

## The Bologna Declaration:

### An introduction to implications for UK HEIs.

The Bologna Declaration is an undertaking made between 38 EU countries to help develop a pan-European approach to higher education and how students study.

The countries have made a commitment to reform their education systems towards European convergence by 2010. What will the key implications be for managers of higher education institutions?

**In basic terms the core ideas of the Declaration are:**

- Enabling students to move more easily between European countries in order to study.
- Linking the way that European universities teach and develop their degree programmes.
- Ensuring that standards in universities across Europe are similar.
- Developing a pan-European recognition of higher education entry and leaving qualifications.
- Developing a synergistic higher education "area" across Europe that encapsulates a common currency in modes of learning, qualifications, quality and study opportunities.

#### THE PROCESS

The focus of the Bologna Process (those actions needed to reach the objectives of the Declaration) is centred on the development of an understanding and comparability within and across different European higher education systems.

#### KEY CHALLENGES

The Declaration presents numerous challenges to managers in higher education, especially with relevance to long term planning for all involved in student recruitment, admissions, communications, curriculum development, MIS and quality.

**The challenges centre on the following issues:**

- Complacency: UK universities do not necessarily view the development of EU markets as a priority. Therefore there is a danger that they may not engage rapidly enough with the Bologna Process or invest the time and resources needed to comply with the actions identified and agreed to on their behalf by the UK as part of the Declaration.

- The UK Government: while the government has been a signatory to the Declaration it does not appear in any practical way to encourage HEIs to become actively involved. A major criticism of the recent White Paper was the failure to mention or take account of the implications of the Bologna Declaration.
- Two-tier system: unlike many institutions in Europe the UK already has a two-tier system in place so may not feel the same urgency to change or "reform". However, the QAA has flagged that there is no guarantee that the pan-European model will mirror the UK system, so continued monitoring of the developments will be critical.
- Foundation degrees: the Process stipulates that first stage undergraduate studies must be three years minimum, which could cloud the future of the foundation degrees initiative and their acceptability within the new European model.
- Quality: the QAA has stated that the Declaration will be one of the factors taken into account in framing their proposals for UK higher education qualifications frameworks and this will have a direct impact on curriculum planning in UK higher education.
- MIS and Information systems: the introduction of Progress Files is currently being implemented in the UK. These Progress Files are very similar to the "Diploma Supplement", a stipulation of the Process, and efforts must be continued to ensure that these two are compatible. Many institutions' efforts to issue the Progress Files or Diploma Supplements are hindered by the need to make changes to existing MIS and student record systems.
- Communications: in the future, marketing and communications for HEIs will need to work within the context of the new, synergistic European market. This will have marketing implications for the development context of everything from marketing strategy to marketing materials.

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