuses on some of our key concerns and interests around qualifications, credit and student mobility.

2.3 NUS is currently refocusing the scope and scale of our engagement with the European policy making process. The organisation engages with European policy through the following channels:

- *ESIB—The National Unions of Students in Europe*: NUS is an affiliate to ESIB, a democratic umbrella organisation representing 50 national unions of students from 36 countries across Europe. ESIB is heavily focused on policy development and represents the educational, social and cultural interests of its members to relevant European bodies, most notably the European Union, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Further information can be found at www.esib.org. NUS will be hosting the 52nd Board Meeting of ESIB in London later in 2007 to coincide with the Bologna Ministerial Summit.
- *Europe Unit's High Level Policy Forum (HLPF)*: NUS feeds directly into the UK HE sector's position on European policy debates through the HLPF, coordinated by the Europe Unit at UUK.
- *UK Socrates-Erasmus Council*: NUS is a member.
- *Ministerial Delegation to the Bologna Process*: NUS has sent a student representative (typically the Vice-President for Education) as part of the UK's delegation to the Bologna Process.

3. *NUS' support for the Bologna Process*

3.1 NUS has been a long-term supporter of the Bologna Process and has engaged in debates—both nationally and internally through ESIB—with the important developments that stem from the Process.

3.2 The Process is in its final years; so it is timely to reflect on achievements (learning opportunities) so far; and project onto next steps.

3.3 The principal reasons for NUS' support of the Process are two-fold:

- The Bologna Process aims to create a European Area of Higher Education (EAHE) as a way of promoting citizens' mobility; so it assigns central importance to the social dimension.
- The Bologna Process sees higher education as a public good and a public responsibility; so it reaffirms the importance of international co-operation rather than competition in higher education (which NUS understands is philosophy behind the Lisbon Convention, for instance).

4. *Lessons learnt: Bologna 1999–2006*

4.1 It is NUS' view that the UK has not engaged as effectively, or proactively, with the Bologna Process as it might have done. This is a challenge as much for students' unions as it is to Higher Education Institutions (HEI's). We believe that both the UK Government and the UK HE sector could have been more pro-active with engagement in the Bologna Process. We also believe that where sector bodies have shown leadership and engagement, this approach has not been followed consistently by HEI's, who have been too precious about institutional autonomy at the expense of clarity, consistency and transparency for students.

4.2 NUS believes that it is crucial that students' union students and staff are well informed of these developments and we have welcomed the willingness of Universities UK to run training sessions for student union officers at NUS training events. As mentioned previously, NUS will be holding ESIB's 52nd Board Meeting in London in May 2007 (to tie in with the ministerial meeting). The theme of BM52 will be equality in education, which we hope will provide a useful platform to engage our membership with the Bologna Process.

4.3 NUS believes that more could be done at the national/governmental level to raise the profile and the level of awareness of the Bologna Process to key stakeholder groups: students, institutions, staff and employers. The Europe Unit, hosted by Universities UK and funded by GuildHE, the Quality Assurance Agency and the HE Sector funding councils, is an increasingly important partner for NUS and has been instrumental in providing leadership and direction from the HE sector bodies. But we believe more needs to be done to ensure that this leadership is disseminated throughout HEI's.

4.4 NUS bats out the challenge to the Government that it demonstrate its support and willingness by detailing the level of support so far provided (strategically, procedurally and financially) to disseminate the Bologna Process to the stakeholder groups detailed above. If there were evaluative work to measure outcomes and outputs all much the better as this information would add to something that is sorely needed around the Bologna Process at the national level: an objective national evidence base.

4.5 NUS accepts that the level of institutional engagement, for example, varies markedly. Some might argue that this is to be expected in a diverse sector. NUS would argue, however, that the Government might like to consider doing a simple piece of research: the credit test? How many institutions look at student workload as a means of developing a credit notion? Consistency and clarity are incredibly important from the student perspective and we have significant concerns about how consistently HEI's are complying with Bologna developments.

4.6 NUS predicts—rather than wagers—that the outcome would be a diverse response—from the engaged to the benignly non-committed. NUS also believes that perhaps some levers might be applied to enhance the relative importance of this area. One way might be to embed expected outcomes and outputs in institutional strategic plans around the 10 Bologna action lines. A brave move, perhaps, and NUS fully recognises institutional resistance to such a notion (the need for extra resources—administration time, more paperwork etc) but surely the argument must be that any future system of higher education—that wants to see itself aligned with its European partners and looking out to the global market—is equipped to provide students with the means to fulfil their potential wherever that might be in the EHEA; and that students' expectations are met.

A EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (EQF)

5. *Foundation degrees and two-year "fast track" degrees*

5.1 NUS is of the understanding that a Foundation Degree is still not recognised as the first step in the three-cycle model (ie as a bachelors degree). NUS would argue that this places a prejudice on those students who have adopted this "degree" in the understanding/ hope of future advancement/mobility within Europe.

5.2 It is NUS' understanding that their expectations—as things stand—would be a unceremonious awakening at the application phase, with a prompt dismissal, as his/her qualification is not recognized as a degree. As mentioned, this has serious implications for progression/social mobility within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

5.3 The thorny issue of foundation degrees has been re-invigorated with recent proposals contained in the *Further Education and Training Bill (2006)* to enable the Privy Council to grant powers to further education colleges to award foundation degrees. NUS believes that foundation degrees are an important part of the Government's strategy to widen access and promote progression; and that they are respected by both students and employers alike.

5.4 NUS believes that the development of foundation degrees has been a success—in a very short amount of time—but more thought and debate needs to go into how these degrees should be recognised at the EHEA level; so that some consensus can be reached; and students are "in the know". NUS makes this point with no intention whatsoever of under-mining the qualification or jeopardizing its future success. Foundation degrees suit the needs of some students, in their bid to fulfil their potential; but these same students, surely, have a right to the right information and an understanding as to where their qualifications sit within the

Bologna framework. Ensuring Bologna recognition for Foundation Degrees should be a priority at the London summit. Discussions at a European level must not jeopardize the development and success of Foundation Degree programmes.

5.5 NUS has similar concerns about the “Fast Track” two-year honours degrees programme. The Bologna Process states that the first cycle (Bachelor level) should last a minimum of three years. We share the concerns of other HE sector bodies that it is not clear that European partners will be prepared to recognize two-year bachelors within the Bologna framework. This may well hinder graduate mobility within Europe and hamper employment in the European labour market. It is deeply unacceptable that this has not been communicated to students currently pursuing those courses.

5.6 NUS firmly believes that these issues should not be raised at a European level (and certainly not at the London Ministerial Summit) until sufficient evidence is gathered on national acceptance and recognition of these programmes, student uptake, employability and progression to postgraduate study. While NUS believes there is potential merit in two-year honours degree programmes, we are concerned that the pilot has been developed without due reference to the Bologna Process and seek clarification from the Department for Education and Skills about the review process.

5.7 NUS believes that Bologna compliance must, in future, be a litmus test in the development of new Higher Education qualifications.

6. Masters

6.1 NUS recognises the value of the range and diversity of masters qualifications (eg some are one year, others are two; and some are attached to four year programmes). These meet the needs of a diverse student population. However, NUS believes that a serious debate is needed on how some of these could—legitimately—be incorporated into a European qualification framework; and recognised by all.

7. Degree classification and transcripts

7.1 NUS continues to be strongly engaged in the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group (Burgess) discussions around degree classification and transcripts; and await the group’s formal response to their second consultation due in early 2007. NUS is a member of the Burgess Scoping Group; and is fully engaged with that debate.

7.2 NUS strongly believes that the current classification system is unfit for purpose; and that a new system is needed. NUS recognises that this is a major challenge to higher education institutions (HEIs) and that consensus within the sector is crucial in achieving successful change.

7.3 NUS also recognises that a gradual approach to reform may be necessary to engage HEIs in this change; and that it will be the brave institutions that accept the need for change and implement change.

7.4 Students’ unions and students have expressed some concerns at the proposals put in the group’s second consultation, namely:

- That they fail to capture the students’ “real” development and achievements in the three years (or more) of study; and
- that institutions—and employers—will gain a skewed understanding of what the student has actually achieved (in terms of experience, skills and knowledge) with the emphasis on the formally assessed academic work. This is compounded by the lack of meaningful employer engagement with the Burgess Review.

7.5 NUS’ four core principles around degree qualifications and transcripts are:

- *Holistic information*: NUS has consistently maintained that to represent the interests of students, their achievements and personal development—in terms of skills, knowledge and experience, both formal and informal—should be captured, evidenced and formally recognised.
- *Student development*: NUS believes that it is vital that the students’ development, in terms of distance traveled, is embedded in any national formal recognition template. NUS remains convinced that one of the most important questions to ask is: how far has the student traveled in terms of their academic and personal development given their own particular circumstances?
- *A national approach to recording achievement*: NUS remains opposed to any “piece-meal” approach to recording achievement. A level of national direction and control needs to be co-ordinated and monitored, if students’ interests are to be safeguarded.
- *Employer engagement*: NUS also recognises that fundamental prejudices exist in recruitment processes, especially amongst graduate recruiters. NUS believes this must be acknowledged and tackled at the national level.

8. *Diploma Supplement*

8.1 NUS supports the Diploma Supplement. By making it easier to compare qualifications gained in higher education systems across Europe, the Diploma Supplement offers enormous potential for facilitating recognition of UK qualifications and, it is hoped, lead to greater transparency and mobility.

8.2 NUS is concerned that any recommendations from the Burgess Steering Group must incorporate the Diploma Supplement as an essential component of measuring and recording student achievement, rather than an added extra. Institutions must also be consistent in their use of the Diploma Supplement.

A CREDIT FRAMEWORK

9. *A credit framework*

9.1 NUS supports a national credit framework that aligns with others in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). NUS believes that it is crucial that a coherent approach to credit is adopted across the EHEA, to ensure success in the mobility of students. It needs to be meaningful to European students, transparent and easy-to-use. There must be a shared meaning of credit at institutional, national and the EHEA level.

9.2 NUS is, however, aware of the current tension in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) debate as detailed on page 22 of the Final Report of the Burgess Group Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England (December 2006): “Many believe that the ECTS approach—which is designed with student mobility in mind—has disadvantages compared to the UK approach.”

9.3 NUS understands ECTS’s intention as a student-centred system based on a student’s workload to achieve the objectives of a programme of study. NUS also understands that this includes work that is required to be completed—that is, all planned learning activities—not just lectures and seminars (ie direct contact)—but excursions, preparation for exams, self-study as well.

9.4 NUS would also argue that the annual workload may be significantly lower in England with the rejection of the workload concept; and understand that highlighting the “truth” may well not allow students to work as much as they currently do to finance their high study costs.

10. *Lifelong learning*

10.1 NUS believes that it is crucial that any new Bologna developments in this phase or beyond recognise and build on the range of life long learning programmes and modes of study which have been built, and respects the value of mobility and international recognition.

MOBILITY

11. *Opportunities to enhance the mobility of students from the UK*

11.1 UK student mobility in the EU is affected by many factors, not least the lack of language skills amongst UK students (only about a third of British citizens speak a second language) but the rules governing student finance do not make this any easier. NUS would like to concentrate on the opportunities to adjust student finance rules to encourage students from the UK to study elsewhere in the EU.

12. *Funding for undergraduates*

12.1 Horizontal mobility, where the student spends part of their studies in another country but the main programme is provided in their home country, is relatively well catered for at undergraduate level, and several EU funded schemes such as Erasmus exist to enable students to spend a term, semester or full year abroad, and the student support scheme offers slightly higher loans to those studying overseas for at least eight weeks as part of their course.

12.2 Nevertheless, NUS believes awareness of the schemes is limited, and more could be done to raise their profile with both current and prospective students.

12.3 However, whilst most grant and loan funding can follow the student to the host country, for some students there are several elements of funding which will not, most notably childcare grants. Whilst most full-time students cannot claim means-tested social security benefits, disabled students and those with children can—but these too cannot be paid during abroad, and so these students’ mobility is doubly restricted.

12.4 Vertical mobility, where a student completes an entire course in another European country is not supported directly through the student finance system, as living costs support cannot be paid unless the course is based at a UK institution. This goes against the intention of the Bologna Process and NUS Believes that this situation must be reviewed and meaningful change introduced at the earliest possible opportunity.

12.5 Some EU nations such as Ireland do offer maintenance funding for study elsewhere in the EU and it would not be administratively burdensome for the UK to do the same. see for example www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/student_financial_support.pdf?language=EN

12.6 An alternative solution advocated by ESIB, the National Unions of Students in Europe, is that the host country should provide finance for fees and living costs to students and this may be a potential avenue for The UK Government to consider with other European partners in the Bologna Process.

12.7 NUS would be content for either policy to be enacted, although we expect that it would be easier for the UK Government to fund UK students in the EU in the short term. In any case, we would also urge the government to look at making up the social security funding that students entitled to it would lose by studying elsewhere in the EU.

13. *Funding for postgraduates*

13.1 Funding for postgraduates is poor for UK students in the UK, but for postgraduate students wishing to study in the EU, funding is even more difficult to secure. NUS urges the Government to work with the research councils to help provide for EU study.

QUALITY

14. *Quality*

14.1 It is NUS' understanding that a pragmatic approach to quality assurance is being followed by ENQA, which registers national agencies, so that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) maintains its vital role in assuring and enhancing quality.

15. *Student engagement in institutional audit*

15.1 In July 2005, HEFCE published a *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: phase one outcomes* (HEFCE 2005/35), which set out the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group's (QAFRG's) conclusions and recommendations about institutional audit. HEFCE, Universities UK and GuildHE endorsed those recommendations, and in the light of them the QAA has revised its methodology for institutional audit.

15.2 However, NUS believes recommendation 8 of the "Burslem Report" (2005) still remains inadequately addressed to date: "Student participation in institutional audit has been successful and valuable, and should continue to be promoted and supported by all."

15.3 NUS continues to work closely with the QAA in developing and providing training events and information that enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of student union officers and staff to engage around the quality agenda.

15.4 For more information on the "Quality Takes Time" (QTT) branded work that NUS has developed and promoted, please go to www.officeronline.co.uk/quality. This database includes details of past NUS QTT events (including presentations and handouts), as well as some examples of student written submissions, access to QAA materials and much more.

15.5 It might be timely to repeat a few other concerns currently in the system as it stands now, in terms of institutional audit:

- *Student selection for auditor student discussions:* QAA will be familiar with this issue as NUS has continually maintained that the students' union should have a role in ensuring that students are appropriately elected to this important position. As QAA is aware, NUS has serious concerns at the potential threat of institutions "cherry picking" and "training up in message management" those students selected. NUS believes, therefore, that students elected should be selected by election by their peers to sit on auditor student discussions. NUS also believes that course reps should be involved in student discussions.
- *Student confidentiality:* NUS believes that the students' voice in focus groups with auditors should be signposted as strictly confidential. Institutional staff, for example, should be absent from the student discussions. NUS also believes that QAA pointers should be developed to aid auditors in the appropriate form of feedback to ensure student confidentiality eg the exclusion of institutional staff from the distribution list, or minutes in the form of bullet pointed anonymous comments.
- *Team composition:* As an adjunct to this NUS believes that there is great value—as evidenced in Scotland via the SPARQS programme—for student representatives to be part of audit teams (refer to www.sparqs.org.uk). NUS also believes that institutions should recognise and reward the skills developed by students in their involvement/engagement in internal and external quality assurance processes (eg PdP development, certificates and accreditation).

- *International provision:* Looking to the future, NUS would value clearer information to students on who “quality checks” higher education institutional provision internationally, now and in the near future. NUS is a member of QAFRG and welcomes the research and debate around this issue in “Burslem phase two b”.

15.6 NUS has committed itself firmly to the quality agenda, but wishes to point out that this heightened expectation on students/student union officers and staff has a resource implication; and expectations should be realistic.

CONCLUSION

16. Conclusion

16.1 NUS supports and commends the level of progress made around the Bologna Process at the EHEA level; although we have misgivings at the level of governmental engagement with stakeholders at the national level in terms of promoting debate and awareness around key issues and concerns.

16.2 As mentioned in the introduction, the London inter-ministerial conference in May 2007, which is the fifth in the sequence which started with Bologna, will begin the drive to conclude phase one of the Process.

16.3 NUS believes that early/timely development of its successor needs to be addressed in London. What are the next steps going to be? What are the priorities going to be? How will the strategy ensure and evaluate effective stakeholder engagement in the Process across nations? What evaluation tools can be used? Are benchmarks valuable?

16.4 As we move forward, the UK HE Sector will need to confront the challenges and opportunities presented by our engagement with the Bologna Process more consistently and proactively than has previously been the case.

16.5 NUS would be delighted to present oral evidence to the Select Committee’s inquiry alongside our partners from ESIB’s Bologna Process Committee and hope the Select Committee will give positive consideration to this offer.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by UCL (University College London)

1. UCL is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. We endorse the points made in evidence submitted on behalf of the UK Higher Education sector. As a research-intensive university with a significant proportion of international students (and, unusually in the UK, as a net “importer” of Erasmus students from the EU) and with a significant volume of international research collaborations, we would like to take this opportunity to emphasise aspects that are of concern.

2. The Bologna Process has had a remarkable impact on many European countries within the space of the last seven years, and has led to fundamental reforms of higher education systems. The impact has been noticed in many parts of the world and is having knock-on effects from America to Asia. The Process has much more than purely European significance—witness initiatives to align French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries, curricular reform in Latin America, ECTS pilots in Asia, and the current ministerial review in Australia. For the UK, it offers opportunities but it also brings challenges.

The implications of a three-phase structure of higher education awards for one-year Masters and short undergraduate courses (HNCs, HNDs, and Foundation Degrees) and the possible implementation of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and a focus on learning outcomes and competencies

3. Formal Bologna policy, as agreed by ministers of participating countries, does not in itself pose significant problems; indeed, there is much to welcome, such as the development of transparent Quality Assurance systems; and the three-cycle structure is already very familiar in UK culture. However, it is the implementation of formal policy at national level that can bring the challenges; far from being standardized, different countries are implementing the reforms in different ways, often by law. Where there are problems with the recognition of UK Masters qualifications, they arise from the local application of the three-cycle structure, rather than from Bologna agreements as such. There is no intrinsic problem with one-year Masters programmes—plenty are being developed in other European countries; but there *can* be problems if the programme follows a three-year Bachelors degree, for example, or if a country has chosen to require two years (or equivalent) study at Masters level.

4. That there are problems of recognition of qualifications is well known. We are aware of individual cases at all levels. Although many European countries have endorsed the importance of Learning Outcomes with enthusiasm, in practice it is often workload that is the stumbling block to recognition. Many UK degrees have a shorter associated notional workload than is required (often by law) in some countries, particularly where those countries have followed the ECTS Guide’s recommendation of 25–30 hours

workload per ECTS credit and operate a 40-week academic year (the UK's 10 hours per credit and 30-week academic year). In fact, if we are short of usable data on recognition problems: there are plenty of anecdotes but little evidence to quantify. A requirement to establish some verifiable data on recognition issues would be a welcome outcome of this inquiry.

The broader impact of Bologna across Europe: a more standardised Europe and the consequences for the UK's position in the global market for HE (Bologna and the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI 2))

5. Recognition problems apart, an indirect effect of Bologna reforms has been the development of many new higher education programmes taught in English in continental Europe. There are certainly new competitors in the market for international students. While we at UCL are confident that the quality of our programmes will continue to attract excellent students from across the world, it is clear that some international students are starting to choose non-UK destinations for their higher education. A major factor here is our exceptionally high fee level for students from beyond the EU. While the reputation of UK HE remains high, international students can now find very high-quality programmes, taught in English, at excellent universities, for little or no fee. It is true that many continental universities are beginning to charge fees, but it will be decades before their fee levels reach ours. If we want to maintain our position in the global market, a much higher level of scholarship provision has to be found.

6. We would be happy to supply further detail on these points if more information is required.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the UK GRAD Programme

The UK GRAD Programme²⁴ welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee inquiry into the Bologna Process and the implications for the UK Higher Education sector in advance of the Ministerial meeting in London in May 2007.

The UK GRAD Programme is funded by the UK Research Councils and is managed and developed by the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC).²⁵ It operates through a national Centre for Excellence at Cambridge and eight regional Hubs located in universities, which support their local universities.

The role of the UK GRAD Programme is to support the academic sector to embed personal and professional skills development into research degree programmes (RDP). UK GRAD, together with our network of universities, is interested in the Third Cycle of the Bologna Process—doctoral degrees, particularly with respect to the training and subsequent impact on the employability of PhD graduates.

The Third Cycle was added to the action lines of the Bologna Process in Berlin in 2003 and the European Universities Association (EUA) was charged in Bergen in 2005 with preparing a report with the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) on the further development of the basic principles for doctoral programmes to present to Ministers at the 2007 Summit.

UK GRAD has been working with the other interested UK stakeholders, such as the Europe Unit²⁶ and RCUK²⁷ to ensure that the basic principles for the Third Cycle are appropriate for the UK, through contributing to the development of the UK position paper and attending the key European Bologna conferences and workshops. Through consultation with our network of Hubs and key contacts in UK Universities we are developing a paper to submit to the BFUG highlighting the aspects of the Third Cycle critical to sustaining and developing the employability of our doctoral graduates and our position as an attractive location for international postgraduate researchers to study.

The Third Cycle or “Doctoral Cycle” has a unique position in the Bologna Process compared to the First and Second Cycles. Doctoral researchers are an important link between the aims of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA). Doctoral researchers are often described as the “engines of the Lisbon Agenda”: they not only being trained as future researchers, but are also making an original contribution to knowledge and sustaining our academic base.

More than in any other European country, UK RDPs recognise the wider employability of PhD graduates and our doctoral programmes have developed to meet the needs of researchers and employers. In many ways the UK is leading the way in the evolution of RDPs in terms of the diversity of qualifications, access to RDPs, development of structured programmes, the inclusion of skills development and improved supervisory processes. It is critical that the outcomes of the London Ministerial meeting recognise and support these developments.

²⁴ www.grad.org.uk

²⁵ www.crac.org.uk

²⁶ www.europeunit.ac.uk

²⁷ www.rcuk.ac.uk

The UK GRAD network generally supports the “Salzburg Principles”²⁸, whose key conclusions are that:

1. The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research. At the same time it is recognised that doctoral training must increasingly meet the needs of an employment market that is wider than academia.

2. Embedding in institution strategies and policies: universities need to assume responsibility for ensuring that the doctoral programmes and research training they offer are designed to meet new challenges.

3. The importance of diversity: the rich diversity of doctoral programmes in Europe . . . is a strength which has to be underpinned by quality and sound practice.

4. Doctoral candidates as early stage researchers: should be recognised as professionals—with commensurate rights—who make a key contribution to knowledge.

5. The crucial role of supervision and assessment: in respect of individual doctoral candidates, arrangements for supervision and assessment should be based on a transparent contractual framework of shared responsibilities between doctoral candidates, supervisors and the institution (and where appropriate including other partners).

6. Achieving critical mass: doctoral programmes should seek to achieve critical mass and should draw on different types of innovative practice being introduced in universities across Europe.

7. Duration: doctoral programmes should operate within an appropriate time duration (three to four years full-time as a rule).

8. The promotion of innovative structures: to meet the challenge of interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills.

9. Increasing mobility: doctoral programmes should seek to offer geographical as well as interdisciplinary and intersectoral mobility and international collaboration within an integrated framework of co-operation between universities and other partners.

10. Ensuring appropriate funding: the development of quality doctoral programmes and the successful completion by doctoral candidates requires appropriate and sustainable funding.

We are also keen to see more recognition of the diversity of researchers and RDPs through the acknowledgement of Second Cycle (masters), being the main—but not only route in the Third Cycle. This should also include the principle of accreditation of prior experience and learning (APEL). There is a strong message from the HE sector across Europe, supported by the UK, that the Third Cycle should focus on learning outcomes and not be credit-rated.

UK GRAD continues to work with the Europe Unit and the EUA to ensure that the principles of the Doctoral Cycle are beneficial to the UK. We would welcome the opportunity to provide additional information about the work UK GRAD and the HE sector is doing to support the Third Cycle of the Bologna Process.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC)

The Royal Society of Chemistry is the largest organisation in Europe for advancing the chemical sciences. Supported by a network of over 43,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public.

The main points the RSC wishes to make are:

1. Since the Bologna Process was launched, there have been major reforms of higher education systems across continental Europe. In the UK, a lack of leadership by government (and by universities) has prevented intelligent debate of the issues with a consequent failure to reap the benefits of the reform process.

2. The UK is increasing participation in higher education. If it wishes both to remain internationally competitive and retain its relatively low non-completion rates, there needs to be a greater differentiation of purpose between phases (cycles) of higher education as indicated in our response to the Committee’s more broad ranging inquiry. The Bologna Process permits:

- a first cycle for general higher education and upskilling;
- a second cycle that fits graduates for professional practice in a given field; and
- a third cycle that provides research training and produces future research leaders.

3. It is imperative that the UK has a second cycle of higher education that is seen to be at the leading edge of output standards so that UK higher education, and its graduates, can:

- compete within Europe; and

²⁸ <http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Salzburg—Conclusions.1108990538850.pdf>

- compete beyond Europe.

4. The main route to professional practice in the UK in chemistry (as is the case in the other physical sciences, pharmacy and in engineering) is the integrated masters, MSci/MChem. Science is international; there is a global market for higher education and science based employment. If the UK is not seen to be leading within Europe, it cannot hope to compete globally. In relation to MChem/MSci there are two strategies available.

Either:

- (a) defend integrated masters as fully meeting the requirements of a second cycle qualification; or
- (b) enhance programmes so that second cycle requirements are demonstrably met.

We do not believe that (a) is tenable in the long term.

5. Our concerns are based upon:

- major employers increasingly recruiting at masters level from continental universities and taking continental masters students on work placement;
- an initiative of a major pharmaceutical company with a Research Council to jointly fund a four year PhD with an MChem/MSci entry that has a substantial educational component prior to the research phase;
- findings of an Anglo-Danish comparative study of chemistry higher education that found that, in the UK MChem/MSci, there is insufficient opportunity to achieve fully the outcomes required at masters level, particular in respect of project work; and
- the requirements for the award of the Eurobachelor in chemistry, for which the RSC is the UK accrediting body, and the Euromaster labels. Whereas UK institutions can meet the requirements for Eurobachelor, they are unlikely to be able to do so for Euromaster.

6. In addition to a lack of leadership, the other major barrier to reform is the financial model for funding teaching in universities which further discourages institutions considering change.

DETAILED COMMENTS FROM THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY

1. *Implications of the Bologna process for the UK Higher Education sector: advantages and disadvantages*

The advantages are as set out in our main comments:

- a greater differentiation and clarity of purpose of the different phases of higher education, and the opportunities for the UK to be seen to be at the leading edge of higher education in Europe. The disadvantages are in the transition process of reform, rather than in the final state.

2. *The agenda for discussion at the 2007 meeting in London—clarifying the UK position*

The most important consideration is the attitude of the UK Government—it needs to be seen to be leading debate at home and seeking to reap the benefits of the Bologna Process if it is to be able to provide leadership across Europe.

3. *The implications of a three-phase structure of higher education awards for one-year Masters and short undergraduate courses (HNCs, HNDs, and Foundation Degrees)*

No mention is made of integrated masters in these terms of reference. The final year of such programmes, and one-year stand alone masters, provides insufficient opportunity fully to meet the requirements of the second cycle. UK graduates can therefore be at a competitive disadvantage in comparison with their continental colleagues.

Short undergraduate courses are extremely valuable in their own right and their intended purposes should not be influenced by the requirements of the first cycle. For students who wish to continue to the level of the first cycle there should be clear routes and full credit given for their prior achievements.

4. *Awareness and engagement in the Bologna process within HEIs*

Awareness is increasing and, although actual engagement is low, there is a significant number of academic chemists who work to do so, HEFCE has funded an RSC led project to work with industry to produce models for second cycle programmes in chemistry. The project has enthusiastic support from employers and a large number of chemistry departments.

5. *Opportunities to enhance the mobility of students from the UK*

Adoption of the three cycle system enhances opportunity.

6. *The possible implementation of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and a focus on learning outcomes and competencies*

There is a tension within a credit system that has as main features input measures such as hours of student effort and output measures such as leaving and competencies. Whilst the emphasis should rightly be on the latter, the former cannot be entirely discounted. Students require tuition, guidance and time to study and learn. We should not be surprised at scepticism that UK students can fully achieve given outcomes in very significantly less time than is common elsewhere.

7. *Quality Assurance systems in HE (teaching and research): the compatibility of UK proposals and Bologna*

This is an area where the UK can justifiably claim to lead. The combination of institutional quality assurance, guided by QAA and orthogonal subject accreditation largely carried out by professional bodies is a good model. RSC enjoys good working relations with the QAA.

8. *Degree classification reform in light of Bologna*

The degree classification used in the UK, which now essentially has three operational levels, has outlived its usefulness. A transcript based approach is more appropriate.

9. *The broader impact of Bologna across Europe: a more standardised Europe and the consequences for the UK's position in the global market for HE (Bologna and the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI 2))*

Elsewhere in Europe, the terms bachelor, master, and doctor are becoming more common. If the UK HE system, and its graduates, are to compete within Europe and more widely it must be seen to be at the leading edge of output standards. This means embracing the benefits of the Bologna Process.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Council for the Mathematical Sciences (CMS)

The Council for the Mathematical Sciences (CMS), comprising the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, the London Mathematical Society and the Royal Statistical Society, is pleased to present its evidence relating to the inquiry on the Bologna Process. This response reflects the conclusions and recommendations of a CMS report *The Bologna Process and Master's Courses in the Mathematical Sciences*, released October 2006. The report was prepared by a working group consisting of representatives from the three societies as part of the Council's ongoing role of representing the interests of the mathematical sciences to government and other public bodies.

The Bologna Process and Master's Courses in the Mathematical Sciences is presented as an annex to this submission, and is also available online at www.cms.ac.uk/CMSsubmissions.html

IMPLICATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE UK HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

1. The CMS welcomes the process in so far as it encourages more cooperation between and mobility of staff and students. Comparing practices with European (and other colleagues) is a useful corrective to possibly complacency.

2. A structure that is unique to the UK Higher Education sector is the integrated masters courses that exist in mathematics sciences, physics, chemistry, engineering and other subjects. These are enhanced undergraduate courses that typically take one more year to complete than a standard Bachelor's degree. These courses, generally known as MSci, MMath, MChem, MPhys etc, are of great importance within the mathematical sciences in providing sources of well qualified people trained to substantially beyond the First Cycle level, well equipped both to enter employment and to go on to further study.

3. It is vital to the health of these disciplines that such courses are accepted as being equivalent to a combined First and Second Cycle qualification, despite the fact that there is often no clear break point between the cycles in these qualifications. Implementation of the Bologna Process would severely disadvantage the mathematical sciences unless this is the case.

4. Compliance may need some amendments to course design, but it is imperative that generic interpretations of the requirements for compliance evolve in such a way as not to cause unfortunate subject-specific consequences.

5. The funding arrangements for the crucial Second Cycle must be considered by Government. Given the nature of most of these courses, and the arrangements which were agreed for integrated masters courses, the natural “parent” body to fund the Second Cycle is the DfES and not the Research Councils.

THE AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION AT THE 2007 MEETING IN LONDON—CLARIFYING THE UK POSITION

6. The UK has generally welcomed the development of Learning Outcomes as course descriptors, rather than relying on numerical credits; this approach should be supported.

7. Nevertheless, as with credits, there are some current inconsistencies between different statements of Learning Outcomes. Some statements insist that M-level work includes some “which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work”. This is wholly unrealistic in the mathematical sciences and must be strongly resisted.

8. Statements to the effect that M-level work is “informed by the forefront” are entirely acceptable, as are statements in which the concept of “research” is given a broad meaning. It is on this basis that the integrated masters (MMath type) and one-year postgraduate masters (MSc type) meet the descriptors of Learning Outcomes for the Second Cycle. The CMS supports the use of the Dublin Descriptors as being the most appropriate expectations for the Second Cycle.

9. Clarification of the “exchange rate” between the Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme (CATS) and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is needed, and the inconsistencies between the two systems must be resolved.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF A THREE-PHASE STRUCTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AWARDS FOR ONE-YEAR MASTERS AND SHORT UNDERGRADUATE COURSES (HNCs, HNDs AND FOUNDATION DEGREES)

10. For postgraduate courses (ie courses of MSc type), the usual UK practice is to offer a one-year programme containing 180 CATS credits with at least 120 at M-level. This is compliant with the Bologna Process where a Second Cycle qualification typically requires 90 to 120 ECTS credits with at least 60 at M-level—unless cognisance is taken of the apparent limitation of a full calendar year to only 75 ECTS credits. Clarification of this issue is urgently needed.

11. The model of 3 + 2 + 3 (BSc + 2-yr MSc + 3yr Doctoral) seems likely in many European countries, but is not the only pattern allowed. It would be very damaging to the future of MMath courses and highly unattractive to UK students if they had to fund themselves for two-years of an MSc course. The importance of proper funding structures is evident.

AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN HEIs

12. A lack of guidance has resulted in HEIs responding to the issue rather late in the day and in ways that threaten the uptake of integrated masters courses.

13. Some universities are assuming that their four-year MMath courses do not comply with the Bologna agreement. If universities make individual decisions to cut their courses without coherent guidance, then the outcome would be disastrous for mathematics and other subjects, and for employers who seek these graduates.

14. Students are beginning to make uninformed choices. The MMath graduates of the Bologna-compliance deadline of 2010 have already enrolled.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS FROM THE UK

15. The CMS is supportive of opportunities to enhance the mobility of students from the UK and would like to emphasise the extra breadth and employability gained by a period in another country.

16. If student mobility between universities in different European countries is to be a reality then First and Second Cycle qualifications gained in the UK need to be accepted elsewhere as appropriate preparation for a doctorate. Quite apart from considerations of credit levels and length of study, it is true that academic traditions are somewhat different in the UK from those in most other European countries. In a report to the Institute of Physics [*The Bologna Process and UK Physics Degrees*, Gareth Jones (London, 2003), p 13], referring to the situation in Physics, the author notes that “in the UK realistic problem solving, practical skills and applications are probably developed better whereas, in the rest of Europe, the theoretical foundations and advanced theoretical methods are developed better”. The same is generally true of mathematical sciences. It is worth noting that the UK has been on the whole more successful in maintaining the numbers of students entering university to study mathematics than have other European countries: numbers have declined relative to the whole university cohort, but not as dramatically as elsewhere.

17. In principle the difference in academic traditions should not be a bar to mobility but it is something that universities in the UK and abroad have to take into account. This applies not only to students proposing to study to the next higher level, but also to students who spend a year of their Bachelor's programme in an EU country.

18. If the UK wishes to redress the balance between incoming and outgoing students it needs to ensure that students are able to speak foreign languages at an appropriate level before they enter university.

19. Students will probably also need extra financial support. Currently, joint degrees are problematic, but mobility can be encouraged without joint degrees.

20. We welcome Erasmus/Socrates exchanges as being of great value, and encourage departments of mathematics in these schemes and to formulate their regulations to facilitate such exchanges.

THE POSSIBLE IMPLEMENTATION OF A EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS) AND A FOCUS ON LEARNING OUTCOMES AND COMPETENCIES

21. The CMS is supportive of an ECTS based on learning outcomes, subject to our points made in paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 9.

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE (TEACHING AND RESEARCH): THE COMPATIBILITY OF UK PROPOSALS AND BOLOGNA

22. We believe that the standards set by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK exceed the standards proposed by the Bologna Agreement.

DEGREE CLASSIFICATION REFORM IN LIGHT OF BOLOGNA

23. The integrated masters degree combines First Cycle and Second Cycle qualifications, but it is not apparent from the way the qualification is badged that both are held.

24. The CMS Bologna Working Group concluded that institutions should make a dual award (First and Second Cycles) at the end of four years (five in Scotland), such as BSc MMath, with a single classification. The years of the degree programme on which this classification is based can vary between institutions, but must include the final two years.

THE BROADER IMPACT OF BOLOGNA ACROSS EUROPE: A MORE STANDARDIZED EUROPE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE UK'S POSITION IN THE GLOBAL MARKET FOR HE

25. We accept that mobility and cross-border understanding of degrees are important for the future of Europe, but feel it would be helpful if the Committee deliberated also the deeper strategic issues surrounding education in Europe. In particular, it would seem that the Bologna Process is driven primarily by the principle of "harmonisation". The implementation of standards is crucial in establishing markets in commodities such as electrical appliances. But education is an extremely personal matter, and the diversity of requirements for educated people is immense. For example, "conversion masters" can be extraordinarily effective in preparing people for employment, and are internationally attractive, but do not obviously fit in the Bologna structure. There is a risk that the emphasis on harmonisation in Bologna will actually be to the detriment of meeting these diverse needs of employers and society.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the Science Council

THE SCIENCE COUNCIL

The Science Council is a membership organisation representing the learned societies and professional institutions across the breadth of science in the UK. There are currently 30 member organisations listed in appendix 1.²⁹

The Science Council's purposes are to provide a collective voice for science and scientists and to maintain standards across all the scientific disciplines. The Science Council provides its member organisations with opportunities to share common concerns, to network with government and others, and to work towards collective action to achieve multidisciplinary solutions to emerging issues.

²⁹ Not printed. See www.sciencecouncil.co.uk/Memberorganisations.php

CHARTERED SCIENTIST

The Science Council was awarded its Royal Charter in October 2003, and Licenses suitably qualified professional institutions to award the designation of Chartered Scientist (CSci). The Chartered Scientist qualification (CSci) reflects best practice in science and is set at a benchmark level (Masters Level) throughout the science professions. With increasing focus on the inter-disciplinarity of science it is vital for scientists to have professional recognition that is applicable across a range of scientific disciplines.

A Chartered Scientist is a professional for whom the knowledge and skills acquired in an accredited scientific Masters level degree (or equivalent) is critical to his/her job competence. Many of our Licensed Bodies formally accredit university programmes, including Bachelors, Integrated Masters and postgraduate Masters programmes.

The Science Council welcomes the broad objectives of the Bologna Process to establish a common structure of higher education systems across Europe based on two main cycles' undergraduate and graduate aiming therefore to remove the obstacles to student mobility across Europe and enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide. Focus has extended beyond these two cycles so that doctoral level qualifications are now considered as the third cycle in the Bologna Process.

BOLOGNA PROCESS—MAIN ISSUES OF CONCERNS

- There has been a distinct lack of engagement from UK Government with UK universities on the implications presented by the Bologna Process.
- There is a wide disparity in understanding and engagement across UK HE Institutions—it is important that there is a consistent approach and understanding of the Bologna Process across the HE community.
- There is a wide disparity in understanding and engagement across the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) community.
- Under Bologna, there is a risk that the popular and successful UK Integrated Masters degree is seen as an intermediate qualification rather than meeting the requirements of a 2nd cycle qualification.
- Under Bologna, there is a risk that both the UK Bachelors and one-year postgraduate Masters degrees are seen as “lightweight”, meeting the minimum requirement of the credit range defined under Bergen (180 and 90 credits respectively).
- It is apparent that some universities are considering including additional credits to the final year of their Integrated Masters programmes. This raises a number of issues, including how inclusion of additional credits could realistically be achieved in an already full curriculum, and additional credits in the final year could not exceed the maximum allocation of ECTS points in one calendar year of 75 credits which would still not meet the minimum credits required under Bergen.
- The alternative to the incorporation of additional credits could be an additional year of study—this has obvious major funding implications for both the university and the individual student and it can be reasonably speculated that the extra costs incurred will discourage prospective students. At a time when there is a major drive to increase student participation, UK Government needs to consider these concerns very seriously.

BOLOGNA PROCESS—OPPORTUNITIES

Whilst there are many legitimate concerns which need to be addressed by Government, the Bologna Process presents some opportunities for the UK:

- The Government has an opportunity to consult and engage widely with the professional bodies and learned societies, in particular when considering the place of subject specific Integrated Masters degrees in the sciences which are popular with both students and employers.
- With its current responsibility for providing the Secretariat to the Bologna Follow Up Group and its Board prior to the Ministerial Summit in London 2007, the UK Government has the opportunity to raise the profile of the Bologna Process with HE institutions, encouraging debate and engagement of the issues and consequences concerned with Bologna.
- There is an opportunity to engage with employers—one of the main aims of the Bologna Process is to enhance the employability of graduates throughout Europe (and there is considerable effort from the STEM community to increase student progression into fulfilling STEM related careers), therefore it is vital that the perspective of employers is considered.
- There is an opportunity for the UK to lead others in the area of quality assurance systems in HE. The work of the Quality Assurance Agency for HE, as well as the subject specific accreditation of university degrees carried out by professional bodies combine to provide a very effective HE QA system.

THE UK POSITION

The UK could be considered to be in a more fortunate position than others in Europe given the UK's long standing tradition of Bachelors and Masters level qualifications. However, differences in the length of Masters qualifications across Europe could also result in UK Masters programmes not being recognised with the same esteem as those in other parts of Europe; while many European countries offer Masters programmes lasting two years, in the UK one-year Masters degrees are more common. In addition, unique to the UK is the integrated four-year Masters Programmes leading directly to a Masters level qualification (MSci, MChem, MPhys, MMath, MEng etc).

In many science discipline is a requirement to provide a formation with a strong scientific and mathematical foundation, together with sufficient knowledge of advanced technical topics, this means that very often Masters level is regarded as the minimum for a high-level professional career. The Science Council is committed to the highest standards of professionalism and has set the exemplifying educational standard for the award of Chartered Scientist (CSci) at Masters Level in science. Throughout the Science Council's 20 Licensed Bodies, many operate formal accreditation of academic programmes for the purposes of CSci; these accredited academic programmes include Integrated Masters as well as postgraduate Masters qualifications.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES VS TIME STUDIED

The UK assessment system is primarily based on learning outcomes, focusing on the competences a student requires from a study programme. The Science Council stresses the importance of a learning outcomes approach to the qualification of undergraduate and graduate programmes, in addition to notional time studied. In the UK, one-year Masters programmes and integrated Masters programmes are increasingly common in, and important to, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

There is a pre-occupation with the time spent on programmes rather than learning outcomes. This could result in one-year Masters programmes and integrated Masters programmes being seen as "lightweight" with regard to curricula knowledge or with respect to the weight of the research project. Such concerns, if not addressed, would clearly have damaging consequences for the international reputation of UK higher education. The number of hours studied or notional "time studied" is only one measure of a programme.

EUROPEAN CREDIT SYSTEM (ECTS)

The Bologna Process sees credit as a tool for removing obstacles to academic mobility, with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is used as a transfer and accumulation system across Europe. The "Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area" includes typical credit allocations for each cycle:

- 1st cycle qualifications: typically include 180–240 ECTS credits.
- 2nd cycle qualifications: Typically include 90–120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle.
- 3rd cycle qualifications: not specified.

The recently published Burgess report³⁰ recommends a UK national credit framework in which a three-year FTE Bachelors with Honours qualification would attract 360 credits, a four-year FTE Integrated Masters programme would attract 480 credits and one-year FTE Postgraduate Masters programmes would attract 180 credits. Currently there is still some confusion as to the relationship between the proposed UK National Credit Framework and ECTS—ECTS credits are defined so that an academic year contains 60 credits and are measures of student workload rather than a combination of the many factors which determine the level achieved in a degree programme. It is therefore important that the key criteria for comparing and measuring degree programmes should be learning outcomes.

If 60 ECTS credits are taken as equivalent to 120 UK National credits, UK Honours degrees at Bachelor level in science and mathematics should have no difficulty in being recognised as first cycle qualifications (180 ECTS credits = 360 UK National Credits). In addition a one year postgraduate Masters would also meet the minimum ECTS credits required and therefore meet the requirements for second cycle qualifications. However, the position for MSci (and MChem, MPhys, MMath etc) degrees requires more consideration, in particular:

- with integrated Masters programmes at 480 UK national credits, equivalent to 240 ECTS which is significantly short of the minimum 270 required for 1st + 2nd cycle
- the MSci is at present a single qualification, and to be recognised as a second cycle qualification in terms of the Bologna Process would need to be preceded by a first cycle award.

³⁰ Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England—Final report of the Burgess Group. http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Burgess_credit_report.pdf

In addition, whilst BSc Honours and one year postgraduate Masters qualifications meet the requirements for 1st and 2nd cycle respectively, they only meet the minimum requirements and therefore risk being considered as “lightweight” or “lowest-level”.

SUBJECT STATEMENTS

The QAA subject benchmark statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes from degrees in a range of subject areas, including many in the sciences. They also represent general expectations about the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate. However, whilst there are many science subject benchmarks at the Honours Level, currently none have yet been published for the Masters-Level.

There is then an opportunity to support the UK model with the development of an M level statement(s), including for integrated Masters programmes, offering an assurance to others, in particular Europe, about the parity of academic standards at this level, based on the achievement of learning outcomes rather than the length of an award.

CONCLUSIONS

UK Government and universities need to take full account of the effects of the Bologna Process, in particular its potential to affect the standing and recognition of UK graduates in Europe and Worldwide.

There is a need to ensure that UK Masters degrees are genuinely at the Masters Level. In addition, it is important that the advantages of the UK system are explained and defended in Europe especially to establish that the UK has a second cycle of higher education that is seen to be at the leading edge of learning outcomes and output standards, so that graduates from UK higher education institutions can compete with those from Europe and beyond.

December 2006

Memorandum submitted by the CMU Universities Group

INTRODUCTION

1. CMU represents over 30 modern universities. These universities have been supportive of the Magna Carta Universitatum adopted at Bologna in 1988. This articulated important principles about the role and function of universities as follows:

- The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.
- Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society and advances in scientific knowledge.
- Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement.

BENEFITS OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

2. CMU universities have actively participated in the Bologna Process and Heads of institutions have supported the intergovernmental initiative designed to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Accordingly, CMU welcomes the Education and Skills Committee Enquiry bearing in mind the 2007 London meeting.

3. There are clear benefits for students in the establishment of a common structure of higher education systems across Europe but also benefits for staff, institutions and for the UK in terms of European and international relationships, economic activity and trade. CMU universities are active in European partnerships, successful in bidding for EU research funding and actively recruit students from the EU.

4. It is therefore important that government policy and initiatives are “Bologna compliant” and that they do not create unnecessary obstacles to future progress on the creation of the EHEA or hinder opportunities to enhance mobility of students and staff from the UK. Specifically, policy must enhance the understanding of students, employees and employers about learning outcomes ie what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity and the knowledge, skills and aptitude which it can be anticipated that will

have been acquired. This is crucial for national and European qualifications frameworks and for the associated assurance arrangements and enhancement of standards and quality in higher education upon which the success of the European Higher Education Area relies.

THE NEED FOR A TRANSPARENT NATIONAL PROCESS

5. The Bergen communiqué (signed in May 2005 by Ministers from countries committed to the Bologna process) recommended that there should be a transparent national process to align national frameworks within the overarching European Framework. It was considered that such a process would assist not only with the progression of but also add reputational value to the Framework for the EHEA which is being promoted. As a result, it was agreed that criteria and procedures to be self-certified by each signatory Member State should be put in place to seek to demonstrate how national frameworks were compatible with the EHEA Framework.

SELF-CERTIFICATION PILOTS: REPORT FROM SCOTLAND

6. As a result Scotland was one of two countries (the other being the Republic of Ireland) to agree with the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks to pilot the self-certification process with a view to reporting on the process by September 2006. (All self-certification processes should be completed by 2010).

7. The report of the Scottish working group has now been published. While higher education is obviously a function devolved to the Scottish Parliament, one of the aims of the report is that it “will prove useful to ministries of education, higher education staff, student and employers and employees across the countries involved in the Bologna process in higher education.” Accordingly, the Education and Skills Committee may well wish to consider the report³¹ as part of their Enquiry and which is also attached to this evidence submission (http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/QF-Scotland_en.pdf). It should be noted that the Scottish Framework for Qualification of Higher Education Institutions (SFQHE) relies on the credit system in Scotland which UUK’s evidence confirms is ECTS compliant (as is that in Wales). In England, modern universities have adopted credit systems and also APL (accreditation of prior learning) which allows for the identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement.

8. The relationship between the SFQHE and the EHEA framework was outlined in the Scottish Report (Table 1) as follows:

| <i>EHEA qualification Cycles</i> | Qualifications within the Scottish FQHE |
|--|---|
| First cycle qualifications | Scottish Bachelors Degree with Honours Scottish Bachelors Degree |
| Short cycle qualifications within or linked to the first cycle | Diploma of Higher Education |
| Intermediate awards within the first cycle | Certificate of Higher Education Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma |
| Second cycle qualifications | Masters Degree Integrated Masters Degree MPhil Degree |
| Intermediate awards within the second cycle | Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate |
| Third cycle qualifications | Doctoral Degrees including Doctorates by Research |

9. It should be noted in particular that the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma are qualifications that are typically for graduates or equivalent but are not of postgraduate level or outcome. These qualifications have been designed explicitly to aid the promotion of flexibility and progression within the lifelong learning agenda in Scotland.

10. The Scottish Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) is typically offered after the equivalent of the first two years of full-time higher education in Scotland. Some DipHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the relevant programme specifications.

11. The Scottish Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is available in a number of Scottish HEIs typically after the equivalent of one year of full-time study. Some CertHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. Again, the precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the relevant programme specifications.

³¹ “Verification of compatibility of the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland with the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area”.

12. These particular qualifications have been designed explicitly to aid the proportion of flexibility and progression within the lifelong learning agenda in Scotland. CMU recognises of course that the Committee wishes to examine the English Framework. However, the Report from Scotland is instructive not only as a pilot for the self-certification process but also because it clearly identifies a framework for higher education qualifications with which the Bologna Process is concerned.

FOUNDATION DEGREES IN ENGLAND: THE FE & TRAINING BILL, CLAUSE 19

13. The extent to which the foundation degree programme introduced in England from 2001 complies with Bologna has been a matter of debate. The DfES website describes foundation degrees as “new, innovative degree level qualifications designed with employers, so they fit perfectly into the world of work”. In spite of the DfES description, they are not “degree (ie first-cycle) compliant” in terms of learning outcomes and competencies. Accordingly within the EHEA framework foundation degrees do not comply as first cycle qualifications and indeed, learner progression onto honours degrees programmes was always anticipated and has been promoted. Accordingly, foundation degrees will need to comply as intermediate awards within, or short cycle qualifications linked to, the first cycle of the EHEA framework.

VALIDATION OF FOUNDATION DEGREES

14. Currently all foundation degrees are validated by universities and higher education institutions. This has assisted students in terms of progression routes, added value and status to the foundation degree as a qualification, encouraged provider collaboration but also added merit to the argument that, as qualifications, foundation degrees fall within the Bologna Process ie within the European Higher Education Framework.

15. The inclusion of Clause 19 into the FE and Training Bill by which further education colleges would be enabled to apply to the Privy Council for foundation degree awarding powers allows education providers that are not primarily higher education institutions to acquire both validation and franchise rights for foundation degrees, subject to any future arrangements and agreement in relation to quality assurance regimes. Lord Adonis has stated that “Clause 19 will allow high-performing further education institutions to award their own foundation degrees removing their dependency on higher education institutions for validation in respect of foundation degrees” (House of Lords 13 December 2006).

16. Subsequently Ministers have advised that they expect only “a few” colleges to be awarded validation powers for foundation-degrees. Even if this proves to be the case, institutions that are not primarily higher education institutions will be awarding foundation degrees.

17. CMU universities have supported the development and delivery of foundation degrees both directly and in collaboration with colleges. However, validation by higher education institutions has been regarded as crucial both to the status of what is a relatively new qualification and also to the proposition that this was a qualification to encourage progression within a lifelong learning framework and within the first cycle of higher education. Accordingly, it is unclear what advantages will be derived for the UK or UK HEIs committed to progressing the European Higher Education Framework and the EHEA from any switch from validation of foundation degrees by universities and higher education institutions to validation by further education colleges. It is also not clear what value will be added for learners, employers and to the Bologna Process by the twin-track approach proposed ie some foundation degrees validated by universities with others validated by colleges.

18. Accordingly, CMU believes that it would be helpful if the Education and Skills Committee considered this specific issue in more detail as part of its Bologna inquiry.

January 2007

Memorandum submitted by Dr Nigel Poole, Centre for Environmental Policy, Imperial College London

I was pleased to have the opportunity to attend the Select Committee meeting on the Bologna Process last week. I am writing, therefore to make some observations on the discussion, summarising what I consider were the key points, and drawing attention to other significant matters.

In the first instance, Lord May’s opening comments from a research focus did not seem entirely apposite, nor representative of the challenges facing the bulk of the UK HE sector. Attention was unfortunately diverted from a constructive approach required to encourage the Bologna Process in an appropriate direction. The key messages from the exchanges between witnesses and the Committee seemed to me to be the following:

- It is essential for the UK to be engaged in the Bologna Process, which is significant not only to the 45 signatories but also to other regions of the world, who are monitoring the Process—there is a global context and a wide sphere of international relations surrounding Bologna.

-
- The semi-autonomous nature of the UK university sector puts the policy-making process on a different footing from the State-led decision making in most other signatory countries. It is essential to maintain ownership of the Bologna Process within the education sector and be cautious about the involvement of the European Commission.
 - Bureaucratisation is a threat.
 - A positive negotiating stance by the UK is critical to achieve the necessary outcomes.
 - The evolving framework should be principles—rather than rules-based, and this will be enhanced by the shift in focus from credits for inputs (hours of study) to learning outcomes.
 - It is important to maintain flexibility about the third cycle (PhD training).
 - It is important to beware uniformity, and efforts should be made to create a European higher education area where flexibility, diversity and delivery are important.

I would want to add further comments of my own, that do not necessarily represent those of my institution, but have evolved out of the need to come to terms with the Process. In the first instance, I reiterate that it is important not to be complacent about the evolution of the Bologna Process, nor about the potential impact on the UK HE sector, nor about the level of awareness of HE institutions. In my view, a sceptical approach won't create a good negotiating position in May:

- While it is fine to stress learning outcomes rather than inputs, many signatory countries have bought into the process by adopting the framework and the rules in a literal way, including the ECTS credit unit system. Some UK HEIs are also adopting, some have adopted the ECTS system. It is hard to see the emphasis on learning outcomes supplanting entirely inputs and credit in the framework. UK needs a clever approach in communicating key messages to fellow signatories.
- The one year and integrated Masters are very important activities for the UK universities (as you know), and generally can provide an excellent educational experience. In my view they are faced with a threat that was not really dealt with at the meeting. There is more to argue here, more for the UK to defend/advance at the May meeting, in the context of the widespread use of ECTS:
 - it is unclear still whether more than 75 ECTS can be earned in a calendar year. If a standard of 90 ECTS is adopted for the second cycle, the number of hours of study "required" is a minimum of 2,250. While it is just about plausible to argue that the average student is expected to spend 46 weeks during a 12 month period studying for a Masters degree in the UK, it is not quite plausible to argue that the average student is expected to spend 48.9 hours per week on average in study per week. So the sums do not add up. On this my view diverges from that of my institution and its written submission, so I speak only for myself. Data to support this contention on study hours can probably be found, *inter alia*, in the UNITE Student Experience Report, of which I have only seen press reports;
 - the sector may be resistant to extending the MSc study period beyond the 12 month (calendar year) period. Nevertheless, marginal changes might create a stronger basis for arguing the validity of a "short" UK 90 ECTS Master;
 - the sector could adopt a more flexible approach to the study period by extending the MSc study period by a month or two, to establish a 90 ECTS MSc, without compromising unduly on critical factors (eg finance) affecting uptake by students—what could be a 13–15 month 90 ECTS MSc, rather than 12 months;
 - it is also important to consider the level of research content in the 90 ECTS Master; and
 - To fail to address these specific issues of the one year/90 ECTS Masters degree weakens the overall UK negotiating position.
- A particular concern of mine is that other signatories are adopting the framework of three cycles and ECTS such that entry to third cycle (PhD) studies requires 120 ECTS at second cycle level. A few longer UK Masters courses can plausibly claim to be worth 120 ECTS. The 90 ECTS UK Master may still be unattractive to students from other countries for this reason as well as other reasons.
- Only some, not all, UK HEIs will be able to rely on strong reputational effects to establish credible claims of quality if (particularly second cycle) programmes are not apparently Bologna-compliant.
- Also, there are other aspects to Bologna, such as the Diploma supplement, that need to be considered.

I am not an expert, and there are others in the sector who are much better prepared than I on the Bologna Process, so my views do not carry any special authority. Nevertheless, Fiona Mactaggart was right, that there is no room for complacency. And as Ella Ritchie said, the devil is in the detail.

January 2007