



# THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA – A PRIORITY FOR SCOTLAND

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# Introduction

The latest two Ministerial communications for the Bologna Process, agreed at the regular Ministerial Conference held in Belgium in 2009<sup>1</sup> and the Anniversary Conference in Hungary and Austria in 2010<sup>2</sup>, highlighted a number of areas of interest to Scotland. Our involvement in these discussions and those at official level reflect our commitment to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to the benefits our students and institutions can gain from being involved with it.

The EHEA enables our institutions to work collaboratively with their counterparts from other European countries and exchange information which will improve the standard of learning and teaching and broaden the range of opportunities open to Scottish students, as well as students from other parts of Europe.

Scotland was the top performing amongst the 46 participating countries in the 2009 Stocktaking Report<sup>3</sup> and there is no doubt that the strong reputation of Scotland within the EHEA reflects the good work of our institutions, staff and students. We must continue this in the future and strengthen our engagement at all levels to pursue our priorities on mobility, lifelong learning and employability to name only three. We will continue to engage at Ministerial and official level to ensure that these priorities are addressed and that we maintain a focus on the benefits that can be realised for Scotland.

This document highlights Scottish activity in areas outlined as priorities for the EHEA over the next three years in the Ministerial Communiqué agreed in Belgium in 2009 - the Leuven Communiqué.

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Leuven\\_Louvain-la-Neuve\\_Communiq e\\_April\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communiq e_April_2009.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/2010\\_conference/documents/Budapest-Vienna\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/2010_conference/documents/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Stocktaking\\_report\\_2009\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/conference/documents/Stocktaking_report_2009_FINAL.pdf)

# Activity Scotland

## Mobility of staff and students

The Leuven Communiqué outlines a clear commitment to mobility as the hallmark of the EHEA with Ministers stating “We believe that mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff enhances the quality of programmes and excellence in research; it strengthens the academic and cultural internationalization of European higher education. Mobility is important for personal development and employability, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the EHEA and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions. Therefore, mobility shall be the hallmark of the EHEA. We call upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and

scope. In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad.”

In Scotland we have a diverse student population with a significant percentage of those graduating having had study or training periods abroad. In the 2008-09 academic year, over 39,000 students in Scottish higher education came from outwith the UK a figure that has increased by almost 40% over the past five years. It has also been estimated that at least 20% of staff are also from outwith the UK, however, we are keen to promote outward mobility and, although small, it is interesting to note the recent increase in the numbers of outward Erasmus placements for staff and students. Of course we are aware that Erasmus is only one element of mobility and that a plethora of other programmes exist.

One such example is the **Pronurse language programme**. The School of Midwifery and Social Care at **Edinburgh Napier University** participated in the development of the programme, which was designed to enable students and nurses to become more mobile by helping them learn professional language in English, German, Italian or Spanish. The programme was launched in February 2009 in conjunction with colleagues from Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain. Both **Edinburgh Napier University** and **Glasgow Caledonian University** are also involved in the **Florence Nursing and Midwifery Network** – promoting nursing education and midwifery and nursing research at 37 universities in 18 countries across Europe. It focuses on cooperative research, joint projects and programmes and mobility of staff and students and Edinburgh Napier University currently provides both the Vice President of the network and the Vice President of the student board.

In order to promote outward mobility of Scottish students, the **National Union of Students in Scotland** produced “The Wee Book of Studying in Europe” – a booklet that provided information on how to access funding, support and information about studying in other European countries. This was produced as part of a series of “Wee Books” to advise on key aspects of student life. An update, in the form of a travel brochure, was produced as “Wish You Were There” in 2009.

## Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning has gained increasing importance within the Bologna Process and this was recognised by Ministers who said in the Leuven Communiqué that: “Lifelong learning is subject to the principle of public responsibility. The accessibility, quality of provision and transparency of information shall be assured. Lifelong learning involves obtaining qualifications, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competences or enriching personal growth. Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, as well as work based routes.

Successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning paths. Lifelong learning will be supported by adequate organisational structures and funding. Lifelong learning encouraged by national policies should inform the practice of higher education institutions.”

A **Scottish Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) network** was set up in 2008 as a vehicle for sharing practice and research into recognition of prior learning in order to further develop it in Scottish higher education and also to raise awareness of relevant developments across the UK, Europe and internationally. The network has identified specific key areas to explore collaboratively, including sharing of approaches, resources and tools in order to make the process more accessible to learners and enable the recognition of learning gained outwith the UK. This links into a **Scottish Government** funded study on support mechanisms to recognise the learning and skills of migrant workers and refugees.

An RPL event organised by **QAA Scotland** was held in Brussels in February 2010. Attended by delegates from over 25 countries, the outcome was that a Scottish-led European RPL network will be proposed as part of the EHEA, in order to facilitate sharing of best practice across Europe.

A number of universities have developed dedicated lifelong learning provision such as that available at the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the **University of the West of Scotland (UWS)**. The centre provides advice and guidance to students and dedicated support for RPL on the basis of learning outcomes. This has contributed to the University’s success in attracting part-time students, who make up almost half of the total and UWS has committed to all of its programmes being available in alternatives to full time tuition by 2012.

## Widening access

The social dimension of higher education was a major theme of work in the Process over the last two years, with the Stocktaking Report containing a section on it for the first time. The Communiqué echoes this with strong references to student-centered learning and the following paragraph on equitable access and completion: “The student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe’s populations. We therefore emphasize the social characteristics of higher education and aim to provide equal opportunities to quality education. Access into higher education should be widened

by fostering the potential of students from underrepresented groups and by providing adequate conditions for the completion of their studies. This involves improving the learning environment, removing all barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from the study opportunities at all levels. Each participating country will set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade. Efforts to achieve equity in higher education should be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system.”

One of the **Scottish Government’s** strategic objectives is to create a Smarter Scotland through which it can expand opportunities for people in Scotland to succeed from nurture through to lifelong learning, ensuring higher and more widely shared achievements. The Government has sought to widen access to higher education through ensuring student support is targeted where it is most needed including: introducing a fairer means test in further and higher education, introducing new measures to improve help for disabled students following a review of the Disabled Students Allowance, introducing a £38 million package of grants for part-time learners in higher education and providing an additional £30 million for student support from 2010-11.

The **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)** Access and Inclusion Committee monitors this activity including advising the SFC on access and inclusion matters and monitoring progress on the implementation of the SFC's strategy document for widening participation in further and higher education in Scotland, Learning for All. The SFC also funds four regional wider access forums to widen access and participation in post-compulsory education through collaborative working. Membership of the forums is made up of representatives from each college and university in its region. Each have local programmes focusing on specific issues and target groups but one common theme developed is a focus on school outreach work. The SFC also allocates funding to higher education institutions for widening access initiatives.

The **Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS)** promotes higher education amongst young people whose school careers have been affected by adverse economic circumstances or who come from communities with little or no experience of higher education. LEAPS is a collaborative partnership between the universities and local authorities in the Lothians area, around Edinburgh.

In a similar way, the **West of Scotland Wider Access Forum** supports member organisations – colleges and universities – in the area surrounding Glasgow, to widen access to further and higher education; provide appropriate information and guidance for students and potential students; improve student retention; facilitate student progression from one programme of study to another; and to support students in transition between the sectors.

## Employability

As the focus on the need for the EHEA to remain competitive worldwide has increased, the importance of producing employable graduates has reflected this. The Communiqué recognises the need to equip students with advanced knowledge and skills and to empower individuals to seize opportunities in changing labour markets. Ministers have recognised the need for institutions to be more responsive to employers needs and for employers to better understand the educational perspective. The Communiqué called for increased high quality careers provision and the embedding of work placements within study programmes.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Scotland have been encouraged to embed the development of graduate employability skills and attributes in their curricula in a variety of ways:

- The publication by the **Scottish Funding Council** of Learning to Work (2004)<sup>4</sup> and subsequent provision of ring-fenced funding of £4m over four years (2006 to 2010) to assist HEIs to develop graduate employability<sup>5</sup>

- The selection by **QAA Scotland** of Employability as the 2005 Enhancement Theme, which resulted in a series of helpful publications and events<sup>6</sup>
- The creation of the **Scottish HE Employability Network**, supported by the **Higher Education Academy**, as a forum for developing and sharing innovative and effective practice<sup>7</sup>
- The inclusion of Employability as one of the strands of the 2009 Graduates for the 21st Century Enhancement Theme<sup>8</sup>
- The publication by the **Scottish Funding Council of Learning to Work Two (2009)**, designed to build on the achievements of the FE and HE sectors in promoting employability and consulting about a further programme of work focused on work-related learning and work placements, enterprise and entrepreneurship, and workforce development.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>[http://archive.sfc.ac.uk/publications/pubs\\_other\\_sfefarchive/learning\\_to\\_work.pdf](http://archive.sfc.ac.uk/publications/pubs_other_sfefarchive/learning_to_work.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/news\\_events\\_circulars/Circulars/2006/SFC8206.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/news_events_circulars/Circulars/2006/SFC8206.aspx)

<sup>6</sup><http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/Employability/publications.asp>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/scotland/ourwork/institutional/sheen>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/21stCGraduates/overview.asp>

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.sfc.ac.uk/news\\_events\\_circulars/Consultations/2009/SFC0309C.aspx](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/news_events_circulars/Consultations/2009/SFC0309C.aspx)



**Aiming University Learning at Work** is a three year project funded by the **Scottish Funding Council** and involving the **University of Glasgow**, **University of St. Andrews** and **Glasgow Caledonian University**. It aims to enhance student employability by developing work-related learning opportunities within the curriculum, focussing on non-vocational subjects such as History, Physics and Mathematics. It has found innovative ways of bringing together academic staff, students and employers to create opportunities including commercial project work and work placement opportunities.

The **Confident Futures** programme at **Edinburgh Napier University** is a programme of personal development unique to UK higher education. In addition to focussing specifically on providing a competitive edge in the job market, it also enables students to take responsibility for their personal development and relate this to their future aspirations. Interestingly, over one fifth of attendees to the workshops on the programme are students from other EU countries.

## Joint and dual degrees

The Ministerial Communiqué emphasises the importance, within each of the three cycles, of creating opportunities for mobility in the structure of degree programmes. In particular it calls for joint degrees and programmes, as well as mobility windows, to become more common practice.

The **Global Innovation Management Masters Programme** is the result of a strategic collaboration between the **University of Strathclyde** and ten other European universities. This led to Strathclyde developing, along with Aalborg University and Hamburg University of Technology, a two year joint Masters programme which develops graduates with a global perspective of study and industry, skill sets suited to small, medium and large companies and who have developed increased research capabilities and an understanding of the innovation process. Staff mobility ensures integration of partners.

The **University of Edinburgh** is a partner in the **Joint Program in Translational and Experimental Medicine** along with partner institutions in Goettingen, Karolinska, Leiden, Dublin and Barcelona. The programme, established by the Network of European Universities in Life Sciences, is designed to promote the mobility of biomedical scientists within the network to provide increased access to a variety of topics, technology and expertise with research visits abroad of up to six months duration.

## Partnership and collaboration across Europe

Collaboration is clearly a key aspect of the development and continued success of the EHEA. The Communiqué describes an area characterised by permanent cooperation between governments, HEIs, students, staff, employers and other stakeholders. It also recognises that the Bologna Process is leading to greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education and is making it easier for learners to be mobile and for institutions to attract students and scholars from other continents.

The **Scottish Government's Action Plan on European Engagement** describes an objective to enhance Scotland's profile in Europe by placing Scotland at the heart of European activity, from where we can benefit fully from the opportunities available. In education this means promoting Scotland, working with other countries and learning from them in order to further improve our own systems.

The **University of Glasgow** recently launched an international Masters in Russian, Central and East European Studies in collaboration with partner universities in Hungary, Poland, Estonia and Finland. The programme offers students the opportunity to spend a year in one of the partner institutions with graduates receiving a double degree from University of Glasgow and the partner.

The **University of the West of Scotland** has a long established partnership with HTWK Leipzig which has involved student and staff exchanges, placements, double degree programmes and collaborative research projects. A dual degree award has been developed at Masters level for Mechanical Engineering students and overall the university collaborates with six faculties in Leipzig.

# Scottish Bologna Stakeholders Group

The Group brings together organisations from across Scotland in a forum for members to discuss areas of interest related to the Bologna Process. The aim being to ensure Scotland can derive maximum value from participation in it. Specific actions include:

- Informing Scottish Government input to Ministerial Conferences and the Bologna Follow Up Group
- Ensuring effective engagement between the Bologna Experts and higher education providers in Scotland
- Raising Scotland's profile and promoting Scottish involvement in Bologna-related events
- Identifying linkages between members' work in this area and encouraging collaboration
- Sharing information and good practice on Bologna-related issues.

The group is chaired by the Scottish Government and membership includes the Scotland-based Bologna Experts in addition to representatives of the following organisations:

- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
- Higher Education Academy
- National Union of Students Scotland
- Quality Assurance Agency Scotland
- Scotland's Colleges
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Funding Council
- Scottish Qualifications Authority
- Scottish Trades Union Congress
- Student Participation in Quality Scotland
- Universities Scotland

# Future challenges

The Stakeholders Group recognises that we must continue our strong performance of recent years. In the context of the EHEA, the following challenges have been identified for the future:

- Maintaining the competitiveness of Scottish Higher Education – in an increasingly diverse global market we must continue to work hard to ensure we maintain our world leading reputation for providing a high quality student experience
- Maintaining and enhancing student and staff engagement with quality enhancement – to ensure everyone who studies, works in and benefits from higher education has a strong voice in helping to guide future progress
- Increasing outward staff and student mobility, including students from under represented and disadvantaged socio-economic groups – Scotland has a large number of incoming students but we must work harder to promote the benefits of outward mobility to students, staff and the Scottish economy
- Improving retention, progression and achievement within under represented socio-economic groups – in order that the benefits of higher education can be appreciated and shared as widely as possible
- Responding to demographic changes by increasing flexible delivery paths and the recognition of prior learning – again in order that the benefits of higher education can be widely shared
- Increasing skills utilisation, knowledge transfer and engagement between higher education and business – in order that we can focus on employability and make best use of the potential of higher education to contribute to the Scottish economy
- Increasing the engagement of colleges – as around 20% of higher education provision is delivered in colleges we must ensure that their contribution is adequately recognised and that key tools, such as the Diploma Supplement, are provided across all of Scottish higher education

# Annex A - Bologna Process background

Launched in 1999, the Bologna Declaration is a commitment to reform the higher education systems within the countries involved in a common direction. The overarching aim of the process is to create comparable and increasingly coherent systems of higher education across Europe, in order to maximise attractiveness, competitiveness, transferability and mobility within a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

It is an intergovernmental initiative, involving 47 participating countries (Scotland takes part as part of the UK). It is conducted outside the formal decision-making framework of the European Union. The European Commission is however a full member of the Process. Representatives of staff, students and higher education institutions are consultative members.

The broad objectives of the Bologna Process are: to remove the obstacles to student mobility across Europe, in particular through facilitating recognition of qualifications; to enhance the attractiveness of European higher education worldwide; to establish a common framework for higher education systems across Europe; and for this common framework to be based on a Bachelors/Masters/Doctoral studies model. Agreement on a set of guidelines and principles for quality assurance and an overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA has also laid the groundwork for improvements in the quality and openness and transparency of HE in Europe.

There are ten specific Bologna action lines as follows:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on three 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
7. Lifelong learning
8. Higher education institutions and students
9. Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA
10. EHEA and the European Research Area – two pillars of the knowledge based society.

Ministers from participating countries meet every two years to assess progress and set priorities for the next two year period, recorded in an agreed communiqué.

Officials meet as the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) between Ministerial conferences, to take forward commitments made in the Ministerial communiqués. This is done by setting up working groups focussing on key issues such as mobility, learning outcomes, employability, qualifications frameworks and lifelong learning.

# Annex B - Contacts and further information

## Scottish Bologna Experts

Morgane Artacho, Edinburgh Study Centre, Arcadia University,  
ArtachoM@arcadia.edu

Alan Davidson, Robert Gordon University,  
a.t.davidson@rgu.ac.uk

Andy Gibbs, Edinburgh Napier University,  
a.gibbs@napier.ac.uk

Graeme Roberts, Higher Education Academy,  
j.g.roberts@abdn.ac.uk

## Useful weblinks

Scottish Government  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

UK Higher Education Europe Unit  
<http://www.europeunit.ac.uk>

European Higher Education Area  
<http://www.ehea.info> (Website operational from 1 July 2010)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

More detail on the European Higher Education Area can be found at:

<http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/bologna-process>

<http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/home/>

<http://www.ehea.info>



The Scottish  
Government

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