

bologna process

NATIONAL REPORTS 2004 – 2005

Country:	England, Northern Ireland and Wales [for Scotland see separate report]
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1. Main achievements since Berlin

1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms

It has been a consistent policy to invest in Higher Education in order to put it on a financially stable footing to ensure that high standards are maintained in the interests of students (both domestic and international), employers, and future economic growth. As part of this policy the most significant legislative reform has been the Higher Education Act 2004. The Act takes forward the Government's proposals to introduce variable deferred fees in England for full-time undergraduate students commencing their courses from 2006/07. Higher Education Institutions will be able to vary their fees between £0 and £3,000 per year for each course. Up-front payment of tuition fees for full-time undergraduate students from 2006/07 will be abolished. Instead, students will be able to take out a loan for fees, repayable only when they are earning more than £15,000, and then in line with income and at no real rate of interest. The Welsh Assembly Government has made a commitment not to introduce variable fees before 2007/08 at the earliest, but has also committed to introduce fee deferral arrangements from 2006/07 for Welsh domiciled students on the same basis as in England. Northern Ireland Ministers are currently consulting on legislation to introduce a similar arrangement as that being put in place for England. The Scottish Executive is not proposing to change the arrangements for Scottish domiciled students studying in Scotland but from 2006/07 will be making fee loans available to Scottish students studying elsewhere in the UK, again on the same basis as in England.

The UK has had a high level of engagement in seminars and debates relating to Bologna, and is closely involved in developing the Bologna Process. The basic structure of UK degrees already conforms to the Bologna model of three main cycles of Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral degrees. Foundation degrees, designed to create intermediate awards strongly oriented towards specific employment opportunities, were introduced in 2001 and are available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Over 24,000 students were studying for Foundation Degrees in 2003/04, compared with 12,400 for the previous year, which demonstrates their increasing popularity. In terms of the Bologna Process they are intermediate qualifications within the first cycle.

Higher education institutions are beginning to implement the Diploma Supplement in the UK. With UK stakeholders' approval, the UK HE Europe Unit has produced a generic general description and diagram of higher education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for inclusion in the Diploma Supplement. This is available on the UK NARIC website (see www.naric.org.uk/ds.asp). Scotland is producing its own national description which will be available shortly. The introduction of the Diploma Supplement has been further encouraged by higher education institution conferences and other events offered in collaboration between the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council, the UK NARIC and the Europe Unit. The UK's Bologna Promoters also assist institutions issuing the Diploma Supplement.

The Burgess Report on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement was published in November 2004. This sector wide initiative made a number of recommendations, including that 'developments in describing, measuring, recording and communicating achievement should take place in parallel with, and as complementary to, the Diploma Supplement and ultimately the Europass'; and that 'the sector should closely monitor and engage with the development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) as the common European credit system'. The sector is now working to take these forward.

In 2003, following the completion of a full round of the review of subjects/programmes in UK higher education institutions, new quality assurance processes based on institutional review and audit were introduced by the QAA. The ten sections of the current Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education for the guidance of higher education institutions are being reviewed and revisions to Section 2: Collaborative Provision (September 2004) take account of and make reference to joint and dual degrees and the Diploma Supplement. The Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning (September 2004) take account of Principles for recognition articulated in the Lisbon Convention and the revised Section 1 postgraduate research programmes includes advice and guidance on the supervision of postgraduate students.

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies (For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

The UK has a system of devolved government, including for higher education, to Scotland, to Wales and to Northern Ireland. Higher education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is provided by a range of institutions, which carry out teaching, research and scholarship. All the universities and many of the higher education colleges are degree-awarding institutions: some colleges do not have degree-awarding powers but offer programmes leading to the degrees of an institution which does have them. Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies established by Royal Charter or legislation and almost all receive significant amounts of public funding.

Funding for Institutions

In England the main government department for education is the Department for Education and Skills. Funding for teaching and research in higher education is delivered through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) by means of a block grant. Much of the funding for teaching and research, including that for capital, is allocated to Higher Education Institutions on a formula basis, although some funding is held centrally by HEFCE

for sector wide programmes, such as subscriptions, and for special initiatives. In addition to funding from HEFCE, the Office for Science and Technology (OST), within the Department for Trade and Industry, also funds university research and postgraduate training throughout the UK through the Research Councils. A number of higher education institutions engage in teacher training, and funding for this aspect of their work is provided by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) which was set up by the Government in 1994 for this purpose. In Northern Ireland the main government department for higher and further education is the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), which funds institutions directly by means of a block grant.

In Wales the National Assembly for Wales has responsibility for higher education. The Assembly does not have primary legislative powers and the UK Government continues to make primary legislation on an England and Wales basis. On the whole therefore, higher education in Wales is subject to the same legislative framework as in England, however there are differences in approach and detail which reflect the specific circumstances in Wales – for example, the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to not introducing variable fees before 2007/08 and has made no decisions beyond that. Funding for teaching and research in higher education is distributed by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales which is an Assembly Sponsored Public Body. Funding is largely allocated on a formula basis, but is distributed to institutions as a block grant.

Support for Students

Financial help for UK students on higher education courses is available for tuition fees and living costs. This is funded by the DfES and delivered through the Student Loans Company. The NHS Bursary Scheme provides financial support to students on NHS-funded healthcare professional courses and to medical and dental students in the later years of their training. The student support system for students from Wales is currently operated by DfES on an England and Wales basis. Responsibility for that will shortly be devolved to the Assembly, allowing the Assembly to take a whole system approach to higher education policy.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure

(For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

There are 132 publicly funded higher education institutions in England, 4 in Northern Ireland and 12 in Wales. There is one privately funded higher education institution in the UK which offers British degrees, the University of Buckingham (in England).

There are a number of foreign institutions with establishments in the UK which offer non-British degrees. The institutions are purely self-financing and receive no public support; they do not award British degrees. However, the institutions offering these qualifications are subject to the same legislation as British institutions ie the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1985 Business Names Act. In many cases these institutions use the Open University Validation Service to ensure the quality of their qualifications.

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country

(National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

The UK HE Europe Unit is a sector-wide initiative aiming to bring the position of the UK HE sector to EU and Bologna Process policy-making forums. The Unit has three primary objectives. First, it acts as a central observatory of European higher education and major research issues and informs all HEIs and stakeholders accordingly. Second, it seeks to coordinate UK involvement in European initiatives and policy debates. Third, where possible, it produces collective UK statements in key areas of EU policy, lobbying to support them as appropriate.

A High Level Policy Forum (HLPF) and an officer-led European Coordinating Group (ECG) comprising representatives from key HE sector organisations including the DfES, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales, the Quality Assurance Agency, Universities UK (UUK), Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the National Recognition Information Centre for the UK (UK NARIC) inform the policy position of the Europe Unit. The Europe Unit also produces weekly and monthly newsletters on European HE issues, as well as regular 'Europe Notes', information notes on policy issues of relevance to the sector.

3. Quality assurance

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Academic standards are established and maintained by higher education institutions themselves using an extensive and sophisticated range of shared quality assurance approaches and structures. Standards and quality in institutions are underpinned by universal use of external examiners, publication of a standard set of indicators and other reports and by the activities of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This ensures that institutions meet national expectations described in the Academic Infrastructure for quality comprising the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the Code of Practice, which are linked to a system of programme specifications. The QAA was established in 1997 as an independent UK-wide body to monitor the standard of higher education provision. This monitoring principally comprises peer-review based audits and reviews of higher education institutions with the opportunity for subject-based review as the need arises. Accuracy and adequacy of quality-related information published by the higher education institutions are also reviewed. QAA reviews also cover higher education programmes provided by further education institutions. The QAA operates in the public domain and statements of its mission, purposes, values, standards, processes and review (academic and institutional) reports, which include confidence judgments about standards, are available on its website (www.qaa.ac.uk).

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.

Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

The UK controls power to award degrees, rather than individual degrees themselves. The degrees themselves are legally owned by the institution with degree awarding powers (DAPs). The power and the criteria for granting DAPs come from the government, which is informed by the QAA. Institutions which hold DAPs are subject to institutional audit.

Reviews of institutions by QAA always result in a judgement of the extent of the reviewers' confidence in the standards of the reviewed institution. The whole of the reviewers' report is published, including this judgement and its basis, thereby providing significantly greater public information than that conveyed by a simple accreditation label.

All universities in existence before 2005 have the power to award degrees on the basis of completion of taught courses and the power to award research degrees. From 2005, institutions in England and Wales that award only taught degrees ('first' and 'second cycle') and which are a certain size, may also be permitted to use the title 'university'. Higher education institutions that award only taught degrees but which do not meet those numerical criteria may apply to use the title 'university college', although not all choose to do so. Institutions with degree awarding powers themselves alone decide the degrees they offer and the conditions on which they are awarded. Degrees and other higher education qualifications are legally owned by the awarding institution, not by the state. Institutions also decide which students to admit and which staff to appoint. Institutions with their own degree awarding powers are listed at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/annex4.shtml>

The types of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions at sub-degree and undergraduate (first cycle) and postgraduate level (second and third cycles) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), including qualifications descriptors, developed with the sector by the Quality Assurance Agency (www.qaa.ac.uk). The higher education qualifications awarded by universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are at five levels. In ascending order, these are the Certificate, Intermediate, Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) and the Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA) have established the National Qualifications Framework which is aligned with the FHEQ. These authorities regulate a number of professional, statutory and other awarding bodies which provide qualifications at levels corresponding to higher education and other levels. Teaching to prepare students for the award of these higher education qualifications can be conducted in any higher education institution or further education college.

There is a universally applied Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales. QCA is developing a system, the Framework for Achievement, intended for further education in England, which will articulate with higher education. There is a widely, but not universally, used higher education credit system in England and Northern Ireland.

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.

Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

QAA is a member of ENQA – the Chief Executive Officer is currently a Vice President of the network and has been an active participant in the Working Group taking forward the mandate from the Berlin Communiqué. The Agency is also a member of INQAAHE and has bilateral links and agreements with partners outside the EHEA including in Malaysia and South Africa reflecting the broader international and transnational activities of UK HEIs. The Agency manages a programme of visits and seminars for international colleagues (44 delegations were received in 2004) which includes briefings to Agency staff from

international colleagues.

The Board of Directors of QAA comprises four members appointed by the Funding Councils, four appointed by representative bodies (UUK and SCOP) and six independent members appointed by the Board following open competition and selection by an interview committee. There is public advertisement of the membership competition and the main criterion is that the applicants should be independent of the higher education sector. Nationality – whether UK or not - is not a criterion. The current membership of the QAA Board of Directors includes the President of the European Bank Training Network, a board level staff member of a large multinational company who lectures part-time at INSEAD and a non UK national who has been a senior academic at institutions in the US and Australia. The Board of Directors also has a student observer and an observer from the Department for Education and Skills.

Students 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 QAA audit team prior to audit visits and meetings with students form a part of all reviews – at subject or institutional level. The Agency 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.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

The UK degree system is based on 3 main cycles (Bachelors/Masters/Doctoral). The traditional Honours degree takes 3 or 4 years to complete and most postgraduate Masters courses take between 1 and 2 years, depending on the particular learning outcomes. The UK Bologna seminar on using learning outcomes was successful in increasing understanding of the term "learning outcomes" and identifying their role in student-centred learning, curriculum design and assessment, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance. There are some exceptions to these general arrangements in the case of professional qualifications and where flexible patterns of study are created to support lifelong learning policy objectives.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

Degrees and other higher education qualifications are legally owned by the awarding institution, and not by the government. Many institutions use credit points for students transferring between programmes or institutions, and use ECTS for transfers within the European area and to recognise learning gained by students on exchange visits with

institutions elsewhere in Europe.

The number of international students in the UK at all levels is an indication of de facto academic recognition of qualifications from a wide a range of systems and countries. The UK ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in May 2003.

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies

(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

Students must have a good honours degree to progress to the 3rd Cycle.

Traditional doctoral degrees (PhD or DPhil) - In most UK institutions, formal registration for the degree of PhD takes place after the initial year of research and following the successful completion of a transfer report. The final outputs are normally a thesis that will vary in length depending on the broad discipline area (arts and humanities; social science; science); and an oral examination (viva voce).

Doctorates with a substantial taught core are now available in some vocational areas including engineering (EngD), business (DBA) and education (EdD). The coursework and final thesis requirements will vary according to institution and the subject area.

Professional Doctorates are available for people in employment wishing to research their professional practice – rather than pure research, professional doctorates are situated within practice, and students are required to show evidence that, through their studies and through testing and applying theories, they have made a significant contribution to their organisation/area or its working practices. Examples of areas in which professional doctorates are available are teacher education, clinical psychology, medicine, business administration, and educational psychology. Nomenclature will vary according to the area of practice.

Doctorates by publication are awarded on the basis of the submission of high quality previously published work of the candidate, supported by a substantial reflective piece critically appraising this work.

Most doctorate qualifications take three and a half years to complete through full-time study. Part-time study is common, and therefore, the duration varies from between 4 - 6 years. The most recent guidance to institutions on the funding councils', research councils' and QAA's expectations in respect of the management, quality and academic standards of postgraduate research programmes was published in September 2004. (QAA Code of Practice: Section 1.) Institutions use of the Code is monitored through the Agency's audit and review processes and in the case of this section, the outputs of those review processes will be used by other agencies, including the UK funding councils. This section of the Code is also designed to guide institutions on the development of institutional codes of practice in the area of postgraduate research programmes, a further recognition of institutions' responsibilities for quality and standards.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?

(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

In the calendar year 2002, public sources in the UK (including Government Departments, Research Councils, Higher Education Funding Councils and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)) invested £5,454million in R&D. Of this, £3,093million was performed by UK HEIs (57%). Private sources (including business, private non-profit enterprises and overseas sources) invested £14,107million in 2002, of which £1,319m was performed by HEIs (9.3%). In 2002, R&D performed by HEIs (HERD) accounted for 22.6% of total R&D (GERD) spending from all sources. Figures are based on the ONS R&D survey results (see table 1 of <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/gerd0304.pdf>).

NOTE: this question can be interpreted in different ways, as it does not define 'research.' HE institutions undertake a wide scope of work which they can carry out with money from the public purse (directly or indirectly). In some cases this will be spent on 'research' which is not necessarily R&D or leading edge base research.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country (For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)

The UK takes a global view towards mobility, and many students choose to study in non-European countries; in addition, there are increasing opportunities for young people to work or study abroad on formal programmes during their 'Gap Year' between school and university.

The UK has a long history of participation in the European Commission's Socrates Erasmus Programme and continues to be a popular destination choice for students from the rest of Europe. The DfES, together with the UK Socrates-Erasmus Council, the national agency responsible for Erasmus, is actively encouraging as many UK higher education students as possible to take part. Measures taken recently include allowing students going abroad for a full year not to have to pay any tuition fees for that year; the amendment of the student support regulations to allow Erasmus students a higher rate of student loan; and increased promotional activity.

There are concerns that the number of UK students taking part in the Erasmus programme has been declining. This led to a number of UK stakeholder bodies contributing to a research study to identify the reasons for this. The study found that the main barriers to participating in the Erasmus programme were concerns about finance and linguistic ability. Consideration is currently being given to the report's recommendations on actions to increase outward mobility.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

The Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI), which seeks to increase the numbers of overseas students at institutions across the UK, has been running since 1999. The initiative is co-ordinated by the DfES and co-financed by DfES, UK Trade and Investment, MOD, the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish administrations, and the British Council. The British

Council has also developed the EducationUK website to provide clear and practical advice for potential users and extend the UK's outreach to prospective students. Another vital part of our strategy has been to focus on the experience of international students studying here and make policy changes to improve that experience. We have taken steps to provide more Chevening Scholarships; a more user-friendly visa service; eased procedures for students and their dependants for working while studying; and more information for students. We have also made it easier for students to stay in the UK to work on completion of their studies.

One of the aims of the new DfES international strategy "Putting the World into World Class Education", published on 15 November 2004, is to ensure that UK further and higher education students are equipped to take advantage of the opportunities for study and work experience abroad available to them. Proposals to take this forward will be developed over the coming months, and an implementation plan will be published in Spring 2005.

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)

The Overseas Trained Teacher Programme offers overseas trained teachers the opportunity to gain qualified teacher status (QTS) while working as a teacher. Once in a teaching position in a school, the trainee follows an individual training and assessment programme leading to QTS.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

The UK has no special measures to improve mobility of academic staff. However, as higher education institutions operate in an international labour market, they will take appropriate measures to ease mobility of academic staff, and the large numbers of international staff reflect the UK's openness towards mobility.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions

Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

Universities are independent, self-governing bodies responsible for their own financial affairs and solvency, empowered by a Royal Charter or an Act of Parliament to develop their own courses and award their own degrees. Any amendments to their Charters or Statutes are made through the Privy Council which advises the Queen on the granting of Royal Charters and incorporation of universities. In addition to universities, there are a number of publicly-designated and autonomous institutions and university colleges within the higher education sector. Higher education colleges and specialist institutions without degree-awarding powers prepare their students for the qualifications of degree-awarding institutions. All of these institutions are subject to the same regulatory quality assurance and funding requirements as universities. About ten per cent of higher education provision is available in colleges of further education by the authority of another duly empowered institution. A list of institutions recognised by the English, Welsh and Northern Irish authorities as being able to offer courses leading to a degree of a recognised body may be found at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees/annex5.shtml>.

Institutions which do not claim to offer British degrees are free to establish a physical presence in the UK and offer degrees outside the above framework.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

See Section 2.3; in addition there is coordination with some Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies such as the Engineering Council (UK).

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?

(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

Student representatives are included as full members of governing bodies of higher education institutions. The governing body is ultimately responsible for all the affairs of the institution. It exercises its responsibilities in a corporate manner with decisions being made by members acting as a body. Student members are integral to the decision making process.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

The Government and its partners collaborate on the Aimhigher Programme, the purpose of which is to widen participation in higher education (HE) and increase the number of young people who have the abilities and aspirations to benefit from it. Aimhigher focuses mostly on people from groups currently under-represented in HE, e.g. people from low participation neighbourhoods, from lower socio-economic groups, people with disabilities. The programme supports collaboration amongst schools, colleges and universities in the design and delivery of a range of activities which should help raise attainment and aspiration levels amongst under-represented groups - so that they are more able and willing to go into HE.

As English universities gain the freedom from September 2006 to vary the level of tuition fee, the Government is determined to ensure that access to higher education is broadened and not narrowed. Institutions will remain responsible for their own admissions policies, but the Higher Education Act 2004 requires institutions wishing to increase their fees in excess of the standard fee to draw up an access plan, which must be approved by the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education (commonly known as the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)).

Institutions in Northern Ireland who wish to increase their tuition fees above the standard fee from 2006/07 must have in place an Access Agreement which demonstrates how the participation of these groups will be increased and which has been approved by the Department for Employment and Learning (rather than by the Access Regulator as in England).

Were the Welsh Assembly to determine to introduce variable fees in Wales, then the Higher Education Act 2004 legislates for a broadly similar regime in Wales to that in England. In order for institutions to charge fees above the basic amount they would need to have an approved plan in place. However, there are policy and legislative differences in the detail. OFFA does not have jurisdiction in Wales. The Assembly has the power under the Act to designate an authority for the purposes of approving plans. Also the Assembly can make

regulations determining the contents of plans. These too can differ from those in England, since the Assembly could specify contents relating to the promotion of higher education, rather than just the promotion of equality of opportunity. This reflects the different circumstances in Wales and the size and structure of the HE sector.

There are a range of financial measures in place to ensure that people are not at a disadvantage, including Childcare Grants, Adult Dependents' Grants, and Disabled Students Allowances. There is also a means tested Higher Education Grant of up to £1,000 available for UK students from lower income backgrounds to help with the costs of higher education.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

The UK Government is committed to encouraging lifelong learning so that more people can fulfil their potential and operate effectively in a changing labour market, throughout their working lives. Higher education policies support the maximisation of participation in and attainment through learning.

The DfES is encouraging and supporting the development of the General Teaching Council's Teacher Learning Academy as a national framework offering professional recognition and accreditation for teacher learning.

The Government introduced Foundation Degrees in 2001 which offer a vocational route into higher education, allowing those successfully completing the qualification to progress to honours and beyond.

Short Masters courses are an important means of providing and certifying continuing professional development.

The Government supports part-time study by making financial provisions for students in the form of a means-tested course grant and a statutory fee grant.

The Sector Skills Councils are in the process of developing Sector Skills Agreements and are specifically identifying how higher education can respond to their higher level skill needs. These include the development of flexible, progression routes into higher education from age 14 onwards and support for continuous professional development for their existing workforce.

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

The UK has always had diversity of provision and variety in its approach to the delivery of learning opportunities and the practice of learning in HE. Formal certification of this learning operates within robust and participatory quality assurance frameworks. These frameworks promote public understanding and confidence in both the quality of HE and the standard of its outcomes.

A similarly diverse range of approaches and practices for the accreditation of prior learning has evolved across the HE sector. Public confidence in the accreditation of prior learning,

comparable to that for learning achieved during more traditional teaching and learning activities, is important if the practice is to be sustained and developed.

Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning have been drawn up by the QAA at the request of individuals and groups within the HE community to help ensure that this important activity can be conducted with a high level of security and in the light of current best practice. The Guidelines are available on the Agency's website.

The 2003 White Paper "The Future of Higher Education", said that the Government wanted to encourage flexible ways of learning that meet the different needs of learners. The higher education sector is looking at a range of possibilities for flexibility such as the ability to vary the pace of study; to stop and start HE at different times in their lives; to draw on work experience and prior experiential learning and to mix work based learning with academic study. Whatever the learning model, it will be very important to maintain the current high academic standards of UK higher education - and their international reputation.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes

Higher Education Institutions have long experience of offering programmes and awards in partnership with other institutions within the UK and abroad. These may variously lead to a single joint award or dual degrees. Section 2 of the QAA Code of Practice covers joint study programmes and joint and dual awards.

In a small number of institutions the legal terms establishing the University may limit the authority to award joint degrees. Universities which wish to change their statutes to allow them to award joint degrees may propose appropriate changes to the Privy Council. There are also Universities where the internal legislation has not permitted the award of joint degrees, but this does not necessarily preclude dual programmes. In such cases institutions which have wished to award a joint degree have amended their regulations to allow them to do so.

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees

There is no national inventory of integrated study programmes either involving a period of study in another European country or leading to a joint or double degree. However, such degrees, particularly double-degrees have existed for a long time, since the period of the joint study programmes which preceded the establishment of the Erasmus programme in 1987. Such degrees are normally on a bilateral basis and involve the mutual recognition of credits. There are double and joint degrees at undergraduate (first cycle) and second cycle (Masters) in a number of institutions. This includes Masters such as those described in the EUA Report on Joint Masters, in which 9 out of the 11 pilot programmes involved UK institutions. Programmes are organised between individual institutions at their own initiative.

11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)

There is no single model of organisation for joint degree programmes. Roles and responsibilities in respect of admissions and assessment of student learning are negotiated between partner organisations

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education

As institutions are autonomous bodies the Government does not have a role in ensuring transnational co-operation. At institutional level a range of activity takes place which contributes to the European dimension in HE. The British Council provides travelling scholarships for humanities subjects. Individuals contribute to the European dimension through participation in conferences. UK institutions are involved in international collaboration projects (for example the CERN project, as well as on human genomes and meteorology).

The Erasmus programme makes a major contribution to the European dimension in UK Higher Education both through the outgoing students and their experience which is transmitted both to their fellow students and academic staff on their return and through the incoming students, who also interact widely with staff and students. In addition, European Language students are all required to spend a period of study (normally a full academic year) in the country of their language.

The UK is pleased to have a number of Jean Monnet Chairs and Jean Monnet Modules which contribute to the European dimension.

The University sector in the UK is actively involved in Framework VI projects, Interreg, European Social Fund and projects for individual Directorate Generals all of which involve interaction with partner institutions and academic and research staff and contribute to the European dimension.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension (For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)

As institutions are autonomous bodies the Government does not have a role in curriculum development. However, the answers under the points above indicate areas in which curriculum development reflect the European dimension. All Law programmes which lead to professional recognition include at least one module on European Law. There are programmes in European Studies, International Relations and Politics & Government, Economics, in large numbers of Universities with either compulsory or optional European modules. Programmes involving European languages inevitably reflect the European dimension. In addition, UK academics are involved in European thematic networks and UK institutions prepare significant numbers of UK graduates for employment by transnational employers.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA

Since 1999 the DfES has led on a strategy to encourage more international students to study in the UK (see Section 7.2). UK institutions are involved in the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe Project.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies

The UK's national Bologna strategies in the period between Berlin and Bergen tie in with the priorities identified at the Berlin Ministerial summit in 2003. That is quality assurance and the ability to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies; the two-cycle (now three-cycle) system and the development of an overarching European qualifications framework; and the recognition of degrees and periods of study, including the introduction of the Diploma Supplement by 2005. There has also been an increasing focus on both doctoral studies and the social dimension of the Bologna Process.

13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country

UK HE had already been through much of the restructuring and change required by the Bologna Process (between the later 1980s and later 1990s) when it was launched in 1999. As a result the UK has a longer perspective on Bologna reforms. The 'main challenges ahead' for the UK are likely to be the following:

- 1: To introduce variable fees in England.
- 2: To widen and deepen the engagement of individual HE institutions with Bologna and the issues it raises.
- 3: To develop the relationship between HE and professional bodies as academic and vocational qualifications are brought together under a framework of qualifications for Europe, and to ensure that there is common understanding across the sector.
- 4: To maintain diversity and flexibility as the 3rd cycle (doctoral level qualifications) is incorporated into the Bologna Process. The UK has begun the process of linking the third cycle to research and industry, and is looking for ways to develop this more. Most holders of research-based degrees take up research and other careers outside HE, in Government, industry or commerce, providing a strong link to University research. 48% of PhD graduates working in the UK remain in the education sector, of which the vast majority work in HE and universities (83%).
5. To encourage greater interest in science and increase the number of students undertaking Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.
6. To promote greater collaboration between universities and business.