Completed National Reports and National Strategies for the Social Dimension should be sent to the Bologna Secretariat by email (secr@bologna2009benelux.org) no later than

1 November 2008.

PART I

BOLOGNA PROCESS
TEMPLATE FOR NATIONAL REPORTS: 2007-2009

Notes:

BFUG members are strongly encouraged to consult other stakeholders about the contents of their National Report.

Please complete your National Report in English using this template (shaded areas) and return it to the Secretariat by email. Where appropriate, please include precise web references to legislation or other documentation. Please add comments as appropriate under each question to describe the current situation. Please try to keep text brief, while aiming to answer all questions comprehensively.

National Reports will be posted on the Bologna website in their original form.

Information from National Reports will form the basis of the Stocktaking Report to be presented to Ministers when they meet in April 2009.

Details

Country	England, Wales, Northern Ireland
Date	1 November 2008
BFUG member (one name only) Position	Rachel Green Deputy Director, Higher Education Group Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Email address	Rachel.Green@dius.gsi.gov.uk
Contributors to the report	in alphabetical order:

	Bologna Experts British Council Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills Higher Education Funding Council for England Higher Education Funding Council for Wales National Union of Students Quality Assurance Agency UK Higher Education Europe Unit UK National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) Welsh Assembly Government

1. Main developments since London 2007

Please describe the important developments relating to the Bologna Process, including legislative reforms and changes in institutional structures, since the London meeting in 2007.

The European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) Review of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has been concluded, and the Steering Group sent the final report to the ENQA Secretariat at the end of July 2008. The report will be presented to the ENQA Board for re-confirmation of ENQA membership at a meeting in mid-November, and the report will be made publicly available shortly afterward.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ-EWNI), first published in 2001, has been reviewed in consultation with HE institutions and interested organisations, and a revised edition published in September 2008. This framework is an integral part of quality assurance in HE and aims to support a consistency of approach and transparency about expectations for students and employers through a series of general qualification descriptors. The FHEQ-EWNI aligns with the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

Alongside the revised FHEQ-EWNI, a framework for the use of academic credit in HE in England has been published, with associated guidance. This follows recommendations in a December 2006 report by the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group that credit arrangements for HE in England which would be compatible with ECTS should be developed with a view to English institutions voluntarily credit-rating their provision by 2009/10 and thereafter starting to include the credit value in a published description of the programmes they offer. Institutions are encouraged to use the credit framework in conjunction with the FHEQ-EWNI

Foundation Degrees have been further developed since the last national report. By 2007-08 there were almost 2,600 courses running, with 815 in development, and the number of students had risen to just below 72,000.

The UK HE Europe Unit held two conferences on the Bologna process: "Are we nearly there yet? Towards a European Higher Education Area by 2010" in June 2007 (http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/sites/europe_unit2/news_and_information/events.cfm) and "Going the Extra Mile: Bologna Beyond 2010" in October 2008, (http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/sites/europe_unit2/news_and_information/index.cfm)

Wales is holding an ongoing Review of the Mission, Purpose, Role and Funding of Higher Education (October 2008-March 2009).

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning issued a major public consultation (Nov 2007) reviewing the policies underpinning the delivery of Higher Education in the Further Education sector, including Foundation Degrees. The public consultation closed on 7 January 2008. In April 2008, the Minister approved the main recommendations contained in the consultation and work is now underway to implement these.

Since changes to the student support system were introduced in 2006/07, universities can charge full time HE students variable tuition fees (to a maximum of £3,145 in 2008/09), but no student has to pay their tuition fees either before or during their studies. Variable tuition fees will bring new income into the HE sector and will enable English HE institutions to maintain and improve competitiveness in the global HE market.

Eligible students can take out a student loan to cover their tuition fees as well as their maintenance (living costs). Unlike commercial loans, student loans only attract an interest rate linked to inflation, so borrowers will repay no more, in real terms, than they borrow. Borrowers repay at a rate of 9 per cent of their income over a threshold of £15,000 a year.

This is backed by a student support package of non-repayable grants and bursaries focusing on the less well off. This grant package has been significantly enhanced by raising the family income thresholds for both full and partial grants. The maximum grant in 2008/09 is £2,835. It is expected that about 40% of students are eligible for a maximum grant. Two-thirds of students will receive either a full or partial grant. Many universities are paying for more than the mandatory bursary of £310.

There are 287,000 more higher education students than in 1997 and over 50% of young people from every social background and every part of the country aspire to go to university. The latest published figures for 2008/09 show a substantial annual increase of 6.2% in overall applicants from England, while applications from those in lower socio-economic groups have risen from 28.7% to 29.4%.

2. Partnership

Please describe the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country.

The implementation of the Bologna principles is primarily a matter for the sector itself which has the principal responsibility for taking forward the process. A broad range of stakeholders, actively engaged in helping oversee the process, who meet regularly:

- A High Level Policy Forum comprises representatives from Government (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Welsh Assembly Government), the Quality Assurance Agency, UK NARIC, Universities UK, Guild HE, National Union of Students, the British Council, and the UK HE funding bodies.
- The UK HE Europe Unit is a sector-wide initiative aiming to bring the position of the UK HE sector to EU and the Bologna process policy-making forums, and vice-versa.
- The UK team of the Bologna experts have been active in the UK and have assisted institutions in all aspects of the process via institutional support, workshops, seminars, etc.
- QAA has included reference to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the new institutional audit arrangement in England and Northern Ireland and reference to Bologna and other European developments in the revised sections of its Code of Practice and other elements of the academic infrastructure.

a) Does your country have a national working group for Bologna follow-up [1]

	Yes ☐	No ☒

b) Does your national Bologna follow-up group include representatives of

	Yes	No
Ministry	Yes ☐	No ☐
Rectors' conference	Yes ☐	No ☐
Academic staff	Yes ☐	No ☐
Students	Yes ☐	No ☐
Staff trade unions	Yes ☐	No ☐
National Quality Assurance Agency	Yes ☐	No ☐
Employers	Yes ☐	No ☐

Other (please specify) _____

c) Does your country have a Bologna promoters' group [2]   Yes ☒   No ☐

d) Does your national Bologna promoters' group include representatives of

	Yes	No
Ministry	Yes ☐	No ☒
Rectors' conference	Yes ☐	No ☒
Academic staff	Yes ☒	No ☐

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[1] A group that develops policy proposals for implementing the Bologna Process
[2] A group that supports/advises HEIs on implementation of the Bologna Process

Students	Yes ☒	No ☐
Staff trade unions	Yes ☐	No ☒
National Quality Assurance Agency	Yes ☐	No ☒
Employers	Yes ☐	No ☒
Other (please specify) _____		

Please add any additional comments if necessary:

The relevant Ministries, the QAA, the HE sector (eg Universities UK) attend Bologna promoters' meetings.
A multi-agency conference on "HE competitiveness enhanced by engagement with the Bologna Process" took place in Cardiff on 8 November 2007 (http://www.wheb.ac.uk/en/news.php). In partnership with the British Council and Higher Education Academy, an event to promote the European Dimension in Learning and Teaching is planned for early 2009.

DEGREE SYSTEM

3. Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle

a) Please describe the progress made towards introducing the first and second cycles.

> The first and second cycle have been fully implemented in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland for a number of years.

b) Please give the percentage of the total number of all[3] students below doctoral level enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2008/09.

Total number of all students below doctoral level	Number enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2008/09[4]	% of all students enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2008/09
2006-07 HESA figures for the UK as a whole are 2,381,490 (below doctoral level) (update for 2008/09 to follow in mid January 2009)	UK 2006-07: 2,265,880	UK 2006-07: 95%

c) Please add comments which accurately describe the current situation regarding implementation of the two cycle system in your country:

> The two cycle system has been fully implemented in the UK for many years.

4. Stage of implementation of the third cycle

Please describe the progress made towards implementing doctoral studies as the third Bologna cycle.

Please include:
- the percentage of doctoral candidates following structured doctoral programmes including both taught courses and independent research
- the normal length of full-time doctoral studies
- other elements[5] apart from independent research that are included in doctoral study programmes
- the supervisory and assessment procedures for doctoral studies
- information on whether doctoral studies are included in your country's qualifications framework and linked to learning outcomes

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[3] "All" = all students who could be involved in 2-cycle system i.e. NOT those in doctoral programmes and NOT those in short HE programmes. *NB Students of ALL study fields are taken into account*

[4] If countries have more recent data available after November 1, they can provide an update but no later than January 15, 2009

[5] E.g. taught courses in the chosen discipline, other taught courses, teaching activities (if these are required as part of doctoral studies), etc.

- information on whether interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills are integrated in doctoral studies
- information on whether credit points are used in measuring workload in doctoral studies.
- Information on the status of the doctoral students (students, early stage researchers, both)

The third cycle is fully implemented and there have been no significant developments since the previous report other than the review of the FHEQ-EWNI. The second edition makes specific reference to the overarching FQ-EHEA and provides a table mapping the levels of the FHEQ-EWNI to the cycles of the FQ-EHEA including the third (doctoral) cycle. In the FHEQ-EWNI all the qualifications descriptors are in two parts: a statement of [learning] outcomes, achievement of which is assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification, and a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed. QAA consulted the sector in May-July 2007 in a discussion paper about doctoral programmes the responses to which are summarised at

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/doctoralProg/progressMarch08.asp

The responses to some questions informed the revision of the FHEQ-EWNI.

Professional doctorates containing taught elements may be credit based - this is a matter for the awarding institution - with a minimum of 360 (UK) credits at the level of the qualification (for guidance, see

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/england/credit/creditframework.pdf and

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/FHEQCreditStatement.asp).

PhD and DPhil are not typically credit-rated - credit points are not normally used in measuring workload in research-based doctoral studies. Guidance on the supervision of postgraduate research students is provided in Section 1 of QAA's Code of Practice at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/code of practice/section1/default.asp

In the current round of institutional audit, QAA examines the effectiveness of arrangements for maintaining appropriate standards and enhancing the quality of postgraduate research programmes, and comments on this in its published reports.

The normal length of full-time doctoral studies is 3.5 years.

Other elements included in doctoral study programmes are normally skills development, employability skills, research methods training (depending on the discipline) and taught elements. There are professional doctorates which contain taught elements, but students are still expected to do a significant amount of research. There could be teaching activities, but these are not compulsory.

Section 1 of QAA's Code of practice: postgraduate research programmes, contains a set of precepts for supervision and assessment which include items like:

"Institutions will provide research students with sufficient information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment in which they will be working". "Institutions will appoint supervisors who have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage and monitor research students effectively". "Institutions will use criteria for assessing research degrees that enable them to define the academic standards of different research

programmes and the achievements of their graduates. The criteria used to assess research degrees must be clear and readily available to students, staff and external examiners".

Interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills are included in doctoral studies. Guidance on the latter is set out in the QAA Code of Practice (see above), Appendix 3.

Although doctoral students are treated as early career researchers, and as part of the research environment of an academic department, those registered for a PhD on a full time basis are regarded as students. They may be employed by their institution on a part-time basis for teaching purposes but this does not affect their status within the institutions as research student.

All UK HEIs have developed a comprehensive suite of skills training modules specifically for the needs of early stage researchers (both postgraduate and post doctoral). Doctoral students are required to undergo a skills training needs assessment and to attend training as necessary to the needs of their research programme and their own personal development.

The percentage of students on structured doctoral programmes in 2006-07 was 4.1% across the whole of the UK. There were 96,935 doctoral students out of a total of 2,362,815 HE students in UK HEIs. These are the most recent data that are currently available. (Source: Table A of the HESA publication 'Students in Higher Education Institutions 2006/07')

5. Relationship between higher education and research

a) Please describe the main trends in the role of higher education institutions in research in your country.

Research is a fundamental element of higher education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Government has, over a number of years, pursued a policy in collaboration with universities and funding councils to identify the real costs of research and teaching in order to ensure that research is adequately funded. All universities receive an element of their block grant to provide the basic infrastructure for research. This funding is closely linked to the results of the National Research Assessment Exercise which is designed to identify and support high quality research. The approach to research funding for projects funded through Government and research councils is to ensure that universities recover the full costs of research - universities are expected to pursue full cost recovery for all their externally funded research. The Research Councils play a vital role in funding fundamental and applied research on a competitive peer review basis. Universities also obtain substantial funding from other parts of the public sector, commerce, industry and charities.

In Northern Ireland, Higher Education Expenditure on Research and Development (HERD) has remained at approximately 0.6% of gross GDP for the 3 year period (2004-2006). Total HERD expenditure increased by 2.6% from £146.8m in 2005 to £150.7m in 2006, lower than the increase of 7.2% from 2004 to 2005.

b) Please outline any measures to improve co-operation between higher education institutions and other private and public institutions that undertake research. Please include:
- percentage of GDP spent on research
  - from public funds
  - from private funds
- total annual national research expenditure (expressed in national currency)
  - from public funds
  - from private funds
- percentage of research carried out in higher education institutions (in terms of funding)
- details of the funding mechanisms for doctoral students in your country

Funding mechanisms for doctoral students: Public funding for research in English higher education is administered under a dual support system. In this system the Higher Education Funding Council for England provides block grant funding to support the research infrastructure and enable institutions to undertake ground-breaking research in keeping with their own mission. On the other side of the system, grants for specific projects and programmes are provided by the Research Councils, charities, the European Union and government departments. See http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/funding/. The UK's expenditure on research and development in 2006 was £23.2 billion (1.76% of GDP). Business accounted for 1.08%; public R&D was 0.68% (£6bn (72%) of public funded R&D was carried out by higher education.

In 2006 in Northern Ireland the Business Expenditure on Research and Development (BERD) - private money - was 0.55 % of GDP. For public money (HERD), the figure was 0.57%, giving expenditure figures of £145 million and £150.7 million for BERD and HERD respectively. Total expenditure on Research and Development in Northern Ireland was £319.2 million in 2006, of which £155.4 million (48.7%) was spent by businesses, £150.1 million (47.0%) by the Higher Education sector and the remainder (£13.7m) was Government expenditure. DEL provides a postgraduate awards (PGA) budget to the two NI universities (research departments) annually. The funding is used to support the students who apply for funding on the basis of a competition.

c) Is there any tracking system to follow the further career of doctoral graduates?
Yes ☒   No ☐   If Yes, please specify:

The Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) survey "Destinations of Learners from Higher Education Institutions", www.hesa.ac.uk

6. Access[6] and admission to the next cycle

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[6] Access as defined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention: "Access: the right of qualified candidates to apply and be considered for admission to higher education."

Describe the arrangements for access between the first and second cycles and between the second and third cycles.

6.1 Access and admission between the first and second cycles

Please indicate:
a) the percentage of first cycle qualifications that give access to the second cycle

There is no change since the previous report. The successful completion of a first cycle qualification gives access to the second cycle so the percentage giving access is 100%. All bachelors (honours) degrees give access to the second cycle.

b) any first cycle qualifications that do not give access to the second cycle (please specify)

Some HE qualifications within the first cycle (eg Foundation Degrees) do not give access to the second cycle. Normally a student with a Foundation degree would first progress to and complete an honours degree before going on to the second cycle.

c) any special requirements for access to a second cycle programme in the same field of studies: *please tick whether graduates must*:

sit entrance exam	Yes ☐	No ☒	In some cases ☐
complete additional courses	Yes ☐	No ☒	In some cases ☐
have work experience	Yes ☐	No ☒	In some cases ☐

If the answer to the last point is *yes*, please specify what type of work experience is required:

It is the case that for admission to some MBA courses students need to have work experience. This may also be true in relation to the caring professions and other professions allied to medicine, but each institution sets its own entry requirements for specific subjects and these will vary from one to another.

d) any further special requirements for access to a second cycle programme in the same field of studies

e) to which students the above special requirements apply *(please tick):*

all students	Yes ☐	No ☒
holders of particular first cycle qualifications	Yes ☐	No ☒
students of the same field coming from other HEIs	Yes ☐	No ☒

f) which of the requirements apply to students coming from other fields of studies *(please tick)*:

entrance exam	Yes ☐	No ☐	In some cases ☒
additional courses	Yes ☐	No ☐	In some cases ☒

work experience   Yes ☐   No ☐   In some cases ☒

6.2 Access and admission between the second and third cycles

Please indicate:

a) the percentage of second cycle qualifications that give access to the third cycle

> There is no significant change since the previous report. Students must normally have a good honours degree to progress to the third cycle. The large majority of students complete a second cycle qualification before starting a doctorate but in some subjects UK HEIs allow access to doctoral programmes without prior completion of a Master's degree.

b) any second cycle qualifications that do not give access to the third cycle (please specify)

c) any measures planned to remove obstacles between cycles

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7. Employability of graduates/ cooperation with employers

a) What measures are being taken to enhance the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications? Please include the most recent statistical data on the employment status of graduates of all cycles.

If your higher education institutions also provide professional bachelor programmes, please provide employability data for both types of bachelors separately

Enhancing the employability of graduates continues to play a key role in Government policy. The Government's "World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England" (July 2007 CM7181) set out practical reforms for a 'skills revolution' and closing the skills gap at all levels by 2020. In response to the Leitch Review the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) launched its higher level skills strategy "Higher Education at Work- High Skills: High Value" (April 08). One of the strategy's aims is to produce more and more employable graduates. Proposals include universities treating all facets of student employability as a core part of their mission; strengthening universities' role in the development of graduate employability skills; - including through work experience at home and abroad - and improving work experience and information, advice and guidance for young people.

The Higher Education Academy (www.heacademy.ac.uk) has developed a range of employability guides to support universities in embedding employability into curriculum design and developing strategies and practice for the enhancement of student employability. Along with the Council for Industry and Higher Education, the HE Academy has also developed and published student employability profiles to help academic staff, employers and students to understand better the skills developed through studying particular subjects.

The undergraduate curriculum frequently includes placements, projects, skills and enterprise modules, simulations and other work-related components to generate higher level skills. The Confederation of British Industry and Universities UK have been working together to identify graduate employability good practice for developing skills within the HE workforce and when students are on placements. The outcome of this collaboration has been published and the details are available here: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Media-Releases/Pages/CBI-UUK%20report.aspx. The National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCGE) - www.ncge.com - has developed a number of activities to support graduates who want to start their own business as well as providing the general skills needed for business, and have been tasked with boosting graduate entrepreneurial skills through regional based university enterprise networks. DIUS's student listening programme identified students also had concerns about the extent to which their courses increase their employability and on the quality of information, advice and guidance (IAG). DIUS is working with the Department for Children, School and Families to improve IAG for prospective students to help them make informed choices and enhance their employability. The unistats website (www.unistats.com) allows university students to compare the labour market outcomes (amongst other factors for different courses and institutions. This type of comparative information is essential in informing student choice and reflecting employer demand. The Higher Education Statistics Agency provides information on the destinations of UK and EU domiciled students six months after graduating. The latest figures (2006/07) for all

first degree graduates show 63% found employment, a further 9% were in employment and further study and 16% were in further study only.

According to the latest Labour Force Survey figures (Q2 2008) employment rates for those in the working age with degrees are 89% with a higher degree; 87% with a first degree and 78% with a foundation degree. The same survey also shows employment rates for graduates undertaking a 'professional' programme - 91% engineering professionals; 90% law; and 88% medicine and dentistry.

In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland it has not been necessary to align recruitment procedures with the Bologna process because the Bologna degree structure is well understood and the first cycle (Bachelor) degree is accepted by employers – a high percentage of UK graduates enter the labour market immediately after obtaining a Bachelor degree.

b) To what extent there is a dialogue in your country between higher education institutions and employers on:
- curriculum design, work placements and international experience
  Significant ☒   Some ☐   A little ☐   None ☐

- accreditation/quality assurance
  Significant ☐   Some ☒   A little ☐   None ☐

- university governance
  Significant ☐   Some ☒   A little ☐   None ☐

c) Are first cycle graduates able to pursue careers in the public service on an equal footing with other graduates?

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

d) Have you aligned recruitment procedures and career structures in the public service to take account of the Bologna changes?

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

If no, or in some cases only, please explain the current situation:

8. Implementation of national qualifications framework

Please answer the questions below. Please add comments which accurately describe the current situation in your country.

a) Has the national qualifications framework been prepared[7]?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (FHEQ-EWNI), introduced in 2001, has been reviewed consultation with the

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[7] A national framework of qualifications compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA

HE sector and other stakeholders, and a second edition was published in August 2008.

b) Does the framework or proposed framework include generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

There are five levels in the FHEQ-EWNI the correspondence of which is mapped to FQ-EHEA cycles at
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf
The framework includes HE qualification descriptors which comprise a statement of outcomes and of the wider abilities that the typical student could be expected to have developed.

c) Does it include ECTS credit ranges for the first and second cycle?

Yes ☐   No ☒

Comment

The FHEQ-EWNI is a qualifications, not a credit framework. Across the UK, there is a shared consensus on the unit of credit. In August 2008, QAA, UUK and GuildHE published the Higher Education Credit Framework for England. Page 14 of the guidance provides advice about credit ranges - both English and ECTS - for the HE qualifications set out in the FHEQ-EWNI
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/england/credit/creditframework.asp#p2.2

d) Has the NQF been nationally discussed with all stakeholders?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

The revision of the FHEQ-EWNI was overseen by an Advisory Group including members from HEIs, government departments, professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies, National Union of Students - for full membership, see Annex A in http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf).

If the answer to d) is No, please answer question e):
e) has a timetable been agreed for consultations with all stakeholders?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Comment

If the answer to d) is Yes, please answer the following questions:
f) Are all formal arrangementsdecisions for implementing the framework in place and have the necessary formal decisions for establishing the framework been taken?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

The FHEQ-EWNI is not a legislative instrument. It is one of a series of external reference points for quality and academic standards used by HEIs in developing and reviewing their programmes and by QAA in its audit and review processes. Following the completion of the public consultation process the second edition of the FHEQ-EWNI will become one of the external reference points for quality and academic standards used in QAA audits and reviews.

g) How far has the implementation of the national qualifications framework progressed *(please tick one)*

- The framework is fully implemented. All qualifications have been
  added to the NQF through a QA procedure (e.g. accreditation) ☒
- There is significant progress on implementing the framework ☐
- The work of describing all qualifications in terms of learning outcomes
  and competencies has been completed ☐
- There is a timetable for implementation and the work has started ☐
- Work on implementing the framework has not yet started but a
  timetable for implementation has been agreed ☐
- Work on implementing the framework has not yet started and there is
  no timetable for implementation ☐

Comment

The qualifications for which there are descriptors in the FHEQ-EWNI are not national qualifications but the qualifications of individual degree awarding higher education institutions.

h) What is the stage of progress on the self-certification of compatibility with the EHEA framework ?

Completed ☐   Started, but not yet completed ☒   Not yet started ☐

Comment
The self certification process is in its final stages. An Advisory Group including four international expert members was appointed to oversee the process which will be completed in late 2008.

i) Has the self-certification report been published?

Yes ☐   No ☒

Comment
The report of the self certification exercise will be published in November 2008.

Please add any additional comments if necessary:

Comment

NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA (ESG)[8]

9. Reviewing the QA system against the ESG[9] and national support for implementation

a) Has your national QA system been reviewed against the ESG?

Yes ☐   No ☒   ☐ Not yet, but such a review is planned
(Please specify time) _____

b) If a review has been undertaken or is planned, please give further details of the review process.

c) If a review process has been undertaken, did it result in any of the following:

Stakeholder consultation on changes required to the national QA system?

Yes ☐   No ☐

The introduction of specific financial or other incentives aimed at improving the internal quality assurance processes in institutions?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If Yes, please give details of these incentives:

- Other measures

Yes ☐   No ☐

If Yes, please outline these measures

d) If incentives and/or other measures have been introduced with the aim of improving the internal quality assurance processes in institutions, has any evidence of the impact of these changes been gathered?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If Yes, please give details of how evidence of the impact of the changes was gathered, and of the main outcomes that it demonstrates

9.1. Internal quality assurance in higher education institutions

Describe the internal QA systems in place in your HEIs.

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[8] http://www.bologna2009benelux.org/documents/Standards-and-Guidelines-for-QA.pdf
[9] ESG - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

The underlying principle of quality assurance in the UK is that responsibility for the standards and quality of academic awards and programmes rests with HEIs themselves. Each institution has its own internal procedures: there is no single model. Institutions address their responsiblities through their procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of their programmes and the assessment of students' learning.

All institutions carry out regular monitoring and periodic review of their programmes. The former is normally undertaken on an annual basis by the department providing the programme. The process normally takes into account reports from external examiners, staff and student feedback, reports from any professional body that accredits the programme and feedback from former students and their empolyers. Periodic review is typically carried out every five years and normally involves both students and external experts.

Each HEI appoints external examiners who report to the head of the institution. External examiners are independent external academic experts drawn from other institutions or from areas of relevant professional practice. External examiners are required to report on the appropriateness of standards set for the awards, the standards of student performance and the extent to which processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and have been conducted fairly.

QAA has, in close consultation with the HE sector, developed detailed codes of practice for all aspects of quality assurance and enhancement which provide a basis for the development of internal quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Please comment in particular on the following aspects, giving references to relevant websites:

a) How many HEIs have published a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality?

All HEIs ☒   Most HEIs ☐   Some HEIs ☐   No HEIs ☐

A joint HEA/QAA/HEFCE project exploring the relationship between quality assurance and quality enhancement was published following a national conference in June 2008. The report shows that many institutions are focusing on enhancing their support for student learning and are attempting to ensure that enhancement is embedded in quality assurance processes. The report is available at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/resources/publications/Quality EnhancementAndAssurance.pdf

b) How many HEIs have arrangements in place for the internal approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards?

All HEIs☒   Most HEIs ☐   Some HEIs ☐   No HEIs ☐

Please describe what kind of arrangements are in place

See above for details, but also section 7 of QAA's Code of Practice - Programme design, approval, monitoring and review

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section7/programmede sign.pdf

Reports on institutional programme monitoring and institutional frameworks for managing quality and academic standards are included in the series of QAA Outcome papers available at

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/outcomes/outcomes1.asp

In the current round of institutional audits in England and Northern ireland, QAA reports include a commentary on an institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision both taught and by research (see audit handbook for details).

c) How many HEIs have described their programmes in terms of learning outcomes?

All HEIs ☒　　　Most HEIs ☐　　　Some HEIs ☐　　　No HEIs ☐

d) Are student assessments at HEIs designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes (based on published criteria) applied in a consistent way?

All HEIs ☒　　　Most HEIs ☐　　　Some HEIs ☐　　　No HEIs ☐

Please describe how the above is achieved.

HEIs describe the intended learning outcomes for their programmes and the means by which these are achieved and demonstrated in Programme Specifications. Guidance on programme specifications is provided by QAA at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/default.asp

Evidence of the widespread adoption and use of learning outcomes by HEIs drawn from the reports of institutional audits was published in an Outcomes report QAA in May 2007.

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/outcomes/learningoutcomes.asp

e) How many HEIs publish up to date, impartial and objective information about the programmes and awards offered?

All HEIs ☒　　　Most HEIs ☐　　　Some HEIs ☐　　　No HEIs ☐

Additional information if necessary

Beyond the formal requirements of quality assurance, HEIs have a responsibility to publish accurate and up to date information about their academic standards and quality. Since October 2007 this is provided through the "unistats" website (http://www.unistats.com/). This includes information at institutional level about feedback from final year undergraduates on the quality of their courses, student entry qualifications and achievements, and destination of leavers.

10. Stage of development of external quality assurance system

Describe the external quality assurance system operating in your country.

Please include:
a) the stage of implementation of your external quality assurance system

External review processes have been in operation since 1990. QAA reviews all HE provision in the UK. Full details at www.qaa.ac.uk. Previous national reports have contained information about external quality assurance in the UK and the QAA.

b) does your external quality assurance system operate at a national level;

Yes ☒   No ☐

If **No**, please specify:

c) does your external quality assurance system cover all higher education[10]

Yes ☒   No ☐

If No, please specify which types of institutions or programmes are not covered by your external quality assurance system:

d) which of the following elements are included in your external quality assurance system:
- self-assessment report   Yes ☒   No ☐
- external review   Yes ☒   No ☐
- publication of results   Yes ☒   No ☐
- follow-up procedures   Yes ☒   No ☐

e) has a peer review of the national agency(ies) according to the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA already taken place

Yes ☒   No ☐

If **No** is there a date set for the review? ☐ Yes (please specify date _____) No ☐

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[10] Higher education: all types of courses of study or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognised by the relevant authorities as belonging to a country's higher education system.

11. Level of student participation

From the following, please indicate all aspects of quality assurance in which students are involved:

a) in governance of national agencies for QA.

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

b) as full members in external review teams

Yes ☐   No ☒   In some cases ☐

c) as observers in external review teams

Yes ☐   No ☐   In some cases ☒

d) as part of the decision making process for external reviews

Yes ☐   No ☐   In some cases ☒

e) in the consultation process during external reviews (eg arrangements for external reviewers to consult with students)

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

f) in internal quality assurance (e.g. periodic review of programmes)

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

g) in preparation of self-assessment reports.

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

h) in follow-up procedures:

Yes ☐   No ☒   In some cases ☐

*Please add any additional comments, especially if students are **not** involved in any of the aspects***:**

In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, students are members of university quality assurance committees. Student evaluation and monitoring is an integral part of quality assurance and enhancement at an individual module and programme level. Students contribute to the documentation for institutional audit visit through the preparation of the Student Written Submission to the institutional audit team. Auditors always meet students during the institutional audit visit; and institutions have established a system of student representatives at all levels and in all subjects for feedback and monitoring purposes.

In addition to feedback through course and faculty representatives and course evaluation forms, there is also a major national survey of student views. The National Student Survey (NSS) is conducted every year and provides feedback from third year full-time undergraduates and fourth year part-time undergraduates about the quality of their courses and their academic experiences. The Survey, with a 64% response rate - or 220,000 students - is seen as a key driver for improvements in the student learning experience. NSS results are published on the unistats website.

National Union of Students and QAA work closely together to enable students to actively engage with quality procedures. The new Quality Matters for Students programme has taken forward the Quality Takes Times agenda including a major conference event to provide students with information and training about how they can get further involved in the processes, as well as briefings.

Re points b) and c) above, in 2007-2008, students were included in some QAA audit teams as observers to inform consultation with HEIs about student membership of audit and review teams. Feedback from student observers and audit team members has been evaluated and was published in July 2008. It is available at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/events/smart08/StudentPaper3.asp This will inform the next steps towards student membership of teams.

d) QAA does not have a separate decision making process for reviews. The judgments made by the audit team are final and not subject to any further verification/decision making stage.

h) the follow-up procedures in most cases (ie where the audit judgement is confidence) are desk -based exercises carried out by QAA officers.

12. Level of international participation

In which of the following is there international participation in quality assurance

a) the governance of national agencies for quality assurance

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

b) the external evaluation of national quality assurance agencies

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

c) teams for external review of institutions or programmes, either as members or observers

Yes ☐   No ☒   In some cases ☐

d) membership of ENQA

Yes ☒   No ☐   In some cases ☐

e) membership of any other international network

Yes ☒   No ☐   If **Yes**, please specify:

Membership of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education Quality (INQAAE), formal observer status at the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN).

*Please add any additional comments, especially if there is no international involvement in any of the aspects***:**

Re c) QAA does not use or appoint auditors on an ad hoc basis and publishes a clear person specification for the posts. QAA recruits auditors through open public advertisement on its website and by circulating the advertisement through corespondence with heads of institutions.
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/appointments/
QAA has non UK nationals in its auditor pool but this was not a criterion for their selection.
The external review of QAA involved international expertise as did the self certification of the FHEQ-EWNI.

RECOGNITION OF DEGREES AND STUDY PERIODS

13. Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement
Describe the stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement in your country. Please include the percentage of all students graduating in 2009 who will receive a Diploma Supplement (if less than 100%, please explain)

The UK is fully committed to meeting the Bologna Process objective that every student should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. The UK National Europass Centre promotes the Diploma Supplement within the UK, working with key sector bodies and National Agencies in the Lifelong Learning Programme to provide essential information and guidance in support of the sector's progress to full implementation. The UK HE Europe Unit also advises HEIs on issuing the Diploma Supplement in the UK. The Europe Unit undertook a survey in 2007 into usage of the Diploma Supplement and other aspects of Bologna implementation in the UK. The survey was sent out to all higher education institutions in the UK. The results demonstrated that 60% of respondents from the 60% of higher education institutions that replied were issuing the Diploma Supplement compared to 32% in 2005. 90% of respondents who were not already issuing the Diploma Supplement intended to do so in the near future. The Higher Education Funding Council for England is asking HEIs for information in their next annual monitoring exercise from autumn 2008 which will provide a very clear picture of the up-to-date state of implementation of the Diploma Supplement in 2009.

The UK team of Bologna Experts have worked with the UK NARIC and with individual institutions to promote an understanding of the Diploma Supplement and help with the detailed implementation and any queries arising as a result. The Erasmus National Agency audit and monitoring visits always include a reference to the stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement and transcript and recent visits have suggested increasing use of the Supplement.

Following a recommendation by the Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group in October 2007, an implementation steering group with UK wide sector representation has been set up to oversee the development of the HE Achievement Report which will pull together and increase the amount of information available about an individual student's achievement. The HE Achievement Report will supplement existing information on attainment and incorporate and build on the Diploma Supplement. It will be piloted in 18 HE institutions across the UK during 2008-09.

a) Is the Diploma Supplement issued to students graduating from:

- 1st cycle programmes   Yes ⊠   No ☐
- 2nd cycle programmes   Yes ⊠   No ☐
- 3rd cycle programmes   Yes ⊠   No ☐
- remaining "old type" programmes   Yes ☐   No ☐   Not applicable ⊠
- short higher education programmes   Yes ⊠   No ☐   Not applicable ☐

b) which of the following apply to Diploma Supplements issued in your country:
- issued in a widely spoken European language   Yes ⊠   No ☐
  - *please specify the language* English

- issued   free of charge ☒   for a fee ☐
- issued   automatically ☒   on request ☒
- corresponds to the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format   ☒

- a national Diploma Supplement is used that is
  different from the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format   ☐

13.1. Use of Diploma Supplement for recognition of qualifications

Please describe the way in which the Diploma Supplement is used for the recognition of foreign qualifications (or studies). Please comment in particular on the following aspects, giving references to any relevant websites and documents:

a) The Diploma Supplement is used as the reference document when admitting holders of foreign qualifications to the second and third cycles.

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

The decision to admit students onto second and third cycle programmes in the UK is the responsibility of each admitting institution, in accordance with their own entrance requirements and procedures. This would include reference to the Diploma Supplement if presented by a student.

b) Holders of foreign qualifications who present a Diploma Supplement in a widely spoken language do not have to provide official translations of their qualifications.

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

UK NARIC has specific requirements regarding the documentation that must be presented in order to provide comparability information for an overseas qualification. This includes a copy of the necessary documents in the original language as well as a certified translation into English. However, if a Diploma Supplement is presented in a widely spoken language, an English translation will not be necessary.

c) Holders of foreign qualifications who present a Diploma Supplement in a widely spoken language do not need to prove through other documents the validity of the qualifications in the awarding country (for further studies or employment in the non-regulated part of the labour market).

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

The Diploma Supplement provides detailed information about the status of the qualification in the country of origin and for the purpose of providing comparability information for an overseas award. UK NARIC accepts this document in lieu of other information to confirm the validity of the award.

d) Specific action has been taken at a National and Institutional level to enhance the use of the Diploma Supplement as a communication tool towards the labour market

Yes ☒   No ☐

Comment

UK National Europass Centre promotional activity for the enhancement of the use of the of the Diploma Supplement as a communication tool towards the labour market includes: i) graduate fairs with higher education institutions, which have been carried out   systematically on a regional basis, including one to one counselling and advice to individuals on both the content and application of the Diploma Supplement; ii) ongoing collaboration in cross-promotional activity with other National Agencies under the Life Long Learning Programme through, for example, participation in relevant events, newsletters and e-shots; iii) close liaison with sector bodies, employers and related organisations; iv) presentations and workshops for a variety of relevant sector bodies, organisations and private businesses, and at the UK National Recognition Centre annual conference to which all key sector skills council representatives are invitees.

14. National implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention
Describe the stage of implementation of the main principles and later supplementary documents[11] of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

a) Does appropriate legislation comply with the Lisbon Convention?

Yes ⊠   No ☐

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved:

The UK ratified the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) on 23 May 2003 and it came into force on 1 July 2003. In the UK, under the Lisbon Convention, responsibility for demonstrating that an application to an institution does not meet the requirements for further higher education study lies with the institution making the assessment, with advice from the UK National Recognition Centre (NARIC) as appropriate. Responsibility for general, non-binding, assessments rests with the UK NARIC. Negotiation of and ratification of the Lisbon Convention was agreed by the UK Government in close cooperation with the UK NARIC and the HE sector representative bodies.

b) Does appropriate legislation comply with the later Supplementary Documents:
        i) Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for Recognition

Yes ⊠   No ☐

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved:

Ratification of the Lisbon Convention makes it a legal requirement for the UK to comply with the requirements of the Convention at the national and institutional level.

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[11] Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for Recognition (2001); Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (2004); Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001)

The Code of Practice of the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) includes recognition measures which are in accordance with the Supplementary Documents. All of the following principles of the Convention are applied in practice: applicants' right to fair assessment; recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; demonstration of substantial differences where recognition is not granted; provision of information about the country's HE programmes and institutions. Similarly, the recognition measures set out in the UK NARIC's Code of Practice are in accordance with the procedures for the recognition of qualifications in the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Eduucation and the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees. There is no evidence to suggest non-compliance by institutions. If there was, it would be pursued at the national level.

ii) Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees

Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved: See the answer to question 14b(i) above

iii) Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education

Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved: See the answer to question 14b(i) above

c) which of the following principles are applied in practice

i) applicants' right to fair assessment

Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please describe how it is ensured at national and institutional level: See the answer to question 14b(i) above

ii) recognition if no substantial differences can be proven

Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please describe how it is ensured at national and institutional level: See the answer to question 14b(i) above

Iii) demonstration of substantial differences, where recognition is not granted

Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please describe how it is ensured at national and institutional level: See the answer to question 14b(i) above

iv) provision of information about your country's HE programmes and institutions

Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please describe how it is done in practice See the answer to question 14b(i) above

v) do you have a fully operational ENIC

Yes ⊠   No ☐

If Yes, please describe the role of your ENIC in recognition and information provision a) nationally and b) internationally: As well as being part of the EU network of designated National Centres created in 1984 to help in the recognition of qualifications and with facilitating the integration of national educational systems, the UK NARIC performs a dual role as the UK ENIC. The UK NARIC is the UK's National Agency responsible for providing information and expert opinion on vocational, academic and professional qualifications from 183 countries worldwide. As the National Agency, managed on behalf of the UK Government under contract, UK NARIC provides the only official source of information and advice on international education and training systems and overseas skills and qualifications. UK NARIC services provide the essential assistance in skills integration and progressions towards employment and further studies in the UK. Individuals, universities (all are UK NARIC members), colleges, employers and a wide range of other organisations use UK NARIC's advice on the comparability of qualifications. Through this work, UK NARIC plays a key and continuing role in achieving student and labour mobility objectives. The information it provides helps to inform policy-making across the education and training sectors, alongside other international comparators.

d) As additional information, please describe any actions to implement fully the Convention and the later Supplementary Documents.

The Government, UK NARIC and higher education institutions representative bodies worked closely together in the lead up to signature and ratification of the Convention to reach agreement and understanding on the implications. Following ratification, details of the Convention and its implications were publicised to all institutions. The principles and procedures in the Convention and the later Supplementary Documents are fully reflected in the work of UK NARIC and the advice they give to institutions.

15. Stage of implementation of ECTS[12]

Describe the implementation of ECTS in your country.

a) Please include the percentage of the total number of higher education programmes[13] in which all programme components are linked with ECTS credits

100% ☐   75-99% ☐   50-75%☐   <50% ☐

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[12] Please refer to definitions in the ECTS User's guide,
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/guide_en.html
[13] Except doctoral studies

The view of the stakeholders in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland is that while there are differences between ECTS and UK credits, they are nevertheless compatible. A number of UK universities were involved in the original ECTS pilot project and it was agreed that 120 UK credits were equivalent to 60 ECTS credits. The majority of UK universities participating in Erasmus use ECTS for the benefit of both outgoing and incoming students, and many indicate ECTS credits alongside their own credits in course handbooks. It is not possible to say what percentage of programmes have all programme components linked with ECTS credits as in the UK HEIs do not have to report on how they structure their programmes and using ECTS is not mandatory.

b) Are ECTS credits linked with learning outcomes[14] in your country? Please tick one:

No ☐   In some programmes ☐   In the majority of programmes ☐
In all programmes ☒

Where ECTS is used, the credits would in all cases be linked to learning outcomes as is the practice in all the national credit systems in place across the UK.

c) If you use credit system other than ECTS, please give details of your national credit system:

Guidance on academic credit arrangements for the higher education credit framework for England was published in August 2008. The framework operates with the same metrics as those in credit and qualifications frameworks in other parts of the UK. The definition of credit in the framework is that "credit is awarded to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level". Full details on the credit framework are at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/england/credit/creditframework.asp For full explanation of the relationship between credit and qualifications at higher education in Wales refer to www.cqfw.net. In Northern Ireland, Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) operates. It is important to note that the unit of credit is the same across the systems, allowing transferability and flexibility.

    i) is it compatible with ECTS?   Yes ☒   No ☐

    ii) what is the ratio between national and ECTS credits?

1 ECTS credit = 2 UK credit points (2:1)

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[14] Clarification: Learning outcomes in the form of knowledge, skills and competences are formulated for all programme components and credits are awarded only when the stipulated learning outcomes are actually acquired

d) Are you taking any action to improve understanding of learning outcomes?

Yes ☒   No ☐

> **If Yes,** please explain:. Through the QAA outcomes paper on the adoption and use of learning outcomes, our external reference points for quality and standards are based on outcomes, and organisations including Higher Education Academy, QAA, and the credit consortia including South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) share workshops/conferences on the topic.

e) Are you taking any actions to improve measurement and checking of student workload?

Yes ☐   No ☐

> **If Yes,** please explain: further information may follow

   f) Are you taking any actions to assist HE staff or other stakeholders in applying ECTS.

Yes ☒   No ☐

> **If Yes,** please explain: A group of the UK Bologna Experts are also expert and experienced in ECTS and are charged with working with the sector to ensure that there is a good understanding of ECTS which is particularly important in the development of joint degree programmes. This is undertaken principally by the UK Bologna experts and the UK HE Europe Unit.

LIFELONG LEARNING

16. Recognition of prior learning
Describe the measures in place to recognise prior learning (RPL), including non-formal and informal learning (for example learning gained in the workplace or in the community).

a) Do you have nationally established procedures in place to assess RPL as a basis for access to HE programmes?

Yes ☒   No ☐

> **If Yes,** please specify: There is no significant change since the previous report. The UK has a long tradition of recognition of prior learning and encouraging mature students to participate in higher education. QAA has established and published detailed guidelines to support universities and to encourage them to document a process which in many cases had previously been informal. The QAA guidelines for the accreditation of prior learning can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/APL.pdf

b) Do you have nationally established RPL procedures in place to allocate credits towards a qualification?

Yes ☐   No ☐

If Yes, please specify:
This is a matter for individual institutions but there is advice in the above mentioned QAA guidelines and also in the guidance on academic credit. In addition the level descriptors in the FHEQ -EWNI and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure for quality and academic standards such as subject benchmark statements also provide useful reference points for institutions in determing credit for prior learning.

c) Do you have nationally established RPL procedures in place to allocate credits for exemption from some programme requirements?

Yes ☐   No ☒

If Yes, please specify:
Admission to HEIs whether with or without credit or exemptions is a matter of institutional autonomy. Institutions have developed their own procedures. Some institutions have a large proportion of mature students admitted without conventional entrance qualifications.

d) To what extent are any such procedures applied in practice?

Comprehensively ☐   Some ☒   A little ☐   None ☐

Please describe the current situation:

In Northern Ireland, one institution has comprehensive credit transfer arrangements for certified learning. Another institution has a long history of using APL, albeit in a limited number of subject areas, for module exemption or advanced entry into a programme

17. Flexible learning paths
 Describe legislative and other measures taken by your country to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, to encourage participation by under-represented groups.

As noted in the 2005-07 National Report, the government is encouraging the development of flexible learning paths to respond to an increasingly diverse student body. Since 2005, HEFCE has given development funding to a small number of HEIs to pilot flexible learning pathways. The number of institutions in the pilot has increased from five to eight and numbers of students and flexible courses offered has also increased. The HEIs are offering mainly vocational courses (for example, business studies, computing, law, sport science). The flexible methods of delivery include two-year accelerated honours degrees, four-year accelerated part-time degrees, work-based honours degrees, work on continued professional and skills development with employers, and distance and blended learning foundation

degrees. There is evidence that these attract students from non-traditional and under-represented backgrounds, including students who would not otherwise have entered HE, although some continue to attract school leavers from traditional backgrounds. The project is to be evaluated in order to inform future direction and development of flexible learning. See http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/flexible/. HEFCE is also funding workforce development and co-funded provision through its Employer Engagement policy and this can include and encourage the development of flexible pathways. For further information, see http://www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/employer/strat/. HEFCE has developed Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) with the HE sector which improve the coherence, clarity and certainty of progression opportunities for vocational learners into and through higher education.

Foundation degrees (Fds) integrate rigorous academic study with work-based learning. Courses are delivered by colleges, universities and other training institutions working in partnership with employers, thus ensuring graduates acquire the necessary skills and knowledge required in the workplace. Entry to an Fd can be through a variety of flexible routes including traditional academic qualifications, other qualifications and also from experience gained in the workplace. Many Fds are offered on a part-time basis to students who are already working which means they can continue to earn while learning. If taken full time, Fd courses take 2 years; if taken part-time course are typically of 3-4 years duration. Fd providers are using an increasingly varied range of innovative and flexible delivery methods. Because courses offer practical and accessible options which suit both employers and workforce alike the qualification attracts a range of people who would not normally consider taking up HE. One of the main purposes behind the Foundation Degree is to widen access to higher education for mature students, students wanting to study part-time, those who want to study close to home, disabled students and those who do not have traditional qualifications.

a) Are there specific measures in place to promote flexible learning paths within the national qualifications framework?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation

The two national qualifications frameworks operating in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ-EWNI) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for the Further Education and vocational sectors operate the same system of levels, numbered 1 to 8, from entry level to doctoral. The FHEQ-EWNI starts at level 4 (the lowest higher education level) and continues to 8 (doctoral), whereas the QCF encompasses all levels. This enables articulation between the two frameworks and progression from the Further Education to Higher Education sectors. Both the QCF and the Higher Education Credit Framework for England (which is aligned with the FHEQ-EWNI) use the same system, based on 1 credit representing 10 notional hours of learning. The HE credit framework for England (published in August 2008) which promotes consistency in the use of credits across the sector, will remove some barriers to the development and operation of flexible learning paths.

In England, the Joint Forum for Higher Levels aims to promote better understanding between the further education and higher education qualifiactions frameworks, thereby encouraging lifelong learning and its recognition. Its intention is to ensure that the frameworks are managed in ways that give priority to the needs of students and other users. At the request of Ministers, the Joint Forum has taken a lead role in establishing a set of "overarching principles and shared operational criteria for a common approach to credit" across the proposed Qualifications and Credit Framework in further education and the higher education credit framework for England. The work of the Joint Forum is intended to provide advice and guidance for those developing systems and providing support for learners progressing between the FE and HE systems. It has developed 6 overarching principles, each of which are underpinned by operational criteria. The 6 overarching principles cover: consistency in the determination of credit value, credit accumulation, credit transfer, and consistency in the award of credit. In Wales, the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales is a fully integrated meta-framework encompassing all post-14 education, learning, and training. There are three levels corresponding broadly with the current system of conventional undergraduate study (Levels 4, 5, and 6) and two post-graduate levels (Levels 7 and 8).

b) Are there any measures to support HE staff in establishing flexible learning paths?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation

Lifelong Learning Networks work closely with HE staff, particularly in academic and admissions departments, to support the establishment of more flexible pathways. It is up to individual institutions to put in place staff development and support mechanisms to enable staff to pursue flexible learning paths, but many of the institutions involved in HEFCE's flexible learning pathfinder project have developed these and have enabled certain barriers to be overcome, although some difficulties still remain.

c) Is there flexibility in entry requirements aimed at widening participation?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Please add comments to describe the current situation and, where appropriate, differences between the three Bologna cycles.

Entry requirements are determined by autonomous higher education providers; any flexibility with regard to entry requirements is therefore wholly at the discretion of institutions. Many have some flexibility on decisions about admissions that recognise the impact of particular circumstances, e.g. health. Some institutions have partnership relationships with schools and colleges to help widen participation – sometimes referred to as "a compact" – and some of these schemes make flexible offers to students who engage in a programme of additional activity or learning. Entry requirements for Foundation Degrees are normally stated in terms of A Levels and General Certificates of Secondary Education, or their vocational equivalents. However, students who lack formal qualifications but who can demonstrate they have the relevant skills and aptitudes are also considered for admission.

d) Are there any flexible delivery methods to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners

Yes ⊠   No ☐

Please add comments to describe the current situation and, where appropriate, differences between different Bologna cycle

Flexible pathways developed by the "flexible learning pathfinder" HEIs in England have enabled diverse groups of learners to enter HE.

Accelerated honours degrees, work-based degrees, accelerated part-time degrees and degrees delivered by distance, e-learning or "blended" learning (involving some distance learning and some learning on campus) enable mature students, returners to work, and those who want to develop their skills in order to progress in their career, to obtain qualifications in a time frame to fit in with their life circumstances. It also enables students from diverse backgrounds, or with family or work commitments, who cannot easily study on campus, to enter HE. There is evidence that flexible pathways have attracted students from non-traditional backgrounds who would otherwise not have entered HE.

e) Are there modular structures of programmes to facilitate greater participation?

Yes ⊠   No ☐

Many programmes are module-based and credits can be awarded for particular modules and transferred to courses at other institutions at the HEIs' discretion, or students can take modules, take a break from study and recommence study according to their life circumstances.

f) If possible, please provide any statistics on the results of measures taken to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, to encourage participation by under-represented groups,

In the academic year 2007-08, there were approximately 400 students at 7 institutions following flexible learning pathways as part of HEFCE's flexible learning pathfinder project. A further HEI is offering flexible courses in 2008-09 as part of the project, and the numbers of students on these pathways is estimated to rise to approximately 850. There are additional students following flexible pathways (for example, distance and work-based learning) at English HEIs which are not part of the pathfinder project. Statistics on these are not collected through the standard data collection process, but we estimate the numbers to be in the thousands. In 2007-08, there were almost 2,600 Fd courses running, with 815 in development, and the number of students had risen to just below 72,000, from 47,000 in 2005-2006. In Northern Ireland, the development of Fds is integral to effective implementation of both the Further Education Means Business Strategy and the Skills Strategy. HEFCE is funding 14, 889 additional student numbers (ASNs) in Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) from the academic years 2006-07 and 2008-09 in order to support vocational progression.

JOINT DEGREES

18. Establishment and recognition of joint degrees[15]

a) Describe the legislative position on joint degrees in your country.
   Are joint degrees specifically mentioned in legislation?

                                                          Yes ☒   No ☐

   Does the legislation fully allow:
       i) establishing joint programmes?   Yes ☒   No ☐

   ┌───┐
   │ **If No** please explain what are the obstacles: see below   │
   └───┘

       ii) awarding joint degrees?   Yes ☒   No ☐

   ┌───┐
   │ **If No** please explain what are the obstacles: The precise nature │
   │ of an institution's degree awarding powers is set out in their own   │
   │ individual charters and statutes. These generally allow individual   │
   │ institutions to make arrangements for the awarding of joint degrees. │
   │ However, in the case of some older universities their statutes may   │
   │ not permit them to award joint degrees. All HEIs created after 1992 │
   │ are able to award joint degrees.   │
   └───┘

   b) Please give an estimate of the percentage of institutions in your country which are involved in
       i) joint degrees

       75-100% ☐   50-75% ☒   25-50% ☐   1-25% ☐   0% ☐

       ii) joint programmes

       75-100% ☐   50-75% ☐   25-50% ☐   1-25% ☐   0% ☐

   c) What is the level of joint degree/ programme cooperation in your country

       In the first cycle?   None ☐   Little ☐   Widespread ☐
       In the second cycle?   None ☐   Little ☐   Widespread ☐
       In the third cycle?   None ☐   Little ☐   Widespread ☐

d) In which subject areas/disciplines is joint degree/programme co-operation most widespread (please list if possible)?

┌───┐
│ This information is not collected centrally.   │
└───┘

e) Estimate the number of joint programmes in your country

┌───┐
│ This information is not collected centrally.   │
└───┘

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[15] A *joint degree* is a single degree certificate awarded by two or more institutions, where the single degree certificate is valid without being supplemented by any additional national degree certificate.

f) Describe any actions being taken to encourage or allow joint programmes.

The Erasmus Mundus programme has been a stimulus to UK higher education to develop joint degree programmes. QAA has held a number of workshops on Joint Degrees and has a section of its Code of Prictice (Section 2) on collaborative provision and flexible and distributed provision including e-learning.

g) Are there any specific support systems for students to encourage joint degree cooperation?

MOBILITY
.
19. Removing obstacles to student and staff mobility
a) What measures have been taken by your country both at governmental and institutional level to enhance student and staff mobility and overcome main obstacles?

The Prime Minister's Initiative is aimed at making UK education attractive to international students and now in its 2nd phase. It has a target of increasing the number of international (non EU) students to the UK by 100,000 (70,000 HE, 30,000 FE) by 2011. Other aims are to improve the student experience of international students and to increase partnership activity and delivery in-country (Trans National Education) of UK education. The UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) is a five-year initiative to facilitate education and research cooperation between the UK and India, to include 50 collaborative research projects; 40 UK award programmes delivered collaboratively in India; 300 additional Indian research students and staff having worked in the UK; 200 UK Researchers and 200 UK undergraduates having studied in India; 2000 Indian research students will complete collaborative degrees in the UK. Scholarships for Excellence enables 50 top-class PhD and post-doc researchers to come to UK universities every year from China, and the Graduate Work Experience Programme allows graduates from China to spend up to one year working and living in the UK. The UK-China Higher Education Summer School programme allowed 200 students from England to experience three weeks of language, business and cultural exposure in China in July and August 2007 (most recent figure available), and USA, Australia, and Canada remain popular study destinations for UK students.

The number of UK students spending a period of their study abroad has risen in 2006-07 and is expected to rise again in 2007-08. The UK Higher Education Funding Councils continue to provide substantial additional funding to the UK's Higher Education institutions to compensate them for the fee-revenue of students undertaking Erasmus student mobility. This subsidy has the effect of rendering a year spent undertaking an Erasmus study- or work-period as free of fees for the student. UK students undertaking Erasmus mobility are entitled to retain their student grant or loan, and normally qualify for an enhanced loan. At institutional level, additional funding is available in some institutions to complement that available through grants from organised mobility schemes such as Erasmus. This is directed largely at the subsidy of student mobility, but most institutions also subsidise their

staff mobility and the overheads arising from the administration of mobility. Many institutions provide preparation for students undertaking mobility. This may take a number of forms, and include academic, linguistic and cultural preparation. This work helps considerably to overcome possible doubts in the student's mind about practical aspects of their plans, and compensate in part for linguistic deficit. In addition to the work undertaken by the UK's LLP National Agency for Erasmus (the British Council) most institutions undertake work to promote the programme to students and staff.
The UK Government has announced that it intends to change and improve the immigration system for students and workers in 2008 and 2009. It has published a 'Statement of intent' in preparation for the new Points Based System. The UK Border Agency was created and UKvisas became a part of the Home Office Department. The Joint Education Taskforce was also created to include external agencies such as the British Council, UKCISA, Association of Colleges, Universities UK, English UK etc to consult on the proposed measures to enhance student and staff mobility. External agencies were also invited to feed back through official consultation documents on changes such as the new PBS system, charges, identity cards, customer service.

b) Have arrangements for visas, residence and work permits been amended to enhance student and staff mobility?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation:

On 30 June 2008, new arrangements came into effect for international students who have studies in the UK. Under Tier 1 post study, students who have obtained a degree or higher level qualification are able to stay or to work for 2 years without the requirement of a work permit.
Student visas allow students to work whilst studying (part-time for up to 20 hours per week in term time, and full-time during vacations) , and also to bring in dependents.

The introduction of the Points Based System for highly skilled individuals (Tier 1 General) was launched in the UK on February 29 2008. This replaced the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme and from June 30 2008 applicants both in the UK and overseas can now submit applications for Tier 1 (Migrant. Investor, Entrepreneur and Post Study Work. Other Tiers will be phased in throughout 2008 and 2009. A new entry clearance category for student visitor was also introduced on 1 September 2007 for short term students who come to the UK for 6 months or less.

c) Is there financial support for national and foreign mobile students and staff?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation:

Financial support is not generally provided to domestic students who study abroad except when this study is part of a course offered by a UK HEI. Fee loans and maintenance grants and loans are then available.
Similarly, international students studying in the UK are not generally entitled to financial support. Some UK Government scholarships are available, for example the Chevening Scholarship scheme administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) , and the Commonwealth scholarship scheme funded by the FCO/DIUS

and the Department for International Development. Higher education institituions have the freedom to provide bursaries and fee waivers to international students, and many of them do so. Staff from UK HEIs continue to be highly mobile. They are often heavily involved with research projects and personal research activities in countries outside the UK. In addition, they frequently attend international conferences and forums.

For students participating in Erasmus, In addition to the Erasmus student grant, they are entitled to retain their UK student grant or loan. Those outgoing students undertaking an Erasmus study or work-period of a year (defined as at least twenty four weeks, not including vacations) are entitled to have the tuition fees at their home institution waived. Some institutions provide complementary funding for outgoing Erasmus students and staff. We are unable to comment on financial support for incoming students and staff, since this would normally be provided through the home country. It is possible, however, that there are cases under Erasmus which receive subvention through the host institution's hardship fund.

d) Are study periods taken abroad recognised?

Yes ⊠   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation:

Within agreed and negotiated exchange programmes recognition is normally integral to the arrangement. It is a *sine qua non* for Erasmus exchanges. The Section of QAA's Code of Practice: Placement Learning, encourages universities to ensure that there is transparency for all parties on the arrangements for academic recognition with a learning agreement specifying the requirements and intended outcomes. This applies to work placements as well as study placements.

Whilst recognition of study periods taken abroad is a matter for individual HEIs entering into recognition arrangements with partner institutions, evidence gained in the course of the sampling exercises and in situ audit and monitoring visits indicates that there is a good level of understanding of the importance of recognition for mobile students, and that this is normally implemented through the common mechanisms of the learning agreement and transcript. It may be noted that recognition may take a number of forms, from the complete translation of all marks and grades and their reflection in the final degree class to simple "progression", by which successful completion of the period abroad is a condition of progress to the next year of studies.

e) Is there accommodation for mobile students and staff?

Yes ⊠   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation:

This is a matter for each HEI to decide. Many HEIs provide accomodation on campus for all international students throughout their studies.

Many UK institutions make allowance for accomodation needs of incoming Erasmus students and staff through their available housing stock. Most have Accommodation Offices which will provide information and support to students and staff before their arrival.

f) Have any measures been taken to increase outward student and staff mobility?

Yes ☒   No ☐

Please add appropriate comments to describe the current situation:

Increasing outward mobility is being promoted on a number of fronts for example through: i) gathering case studies of students who have studied abroad; ii) identifying statistical measures for outward mobility rates; iii) publicity at a variety of events, including most recently the BUTEX conference; iv) the possibility of including a supportive storyline or references in Hollyoaks, a TV series aimed at young people; v) the British Council who are taking forward plans to provide an internet page with links for outward mobility, and the DIUS website which has clear signposting for students who want to find out more; vi) clarification of the legal position re. portability of student support; vii) the travel grant which gained publicity through the Prime Minister's visit to the US; viii) the development of a core script which is regularly updated, most recently following a study from Sheffield Hallam university which suggests that students are more enthusiastic about study abroad than is generally believed in the sector; ix) work of returning Erasmus students as "Erasmus Ambassadors" who speak about their experiences of study abroad to prospective university students in schools.

Funding for outward mobility of students has been included on a pilot basis within the Prime Minister's Initiative, the UK India Education & Research Initiative and the UK China Programme. Apart from these specific instances of encouragement of mobility, the internationalisation of UK institutions is central to discussions at institutional and national levels concerning the development of the UK's HE system.

20. Portability of loans and grants
a) Are portable grants available in your country?

Yes ☒   No ☐

If No, describe any measures being taken to increase the portability of grants.

England, Wales, and Northern Ireland provide portable support to students who study abroad as part of their UK course, but do not currently provide support to students who attend a whole course abroad. However, we are committed to encouraging student mobility, participating in the Bologna Follow Up Group Network of Experts on Student Support, and work is being undertaken with partners in the higher education sector in England to increase opportunities to study abroad.

b) Are portable loans available in your country?

Yes ☒   No ☐

If No, describe any measures being taken to increase the portability of loans.

See a) above.

THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE EHEA
AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

21. Implementation of strategy

a) Describe any measures being taken by your country to implement the strategy "European Higher Education in a Global Setting"

Launched in April 2006, the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) is a five year strategy aiming to attract to the UK students from China, India, USA, Nigeria, Ghana, Pakistan, the Gulf States, and many more. Key part of the PMI2 is ensuring the quality of the student experience and supporting partnerships between UK institutions and those in other countries. Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland has a Strategic Framework for International Activity which complements and supports the "European Higher Education in a Global Setting". Key Principles of the Department's strategy include: (i) developing the skills and competencies to compete in a global economy through exposing individuals to global issues, and nurturing in them an appreciation of cultural diversity; and (ii) maximising the contribution of the tertiary education sector, including university research, to overseas trade and inward investment, by encouraging strategic partnerships and opportunities for international collaboration.

b) What has your country done to:
    i) improve information on the EHEA outside Europe?

A number of the UK Bologna Experts have participated in and spoken at international conferences and workshops outside the EU to explain and discuss the development of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area. In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning, in partnership with the British Council, have developed a project to promote Northern Ireland as a place to study. "Choose Northern ireland" has been published – it highlights the opportunities for international students to study in Northern Ireland and will be made available in British Council offices throughout the world. Wales International Consortium provides information on study in Wales http://www.walesinternationalconsortium.com/; an electronic Guide to Higher Education in Wales has been published at http://www.i-studentadvisor.com/wic/index.html.

    ii) promote European higher education, enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness?

The British Council is a member of a consortium with Campus France, Nuffic, and DAAD, which has delivered a series of European Higher Education Fairs in China, India, Phillipines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. These have promoted education and study opportunities across the EHEA.

    iii) strengthen cooperation based on partnership in higher education?

A number of UK universities are participating in Erasmus Mundus consortia. A number have established partnership links involving a range of levels of cooperation such as campus, joint programmes of study, and exchange links with third countries. Each of the Higher Education Fairs mentioned above was accompanied by a seminar for policy makers and academics which aimed to build co-operation and partnership working on key education issues. In additions to bilateral programmes mentioned in the mobility section (19) of this report, British Israel Academic Exchange Programme Scheme enables junior and mid level academics to develop links, with grants available for shorter exchanges. There are Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with Africa, Development Partnerships in Higher Education, UK-Canada student scholarship, Fulbright scholarships for students and staff exchanges, and many more.

iv) intensify policy dialogue with partners from other world regions?

As part of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) the UK has undertaken a series of multi-lateral policy dialogues in key regions around the world during 2007/08. Each dialogue focused on a specific area and brought together groups of policy makers, senior managers and practitioners from the UK and overseas. Each of these Policy Dialogues have included discussions on credit transfer and quality assurance and have highlighted the opportunities for partnership with UK in the context of the EHEA. Each dialogue has been followed up by a jointly agreed action plan including research or other appropriate collaborations. Policy Dialogues have taken place in Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

v) improve recognition of qualifications with other world regions?

As the National Agency responsible for providing information and expert opinion on vocational, academic and professional qualifications from abroad, the UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), supported by the work of the National Europass Centre, plays a vital and continuing role in building bridges between education systems and qualifications, and in furthering recognition practices worldwide. UK NARIC provides a recognition service and comparability information for 183 countries across the globe. It works continuously to improve the mutual understanding and acceptance of qualifications through i) information development activity involving close contact with the educational authorities in the countries concerned, ii) the provision of specialised analytical services ranging from detailed comparative studies and subject-, trade-specific benchmarking of international skills and qualifications, iii) and active participation in the major networks of international recognition centres. The UK NARIC was, for example, instrumental in the groundwork leading to a mutual recognition agreement between China and the UK, which firmly established the foundation for continued institutional partnerships between higher education institutions in the two countries. As the national Designated Body, the UK NARIC works with the Chinese authorities to ensure the implementation of the Agreement.

c) What measures have been taken in your country to implement the *OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*? Please describe.

d) Are the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education applied to

   i) cross-border provision of your education programmes?

   Yes ☒   No ☐

If Yes, please explain in what ways the guidelines are applied

Through QAA's overseas audit process and reports and the development and activities under Memoranda of Understanding and Cooperation with QA agencies in countries with significant UK TNE provision.

   ii) incoming higher education provision?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

   If Yes please explain in what ways the guidelines are applied awaiting further information.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

22. Main challenges for higher education
Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for higher education and the Bologna Process in your country in the short and long term.

The main challenges ahead for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are likely to be the following: widening participation in HE, student mobility – particularly outward mobility but also maintaining attractiveness of UK HE to international students, effective collaboration with social partners, increasing the number of students going on to doctoral studies (not only to provide the skills for research but also high level skills for employment), innovative teaching and research to respond rapidly to changing economic, social, political, and scientific developments, and a more proactive approach to inter-cultural dialogue and understanding, both national and international.

PART II

TEMPLATE for NATIONAL STRATEGIES
on THE SOCIAL DIMENSION of THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Practical instruction

The answers to this questionnaire will be included in the general national report on the implementation of the Bologna Process and reach the Bologna Secretariat (e-mail: secr@bologna2009benelux.org) by November 1, 2008. **Please do not exceed the length of 10 pages for the national strategy on social dimension**. The questions in Annex C are not included in the questionnaire itself but are to be considered as reference material which could facilitate the drafting of the information on the national strategy.

I. Definition of the Social Dimension in the London Communiqué

"We strive for the societal goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our populations. We therefore pledge to take action to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity."

II. AS IS SITUATION (Current state of affairs)

1.   Which groups in society are still underrepresented in your national higher education system? What are the main obstacles to participative equity in terms of access and successful completion of studies?

Evidence indicates that young people from lower socio-economic class backgrounds remain under-represented in higher education (HE) in England since the 2005 - 2007 report, although the position has improved steadily since then. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Widening Participation Performance Indicators time series shows that the proportion of young full-time first degree entrants to English HE institutions from: (a) State Schools has risen from 81.0% in 1997/98 to 87.2% in 2006/07;   (b) Lower Socio-Economic Groups has risen from 27.9% in 2002/03 to 29.8% in 2006/07; and   (c) Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPN) rose from 11.4% in 1997/98 to 13.5% in 2005/06.   Changes to the methods for calculating (b) and (c) above mean that there is not a full time series betwee 1997/98 and 2006/07 for these 2 Performance Indicators. The LPN Indicator is calculated differently from 2006/07.   Since the 2005-2007 report the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (created under Machinery of Government changes in 2007) has developed a new indicators of progress with widening participation in HE - the Full-Time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) measure. This shows the participation rates of 18-20 year olds from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds since 2002/03 to the most recent data point, covering 2006/07.

FYPSEC shows that in 2002/03, 17.5% of 18-20 year olds from lower socio-economic backgrounds participated in HE and that in 2006/07 this had risen to 19.0%. Over the same period, the gap between the participation rates of 18-20 year olds from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds has narrowed from 26.5% in 2002/03 to 20.5% in 2006/07.

There is also evidence which indicates that men are under-represented in HE, especially compared to women. The Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) roughly equates to the probability that a seventeen year old will participate in higher education by age thirty given the age specific participation rates. The overall HEIPR in 2006/7 was 40% - but for women it was 45% and men 35%.

There is also some evidence to indicate that disabled people are under-represented in HE, although this evidence is not conclusive as there is currently no generally recognised definition of disability, and also no general taxonomy of subsets of disability. But datasets do show that the number and proportion of HE students in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance has risen from 18,640 and 2.6% in 2002/03 to 34,446 and 4.4% in 2006/7.

Finally, evidence indicates that, overall, minority ethnic groups are over-represented in HE compared to their representation in the general and working-age populations, although some groups are under-represented (e.g. Black Caribbean males and Bangladeshi females).

The main issue affecting HE participation is prior attainment - participation patterns by nearly all groups are strongly associated with prior attainment. So efforts by colleagues in DCSF to raise attainment for all whilst also narrowing attainment gaps are important here. But there are also issues around aspirations, applications, admissions and affordability that also affect HE participation patterns.

In Northern Ireland there continues to be under representation in higher education by: students from socio-economic classification (SEC) groups 5-7, students with disabilities, and male students from lower SEC groups in Protestant community. The main obstacle to participative equity is social background.

2.   Please describe what measures your Government is taking to increase the representation of the groups identified in the question above. Please refer to the possible actions listed in the Bologna Working Group report on the Social Dimension and Mobility (see Annexes A and B to this document).

The main interventions that fall within the remit of Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills are:

(a) the Aimhigher programme, which brings together universities, colleges and schools in partnership to raise the attainment levels of young people and their aspirations towards higher education. The programme provides opportunities and experiences for learners which help to widen their horizons, develop talents, increase motivation and maximise potential. Available expenditure for the Aimhigher Programme for each year since 2004 to date was:2004-05 - £136m; 2005-06 - £102m; 2006-07 - £87m; 2007-08 - £80m. The total annual budget is £77.5m for each of the 3 financial years between 2008 and 2011;

(b) in April 2008, the Secretary of State for DIUS announced the launch of Aimhigher Associates. Associates are undergraduate students, some of whom are from a widening participation background, and many of whom will have experience of Aimhigher (Aimhigher 'Alumni'). They will be linked with young people from Y9 onwards to support them and encourage them through the transition points and into HE, including with the UCAS application process. HEFCE has approved 17 bids to operate pathfinder projects from September 2008 in advance of a national roll out in 2009. We have invited partnerships in City Challenge areas to explore links with the gifted and talented strand of that initiative. The Scheme aims to provide 1,875/5,500/5,500 associates over the next three years. Funding of £21m (£3m/£9m/£9m) has been available.

(c) the Office for Fair Access, which was set up in 2004 to regulate the charging of higher tuition fees through the approval and monitoring of access agreements, in which institutions set out the measures they will put in place to safeguard fair access to HE for low income and other under-represented groups. In 2006/7, institutions spent around £95m on bursaries through their access agreements and a further £20m on additional outreach activity; and

(d) the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Widening Participation Allocation (WPA) contributes towards the additional costs incurred by institutions in recruiting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds. In 2006/7 the outreach element of the WPA amounted to £92.3m.

All higher education institutions receive widening participation funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. This ensures that widening participation is positioned appropriately within and institution and most HEIs use this funding to support central and/or departmental teams which manage their local and national widening participation interests.

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning is committed to widening participation in higher education by students from those groups who are currently under-represented. Since 2000, it has been addressing this issue through a number of policy initiatives and a range of specific funding mechanisms: it pays universities a widening participation premium for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for special projects aimed at increasing participation in higher education by under-represented groups. Special projects include the Step-Up programme at the University of Ulster and the Discovering Queen's programme at Queen's University. Through the Disabled Students Allowance, the Department funds the Register of Support Providers, which is a register of freelance professional and non-professional providers recruited and trained to assist students with disabilities. The Department is now taking forward the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council (NIHEC) Expert Group Report on proposals for the future direction of the Department's widening participation policies. Work is underway to develop and implement a regional integrated strategy to widen participation in higher education.

3.   Describe what measures are being taken by the Government to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social or economic background. Again, please refer to the possible actions listed in the Bologna Working Group report ion the Social Dimension and Mobility (see Annexes A and B to this document).   Please indicate whether the measures apply to all students or only to certain levels or types of higher education institutions.

England, Wales, and Northern Ireland have one of the highest levels of student retention when compared internationally. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the UK ranks 5th for first degree completion rates, out of 23 countries who report data in this area. This has been achieved and maintained during a period when the student population has increased and its diversity widened. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) works with institutions with poor drop out rates and also penalises institutions financially where students have dropped out and achieved nothing. Many students who "drop out" before completing their year do achieve modules which count as partial success. The Aimhigher Programme seeks to ensure those who enter HE are not at risk of drop-out, by encouraging them to apply for the course or institution that best suits their potential, circumstances and interests.

4.   Does your country have statistical and/or other research evidence at disposal to underpin the identification of underrepresented groups and the main obstacles to participative equity (see Q 1) ? If yes, please specify. Or are regular student survey organised with the aim to provide data concerning the social dimension?

See section 1 above which identifies the key data sources which inform views on progress with widening participation in HE. In addition there is a range of research available from DIUS and elsewhere - see http://www.dius.gov.uk/research/index.html

III. PROCESS TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM (strategy for the future)

5.   How do you plan to tackle the challenges identified under Q 1 in the near future (2008-2010)?

(a) Which concrete goals do you want to achieve?

DIUS will continue its investment in the Aimhigher Programme and its spin-off, Aimhigher Associates, through to 2011. In addition DIUS will work with the HE sector to seek greater openness and transparency of admissions policies and practices; more collaboration across institutions in relation to their own outreach initiatives; and to help forge stronger, deeper links and partnerships with schools.

(b) What actions are planned for the different target group identified above to overcome the obstacles in access, participation and completion of studies by students? Please refer to Annex B and to the suggested approach outlined in the

2007 report from the Bologna Process Working Group on the Social Dimension and Mobility (Annex C to this document).

Continuation of existing interventions, alongside better evaluation and good practice identification and dissemination.

(c) is there a specific budget for these measures for underrepresented groups ? If yes, please provide details

See section 2 above.

d) is there a timeline for action? If yes, please provide details.

Plans are in place up to 2011, with no specific milestones within that but would expect annual generation of data to help gauge progress.

6.	What arrangements are planned for monitoring progress towards more equitable access, participation and success?

In addition to the datasets shown at Section 1, we are looking at additional income-related measures, at national and/or local levels.

IV. INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PREPARATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Please indicate which authority or other actor is responsible for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the national strategy and describe the way in which the various stakeholders are involved. Did your country designate (a)contact point(s) for the national strategy? If so, please add the coordinates of the national contact point(s).

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) manages the implementation and evaluation of the Aimhigher Programme, with input from DIUS which is the co-funder alongside HEFCE. There is a National Advisory Board for Aimhigher. Alongside this both DIUS and HEFCE commission and review jointly research projects which inform the development of policy in this area. Furthermore, HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) have been discussing with the HE sector how to increase widening participation and admissions openness, transparency and accountability around the system. HEFCE and OFFA have made recommendations as to how HEIs widening participation and fair access policies, including transparent admissions systems, might best be brought together into a single document and how this might be supported by both organisations within their existing powers. There is a range of contacts across HEFCE, DIUS and OFFA with a role in the management etc. of policy development, implementation and evaluation.

ANNEX A

Actions mentioned by the Bologna countries in the 2007 national reports

Financial
• scholarships - means tested
• scholarships - merit based
• research grants
• grants for studying abroad
• grants or loans for (nearly) every student
• unspecified social support system
• free education (at least 1st cycle)
• reimbursement of tuition fees for certain groups
• financial assistance for certain groups/areas
• improved funding systems

Structural
• new /expanded routes of access
• broader teaching or learning strategies
• information and preparation at secondary schools
• increase student places
• indirect aid schemes (tax relief, family allowance)
• subsidised residences/meals/transport/books
• provision of student welfare services (health care, day care centres)
• counselling/guidance services

Certain groups
• measures for ethnic minorities (not financial)
• measures for disabled (not financial)
• measures for disadvantaged groups (not financial)
• allocation of study places to certain groups
• promote access from all national areas

Policy and practice
• explicit widening access policy (devoted funds/units/laws)
• carry out surveys (study & work, disabled students,...)
• evaluations/research of policies and practices
• monitoring access (and retention) by students

ANNEX B

Possible actions and tools identified by the 2007 Bologna Working Group on the Social Dimension and Mobility

Measures to promote equal opportunities for access, participation and completion
• Anti-discrimination legislation covering higher education
• Admission rules that are simple, fair and transparent

Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education
• Outreach programs for underrepresented groups as defined nationally
• Flexible delivery of higher education
• Flexible learning paths into and within higher education
• Transparency of qualifications and recognition of prior learning
• Incentives for higher education institutions to take action to widen access and participation

Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience
A, Provision of academic services
• Guidance (academic and careers) and tutoring
• Retention measures (modification of curricula, flexibility of delivery, tracking academic success etc.)
• Working tools and environment (well functioning libraries, lecture halls and seminar rooms, internet access, access to scientific data bases etc.)

B, Provision of social services
• Counselling
• Targeted support for students with special needs and students with children
• Appropriate housing conditions for all students
• Provision of healthcare
• Provision of transportation, student canteens etc.

Student participation in the governance and organisation of higher education
• Legislation or other measures to ensure student participation in higher education governance
• Provisions for the existence of and exercise of influence by student organisations
• Student evaluations of courses, programmes and institutions, including action plans and follow-up of actions taken

Finances in order to start and complete studies
• Financial and legal advice for students
• Appropriate and coordinated national financial support systems that are transparent
• Targeted support for disadvantaged groups as defined nationally
• Support measures for students with children

ANNEX C

Suggested approach of the work on national strategies on the social dimension

In time for the next ministerial meeting in 2009 the Working Group suggests that the countries should report to the BFUG on their national strategies for the social dimension, including action plans and measures to show their impact. All stakeholders concerned should actively participate in and support this work at the national level.

The development of a strategy should be followed by a national action plan that includes monitoring mechanisms. Ideally, the strategy and action plan will be based on a national debate on the social dimension and the future priorities of that country depending on the current situation. In order to facilitate a national debate on the social dimension the Working Group proposes the following structure and topics for such a debate:

• Measures to promote equal opportunities

What obstacles are there to equal opportunities within higher education? What protection is there if a student is discriminated when applying for, being admitted to or carrying out studies? Is there a framework for appeal? What action would be the most effective to achieve equal opportunities in higher education?

• Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education for underrepresented groups (gender, ethnic origin, immigration, socio-economic status and background, disability, geography etc.)

What groups are under represented in your national higher education system today? Is there data to show access to higher education by gender, socio-economic background, disabilities, prior immigration, region etc? What obstacles to widened access and participation are there within your higher education system? At other education levels? What actions would be appropriate for the different groups to achieve widened access? Are targeted outreach activities needed?

• Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience

A, Provision of academic services

B, Provision of social services

What kind of academic or career guidance is provided for the students in your country? What is the student – staff ratio? Are there retention measures adapted to different groups or individuals with different needs? Is the academic success of student tracked? What would be/has proven to be the most efficient retention measures? What kind of study environment is there at the higher education institutions? Do student have access to information, electronically or by other means? What is the condition of libraries, lecture halls and seminar rooms? How do students in your country live? Is housing available, of acceptable standard and affordable? Is targeted support provided or needed for specific student groups? Is counselling available if students run in to personal difficulties?

• Measures to increase formal and actual student influence on and participation in higher education governance and other higher education issues

Are there formal provisions for student influence and participation at all governance levels, in consultative as well as decision-making bodies? Are there formal provisions for student evaluation of the education? Are the formal regulations followed-up with actual practices? Are there informal ways of student influence and participation as well? Do students have an influence on all issues related to higher education? Are students aware of their rights? Do students have organisations that

can organise elections to fill elective posts? Is it possible to find enough candidates to fill the posts available? If not – how could this be improved?

- Finances in order to start and complete studies

What kind of information and guidance is provided for students regarding financial issues? How does the average student make his or her living during studies? What kind of state support is provided? Is it appropriate for all groups and individuals? Do certain groups run the risk of being excluded from, or not ableto finish their studies, due to financial reasons? Which are these groups or individuals? What could be done to help them? Are students informed about possible employment possibilities after finishing their studies? How is the labour-market relevance of the studies secured? Are former graduates tracked to follow-up their employment rates?

• Monitoring: The participating countries should establish national measures to monitor and evaluate the impact of the national strategy and action plan.

What monitoring mechanisms would be the most appropriate? How could success in strengthening the social dimension be measured short-term and long-term? What quantitative and qualitative data are needed? How is the responsibility for monitoring and evaluation allocated and divided? Are there student surveys carried out to measure the impact of a social dimension strategy? How can student surveys be used in this work?

• Stakeholder involvement

Which stakeholders should be involved in the development of a strategy and an action plan? What should be the responsibility of the different stakeholders when carrying out the agreed strategy and plan?