

# The Bologna Process: Supporting the internationalisation of higher education in the UK

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JISC infoNet has been working in partnership with EUNIS and others on a project called 'Building Capacity: Preparing for Bologna' which aims to assist UK institutions in preparing for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by promoting collaboration and the adoption of good practice across the sector. As the project has progressed, the wider implications of the Bologna Process in the context of internationalisation have become increasingly apparent. It therefore aims to make more explicit the role of the Bologna Process in underpinning the broader internationalisation, employability, mobility and lifelong learning agendas. This wider perspective is also surfacing a range of initiatives in the related areas of international strategy, curriculum development and e-portfolio implementation.

Internationalisation is becoming an emergent driver within the UK higher education sector with many institutions developing new, and reorienting existing, strategies to encompass more than just international student recruitment and 'outward-facing' activities. Internationalisation is increasingly a more holistic approach to embedding international/global values into all aspects of the institutions ambitions (e.g. enhancing the student experience, internationalising the curriculum, developing sustainable partnerships). It also underpins a number of other agendas, in particular, employability, mobility, lifelong learning and curriculum development.

In the UK, JISC has been instrumental in driving forward innovation in areas such as the exploration and development of e-portfolio technologies and tools which underpin or support many of the areas. JISC infoNet will be launching a new infoKit on e-portfolios which draws together this research as well as synthesises current thinking around the subject. The outputs from the Bologna project will be developed into an infoKit-type resource over the summer of 2008 and will link strongly to the e-portfolio resource, as well as including Bologna-specific information such as good practice examples on mapping UK IT systems to the requirements of the Diploma Supplement.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Since 2006, JISC infoNet has been working in partnership with EUNIS and others on a project called 'Building Capacity: Preparing for Bologna' (JISC infoNet, 2008) which aims to assist UK institutions in preparing for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by promoting collaboration and the adoption of good practice across the sector through the tried-and-tested infoKit approach. Although the Bologna Process provides the focus of the project, its wider implications in the context of changing demographics within the UK, global competition and the whole concept of 'internationalisation' have become increasingly apparent. The scope of the project has therefore broadened to make more explicit the role of the Bologna Process in underpinning the broader internationalisation, employability, mobility and lifelong learning agendas. This wider perspective is also surfacing a range of initiatives in the related areas of international strategy, curriculum development and e-portfolio implementation all of which will be touched on in this paper.

The original rationale behind the project was to redress the lack of apparent momentum around implementing the Bologna Process in the UK, despite the UK having an active part in its development. This was evidenced in the Europe Unit 2005 survey which showed that the general level of awareness about Bologna and its implications amongst IT and administrative practitioners in UK appeared to be less than in many other countries (UK HE Europe Unit, 2005). Although the 2007 follow-up survey results show progress, a number of issues persist. Implementation of the Diploma Supplement is not universal (currently about 60%), for example. The main reason for this appears to be difficulties with IT systems and data thus reinforcing the need for specific guidance in this area. Although the Europass scheme - which promotes mobility and serves to make skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe - underpins Bologna's objectives, only a few UK institutions are aware of its potential to support students and are actively promoting it (UK HE Europe Unit, 2007). A key challenge is to encourage better take-up of these, among other measures. One of the collective views from a May 2007 study visit to Dublin, which brought together the project partners and representatives from a number of Irish institutions, was that the importance of emphasising the positive force of Bologna in supporting the wider institutional strategies should be promoted, rather than regarding it as an isolated initiative. Indeed, Irish universities were already poised to begin awareness-raising to their learners of the wider Europass scheme and its opportunities.

## 3. INTERNATIONALISATION

Addressing internationalisation within institutional strategies is becoming a growing imperative in the context of an increasingly globalised sector. Any high-level strategic trend analyses such as PESTLE (JISC infoNet, 2008) or Scenario Planning (JISC infoNet, 2008) activities within an institution will guarantee the highlighting of internationalisation/globalisation as a major driver, and this view is backed up by strategies, policies and initiatives from a range of UK sector organisations and funding bodies such as HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) (HEFCE, 2003). The term 'internationalisation' is not new and there are different interpretations of what it means depending on the institution and its mission. To some it will be primarily focused on international student recruitment, to others on establishing an international presence overseas. However, many are developing or revisiting their internationalisation strategies with a more holistic approach. As one definition suggests, internationalisation is "*the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education*" (Knight, 2003). As such it is an intrinsic set of values which seeks to:

- internationalise the student experience (both on and off campus);
- enhance the employability of students through international experience, such as participation in mobility programmes;
- develop the international dimension of the curriculum;
- increase global competitiveness through international partnerships, networks, collaboration, and;
- raise the attractiveness of UK HE provision as a world player to a wider audience.

It can therefore be seen to underpin a number of key inter-related drivers embedded within the Bologna Process objectives: employability, mobility and lifelong learning.

#### **4. EMPLOYABILITY AND SKILLS**

Developing globally competitive skills is at the heart of the Lisbon strategy which aims to make the EU the most dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 (European Commission, 2008). At a national level, the UK's skills base is lagging behind many other countries as highlighted in the 2006 Leitch review which talks of a skills crisis in the UK: *'Our nation's skills are not world class and we run the risk that this will undermine our long-term prosperity'* (HM Treasury, 2006). It is therefore a major challenge for the UK education sector as a whole to develop skills relevant to the global market in order to increase the competitiveness of the workforce. Raising basic skills and engaging learners is critical to this development and the introduction of the new 14-19 Diplomas aims to address this by emphasising the importance of engaging with employers. Recent research by the CIHE (The Council for Industry and Higher Education, 2007) highlights the importance placed by employers on international skills of graduates, in particular time spent abroad for study or work and language competencies. This raises challenges for institutions to offer students these experiences through mobility schemes, international work placements and language provision. Curriculum development within the context of internationalisation is an important process here.

Implementing the Diploma Supplement to improve the recognition of qualifications in Europe and overseas as well as to encourage mobility could help support such strategies. The Burgess report (Universities UK, 2007) recommends introducing a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) in England which would be the primary vehicle for measuring and recording achievement. Supported by HEFCE (HEFCE, 2007), the report would provide employers with a richer picture of a student's competencies and experiences, containing information on work-based learning for instance, and would incorporate the European Diploma Supplement. Providing this richer picture of experience could also be supported by e-portfolios which are being used by learners to develop CVs, showcase work and present for employment.

#### **5. MOBILITY**

One of the key objectives of the Bologna Declaration is the "promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement" (European Ministers for Education, 1999). At the London Summit in 2007, mobility was designated as a key priority for the Bologna Process until 2009. EU mobility programmes such as Erasmus have been provided support across Europe for students wishing to spend a period of study abroad. However, there has been a low level of outward student mobility from the UK compared to other countries. Only about 1% of UK students spend a period of time abroad as part of their studies. Outward mobility is also declining - in 2002/03 the number fell to only 7,956 compared with 11,988 in 1994-95 (HEFCE, 2004). Many factors affect the mobility (or lack of) of UK students such as lack of knowledge about mobility schemes, lack of a tradition of mobility, social factors, language barriers, lack of opportunity/support offered by the institution and family/work commitments. The real benefits of mobility have been highlighted in research e.g. personal development, higher levels of achievement, employability and this poses challenges for institutions to fully support the student and staff experience in this area.

#### **6. LIFELONG LEARNING**

Globalisation increases the importance of lifelong learning in that skills and knowledge need to be enhanced continually to adapt to new developments. In recent years the idea of learners moving from one educational context to another at different times throughout their careers has emerged in the UK. e-Portfolios are increasingly being regarded as a mechanism to support this. The 2005 government e-strategy (Department for Education and Skills, 2005) proposed that there should be a personal online space for every learner which will contribute to an electronic portfolio to build a

record of achievement throughout lifelong learning. As a key emphasis of lifelong learning is on supporting transitions to different environments at different stages (school/college to work or higher education, adults returning to education, moving between different education systems), this poses a number of technological challenges particularly in terms of interoperability and technical standards to enable data transferability. Research has been undertaken by a number of JISC-funded projects to look at interoperability - for instance, the regional EPICS project in North-East England explored the exporting of data held in the institution's e-portfolio system to the Europass CV using HR-XML standards. The project served to highlight the need of e-portfolio systems to support multiple standards due to the variety of systems and data purposes (ePortfolios, 2008). The role of e-portfolios in supporting the Burgess recommendations for a HEAR is yet to be determined although the potential is becoming increasingly apparent and could help support lifelong learning by enabling students to 'carry' their portfolios of learning and achievement through different learning and work experiences.

## 7. CURRICULUM DESIGN

Curriculum design is an area where all the various strategic threads mentioned come together for consideration, with provision required to be increasingly flexible and fit for purpose to cope with 'non-traditional' and mobile lifelong learners and needing to address the employability and skills agenda. This has to be done in the context of a highly competitive and increasingly global market and the aim of the institution to market provision with a differentiator or 'unique selling point' to optimise their 'market share'.

Many UK institutions are in the early stages of rethinking the design of their curricula in the context of these national and global drivers and in response to changing learner demands. JISC has recently invited (under the banner 'Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design' (JISC, 2008) proposals for projects to review course design and validation processes, and the ways these are supported and informed by technology, in order to transform learning opportunities to address an identified issue or challenge of strategic importance to the institution involved.

## 8. BENEFITS OF ICT

In the UK, JISC has been instrumental in driving forward innovation in areas such as the exploration and development of e-portfolio technologies and tools which underpin or support many of the areas covered here. JISC infoNet's latest infoKit covers the main drivers, purposes, processes, perspectives and issues around e-portfolios, as well as showcasing the wide range of activity undertaken by JISC projects and others over the last few years, and linking in projects currently underway which are due to report in 2009 (JISC infoNet, 2008). Alongside a new Effective Practice guide on the subject, the new infoKit will be officially launched at the UK's ALT-C conference in September 2008. The outputs from the re-oriented Bologna project will be developed into an infoKit-type resource over the summer of 2008 and will link strongly to the e-portfolio resource, as well as including Bologna-specific information such as good practice examples on mapping UK IT systems to the requirements of the Diploma Supplement.

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