

# Enterprise and Learning Committee

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## Inquiry into the Economic Contribution of Higher Education

### Written Evidence by Swansea - vis á vis Bologna

#### Purpose

This section of the paper aims to draw to the Committee's attention the significant developments taking place within higher education in Europe, and across the world, under the label of the Bologna Process, which involves the universities and governments of 46 countries.

Driven by the sector, led by the European Universities Association, influenced by students and employers, the Bologna Process is an unprecedented international movement. The paper further aims to encourage the Welsh Assembly Government to be proactive in ensuring the involvement of the interested parties, building upon the success of the Welsh sector to date, by not only facilitating collaboration with other European universities, but also with industry and commerce, locally and internationally.

#### Background

"The Bologna Process aims to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010, in which students can choose from a wide and transparent range of high quality courses and benefit from smooth recognition procedures. The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive for Europeans and for scholars from other continents. Reform was needed then and reform is still needed today if Europe is to match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably the United States and Asia." [European Commission - EUROPA - Aug. 2007]

It is imperative for the Welsh higher education sector to engage with this process since it offers ready-made networks and opportunities, which will underpin collaboration with world-class institutions and engagement with developments in the international labour market.

Recognising the impact of globalisation on the labour market, the London Communiqué (2007) emphasises the importance of student and staff mobility for the enhancement of employment prospects within an international setting. As Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Universities and Skills, noted on that occasion, "Bologna's push to increase the free movement of students and staff, to improve the employability of learners and to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EU is critical to both our future survival and success".

Since the incorporation of Doctoral degrees in the Bologna process in 2005, as the third cycle degree, the objectives of the European Research Area and the Lisbon Declaration have become integrated into the academic activities. The universities' postgraduate provision has become one of the main focuses of the Bologna agenda of late, particularly through the EUA Doctoral programme. Mobility, joint degrees (involving European universities and those outwith Europe), the skills agenda, and engagement with industry have all been given prominence. The European Commission's substantial investment in the Erasmus Mundus programme, the second phase of which will incorporate Doctoral degrees, is a reflection of the importance of developing programmes which will produce postgraduates with enhanced skills and cultural awareness.

In the months leading up to the Leuven Ministerial Meeting in 2009, plans for the final stages of converting the Bologna Process into the European Higher Education Area will be developed, through a series of policy-making seminars. Interestingly, the EUA has highlighted the following objective:

"Strengthening the relationship between governments, higher education institutions and other societal stakeholders is essential to anchor and sustain the goals of the Bologna process. One major priority must be to broaden debate with employers, students, parents and other stakeholders, and thus enhance trust and confidence in the quality and relevance of institutions engagement."

[Trends V, EUA publication 2007]

The Welsh Assembly Government's involvement with the Bologna Process includes: the Minister's attendance at the Bergen Ministerial Meeting in 2005; jointly hosting the official Bologna Follow-up Group Seminar on "Enhancing European Employability" at Swansea in 2006; hosting the 4 Motor Regions Conference at Swansea in 2006; attendance at the London Ministerial Meeting in 2007 (observer).

#### Summary / Recommendations

The Committee is encouraged to consider recommending the following action:

To ensure that Wales is represented at the Leuven Summit in 2009 and that the Assembly is kept apprised of developments.

To ensure that the Welsh higher education sector/ Welsh Assembly is represented at key policy-making seminars leading up to 2009, and that Wales' profile becomes more prominent, both protecting Welsh interests and seeking maximum advantage from new developments.

To emphasise the importance of institutional autonomy in creating a fully effective European higher education sector - this is a major Bologna concern.

To take action to promote mobility and prepare students for such opportunities, through early engagement with school pupils, and the promotion of language teaching in schools and universities; assist in national networks; engage with universities to overcome obstacles in establishing joint degrees.

To facilitate the interaction of universities and Industry, particularly multi-national companies and local SMEs, in identifying industry and business' expectations of our graduates in terms of skills and experience: their input into curriculum review would also be beneficial. This action would be in direct response to the London Communiqué and the Trends V report.

To facilitate interaction with European Ministers of Education at a government level, and involving HEIs, (eg hosting meetings to coincide with such events in Wales as Internationals)

To support Welsh universities in responding to calls for proposals which may lead to enhanced career prospects for local students, particularly under Erasmus Mundus II.

It is submitted that the Bologna Process and, post-2010, the European Higher Education Area, will serve as a sound platform and an ideal springboard for universities' international ambitions.