EUROPEAN UNION COMMITTEE
Social Policies and Consumer Protection Sub-Committee
Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: The EU Contribution
Oral and written evidence

Contents
1994 Group – Written evidence ............................................................................................................. 3
1994 Group, The Russell Group of Universities, million+ and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107) ............................................................................................................. 5
Association of Colleges – Written evidence ......................................................................................... 6
Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy (ALLSI) – Written evidence ........................................ 10
Birkbeck College – Written evidence .................................................................................................. 11
British Academy – Written evidence .................................................................................................. 12
British Council – Written evidence .................................................................................................. 17
British Council – Oral evidence (QQ 27-50) ................................................................................... 22
Businet and Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) – Written evidence ............................. 35
Dr Anne Corbett – Written evidence ................................................................................................. 36
Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) ...................................................................... 42
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills - David Willetts MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science, – Oral evidence (QQ 70-91) ................................................................. 57
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills – Supplementary written evidence ................ 68
Engineering Professors’ Council – Written Evidence ........................................................................ 71
European University Association – Written evidence ....................................................................... 73
European University Association – Oral evidence (QQ 108-124) ................................................... 79
Professor Paul Furlong, Cardiff University – Written Evidence ...................................................... 93
Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) – Written evidence ........................ 98
million+ – Written evidence ................................................................................................................ 101
million+, The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107) ............................................................................................................. 106
million+ - Supplementary written evidence ..................................................................................... 107
Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) and Businet – Written evidence ................................ 111
National Union of Students – Written evidence ............................................................................. 121
National Union of Students – Oral evidence (QQ 51-69) .................................................................. 126
Northern Ireland Assembly – Written evidence ............................................................................. 137
Julia Osborn, University of London – Written evidence ............................................................... 138
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – Written evidence ............................ 140
The Russell Group of Universities – Written evidence .................................................................... 145
The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group, million+ and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107) ............................................................................................................. 151
1994 Group – Written evidence

The following is the 1994 Group’s response to the House of Lords Inquiry into the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: The EU Contribution. For more detailed information please refer to the individual responses of our member institutions.

Members of the 1994 Group are: University of Bath, Birkbeck University of London, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths University of London, Institute of Education University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex and University of York.

1. The 1994 Group welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Committee’s Inquiry. We are pleased that the Commission wishes to reinforce its role in supporting European Higher Education institutions and that it recognises their vital contribution to growth and job creation. We welcome the fact that the Commission supports an increase in the budget for education, research and innovation. We also see the proposal for a European Masters Level student loan guarantee facility as a step in the right direction. Extending the number and scope of international strategic partnerships remains a key priority of the Group, as does increasing support for postgraduate students.

2. However, the Group is concerned about the potential impact of a new European universities league table. The remainder of our response will address question 5 from the Committee’s call for evidence.

3. The ‘U-Multirank’ tool represents a further addition to an already overcrowded market for league tables. Prospective students need clear information and guidance when choosing a course of study and a university. The clarity of the information that is available to applicants is likely to be undermined by the addition of a new league table to the market. Furthermore, applicants must be provided with fully contextualised information about courses and institutions in order to make sense of their choice. The creators of U-Multirank have clearly taken care to collect a large amount of information about a variety of European institutions. However, it is essential that they ensure that this information is accessible to its users and is presented in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

4. It should be noted that an impressive number of UK HEIs already appear in international league tables: 31 British institutions gained a placed in the top 200 of the QS World Rankings and 32 in the Times Higher Education table. This already demonstrates the high quality and global reach of higher education in the UK. U-Multirank is unlikely to add to the profile of UK institutions and may actually confuse the picture for prospective applicants.

5. We are also concerned by U-Multirank’s strong focus on regional engagement. The success of highly regarded research-intensive universities is linked to having a global approach to knowledge creation and transfer. International engagement is a vital factor in
how our universities produce such well-rounded graduates. Whilst regional engagement is an important dimension of a university’s role, the indicators used by the tool need to be carefully weighted so that they do not put universities with an international reach at an unfair disadvantage.

6. Finally, universities are organic institutions that are susceptible to rapid change. Factors such as changing research priorities, turnover of staff and shifts in government policy can mean that institutional profiles can look dramatically different year upon year. While other well-known league tables use data that is collected yearly, U-Multirank will base its 2013 results on the reference year 2008-9. We fear that changes in our member institutions over this period will not be accurately reflected in this first set of results. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that the sector as a whole in the UK is in the midst of an extraordinary overhaul. As many of our universities are waiting to see what the full effect of the Government’s reforms will be, it seems unfair to compare them with others that will not be subject to such drastic changes. The year-on-year changes for each individual British institution moving from 2011-12 to 2012-13 are also likely to be distorted by the reforms.

7. To conclude, the 1994 Group urges the Committee to look closely at how this highly complex tool will impact upon both users and institutions. We fear that it may confuse applicants and may act to the detriment of research-intensive institutions, particularly those in Britain.

21 November 2011
1994 Group, The Russell Group of Universities, million+ and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)

1994 Group, The Russell Group of Universities, million+ and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)

Transcript to be found under Russell Group
Association of Colleges – Written evidence

The Association of Colleges (AoC) represents and promotes the interests of Further Education Colleges and their students. Colleges provide a rich mix of academic and vocational education. As autonomous institutions, established under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, they have the freedom to innovate and respond flexibly to the needs of individuals, business and communities.

The following key facts illustrate Colleges’ contribution to education and training in England:
- Every year Colleges educate and train over three million people.
- 35% of entrants to higher education come from Colleges.
- More than half of all Foundation Degree students are taught in Colleges
- 171,000 students study higher education in a College
- Colleges teach over 45,000 students from outside the UK.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

I. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

AoC broadly supports the EU proposals for the modernisation of European Higher Education and would take as its starting point the following analysis from a 2006 Commission paper:

“…most universities tend to offer the same courses to the same group of academically best-qualified young students and fail to open up to other types of learning and learners, e.g. non-degree retraining courses for adults or gap courses for students not coming through the traditional routes. This has not only impeded access for disadvantaged social groups and prevented higher enrolment rates but has also slowed down innovation in curricula and teaching methods”

and the prognosis contained in the 2020 proposals published in September 2011:

“In order to overcome persistent mismatches between graduate qualifications and the needs of the labour market, university programmes should be structured to enhance directly the employability of graduates and to offer broad support to the workforce more generally. Universities should offer innovative curricula, teaching methods and training/retraining programmes that include broader employment-related skills along with the more discipline specific skills. Credit-bearing internships in industry should be integrated into curricula. This applies to all levels of education…(and) non-degree courses for adults, e.g. retraining and bridging courses for students not coming through the traditional routes.”

AoC believes that the important priorities for both the economy and individuals are not an expansion of three-year undergraduate degrees, but the need to improve workplace

---

learning, increase apprenticeships at all levels, and up-skill the workforce.2 ‘Traditional HE’ – the three/four year honours degree – based in a university, has now become the norm in developed countries for a range of occupational areas and subjects.

However, what is needed is a more diverse HE system, including traditional HE, but also featuring credible alternatives such as higher apprenticeships and shorter, HE-equivalent periods of study, focussed on skill development both at college/university and in the workplace. This could include expanding the accreditation of in-house company training schemes, more recognition and accreditation of prior experience and knowledge, accelerated learning programmes, and more learning delivered and assessed in the workplace.3

To be successful this could mean a reduction in traditional HE student numbers, but an expansion in a variety of other forms of HE and a re-framing of what ‘higher education’ means.

AoC believe that one mechanism to create a more diverse and flexible vocational HE system is the creation of lifelong learning credit accumulation and transfer systems (CATS) in member countries linked by a EU trans-national referencing framework.

As a recent Commission report indicates: “Obstacles to lifelong learning (LLL) persist, such as limited learning offers poorly tailored to the needs of different target groups; a lack of accessible information and support systems; and inflexible learning pathways (e.g. between VET and higher education). The problems are often exacerbated by the fact that potential learners have low socio-economic and prior educational status.”4

However, the structure is already in place for higher level VET and could be replicated to encompass appropriate vocational HE delivered in universities. AoC accepts that it would not be appropriate for some HEI courses to be part of such a scheme, and of course some universities with a more traditional portfolio of courses may not view participation as relevant or necessary.

However, the introduction of a lifelong learning CATS would facilitate the acquisition of HE knowledge and skills on a modular credit basis allowing the individual to study at their own pace and in line with the skills needed by their occupational sector. It would create more efficient national HE systems as individuals would have a record indicating the HE learning credits they had achieved. This would be accepted by all participating Colleges, Universities and training providers, thus supporting portability, addressing duplication of learning and fostering a lifelong learning culture.

National CATS would of course need to take into account student preference, planned provision and market determination.

---

Member counties could learn from the strengths for example of the German ‘dual system’ at lower VET levels, and of course American community colleges have an excellent record of responding quickly to employer need. The Netherlands has recently successfully introduced associate degrees, and France has successful two-year vocational diploma programmes clearly articulated with bachelor’s provision.

The Quebec model based around Collège d’Enseignement Général et Professionnel (CEGEP) is also an interesting case.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

1. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

AoC supports the Bologna process and development of the European Higher Education Area but believes it also needs to include higher vocational education, and that measures are put in place where appropriate to encourage the integration of ECVET and ECTS within the European Qualifications Framework. This is already occurring in some countries such as Scotland and would address some of the problems associated with creating a coherent HE system for individuals and employers, facilitating movement between higher vocational education and training and university based vocational education; and thus a coherent lifelong learning system. A recent briefing paper from CEDEFOP supports this proposal. It maybe that some form of Higher Vocational Education Observatory is established within CEDEFOP in alliance with proposed ‘EU Skills Panorama’ with a remit to develop an integrated EVCET and ECTS.

Mobility

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

AoC is supportive of the five measures listed in section 3.2 of the modernizing agenda document.

Targets and league table

4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

AoC is supportive of this target although in line with its previous comments, believes this target should include higher vocational education and short cycle higher education.

---

5 Cedefop Briefing Note: Shaping lifelong learning making the most of European tools and principles: Successful implementation depends on a clear understanding of how they relate to each other…
http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9065_en.pdf (accessed 09/01/12)
5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

AoC is supportive of this measure, and its philosophy of assessing and comparing performance, although aware that any ranking tool can have unintended consequences and possibly skew behaviour in ways that could be detrimental to institutions with strong access missions.

Funding instruments

6. What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?

AoC is supportive of measures to increase EU spending on higher education but is concerned that spending is related to improved performance and transparency of universities as indicated in the document. It would be pointless to increase spending without consequent improvement, especially at a time of economic restraint.

International dimension

7. The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

AoC is supportive of the Tempus agenda and the development of links with other countries’ HE systems. However, AoC would support that greater emphasis on higher vocational education needs to be embedded into the measures contained within the overall internationalisation strategy, including the emergence of transnational CATS systems and LLL strategies.

January 2012
Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy (ALLSI) – Written evidence

1) The undersigned is chairman of ALLSI, The Association of Foreign Lecturers in Italy and is a lecturer in English at the University of Verona. ALLSI is a trade union and pressure group which advises teachers on mutual recognition of qualifications and equal treatment under EU single market rules. Although most of our advice primarily concerns migrant teachers in Italy we have also advised migrant teachers in other EU countries.

2) The English language is one of the UK’s largest invisible exports. It attracts business to the UK through language schools, colleges and universities. In addition, the British Council as well as examining boards such as Cambridge, IELTS (International English Language Teaching System) are important to the UK as a source of income as well as having a proven track record in upholding standards through their certificated examinations.

3) The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) is a welcome development which ought to help mobility. However, there are dangers. States sign up to upholding EU regulations while at the same time (for short-term advantage and narrow national interests) thwart their fair and effective application. The CEFR framework for levels of language competence are classified as C2, C1, B1, etc. Institutions can and do appropriate and exploit this “common” terminology without any regard to actual common standards. For example, the Dutch finishing school examination in English (attesting that the candidate can follow a course in English in a higher education institution) is considerably more onerous than final examinations we have seen for students graduating in English in many Italian universities.

4) Institutions advertise that their C1 is equivalent to Cambridge Advanced and/or IELTS band 7/8 and are in effect fraudulently “piggy-backing” on the reputation of latter.

5) Putting in place a system of “External Examiners”, upholding common standards both in theory and in practice is essential. Members of the Bologna process are so disparate, economically and socially that national traditions risk undermining rather than enhancing the spirit of the Bologna process.

We remain at the disposition of the Sub-Committee should it require further clarification and trust that its work will be fruitful in the encouragement of better mobility.

20 November 2011
Birkbeck College – Written evidence

1. We are pleased to respond to the Call for Evidence issued by the House of Lords Social Policies and Consumer Protection EU Sub-Committee.

2. We would like to inform the sub-committee of Birkbeck Colleges recent success in securing EU co-financing (€300, 000) from the Lifelong Learning Programme managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), under the Erasmus programme for Multilateral Action.

3. Over the next two years the Social class, gender, participation and lifelong learning (GLAS) project will compare, develop and disseminate best practice, through international institutional partnership working, on the social inclusion and progression of working class individuals and, in particular, women.

4. The project will build on the learning and experiences achieved by staff at Birkbeck College in hosting the Linking London Lifelong Learning Network from 2006-2011, as coordinating institution, and benefit from the expertise present within its international partners: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Spain; Stichting Hogeschool Zuyd, Netherlands; Expertisecentrum, Netherlands and Universidade Aberta, Portugal.

5. We believe that the projects focus of social inclusion and gender equality to be issues common to all European countries and something which requires a transnational, transcultural collaborative approach. The project will identify best practice, and develop and share successful interventions around six core themes, integral to the modernisation of the higher education agenda:
   a. The accreditation of prior (experiential) learning
   b. Work-based learning strategies
   c. Continuing professional development
   d. Strategies for increasing social mobility
   e. Community and civic engagement
   f. Widening participation

6. We will happily keep the committee or one of its members informed of the progress of the project over the next 2 years.

15 November 2011
Introduction

1. The British Academy, the UK’s national academy for the humanities and the social sciences is pleased to respond to the inquiry commissioned to consider the European Union’s contribution to the modernisation of higher education in Europe. The European Commission’s Communication Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems right points out that education (and higher education in particular) plays a crucial role in individual, societal and economic advancement, helping to create jobs, growth and prosperity. However, it also notes that the potential of European higher education institutions is underexploited, and estimates that by 2020, 35% of all jobs in the EU will require high-level qualifications but that only 26% of the current workforce has those qualifications.

2. As highlighted by the Commission in its Communication, only 200 of Europe’s 4000 education institutions are included in the top 500, according to the 2011 Academic Ranking of World Universities / Shanghai Jiao Tong Index. Looking more closely at that list, only three European institutions are in the top 20 (all of them British universities), and only 10 in the top 50. We welcome the concerted efforts of the European Commission to support institutions and member states in modernisation programmes, but we question the extent of the impact given that, by its own admission, the Commission acknowledges that the real drivers of change are the member states and individual institutions. With these constraints, we think it reasonable to assume that the Commission’s proposals are more likely to make a genuine impact on developing institutions and member states (in terms of higher education systems) than on those that are already world leaders.

3. We also note the increasing role of cross-national groupings of universities such as LERU (League of European Research Universities), UNICA (Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe) and of course the European Universities Association (EUA). These all include members from outside the EU, a fact that points to the importance of a Europe-wide agenda for the development of higher education that goes well beyond the present borders of the EU.

4. It is important to understand that higher education systems throughout Europe are diverse. Even within individual countries, there will be hugely divergent approaches to higher education. To take the UK as an example, it is clear that there is no one unitary system of higher education. Rather, the four constituent nations support higher education institutions in different ways, depending on their differing contexts.
5. A second example of the diversity and complexity of the European system is evident in the recent publication of the ‘Autonomy Scorecard’ by the European University Association. The study includes four scorecards that rank and rate higher education systems in four autonomy areas: organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy. The Commission needs to be mindful of the diversity of European higher education, and therefore the limitations of specific or detailed solutions, when developing and implementing the proposals for modernisation.

Concerns about postgraduate study and research

6. We note that the Sub-Committee’s call for evidence specifically excludes comment on domestic policy. However, we are concerned that some of the European Commission’s suggested activities may run counter to particular policy developments in the UK, for example: the increase in tuition fees in England, along with the transferring of most of the payment burden to the individual for the majority of disciplines and the declining support for postgraduate research. The risk is that the Commission’s work makes no or little impact on the UK system, but instead leads to unnecessary divisions and differences between studying in the UK and studying in the rest of the EU.

7. We believe that postgraduate study and research are of fundamental importance to any higher education system. We therefore welcome the Commission’s announcement to establish an Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme.

8. However, the Commission should consider whether it could do more to increase the awareness, recognition and attractiveness of some of its existing schemes. As an example, both the Marie Curie and Erasmus Mundus schemes support doctoral and postdoctoral research but participation by UK students is limited. We believe the schemes would be even more successful if we could secure greater engagement from UK students.

9. The Bologna agreements support a notion of a first, second and third cycle of higher education, from undergraduate study to postgraduate research via masters level (often called MRes) preparation. It suggests a defined and structured sequence for the academic journey, which may eventually lead on to a research career, whether that is conducted in a university or in industry. The three-cycle approach emphasises the notion that masters and doctoral programmes are as much (if not more) the early stages of a research career than the final stages of life as a student. There is a risk, however, that as member states “encourage a better identification of the real costs of higher education and research and the careful targeting of spending, including through funding mechanisms linked to performance which introduce an element of competition” and “facilitate access to alternative sources of funding”, they will find it harder to provide adequate levels of support for postgraduate study and research. This might lead to many more students declining to progress to postgraduate study and research, which will damage the EU’s competitiveness compared to other economies.

8 *ibid, p9
10. An example of this is the recent development in English higher education, where the changes to the tuition fee regimes that come into effect from September 2012 will lead to a greater level of financial responsibility for undergraduate study being taken on by individuals. Postgraduate study and research in England (and the rest of the UK) is largely unsupported by government funding (especially in the arts, humanities and social sciences), with the result that domestic students must either fund themselves or take on commercial debt. This serves to render postgraduate study and research relatively unaffordable for many students. Figures in The Smith Report, One Step Beyond, show that from 1997/8 to 2008/9, there was only a 14% increase in UK postgraduate students at UK institutions compared to a 69% increase in REU postgraduate students and a 155% increase in non-EU students in the same period.

11. This indicates an expanding postgraduate system in the UK, but with significantly less growth in UK students. The changes to the funding system will possibly lead to UK students being less willing to embrace postgraduate study in the UK, but also not generally seeking opportunities to participate abroad. The pattern of structured doctoral programmes developing within other European countries may address some of this imbalance – potentially they will be deemed more attractive than UK programmes and so UK students look to move countries to further their research. The attendant risk is that the postgraduate sector in the UK withers while it expands in Europe, to our national disadvantage.

12. We therefore think that any moves by the European Commission to provide financial support to students pursuing postgraduate study should be congratulated. We believe this should be accompanied by continued efforts to promote undergraduate student mobility. Participation in Erasmus programmes by UK students is very low. We are concerned that policy developments in UK higher education may limit student mobility even further if current mechanisms to compensate English institutions are not continued in the new tuition fee environment.

13. We would sound one note of caution about the provision of financial support to postdoctoral researchers. Many early scholars will find it difficult to establish rewarding and successful research careers when necessary mobility causes stress at the level of personal and family life. Cross-national mobility carries costs as well as opening up new opportunities and horizons, e.g. the pattern of short-term research contracts that hamper the ability to create stability. We are minded to make this point to the European Commission as part of our response to the consultation on the European Research Area.

14. More generally, we believe that the European Commission needs to give some thought to creating greater coherence between policy developments in the Directorate-General for Education and Culture and the Directorate General for Research and Innovation.

---

9 Rest of the EU
10 One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education, March 2010, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
11 When calculated as a proportion of all students enrolled in UK higher education institutions in 2008/09, outgoing national ERASMUS students represent just 0.5% of the total. See Mapping mobility in European higher education Volume II: Case studies, Brussels June 2011 2009-3287/001-001 ERA-SHEPDE
12 Currently, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) for England provides fee compensation to English HEIs for students that participate in Erasmus programmes. There is no indication at the moment that HEFCE will be able to afford to compensate institutions for the loss of much higher tuition fees. This would provide a disincentive to institutions to encourage students to participate in Erasmus programmes.
Certainly in the postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral dimensions policies will overlap and possibly, without careful consideration, conflict with each other. It would also be helpful, in the context of modernising higher education, for the Commission to consider how structural and other funding can be used to support this agenda.

15. We have been concerned for some time about the impact of the UK government’s policy on visa controls on the mobility of those academics resident in countries outside of the EU. The risk is that the leading academics from around the world who would have continued their research within the European higher education system (by opting to work in the UK) remain in their home country or take up positions in competitor countries. It is difficult to see how the European Commission might be able to address these, but they are issues that could potentially affect the overall success of European higher education.

16. We were extremely pleased that the Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn used her speech at the British Academy on 10 November to affirm the European Union’s support for academic research in general, and humanities and social sciences in particular. The establishment of a European Research Area and the acknowledgement of the contribution all academic disciplines have to offer to ensure Europe meets the economic, social and political challenges of the next few years are both significant developments.

17. The President of the European Commission, José Manual Barroso echoed these sentiments in a speech in Lisbon the following day. He also noted the importance of investing in our intellectual capital and ensuring excellence in research in order to maximise the innovation potential of universities.

18. The European Commission should see the content of these speeches as fundamental principles and arguments for investment in European higher education institutions. The proposals to modernise higher education systems must adhere to the ambitions espoused by both the President and the Commissioner.

Summary

19. The proposals by the European Commission provide valuable alternative sources of support and encouragement to individuals to pursue postgraduate study and research. The impact of funding changes in the UK mean that research funders are having to reduce the level of support they once offered to doctoral and postdoctoral researchers (e.g. fewer awards, removal of small grant and conference programmes, concentration of research awards to align with particular strategic themes). The combined impact of all these changes means that academics find it harder to progress their career – the various systems are now in danger of concreting over the seedbed from which future research excellence will grow. The European Commission proposals may be able provide

---


opportunities for academics to develop, progress and establish their careers through the promotion and funding of researcher mobility and collaboration. However, the Commission is unlikely to be able to offer anything of a scale sufficient to address the serious challenges facing postgraduate study and research in UK higher education institutions because of recent and forthcoming policy developments.

We welcome the ambitions of the European Commission contained within these proposals, and in recent speeches by the President and the Commissioner for Research and Innovation. We believe the Commission is setting a tone that European higher education is fundamental to the success of the European Union in the global economy. As such, it requires significant investment from both the Commission and from individual member states.

21 November 2011
British Council – Written evidence

I. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

1. The British Council has a particular interest in the link between higher education and the world of work, and runs programmes which address the employability of graduates and the demand for skills in a global economy so that national educational and training systems are better able to respond to labour market demands and learner needs.

We believe the EU must continue to stimulate closer collaboration between universities and business, through dialogue and specific initiatives, such as: supporting an annual University-Business Forum, which brings together higher education institutions, companies, business associations and public authorities in order to exchange information on good practice, and to build closer working relationships; and funding University-Enterprise cooperation projects (currently funded through the Erasmus centralised budget), which aim to bring together these two worlds in order to promote entrepreneurship, creative thinking and innovative approaches as part of the curriculum for students and as a skill for teachers and researchers, and to reinforce the link between study and employment needs.

2. The EU must continue to provide direct and substantial support for student mobility, and staff mobility, recognising that there is general agreement on the benefits in terms of employability for all who participate (a number of studies of mobility, and surveys of employers provide evidence for this). In particular, the new education and training programme, which will operate from 2014, should provide support for mobility to institutions and enterprises in countries outside Europe.

3. While we stress the need for circumspection in allocating budget assigned for an education programme to developing infrastructure, nevertheless we would support the proposal for a centralised platform for traineeship opportunities described in the Communication. Such a development will offer invaluable help to students seeking opportunities for a work-placement in another country.

4. The new programme should provide a stimulus for greater structured cooperation between institutions. While individual student and staff mobility often serves as a starting point for further collaboration, formal structured cooperation might range from short-term programme-based collaboration to longer-term research projects and university-business consortia.

5. The new programme’s design should strive for increased simplification and flexibility. National Agencies should be permitted to operate within adequately flexible boundaries, to allow for the characteristics of national education systems to be respected.
2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

1. We would strongly support a continuation of EU sponsorship of national teams of academics/HE experts (‘Bologna Experts’) to promote and enhance the understanding of the Bologna Process and the EHEA within a national context. This is carried out in a number of ways, and in particular through institutional visits, and national conferences. The National Authority (the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) is responsible for the selection of Experts, and the British Council for the development and administration of the Work Plan. We believe it to be an effective mechanism for interpreting the benefits, and occasional complexities, of the Bologna Process for the UK sector.

2. It might be argued that without the stimulus of Erasmus mobility, the Bologna Process would never have taken root. With this in mind, we would expect the Commission to continue to emphasise the importance of academic recognition to successful mobility, and to ensure it remains an integral part of institutions’ commitment through the Erasmus University Charter.

3. We would favour the periodic review of the format and structure of key instruments of recognition, in particular the Diploma Supplement (DS), to allow their development in line with higher education policy (to reflect, for example, informal and non-formal learning, and extra-curricular achievement). Some account might usefully be taken of national developments in this area, such as the UK’s development of the Higher Education Achievement Report.

4. The EU should continue to work to reinforce the connection between the EHEA and other countries through, for example, clear support for the Bologna Policy Forum activities. The new programme, which indications suggest will allow certain forms of mobility beyond Europe, might be used as a vehicle to promote the benefits of the Bologna reforms for educational systems in other continents.

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

We believe that one key aspect of stimulating greater interest in the opportunity for mobility as a university student is to introduce the idea at school, and to develop curricula and awareness at school which will lead naturally to an aspiration to mobility during tertiary education. There are at least three significant elements to such a strategy:

1) ‘internationalize’ the school curriculum, from the earliest possible age – this entails a broader approach to design of the syllabus, and providing space and opportunities for schools to engage with the international dimension through, for example, international partnerships and teacher exchange. Programmes such as Comenius offer excellent support for this.

2) Accord greater weight to the teaching of foreign languages – they should be taught formally at primary school level, and their teaching at secondary level be made once
again compulsory. Such an approach would help in time to improve the present ‘linguistic deficit’ suffered by many UK students, which inhibits mobility. [See point 6 below.]

3) Information on opportunities for mobility, and the advantages these bring, should be more widely available. A student’s planning for university entry, and the particular course they choose, should take these possibilities into account. The British Council, as NA for the Comenius and Erasmus programmes, already carries out a considerable amount of cross-programme promotion. This effort will continue, but schools across the country need to be alerted to the opportunities available to their students. [See point 8 below.]

There are a number of things which we believe universities might do to reduce or remove obstacles to mobility, including:

4) introduce more flexibility in the design of curricula, to allow semester- or year-long mobility ‘windows’, which permit the student to take up the opportunity of a period of study abroad. Such arrangements are more difficult in STEM subjects, for which the syllabus is more highly structured and where later courses often pre-suppose completion of an earlier related course. But Erasmus mobility from the UK takes place in all disciplines (including, for example, medicine, dentistry and the physical sciences), so it is clearly possible to achieve such flexibility.

5) ensure that academic recognition is provided, and in a clear, and comprehensible fashion. Students need to be reassured that their work will be properly recognised, and to understand precisely how that will happen. The Commission and National Agencies already work hard to promote this message, and universities need to continue to play their part in the process.

6) make possible opportunities for students (in particular those whose subject is not a language) either to learn languages ab initio or to consolidate and improve their level of attainment in a language with which they are already familiar. Many studies of obstacles to mobility among UK students have shown that, together with financial constraints, poor grasp of another language is the most significant deterrent to participation. Indeed, while the proportion of UK outgoing Erasmus students who are studying languages is now around 50%, in the programme as a whole the proportion is only c 15%. This is an indication of the extent to which those students who are not degree-level linguists feel hampered by their lack of proficiency. Some UK universities already require GCSE-level attainment in a language as a condition of admission, and this tendency, which is a signal to schools of the seriousness of intent in this area, should be welcomed and encouraged. Universities can go further, as many do, by allocating the necessary resources to language centres, or to extra-curricular courses offered by language departments, to allow those students who wish, to improve their linguistic capability.

Measures which can be taken by programme-level authorities, including the European Commission, the government, the National Agency and other bodies include:

7) introduce funding to support mobility to destinations beyond the countries at present participating in Erasmus, as provisional information on the new programme suggests will be the case. Support of this kind is currently restricted to Erasmus Mundus, and therefore available to a small percentage of UK institutions only. Information on mobility flows indicates that Anglophone destinations are particularly
popular, but there is a need to encourage and support mobility to industrialised economies in all parts of the world.

8) provide a centralised repository of information on Erasmus and other opportunities for study abroad, bringing together information on all available options for students, with links to more detailed information. The British Council is already developing such a tool, an online portal, as part of its Internationalising Higher Education programme.

9) Particularly for the STEM subjects, professional recognition requirements make establishing successful mobility more difficult. Professional bodies must be encouraged to view mobility as a necessary and valuable component of professional development, as it is viewed, for example, by their German counterparts. Again (see (4) above) there is established UK outgoing Erasmus mobility in all of these subjects, so it is clearly possible to achieve.

10) Employers - in particular the large multi-nationals – must be encouraged to play their part. We see this as consisting, at least, of: (i) actively promoting and articulating the benefits of mobility for employability; and (ii) cooperating with the higher education sector in the organised provision of work-placements.

11) Maintenance by UK government of the Erasmus fee-waiver, or some other appropriate mechanism which recognizes the distinctive value of Erasmus mobility, and provides a real incentive to participation.

12) The attraction of a more diverse body of students to the programme is an area which remains poorly understood, and therefore systematic analyses, and policy reviews at European level are of considerable value. We would therefore urge the Commission, and specifically its Eurydice Unit, to continue to conduct studies of the kind recently published, which is an invaluable conspectus of different governmental and sectoral approaches to raising participation by under-represented groups in Erasmus.

13) at a national level, improving institutions' understanding of rates of under-representation is equally important, and the British Council, as National Agency for Erasmus, works to achieve this through cooperation with HESA (the Higher Education Statistics Agency) and other sectoral bodies. We also provide fora for the exchange of views and dissemination of ideas about good practice.

14) We are aware that some institutions offer bursaries to students from lower socio-economic groups, and we have encouraged this. As from 2011/12 the National Agency will pay an additional grant to outgoing UK Erasmus students identified by their institution as belonging to one of the widening participation groups. The Erasmus fee-waiver is also a substantial financial incentive to participation; abandoning it as part of the re-organization of the fee regime, will impact disproportionately the lower socio-economic groups already under-represented in the programme.

15) Targeted promotion of the programme to specific under-represented groups is an important element of our work, and we do this using a variety of media and in collaboration with a number of different partners.

4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

1. We believe that the target is appropriate in terms of meeting the projected need for employees with tertiary level skills. It is also desirable from the wider perspectives of raising aspirations and the advantages endowed to society.
5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

There are already several ranking systems (Times Higher Education’s World University Rankings, and Shanghai Jiao tong University’s Academic Ranking of World Universities are examples) available to university students and staff to assess the relative merits of different institutions. Nevertheless, the Commission’s proposed system may provide more flexibility for students, in particular, to review institutions’ suitability for their needs according to different criteria, and attributing different levels of importance to these criteria. We would support the introduction of a system which allowed students this greater flexibility.

6. What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework?

We welcome the funding increases outlined for the new programme.

7. The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

The EU will need to ensure that mobility and institutional cooperation on an international scale is supported through the new programme. This will entail extending the boundaries of large-scale mobility, such as Erasmus mobility, not simply the incorporation of Tempus and Erasmus Mundus in the wider education and training framework

The purpose of the proposed EU internationalisation strategy requires some further clarification, but the stated support for the development of strategies at institutional level is welcome.

We welcome the intention to provide further support for policy dialogue within and outside Europe. We believe that some of this can be viewed in the context of the promotion of the central principles of the Bologna Process to those countries which would benefit from it.

We believe that, if internationalisation of European higher education is to be achieved, EU programmes must actively promote and enable both institutional links and staff and student mobility to countries outside Europe.

British Council is strongly committed to supporting institutional collaboration within and beyond Europe through the Erasmus Mundus programme. We would wish to see much greater participation by UK institutions in this programme. The Council is well positioned to promote and support this.

25 November 2011
Q27 The Chairman: Good morning and welcome. Thank you very much for coming along this morning for this inquiry. While you settle yourselves, I have a few housekeeping notes. First of all, Members’ interests are recorded in the Register of Lords’ Interests, and the list of declared interests is on the witness table for you. The session is on the record; it is being webcast live and will be subsequently accessible via the parliamentary website. You will receive a transcript of the session to check and correct. This will be put on the record and, again, on the parliamentary website. Could you begin by stating your names and official titles? If you wish to do so, you could give a brief opening statement or we can go straight into questions.

Dr Beall: I am Jo Beall; I am Director of Education and Society at the British Council. I think our written statement will stand, so we can go straight into session.

Simon Williams: I am Simon Williams; I am Head of EU Programmes at the British Council.

David Hibler: I am David Hibler; I am Erasmus Programme Manager at the British Council.

Q28 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. This is not in the Register of Lords’ Interests, but I should start by saying that a long time ago I had quite a lot of dealings with the British Council through chairing the Arts Advisory Committee, but I do not think I came across any of you as colleagues.

I am going to start with a question around this issue of what kind of added value the EU can add to higher education, how the development of the Bologna process can proceed and
how the European higher education area can be developed. How beneficial do you think these processes have been so far? Might systems such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System operate well? Are there things that could be improved or is it not really working? I would like to get your general views on those areas please.

**Dr Beall:** I will kick off. In answer to the first question about the added value of the EU, I think most academics and most universities would see the value in this way: through international collaboration, you reach a wider audience in terms of research impact, employers and innovation. Most research groupings seek to get research funding, particularly for the STEM\(^{15}\) areas and the expensive areas of research endeavour, beyond what national budgets can achieve on their own. For example, the British Council facilitates a link between US and UK universities, and at the moment the alliance is negotiating funding with the US government having pledged £3 million a year for five years and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is hoping that together with British institutions we can match that. This kind of collaboration ups the ante and makes us more competitive. The EU also provides this by multiplier effect. That is the first thing.

The second is that working with the EU and within that context gives our students and universities an incentive to increase our language capability. That is absolutely essential for us to be globally competitive. We are very much behind, given the aversion of many of our students to speaking multiple languages. Working with the EU is critical in advancing our capacity nationally in that regard.

Bologna, in particular, is a really important process for us to engage with positively. The main reason for that is international mobility of staff or students and connectivity of universities and institutions of higher education is the way forward. It is a very competitive world. The international higher education landscape is incredibly competitive, and if we are going to participate in it, our qualifications need to have recognition value. The EU is working very hard not only to harmonise qualifications and quality assurance within the European Union but to export that quality assurance internationally.

It is critical that we are a part of that, because the contribution of higher education to our exports is £14 billion. If people are familiar with our system, they are more likely to come here, and as the European Union exports the Bologna system and more and more people become familiar with it, we will get more and more international students coming to us. At the moment, European universities are offering more and more courses in English, particularly at postgraduate level, so we do not want to be in a position where we have to compete with Europe. We want to be part of Europe, and the Bologna process enables us to do that and to benefit from the export of that Bologna system.

**Q29 The Chairman:** Can I just pick up on one point you have made there? You said that part of the added value was the incentive to learn other languages for our students, but as you say, and I know from personal experience, more and more universities are offering courses in English overseas. Do you think that might not counterbalance that, and make our students feel even less inclined to learn other languages because eventually everybody will be speaking English?

**Dr Beall:** There is that argument, but I think it is going to take some time before everyone speaks English. Ultimately, China is going to be the largest English-speaking country in the world, but that is not going to happen just yet. Latin America is Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking; Brazil is one of our key emerging market partners, and engagement in Europe with

\(^{15}\) Science, technology, engineering and maths
Spanish and Portuguese is going to help us there. Vietnam is another important emerging market where French is spoken, and so on. While we are very privileged to speak the language of the majority world, we need to show willing in an increasingly competitive global market.

**The Chairman:** Would Mr Williams or Mr Hibler like to say anything else on those areas?

**David Hibler:** Perhaps I could simply reiterate that, through making mobility a policy priority, the EU adds value to the development of competencies in UK students. In addition, through the sponsorship of the team of Bologna experts that the Commission undertakes, it provides a stimulus to greater understanding among Member States and other countries of what Bologna is. That is certainly something that we value in the British Council.

**Q30 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** I want to ask something about language later on, but something you have just said leaves me with a question about the issue of competitiveness. Instinctively, one feels it must be right that, if people are not learning foreign languages, it puts us at a competitive disadvantage, but I wonder if you or anyone else have done studies that can quantify that to help make a financial case for investment in language teaching.

**Dr Beall:** We have studies conducted employers and we know that it is valued. I do not know if either of my colleagues knows of British Council or other studies that have quantified this.

**Simon Williams:** There is a HEFCE\(^\text{16}\) study we contributed to and another study I cannot quite remember that have a lot of anecdotal but quite important evidence from employers about wanting to recruit graduates who had language.

**The Chairman:** If you do come across any of that material or, indeed, that HEFCE report, it would be really good if you could perhaps write to us with that.

**Simon Williams:** Absolutely.

**The Chairman:** We always like to be as evidence based as possible. We do not want to make assertions without being about to back them up.

**Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** I think it is particularly important now, with the cost of degrees being much more upfront to students and part of the rational choices they will be making about how they invest their money. Evidence that demonstrates that their employability is increased by doing it would be very helpful.

**Q31 Lord Lexden:** Before we leave Bologna, could I ask whether you think an increased focus is needed on work towards a standardised measure of academic progress and achievement within participating countries?

**Dr Beall:** The short answer is yes, but the qualifier is: with some flexibility. One has to have respect for national systems and, indeed, the harmonisation process does that. It is standardisation, but with flexibility.

**Q32 Baroness Prosser:** Good morning. All of us nowadays talk about education and training in the context of where that links into the world of work and the future of employment. The Europe 2020 Strategy has all of that implicitly built in. As I am sure you

---

\(^{16}\) Higher Education Funding Council for England
know, it has the Innovation Union, which is one of its flagship policies. Can you tell us what role you think the European Union can play in stimulating a closer collaboration between education institutions and business? Perhaps you could tell us a bit about the University-Business Forum and then the university enterprise projects, which you have mentioned in your evidence. If you could flesh some of that out, it would be interesting.

Dr Beall: What we suggest in our evidence is that a University-Business Forum would be a good idea; it does not yet exist as such at a European level. There are many successful examples of universities, employers, businesses and public authorities coming together in what is often called the triple helix to stimulate a closer relationship and to stimulate universities to work towards the development of local or regional economies. We have some good examples in the UK in Newcastle and Manchester, but Europe is very strong on this and we can benefit nationally from engaging with European examples. The iconic one is Barcelona, but there are many others.

In the British Council we have a programme called Knowledge Economy Partnerships, which particularly focuses on developing relationships between universities internationally, both in Europe and beyond, and doing that in conjunction with business to try to get that relationship working. I would say it is the most common way of funding research internationally; it is certainly something where Europe has a comparative advantage, and I think you maybe need a slightly bigger pool than a national economy of our size to grow that. That would be the main advantage.

Q33 The Chairman: Do you think we are holding our own in that forum? From what you are saying, it sounds as though Europe is a bit ahead.

Dr Beall: We are holding our own, but we could do better by joining up with more companies. Europe is our biggest market.

The Chairman: Did you want to add anything?

David Hibler: Through its centralised actions, which are managed by the Commission rather than by national agencies, Erasmus sponsors university enterprise co-operation projects. These are intended to bring universities together with business and employers’ organisations to develop curricula that are appropriate to the world of employment, but also respecting necessarily the university requirements. They are “curriculum development” projects.

Dr Beall: Could I add something? These knowledge economy partnerships often happen spontaneously, and so one of the questions that arises is: do you need to interfere? Sometimes you do if you want to go to scale. Working with the European Union provides structured co-operation that enables scaling up of activities that are happening between individual academics or institutions anyway.

Q34 Lord Eames: I think you have covered a great deal of what I wanted to ask you about. It is the mobility of students and Erasmus, and your connection particularly with the British Government. How do you find that relationship working out? Is it a happy relationship? Is it a positive one? Is there anything more you can tell us about the Erasmus link in so far as mobility of students is concerned? You have already talked about the priority that you give as an organisation to mobility, but could you say something more to us about your relationship particularly with the Government on this?
**British Council – Oral evidence (QQ 27–50)**

**Dr Beall:** I will kick off briefly, and then turn to my colleagues, who know a lot more about the operation of Erasmus. We are working very closely with David Willetts in BIS on the whole issue of outward mobility, and various members of the British Council are on various committees as part of that promotion of outward mobility and so have a very good working relationship in that respect and with the Department of Education. I will hand over to my colleagues to talk in more detail.

**Simon Williams:** I will say a bit about the Erasmus relationship. We are designated as the UK national agency for Erasmus by the UK Government, and it is BIS in partnership with DfE that acts as national authority for all the EU programmes. It is a contractual relationship; it was a role that was put out to tender at the start of the current phase of programmes that runs from 2007 to 2013. That said, it is a very positive relationship; it is a very good relationship; it is a very mutually supportive relationship; but it is a very defined relationship both in terms of what the Commission requires of the role of the national agency and the national authority, and indeed our legal relationship with the Government.

**David Hibler:** I do not think I can add to that in terms of our relationship with Government.

**Q35 Lord Eames:** Can I perhaps prise one particular aspect of it? How do you find the initiative comes in these various things? Do you have to suggest particular initiatives or does it come through to you from Government? In my experience, that is very often the core of a relationship such as this; I was just wondering how you find that.

**Simon Williams:** I think it is probably both. Our role as a national agency is defined by the Commission rather than by the UK Government, through the European Parliament’s legal decisions. As part of our contractual relationship, we have performance indicators and we have formal review periods, but we have a lot of informal co-operation as well. While a lot of what we do is defined—universities apply to us for funding and we provide funding to universities—there is not necessarily a lot of innovation in that, if you see what I mean. It is a transactional relationship. Actually, we have national advisory councils in which both the sector and BIS participate, so I would say it is a very organic, mutually supportive relationship.

**Lord Eames:** And what is the contractual relationship’s time limit?

**Simon Williams:** The current programme is 2007 to 2013. I would just add we are similarly the national agency for the Comenius programme, which is for schools, and for Youth in Action, and again the same framework applies.

**Q36 Baroness Henig:** Good morning. Student mobility is one of the areas that I am particularly interested in, and I have read your remarks about some of the obvious barriers—we have talked about language and financial issues already. You make a point about universities themselves having a very important role in facilitating this, and I agree with that, having spent a long time in a university precisely doing that: making it easier for students to go and making sure that everything they do when they are away counts in their assessment, and all the rest of it, so I absolutely agree with all of that.

Anecdotally, however, I seem to have been getting a lot of information recently that, because of the present situation, students are now becoming more reluctant to go abroad. In fact, courses that I knew to be well-established in the Erasmus area are now closing down because of the circumstances there are at the moment. It is becoming more difficult to
persuade students to go, rather than easier. It is in that sort of context that I wanted to ask
how you saw the Erasmus programme developing in the future. How can we boost and get
back to the situation that was perhaps there 10 or 20 years ago? I would like your
comments on that, and then also there is the issue of the Commission’s proposal for a
European masters’ level student loan guarantee facility. I think that is a bit different; at the
postgraduate level, the issues are perhaps somewhat different from at the undergraduate
level. Could I invite comments on that sort of area?

Dr Beall: We have given this a lot of thought in the British Council and have recently
commissioned a report on student mobility from the UK. This is being launched on 8
December with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. The report reveals
that, whereas the Bologna average is 20% of students being mobile, we are a long way
behind that in the UK with around 1% of our students being internationally mobile. We are
in danger if we say that there is something wrong with our students and they are not
interested in travelling or the international experience, because, clearly, those who can
afford it go on gap years, and those universities that offer programmes that have both a UK
component and a component built into the degree that takes students elsewhere are very
popular and they are very successful recruiters.

The key for us is to find ways in which we can offer UK students the overseas, international
experience in ways that do not compromise their education and their chances. If there is a
greater reluctance now, I am pretty sure that it would be linked to financial considerations.
People are not going to take a term out or a year out if it does not count towards their
degree. In a way, that brings us back to the Bologna question, because the Bologna quality
assurance question, which promotes greater harmonisation, will make it easier for students
to have that international experience and for the quality control to be there for those
students to count that experience as part of their degrees. That is something we are
working very hard on, and we have evidence we can share with you soon on that.

The Erasmus programme is absolutely critical to promoting international experience for
British students and for helping to get us up to a more acceptable proportion of students
studying abroad.

Q37 The Chairman: What lessons do you think we can learn from other Member
States in this area?

Dr Beall: First of all, in other Member States there is less fear of language, so that is
something we have to tackle—to go back to that question. Other Member States want to
come to Britain; they want to go elsewhere to increase the number of languages they speak,
whereas languages are sometimes a deterrent for our students. One issue is to get over the
fear of language. Perhaps that means going back to the school level and introducing second
language at primary level or making it compulsory up until GCSE, because that then takes
the fear out of travelling to countries where a different language is spoken. That would be a
critical element.

If you look at the United States as a model, and that is a model that is being looked at by
other Member States in the European Union, it is almost de rigueur to have a semester’s
study abroad as part of your undergraduate degree. European Union countries are thinking
about that; some have already moved towards it, and the Bologna process is very much
about facilitating that. To come back to the issue of universities having to play their part,
they really have to start thinking about not saying, “British education is of such a high
standard we could not possibly release any of our students for a qualification elsewhere for
even a term.” Rather, they should say, “What is the added value of that experience? How can we work co-operatively to ensure the standard is satisfactory to us?”

**Q38 Baroness Henig:** Can I just ask a supplementary question? I am wondering whether it puts off other students that one of the feedbacks students often return home with is that they do not get the same degree of supervision of tutorials; they go to some European equivalent and it has a massive lecture approach. Therefore, it is not like for like; they do not feel that the academic experience is as rich or as supportive. Is that an element? That is certainly some of the feedback that we used to get, and I wondered how relevant that was.

**Dr Beall:** It probably is relevant and it is probably again something that has to come back to the Bologna quality assurance harmonisation process—to ensure that universities get that right. Many individual universities are choosing particular partner universities to work with where they can guarantee the right standards. Many of the universities do not know where to begin and how to do that, and that is where a more broadly structured offer can help.

**Q39 The Earl of Courtown:** More students in the UK are travelling overseas now and carrying out their secondary education. Obviously the story is getting over that there are good courses outside the UK, but language is a problem. Basically, it is a question of educating the students to think more outside the box rather than the traditional method of a British university. How can the British Council help in this area?

**Dr Beall:** I know my colleague wants to come in on the previous question, but, to answer that one, the British Council plays a role in facilitating student mobility all over the world. Erasmus and Comenius are big programmes, but we have many others. We feel quite strongly that in the new European education suite of offers we should encourage mobility, not only within Europe but between Europe and other countries.

For example, I talked to you about the US/UK partnership, and the funding that both Governments are putting in there with consortia of universities in both countries. This is designed to facilitate research and mobility between the staff and researchers of universities in the US and the UK, plus Brazil and India. It is targeting key markets for our economies and it is also getting mobility internationally. We would strongly recommend that the next iteration of Education Europe builds on the Erasmus Mundus Programme, which connects consortia of European universities with universities internationally, and build that into Erasmus more generally.

**David Hibler:** In relation to the question of Baroness Henig, I just wanted to add that Erasmus has safeguards to allay the fears of students about recognition and the comparability of the work they will do. It not only requires institutions to provide academic recognition for the work that students have done abroad, as you may be aware, but also has a highly structured approach to defining the work that students will do and how that will be assessed and marked. It serves as a model for mobility programmes in that sense, although I recognise the point you make about the diffidence UK students probably feel about studying abroad, which I think is a complex of different factors to do with personal motivation and academic concerns that might arise.

**Simon Williams:** Could I add something coming in on the Earl of Courtown’s question? One of the things we find at the British Council is that the work we do linking up schools internationally, whether through mobility-type projects or through virtual co-operation projects, is a very effective way of getting young people to widen their horizons at that stage. Then when they are coming to look at the universities and thinking about the universities and courses they want to go on, they already have mobility in mind as something
they want to do. That is very much a continuum of building readiness and appetite, which these programmes allow.

**Q40 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** You are well placed to make comparisons between the willingness of UK students to go to European countries to continue their studies and to other countries. I wonder what the data tells you about that. What are the figures suggesting and what are your conclusions about where British students prefer to go?

**David Hibler:** Perhaps I should say first that the quality of data that we have nationally is not very strong in this area. It is generally very good for organised mobility programmes such as Erasmus, because finance and activity data are related, but, for general outward mobility at institutional level, there is very little data that is held, and what is held is open to interpretation in different ways. We believe from what data exists that there is an evident increase in mobility to countries outside Europe and, in particular, to Anglophone destinations—so the US and Australia in particular—but other countries as well. Mobility to Asia has been increasing in the last two to three years and to one or two other destinations, but principally those. We believe that at undergraduate level it is still not of the same scale as Erasmus. Very approximately, the figures are that in 2009/10 there were almost 12,000 mobilities under Erasmus. A study that has looked at this most recently estimated there were, in addition to the Erasmus mobilities, about 6,000 to non-European destinations.

**Q41 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** What I am struggling to get a sense of is whether or not the reasons why our students are not learning languages, and therefore feel rather afraid of going to study abroad, is a chicken and egg thing. Is there something about us in this country that makes us feel that somehow we do not have to do these things? In other words, is it an ingrained cultural thing or is it simply a more mechanical process because we are no longer teaching it compulsorily at school? I am just trying to get a sense of where we are on that. If we do not have the data, it is quite difficult to conclude whether or not students do not go abroad because they do not speak the right languages, or whether they do not go abroad because they do not like abroad. Do you know what I mean? Without that data, I think it is probably quite hard to make that judgment.

**David Hibler:** It is. Some of the Commission’s work recently and the Bologna process work has been to provide influence in this area, because, by setting targets, they are creating an expectation that national authorities will look at their data collection systems and improve them. That is going to happen across the board, and I do not think the UK is in a worse position than other countries in that respect. I do think, though, that what evidence we have suggests that other countries are sending proportionally many more students than we are to study abroad. Certainly in Erasmus, where we have reliable data, outward mobility from comparator countries like France, Germany and Spain is about three times that from the UK.

**The Chairman:** And is that not just about them coming to the UK, but also about France going to Spain, Germany and so on?

**David Hibler:** Yes, total Erasmus outward mobility from each of those countries is between two and three times what it is from the UK.

**Q42 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** I have just one more question. With regard to Mr Williams’s point about primary school programmes, are you confident you have the data to evidence the fact that these programmes do result in benefits some years...
**Simon Williams:** That is the Holy Grail of very hard evidence that we all would like. There is masses of anecdotal evidence, which is useful, and indeed in the report Jo mentioned that we are publishing next week one of the things that struck us was that a lot of students thought it was not worthwhile being mobile because it would only give them soft skills like teamwork, project management and getting on with other people, rather than hard skills. Actually, that is what the employers are saying they need, so it is a strange self-denying thing. Schools tell us that, if some of their best students get really excited about working with schools in other countries, they go on to choose languages and go on to think about that. We do not have any hard data on that.

**Dr Beall:** If I can just add to that, there is evidence—not from our research—that, once you have had an international experience, you are more likely to go again. There is evidence from our research that employers really want those soft skills.

**The Chairman:** That is more encouraging.

**Q43 Baroness Henig:** Are we missing one element here? Students are even more desperate now to get a good degree. Therefore, they are thinking, “If I go abroad, is that going to be a unit that I am not going to get a good mark on, and is that then going to put my mark down?” That is on the one side. On the other, yes, they are getting all these skills that maybe employers down the track will value, but I get the sense that students in the last few years have had this laser view of, “I must get this 2.1; I must do these units, and if I go to Copenhagen it is going to undermine that possibility.” How relevant is that? If that is an issue, it has to be addressed somehow.

**Dr Beall:** You are absolutely right, and the way to address it is for employers, business associations, companies—particularly the larger multinational companies—to make much clearer that that is what they are looking for. What they value is not necessarily the first class degree but rather the 2.1-plus, intercultural communication and other soft skills and so on. It is this that will get you the job above the next person. A lot of it is about teamwork and communication.

**Q44 Lord Eames:** Very briefly, as I do not want to take up too much time, going back more years than I can remember now, when I taught at university, the whole question of travelling abroad—this is jurisprudence, incidentally, law students—was usually, “Can I enlarge my experience of law and apply it back at home?” For those students that you have under Erasmus and so on, who want to simply sense the culture of somewhere else, and you help them to go abroad, is there still that narrowing of distinction between, “Does this further my career prospects?” and “Does this enlarge me as a person?” Do you see what I am getting at? Is that the position at the moment?

**Dr Beall:** I think students are differently motivated. Some will want to go for the fun of experiencing another place, and some will go to further their career. I think Baroness Henig is right that students are very laser-focused on achievement in a competitive world, so I would suggest it is probably a lot more about career development and promotion.

**The Chairman:** I am conscious that we are going to run out of time shortly, and we have a few more questions we want to ask you. Could we as a Committee be succinct with our questions and you with your answers? Anything else that you want to let us know about,
please do write to us; perhaps we will say to you on one or two things, “Please write to us on this.” I am sorry to have to do that; it is fascinating, but we have time limits.

Q45 Lord Lexden: I have one further but perhaps final point on Erasmus. Is it your view that the Government’s fee waiver scheme is secure for the foreseeable future, or do you think there is a threat to it?

David Hibler: Jo has referred to the group that the Minister has established to look more widely at mobility; one of the groups that reports to the main group there is looking specifically at the fee waiver. Currently, the position is that old-fee-regime students—that is, students currently in the system—will be eligible for a fee waiver for 2012-13 and 2013-14. No decision has been taken on the fee waiver for students entering under the new regime in 2012-13. Our view as the British Council is that this is a really very important incentive. It acts as a reassurance that there are no additional costs to mobility that would not otherwise be present, and we believe it will make a difference to UK numbers. It will particularly impact on students from under-represented groups, who are already not well represented in the Erasmus cohort.

Lord Lexden: One assumes from what you have said that you are pressing strongly for its retention.

David Hibler: We have argued to the group that we believe it is important either that the fee waiver is retained or that there is some comparable mechanism to act as an incentive to mobility.

Q46 The Earl of Courtown: You briefly touched on mobility of researchers in one of your answers. How do you think we can boost that here in the UK? We heard from Universities UK about the German academic exchange service. Do you think that could work here?

Dr Beall: Yes, I do. Most international research groups of which UK universities are a part are looking for mobility, particularly of emerging researchers, PhD students and post-doctoral fellows. That is where you get the most bang for your buck. Within Europe there is a strong appetite for it among academics, but it has to be institutionalised in a more structured form, so I agree strongly.

Q47 The Chairman: I would like to ask you a question about league tables. We have already talked about there being some data that we would like to have, but I am wondering whether our best interests would be served by the introduction of a European universities league table, what is being called the U-Multirank tool. There is also something in the air about the European tertiary education register. Do you think these developments might be useful? Is so, how, and if not, why not?

Dr Beall: We have many rankings globally. They are a blessing and a curse. They are a blessing because I think they have upped responsiveness on the part of institutions; they are taken seriously by parents and students. They are a curse because they are all partial in one way or another. Certainly, if you take the Shanghai Jiao Tong Index, it is very much geared towards ensuring that East Asian universities, and particularly Chinese universities, are considered to be up there and become stellar universities on their ranking criteria. Therefore, it is not a silly idea to have a European one, because rankings have a political or a marketing purpose as well as a quality assurance and benchmarking purpose.
The proposed European ranking particularly looks at the student experience, whereas others are very biased towards only research output. For that reason, it links very closely to the Erasmus goals, and anything that promotes students’ choice or ability to make appropriate decisions is to be valued. Within the world of university rankings, some of the ideas that are informing the European multi-ranking system are very progressive and to be welcomed.

**The Chairman:** Do you think that there might be such a significant burden placed on reporting from universities that it would be off-putting for people?

**Dr Beall:** I do not think so. Basically, in the UK, universities are reporting for QAA anyway on teaching and to different bodies on research nationally. It would probably be accumulating and repackaging some of the information they are already collecting. These things are always onerous, but I do not think it would be particularly onerous.

**The Chairman:** Do you have any insight into or any information about this European tertiary education register? We heard evidence that there does not seem to be much known about what that will be about.

**Dr Beall:** I do not.

**David Hibler:** No.

**The Chairman:** No—nobody does; that is fine.

**Q48 Baroness Henig:** Very briefly, I would like to ask you about Erasmus for All, the funding proposal, and whether you think that it achieves its aims of simplification and flexibility, and whether there is anything about the Erasmus for All funding proposal that you particularly endorse or dislike.

**Simon Williams:** We welcome the proposed significant increase of funding in to the programme. There is a simplification. I think under the current programme there are about 70 different types of activities that people can apply for; it has been simplified down to three. There has been a much greater use of lump-sum funding; rather than people scrabbling around for bus tickets, they will actually be reporting on the impact of what they have achieved through the funding. I think the aim that there is a similar offer for whatever stage you are at—for formal and non-formal education—makes much more coherent sense. We really welcome the introduction of international aspects to it—the fact that there will be funded student mobility beyond just the European Union, from beyond the European Union back in, and some of the strategic partnerships between the European Union and beyond.

Given the fact that it is bringing together all the previous programmes, it would be fair to say there is more concern in the other constituencies than in Erasmus. Indeed, the indicative funding for the higher education part is significantly higher than for the others. If you try to extrapolate, looking at current UK share, it could mean a doubling of student mobility funding for the UK, which would be great if we can get over all the other obstacles we have talked about.

The non-formal aspect, the Youth in Action programme constituency, has concerns. We would recognise some of those about the incorporation of the non-formal activities into this big thing called Erasmus for All. There is a risk that that might be sidelined if there is greater

---

17 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
emphasis on just employability rather than social cohesion; people with fewer opportunities
may be sidelined out of it, and so we would recognise some of that concern. From the
higher education aspects of it, we very much welcome it.

**Q49 Baroness Henig:** What about other funding instruments, such as the European
Social Fund? How important are they?

**Simon Williams:** We talked about this walking along the pavement. It is an area we do not
know a lot about, and I do know that Erasmus for All seeks to make a clearer distinction
between what Erasmus for All will fund and what the Social Fund will fund. Training people
within work will fall to the Social Fund and people within formal or non-formal education
will fall to Erasmus for All. That makes sense to us, but that is about all we know on the
Social Fund.

**The Chairman:** I should say at this point we are holding a seminar on the European Social
Fund next week.

**Simon Williams:** We will come to it.

**The Chairman:** Are you coming?

**Simon Williams:** It sounds very interesting.

**The Chairman:** It is oversubscribed actually, but we have a couple of representatives from
universities coming along. When we did our report, we took evidence from a number of
people with an interest in higher education. Do watch out for our report from that.

**Simon Williams:** We will do, thank you.

**The Chairman:** There might be something in that that helps you to understand that area a
bit more.

**Q50 Lord Lexden:** Finally, on the issue of internationalisation of higher education, on
which I note that Dr Beall is a very considerable expert, do you think that an EU-wide
programme of internationalisation would bring significant benefits, or is this something that
is taking place anyway in member countries and the EU would well advised to keep out of
or have no more than a limited role in?

**Dr Beall:** I think you are right that it is happening anyway. Most universities are engaged in
international partnerships of one kind or another. However, the scale that one can reach
through European funding and through an Erasmus programme is much greater than either
individual universities could achieve or that even nationally we could achieve. From that
point of view, it is to be welcomed.

There are different ways in which universities internationalise—through bilateral
partnerships or through consortia—and I think the EU would probably favour consortia.
Certainly in the way it has operated up until now, through Erasmus Mundus, that has been
the case. I do not think it would preclude universities having bilateral relationships outside
of the European Union. Certainly, the European Union is moving beyond simply
European-based exchanges to global ones.

**Lord Lexden:** We live at a time when there is immense support for the production of
strategies for this, that and the other. Is an EU strategy of any kind needed in this area?

**Dr Beall:** It is always good to have a strategic guideline on how you go about these things.
The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for a very fulsome set of responses to our detailed questions. It is very useful for us to have evidence from a body that has a wide overview. Once again, thank you very much for your time; I look forward to reading the transcripts. Hopefully, you can return them as soon as possible and let us know if they are all okay with you.
Businet and Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) – Written evidence

Submission to be found under Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG)
Dr Anne Corbett – Written evidence

0. Introductory remarks

0.1. I am a political scientist, with a position as Visiting Fellow in the European Institute at LSE. I am giving evidence as a researcher with an established interest in the politics and processes of the policy area of knowledge, higher education and Europeanisation. I am the author of a monograph on why and how, and contrary to widespread belief, the EC has wanted since its creation to have universities associated with the European project (Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship on European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005: Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan) My current research is focused on the Bologna Process and the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Lisbon-EU2020 strategy, and the Europeanisation of higher education (HE), or lack of, in all its forms. http://www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/staff/visitingStaff/corbett/Home.aspx

0.2. I very much welcome the fact that this topic has attracted Parliamentary interest. The British veto at the European Summit of December 9, 2011, gives an unexpected timeliness to discussions of Europeanisation in other policy areas. While higher education does it enjoy the same salience as the financial sector, there is much to suggest that UK reaction to the EU on higher education can also be plotted on a scale that runs from suspicion through indifference to just a few pockets of enthusiasm. The Subcommittee inquiry offers the chance to assess the relationship of Europeanisation and British interests specifically for the higher education sector.

0.3. My main aim is to convey, in the light of the communications listed above, and some relevant changes in the status of higher education in the EU in the last decade, what I think that the EU can expect from HE, and what HE can expect from the EU, and why legislatures should be taking notice. My emphasis is on the interlocking of the ideas, institutions and process behind the proposals, since these frame the opportunities and constraints implicit in the Subcommittee’s main questions.

I. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

1.1. The short answer is that the EU is most effective when its institutions inject an appropriate amount of tension or dynamic into a policy sector in which there are Europe-wide problems and many shared aspirations, but which remains essentially national. Over the past ten years, there has been a dramatic change in process; the Commission’s classic instruments of rhetoric (‘discourse’) and incentive funding have also been supplemented. There has been an increasing concern since the Lisbon European Council, 2000, with policy monitoring and the collection and analysis of data, which in turn generates new policy initiatives. I also see the emergence of a broader conception of higher education than common in EU arenas in the past, and how this can be deployed to serve general EU goals.

1.2. Since 2000, when the European Council assumed the strategic lead in knowledge related policies, there have been modifications to the role of the Council and Commission and a redistribution of powers. The ‘new governance architecture’ in working mainly through the open method of coordination (OMC), requires the Commission to adopt a bigger technical role. In developing coordination instruments of benchmarking and peer learning and in monitoring, OMC also obliges the Commission...

18 I am the author of a monograph on why and how, and contrary to widespread belief, the EC has wanted since its creation to have universities associated with the European project (Universities and the Europe of Knowledge: ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship on European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005: Basingstoke. Palgrave Macmillan) My current research is focused on the Bologna Process and the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Lisbon-EU2020 strategy, and the Europeanisation of higher education (HE), or lack of, in all its forms. http://www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/staff/visitingStaff/corbett/Home.aspx

to work in much closer liaison with national officials, and to a much greater extent, in partnership with the Council.

1.3. The evolution of the Lisbon framework, in its latest incarnation of Europe 2020, has now embedded higher education into core EU strategy as a key driver for growth (‘smart, sustainable and inclusive’). EU higher education is integrated for strategic purposes with research and innovation, employment, social cohesion and regional development in ways which are more likely to appeal to increasingly autonomous HE sectors. The prospect of Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will further this process.

1.4. These institutional changes have helped to make the EU conception of higher education less narrowly instrumental. Back in the 1990s the Commission DG for education was seeing higher education almost exclusively as the producer of skilled manpower. The evolutions of the Lisbon decade have not only brought policy sectors closer together, emphasising the ‘knowledge triangle’ of education, research and business, and widening opportunities for higher education to engage. This decade has also seen a new emphasis on creating opportunities for individuals: to be creative as well as skilled, and to have social competences, and more attention to learning and the encouragement of good teaching.

1.5. In the invitation to member states to take the measures (table below), the Agenda for Modernisation broadly reflects this less opportunistic, more strategic policy-making in EU education. But there is always place for the unexpected. An issue I highlight in a subsequent section are the implications of more ECJ law finding its way into higher education if the Commission has its way, though it is to be noted that the Council has refused to discuss the issue.20 Also in prospect is a possibly revitalised role for the European Parliament.21

1.6.

- Increasing attainment levels to provide the graduates and researchers Europe needs
- Improving the quality and relevance of HE
- Strengthening quality through mobility and cross-border cooperation
- Making the knowledge triangle work: linking HE, research and business for excellence and regional development
- Improving governance and funding

1.7. The general thrust of what the Commission would like to do under the Agenda for Modernisation (table below) looks equally unexceptional and in line with Treaty commitments to subsidiarity and the Lisbon/ Europe 2020 dynamic.23

- Promoting mobility
- Putting HE at the centre of innovation, job creation and employability
- Supporting the internationalisation of European HE

---

20 Council Conclusions on the modernisation of higher education, 3128th Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting, Brussels 28 and 29 November, 2011.
21 The European Parliament will be debating EU support for higher education on December 21, 2011 see footnote 17.
22 Figures commonly quoted are 4000 higher education institutions, 19mn students, 1.5m academics and other staff.
23 The Treaty empowers the EU to contribute to education and training of quality by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting their responsibility for the content of their teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity (Article 165).
0.4. But within these traditional categories there is a bid by the Commission to be more active in problem solving. Among the innovatory proposals, some are more contentious than others. I personally have mixed views. These issues are highlighted in answer to the detailed Subcommittee questions below.

2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

2.1. The EU has already added value to the Bologna process by enabling it to survive. The Bologna Process and the emerging EHEA, currently consisting of 47 participating countries and the Commission as a special member, would not exist today had it not been backed financially by the Commission. Since 2001, the Commission has financed those Bologna activities which are not met out of national funds, in other words almost everything: developmental projects, research, the salaries of Bologna experts, far-flung conferences and more, notably its own staffing costs. It also contributes staff expertise.

2.2. The Communication can be read as implying that the EU is treating the Bologna Process as a kind of antechamber for developing policies which it can take up on a bigger scale. for example on data analysis, and internationalisation. It might therefore be assumed that the best way for the EU to add value is to resource and institutionalise Bologna action lines, as has to some extent done on mobility, quality assurance, recognition and monitoring (‘stocktaking’ in the Bologna jargon).

2.3. There is also a potentially influential move from the European Parliament to enhance the contribution of EU institutions to the consolidation and progress of the Bologna Process. calling for EU action to consolidate quality assurance and common core curricula with incentive funding.

2.4. I maintain, whatever the supplementary funding, that it is important that the ideational and institutional distinctions in the two processes survive. The EU will not add value if it attempts to drive a wedge between EU and non-EHEA members f the EHEA. Whatever the overlap on actions and on methodology and the presence of national officials, linking the Lisbon/ Europe 2020 policy-making and that of Bologna, the processes have different wellsprings and different aims. Bologna as a process designed to create a European Higher Education Area of compatibility and comparability, has as its prime focus the higher education sector, not (whatever its contribution) the goal of transforming the European economy.

2.4. Attempts to combine the Bologna and EU logics would mean the loss of some valuable characteristics of the intergovernmental Bologna Process. Bologna is a political arena for higher education as opposed to the EU. As such it has been intensely caught up in issues

24 www.ehea.info
26 The last business meeting of the Bologna ministers listed priorities for the next Bologna decade which are all to be found in the EU’s Lifelong Learning Policy Framework. These include equitable access and completion (social dimension); lifelong learning; employability; student-centred-learning and the teaching mission of higher education; education, research and innovation; international openness; mobility; data collection; multidimensional transparency tools; funding (Ministers, 2009). In addition there are overlaps in methodology. The Bologna ministers adopted an OMC methodology of indicators, without calling it OMC, back in 2003. Bologna was early into peer learning, with a system of workshops and, later, working groups with national experts playing an important role.
of principle, which underpin a higher education system several times in the last ten years, including major policy debates over the social dimension of higher education, and higher education as a public responsibility. Furthermore academic freedom and values are basic to Bologna. Principles do not figure overtly in the EU education debate.27

2.5. Furthermore the commitment to creating an EHEA in 1999 has given a foothold to university leadership and students unions to organise themselves on a European scale. The higher education stakeholders with a central place in policy-making (notably the EUA and the ESU) have contributed greatly on important issues (such as the social dimension, and linking the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area through the emphasis on doctoral studies). They have also opened up the process to national higher education sectors.

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What you’re your suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters Students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

3.1. The Commission is making an astute move in putting forward these mobility proposals, and the proposal for a student loan guarantee facility. The fact that the proposal is for intra-European mobility, as opposed to international mobility, will attract support from a range of policy actors. The Bologna Process has failed to find the levers to counter the uneven distribution of mobility within Europe.

3.2. However there are no concrete proposals here to solve the problem of those countries of Eastern Europe that have very low outward mobility, nor to link up with countries participating in the EHEA. There the problem is that students are relatively too poor to move. More joint degree might help to bridge a divide. There were efforts in the past to encourage north-south connections (this worked between Norway and Portugal).

3.3. The issue of brain drain is even more pronounced at research student level. The ERC awards (in which UK universities do particularly well) provide a case study.28

3.4. The argument has been forcefully put recently by Professor Jo Ritzen, former Dutch minister education and former President of the University of Maastricht, that it is up to the countries of central and Eastern Europe to make their investment in human capital and not simply in infrastructure as a way of combating the brain drain.29 I think in contrast this is an area for an EU initiative.

3.4. The loan proposal builds on the evidence that masters’ degrees are becoming increasingly attractive to students who want to undertake part of their studies in another country.30 As such the proposal will also revive the debate about the worth of a one-year masters’ degree. It should be noted that these are not unique to the UK. It is surprising that the UK does not seem to have made any Bologna-wide alliance on this issue.

27 The European Student Union response to the COM (2011) 567 amplifies my point. Brussels, 10 October 2011 www.esu-online.org
4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40 per cent of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

4.1. Comparative statistics produced by OECD and Eurostat show the much higher rates of enrolment and completion in Asian countries and Scandinavia. The UK too will exceed the target.

4.2. The general lesson, however, is the high cost of low educational achievement. It is a powerful argument with the Commission and those national governments investing more in their higher education systems at a time of austerity.31

4.3. The political challenges of increasing provision are two-fold. One is to create forms of institutional and curricular diversity within higher education, which are well-targeted, and not simply a reaction to forms of funding which create a ladder of esteem. The other is to encourage greater mobility across Europe (see above).

5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table - the U-Multirank Tool?

5.1. I take this as a promising initiative, responding to the problem that the Shanghai Jiao Tong and THE league tables are based on restricted criteria which elevate reputation, at the expense of achievements, that may be real, but are more fragmented. U-Multirank forces universities to use their autonomy to refine their own goals. It forces prospective students to clarify their ideas about what they wish to do.32 If multi-ranking turns into a viable model, it will greatly assist the efforts to encourage diversity within systems.

8. Conclusions – a bigger role for Parliaments?

8.1. I suggested at the outset that the Subcommittee inquiry offers the chance to re-assess the somewhat suspicious relationship of the British higher education sector33 to Europeanisation, outside the financing of research. Tensions are part of any policy process: I take the line that the EU institutions are basically playing by the rules, and that some of the suspicion is founded on ignorance. I conclude that the Communication offers the potential for more engagement by the higher education sector, and indeed that is essential to ensure that it plays a part in developing the rules, as for example on the use of credits.

8.2. I end with two concerns. One is the important political question as to the relationship between the EU- EHEA members and those countries not in the EU. There is a definite political shift towards encouraging more EU engagement which is not strictly related to jobs and growth, but as much to student rights. This may be for the best, but it needs to be clear.

8.3. My final point is whether Parliaments are being unduly marginalised as higher education becomes central to EU strategic policy and the Bologna Process, and if so what might be the remedies. There are signs that the European Parliament is ready to claim a

---


33 Strictly speaking UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).
bigger political place. But policy-making is otherwise largely in the hands of the executive and the stakeholders. Particularly at a time of such public contention about the EU and indeed about higher education, the need for a continuing all-party interest in these issues is overwhelming.

12 December 2011

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Introduction

1. The Commission’s recent Communication Supporting growth and jobs: an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems updates a 2006 Communication, which proposed a series of policy changes required to develop the potential of EU higher education institutions (HEIs). It also responds in particular to the Europe 2020 initiative for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010) and the decision in 2011 to complete the European Research Area by 2014. The Government is supportive of these initiatives, and agrees that higher education has a crucial part to play in meeting the competitiveness challenge that all in Europe face, and therefore agrees with much of the content of the Communication. However, the Government would reiterate that the main responsibility for taking action on this rests with Member States (including devolved administrations where they have responsibility.) The Government therefore welcomes this Inquiry into whether the initiatives outlined by the Commission are the most appropriate to fulfil its supportive role in higher education or whether there are other ways in which the EU might add value in this area.

2. The House of Commons in clearing the document as politically important noted that the Government was ‘right to question the need for some of the policy initiatives proposed by the Commission and to highlight the Commission’s spending plans which would appear to be unrealistic in the current economic climate’ and urged the Government ‘to ensure that any Council Conclusions relating to the Communication, although non-binding, do not in any way pre-empt forthcoming negotiations on the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014–20’. The Government is grateful for this support.

3. The Government’s views on the specific questions raised by the Committee are listed below. The Devolved Administrations and the Department for Education have been consulted as appropriate, but this evidence has not been cleared by them. We understand that the Scottish Government has submitted its own response.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

1 How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

4. Europe 2020 proposed that every link in the innovation chain should be strengthened, from blue-sky research to commercialisation. An important aspect of successful innovation is integration of the 'Knowledge Triangle' – the effective co-ordination of higher education, research and innovation so that well-educated people with top-class research ideas understand how to turn them into innovative products and services.

5. While respecting the responsibility of individual Member States in undertaking reforms to their domestic policies, the EU can play a key role by: encouraging and supporting them in their efforts to modernise and improve the quality of their higher education sectors and continuing to develop its initiatives to facilitate mobility; providing instruments that help remove the remaining obstacles to transferring research outcomes through to development and commercialisation; and by supporting Member States in providing entrepreneurial educational programmes to help produce the next generation of European entrepreneurs. One such instrument is the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). Through
its operational arm, the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), EIT provides the opportunity for increased university-business cooperation in the fields of education and training, and European test beds to explore ways in which to reduce the barriers between the partners in the knowledge triangle. The industry-focused Marie Curie actions, currently undertaken in the Seventh Framework Programme and expected to be retained in its successor HORIZON2020, also play an important role in supporting inter-sectoral mobility and the transfer of knowledge and experience within the knowledge triangle.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

2 How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

6. The Bologna process is an inter-governmental agreement between Ministers of higher education in 47 countries in Europe. The process is a collective effort of public authorities, universities, teachers and students, together with stakeholder associations, employers, quality assurance agencies and international organisations and institutions. It includes the European Commission as a full member. The Council of Europe, and UNESCO and its European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES), amongst others, are also involved as consultative members. The decisions in the Bologna Process are officially taken by the Ministers for HE in the Ministerial Conferences, where Communiqués are adopted through acclamation (technically by consensus). The Bologna Follow-Up Group also tries to take decisions in its meetings by consensus in between Ministerial Conferences (and in line with the Ministerial Communiqués). There are some cases in which voting can be used (with 2 votes per EHEA member, which includes 2 votes for the European Commission as a full EHEA member).

7. The Bologna Process began in May 1998, when higher education Ministers from France, Germany, Italy and the UK met in Paris to discuss and agree upon the Joint declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education system - the Sorbonne Joint Declaration. The subsequent Bologna Declaration agreed by 29 European Ministers meeting at the University of Bologna in June 1999 elaborated on the Sorbonne text and set the objectives for the establishment of a world class European Higher Education Area (EHEA): the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; adoption of an HE system essentially based on three cycles (bachelors, masters and doctorates); a system of recognition of credits for study; the promotion of mobility; European co-operation in quality assurance; and a European dimension in HE. The EHEA was officially launched by Ministers at meetings on 11-12 March 2010 in Budapest and Vienna.

8. The Bologna Process aims to enhance the quality and international standing of the EHEA by encouraging participating countries to reform their higher education systems to make them more competitive in the global arena, as well as more comparable and compatible with one another. It is not designed to 'harmonise' higher education across

35 Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium (French and Flemish), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom, Ukraine.

36 The others are the European University Institute, the European Universities Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the European Students Union, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Education International Pan-European Structure and BUSINESS EUROPE.
Europe - the process is a moral agreement respecting diversity of higher education across the continent and leaving stakeholders the freedom to implement its action lines in accordance with national custom and practice.

9. The Bologna Process has achieved a considerable degree of change since it was originally agreed. Significant reforms in the structure of higher education courses and study programmes included the introduction in many countries of the Bachelors, Masters, and Doctorate model, for the first time. (In many European countries pre-Bologna, first degrees often took five or six years to complete, with students entering the labour market much later than their UK equivalents). Quality assurance guidelines have been developed and agreement reached at European level on appropriate qualifications frameworks. A key reason for this success is that Bologna leaves the detail of implementation up to countries and institutions. It does not seek to impose a single approach nor does it seek to achieve its goals through legislative means.

10. The UK is fully committed to the Bologna Process and the development of an EHEA based on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, equal opportunities and democratic principles that will facilitate mobility, increase employability and strengthen Europe’s attractiveness and competitiveness. The aim is to ensure that higher education institutions have the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes such as preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation. The UK believes that the Process should continue to leave the detail of implementation up to individual countries and institutions and should not seek to impose a single approach nor to achieve its goals through legislative or regulatory approaches. It should continue to be based on the strong involvement of key stakeholders – the higher education sector, students, and quality assurance organisations - through the appropriate representative organisations.

The EU contribution to the Bologna Process

11. The European Commission has been a committed member of the Bologna Process, which it sees as driving forward the most important reforms in higher education in the modern era. Education Commissioner Vassiliou recently reaffirmed the Commission’s commitment to the Bologna Process for the next decade and its support for and contribution to the process though its technical expertise and systems, its current education programmes and the new generation of EU education programmes proposed for the period 2014-2020.

12. Although the Process goes well beyond the EU’s borders, it is closely connected with EU policies and programmes. For the EU, the Bologna Process is part of a broader effort in the drive for a Europe of knowledge which includes lifelong learning and development; the strategic framework for the Open Method of Coordination in Education and Training (ET2020); the Copenhagen Process for enhanced European co-operation in Vocational Education and Training; and initiatives under the European Research Area.

13. The EU supports a broad range of measures to modernise the content and practices of HEIs in the 27 Member States and the EU’s 28 neighbouring countries, including support

38 Ibid, Foreword
from the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)\textsuperscript{39}, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the Tempus programme\textsuperscript{40} and the EU’s programme for worldwide academic cooperation: Erasmus Mundus\textsuperscript{41}.

14. The EU also works to support the modernisation agenda of universities through the implementation of the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research (European Research Area)\textsuperscript{42} and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme as well as the Structural Funds and loans from the European Investment Bank.

15. To establish synergies between the Bologna process and the Copenhagen process, which concerns vocational education and training, in co-operation with Member States, the Commission has established a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)\textsuperscript{43}. The EQF is linked to and supported by other initiatives in the fields of transparency of qualifications (Europass)\textsuperscript{44}, credit transfer (the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System for higher education\textsuperscript{45} (ECTS), and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training\textsuperscript{46} (ECVET)) and quality assurance (European association for quality assurance in higher education (ENQA), and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (ENQA-AVET)).

16. The EU’s HE modernisation agenda has already identified the key issues which need to be addressed if HE in Europe is to adapt effectively to the needs of globalisation. Increasing autonomy for institutions, more effective working with business and employers, qualifications matched to employment needs, adopting alternative funding mechanisms and developing university leadership, are all areas where greater dialogue within Bologna would be beneficial.

17. The main focus of Bologna on structures (degree courses and qualification frameworks) has tended to by-pass any discussion of the nature of the institutions needed to deliver the new study programmes and generally to ensure that graduates, at all levels, have the necessary skills and competences to equip them for employment in a more globalised economy. This suggests that there need to be closer links drawn between the Bologna process and the EU’s agenda designed to secure modernisation of higher education. There are issues concerned with the links between HEIs and business/employers, the different funding mechanisms appropriate to mass higher education and how to develop the leadership and management of HEIs. All of these areas need a greater focus if the original goals of the Bologna process and the European Area of Higher Education (EHEA) are to be effectively realised.

18. The Government supports the involvement of the European Commission in the Process, and its efforts to avoid duplication and ensure that EU initiatives are complementary to those of Bologna. The Government expects the Commission to work in close association with the Bologna process, respecting the basis on which the process operates - leaving implementation up to individual countries - and would not support any moves by the Commission to impose actions on the EHEA members.

\textsuperscript{39} http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm
\textsuperscript{40} http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc70_en.htm
\textsuperscript{41} http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/doc72_en.htm
\textsuperscript{42} http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html
\textsuperscript{43} http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm
\textsuperscript{44} http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc46_en.htm
\textsuperscript{45} http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm
\textsuperscript{46} http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc50_en.htm
19. On the specific issue of the EU’s Directive\textsuperscript{47} on the recognition of professional qualifications, the Government believes that the discussions relating to the forthcoming revision of the Directive should feed into recognition discussions in the EHEA, and vice versa. Otherwise there is a risk of creating different sets of frameworks for higher education, and of not taking account of labour market inflexibilities. The Government wishes to ensure frameworks such as Bologna and EQF are reflected in the revised Professional Qualifications Directive, but \textit{without making them legally enforceable}. In particular, the minimum training requirements for the seven ‘sectoral professions’ covered by the Directive\textsuperscript{48} do have a binding effect on universities and may therefore need some synchronisation with the Bologna process (and EQF levels).

\textbf{Mobility}

3 How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

20. The UK is the second largest destination for students studying abroad, behind only the USA. The most recent HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) data show that there are nearly 406,000 foreign students studying at UK universities\textsuperscript{49}. However, the UK Higher Education International Unit has recently estimated the number of UK students studying abroad at 33,000\textsuperscript{50}. The Government is therefore interested particularly in promoting outward student mobility.

21. Institutions need to make clear to students that their work will be properly recognised, and that they understand precisely how their period abroad will contribute to their final marks. The development of credit systems provides a mechanism to do this but their use is not standard yet. More institutions are looking at curriculum design to include ‘mobility windows’ which allow students to study overseas and receive full academic recognition via credits for their time overseas. Such arrangements should take account of the greater difficulty in doing this for STEM subjects, which are more intensive. Students (especially non-linguists) should also be given opportunities to learn or to improve their linguistic ability\textsuperscript{51}.

22. The Minister for Universities and Science tasked the sector through Universities UK to establish a Steering Group to consider outward higher education student mobility. The Group, for which BIS is providing a secretariat, is chaired by Professor Colin Riordan. This Group is considering options to promote student outward mobility, by looking at current incentives, financial support and obstacles – drawing on thinking from engagement with business and best practice in the UK and overseas. The Group is due to report to the

\textsuperscript{47} \url{http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/policy_developments/legislation_en.htm}
\textsuperscript{48} Architect, dentist, doctor, midwife, nurse, pharmacist, veterinary surgeon
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Students in Higher Education Institutions 2009/10}, HESA 24 February 2011
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{International Focus}, 55, January 2010
\textsuperscript{51} Studies of obstacles to mobility among UK students have shown that after financial constraints, poor grasp of another language is the most significant deterrent to participation (The proportion of UK outgoing Erasmus students who are studying languages is now around 50%, but programme-wide the proportion is only c 15%). Source: International student mobility (2004, updated 2010) available at \url{http://www.hedfe.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2004/04_30/#exec and http://www.hedfe.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2010/rd20_10/rd20_10.pdf}

**Erasmus**

23. The current Erasmus scheme enables undergraduate students in 31 European countries to study for part of their degree in another country. UK Erasmus students normally receive an Erasmus grant provided by the European Commission which contributes towards the extra costs arising from studying abroad. Students also currently benefit from tuition fee-waiver schemes, whereby the relevant funding council provides fee compensation to HEIs so that they do not charge a fee for an outgoing Erasmus whole year abroad; the rate of compensation is the ‘half fee’ at the higher amount permitted in legislation. HEFCE has proposed\(^{52}\) to continue to implement the fee waiver in England until 2013-14. Devolved Administrations also provide a fee waiver and none has any plans to change this\(^{53}\).

24. The Government is supportive of the proposals to ensure the efficient recognition of credits gained abroad. Credit transfer and recognition between EU member states has been facilitated so that all Erasmus students are required to receive full academic recognition for their study period abroad. This is an integral part of the Learning Agreements put in place between institutions which participate in Erasmus exchanges and show how the study period abroad will count towards the student’s overall degree. There are also analogous arrangements for Erasmus work placements abroad. Erasmus placement and credits can be transferred. An Erasmus placement does not add to the duration of a student’s course and is formally acknowledged on degree transcripts. Credit systems are becoming increasingly widespread outside the EU – for example the 20 non-EU countries which participate in the Bologna Process are at varying stages of development in implementing their own systems.

**Widening participation in Erasmus**

25. The current profile of students taking an Erasmus year closely matches that of those students who study languages. The 2010 Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) report *International student mobility literature review* found that credit-mobile students are ‘disproportionately white, female, middle-class and academic high-achievers’. Widening participation in Erasmus is therefore a key priority for all the Governments of the UK. Students taking part in an Erasmus year are entitled to the same maintenance loans and grants as in their other years of study. The British Council, as the UK National Agency for Erasmus, has this year introduced a one-off supplementary grant of €500 to Erasmus students identified as eligible for the various widening participation premiums already operating at HE level across the UK. The aim is to encourage greater participation in mobility by students who might otherwise be put off due to financial constraints.

26. The Outward Higher Education Student Mobility Steering Group will consider what measures are necessary to support the growth of UK participation in the Erasmus programme and ensure that fair opportunities exist for students of every background to take part in Erasmus. Other areas that are being considered by this Group are:

---


\(^{53}\) The Welsh Assembly Government has proposed to merge the fee waiver into the HEFCW teaching grant, but this is not expected to result in any change from the student point-of-view.
Stimulating greater interest in the opportunity for mobility among university students by developing awareness of programmes such as Erasmus at school. This might involve redesign of syllabi, including giving greater weight to the teaching of foreign languages; and helping schools engage with the international dimension by international partnerships and teacher exchanges, e.g. through the current EU Comenius programme;

Whether the British Council, as the UK National Agency for the Comenius and Erasmus programmes, could do even more to make information on opportunities for mobility, and the advantages these bring, more widely available; and what role HEIs can play in providing information to students and applicants;

The EU, Member States and National Agencies could provide a centralised repository of information on Erasmus and other opportunities for study abroad (this question is also expected to be considered by the Bologna Follow-Up Group in the near future);

Ways in which employers - ranging from corporate multi-nationals to small and medium sized enterprises - could be encouraged to play their part, by actively promoting and articulating the benefits of mobility for employability; and cooperating with the higher education sector in the organised provision of work placements;

Mobility is an area which remains poorly understood, and therefore systematic analyses, and policy reviews at European level would be of considerable value. The Commission’s Eurydice Unit is well-placed to undertake this work, which could inform targeted promotion of the programme to specific under-represented groups.

27. The Government has previously made the case for expanding the Erasmus student and staff exchange programme in its response to the Commission’s 2010 public consultation on the future of its Lifelong Learning programmes and in Ministerial correspondence with the Education Commissioner. The Government considers expanding Erasmus to third countries to be an effective, economical method of increasing UK participation in the programme, which would make a significant contribution to increasing overall student mobility, and help to engage with priority countries such as India and China. However, the Commission, while not opposed to the idea, has pointed out that Erasmus exchanges in third countries are likely to be more costly than those in Europe, and could reduce the number of exchanges that could be funded with available resources. It has also, in the past, pointed to the UK’s poor participation rates, which were on a downward trend until 2007/08. Numbers have increased in recent years largely because it is now possible to undertake a work placement as part of the programme. There were 12,873 UK Erasmus student mobilities in 2010-11.

28. The Government is fully committed to the teaching of languages in schools, not only for its social and economic benefits, but also because learning a language improves the mind and helps pupils to understand the different cultures of people around the world. The review of the National Curriculum is considering the status of languages at both primary and secondary level. The Government is consulting a wide range of academics, teachers and other interested parties to ensure that the core curriculum can compare with those of the highest performing countries in the world.

29. The Government has introduced languages as one of the academic subjects making up the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) at GCSE level, along with English, mathematics, science

54 Correspondence between the Minister for Universities and Commissioner Vassiliou, 14 February - 28 April 2011
and history or geography. The EBacc will encourage more young people to take a language at GCSE level and should lead to a renaissance in languages in our schools. Given the importance of languages, and the benefits of an early start, the Government strongly encourages primary schools to continue to teach languages and build on the excellent progress already made.

30. The British Council will be launching its new offer to schools early in the New Year. This will promote a whole school approach to the international dimension with the current Comenius schools mobility scheme as a key component. It will be rationalising its overall international education programmes and providing a new single new web portal for schools to provide greater clarity and increased exposure for the school-based programmes.

31. The British Council will be focusing much of its promotional activity in 2012 on targeting e-twinning schools and expects to increase the number of schools registered on the e-twinning portal by 2,000 from the current 9,000. E-twinning, which offers on-line curriculum projects between participating schools, can provide ideal preparation for deeper longer term Comenius partnerships. Promotional activities for these programmes in 2012 will include 100 e-twinning workshops, presenting Comenius case studies at relevant events, press releases and advertising in the education press.

Recognition of Professional Qualifications

32. Once recognised as having the qualifications for a particular profession which is regulated in an EU Member State, graduates would also benefit from a improved Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive. The Commission plans to propose a Directive on 20 December 2011. The Government’s priorities for a revised Directive, including a process to reduce the number of regulated professions to boost mobility, can be found in the UK response to the Commission’s Green Paper on Modernising the Professional Qualifications Directive56.

Proposed Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme

33. The Government believes that Masters degrees raise qualification levels in higher education and help students acquire the advanced skills of knowledge-intensive jobs. While the Bologna reforms have created more opportunities, there is little degree mobility at any level taking place in the EU. Partly this is because national student support schemes, where they exist, tend to be limited in scope and the support cannot be taken to another Member State; also students usually do not have sufficient collateral against which to secure a loan, especially for study abroad. The problem is particularly acute for students wishing to complete a full Masters degree programme in another Member State where tuition fees are likely to be high.

34. The Commission has stated in its Communication on the next generation of EU Education programmes (2014-2020)57 its intention to propose establishing a student loan guarantee facility, which will offer access to loans at favourable conditions for Masters students considering undertaking a full degree programme in another EU or EEA country. The Commission’s accompanying document58 describes the scheme as an intervention to

---

56 Available at http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/europe/docs/u/11-794-uk-government-response-mutual-recognition-professional-qualifications

57 ‘Erasmus for All’: The Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, 23 November 2011, COMM (2011) 787, p.8 http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all

58 COM(2011) 788
provide a guarantee to financial intermediaries to offset some of the risk of potential non-repayment by students and thus make lending viable to banks. It would cover up to €12,000 for a one-year Master’s programme and up to €18,000 for a two-year programme. The Commission proposes a conservative limit on the number of loans – an average of 43,000 students per year benefiting from the scheme. To illustrate the approximate costs, the Commission’s view is that funding of €100 million per year could generate loans totalling at least €600 million per year. The scheme would be managed by an entrusted managing authority, probably the European Investment Bank.

35. Funding for the scheme is part of the Education budget proposals within the Commission’s Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2014-2020 and it will therefore depend on the outcome of negotiations on the overall budget among member states over the next year or so. The Government’s position is that the total EU Budget for 2014-2020 should not exceed the 2013 level with a growth rate below the rate of inflation.

36. The Government recognises that international mobility of students and researchers is an important element of the UK higher education system and a fundamental pillar of our excellent science and research base. Concerns about finance have been identified in studies of student mobility as the major barrier to student participation in mobility schemes and the proposed student loan guarantee scheme might help to address these concerns at Masters level and therefore could potentially be helpful to mobility. But much more detail on the operation of the proposed scheme is needed before the Government - in consultation with the Devolved Administrations - can fully respond.

The European Research Area (ERA)

37. The Government is supportive of the ERA concept, provided that it respects the responsibility of individual Member States for the implementation of their own national policies. Its clear preference, in the research careers and mobility area as elsewhere, is that it should be implemented in practical and, wherever possible, non-legislative ways. In this area it should be noted that UK practice very frequently represents European best practice and the Government would therefore not favour legislative approaches, which might in effect penalise 'early movers' like the UK by imposing 'lowest common denominator' solutions. In a research context it is also important to remember that researcher mobility is not an end in itself; it is a means of facilitating the performance of excellent research. Indeed the Government believes that the key factor encouraging researcher mobility is the possibility of doing excellent research in the UK or more widely in Europe; for this reason excellence should remain the key criterion in European research funding decisions.

Targets and league tables

4 How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

38. This target is one of the Europe 2020 Education targets agreed by Member States. It is based on an EU average, not individual Member States’ performance and refers to the proportion of those aged 30-34 who hold a first degree or an equivalent qualification.

39. In 2009 the EU-27 average 'score' was 32.3% (up from 22.4% in 2000); given this, the same rate of expansion would deliver the 2020 benchmark figure somewhere around 2017. The ongoing economic crisis and the fact that those countries already towards the top end of the scale could not be expected to see further significant expansion mean that cannot be assumed; and the recent Progress report suggests that the rate of growth in 2009-2020 might well be slower than that seen in 2000-2009. Nonetheless, the target appears to be attainable by the EU by 2020.

40. The UK was already itself above the target with a 'score' of 41.5% in 2009 according to the latest Progress report\(^60\). But as the 2010 White Paper *Students at the Heart of the System* states 'We have no target for the 'right' size of the higher education system but believe it should evolve in response to demand from students and employers, reflecting particularly the wider needs of the economy. Subject to expenditure constraints courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.'

5 What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

41. The European Commission has undertaken a feasibility study for a U-Multirank tool\(^61\), which, despite the name, is not proposed as a new ranking system, similar to the existing international rankings, but, according to the Commission, is designed to be a potential means of providing much more detailed information for students on the nature of courses and European higher education institutions to allow them to choose among the courses available on the basis of their individual needs and priorities. It is an attempt to provide a multi-dimensional ‘transparency’ tool to enable comparison among institutions in specific fields with comparable profiles. The Commission’s intention, having completed the feasibility study, is to launch the tool in 2012, with first results in 2013. The Commission has indicated it will provide 'seed' funding to get the scheme running and then would expect a not for profit organisation to take it on and expand it across Europe.

42. There are several other projects currently taking place which are exploring issues around rankings. These are: Classification of European Institutions in Higher Education (CEIHE) project; the Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung (CHE) ranking; the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS), Leiden University ranking system; and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ‘Assessment of higher education learning outcomes’ (AHELO) project. The European University Association recently produced a report \(^62\) on existing rankings for their member institutions and in response to the European Commission’s proposals to develop a ranking system. Higher Education Ministers from the European Higher Education Area asked at their last meeting that through the Bologna Follow Up Group the development of these transparency tools should be monitored and a report submitted to the Bologna Ministerial Summit in April 2012. The UK is fully engaged in the Bologna process and will consider the relative merits of these tools.

43. Existing international university rankings, such as the Shanghai Academic Rating of World Universities and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, do provide...

---

\(^60\) *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training - Indicators and benchmarks, 2010/11, Figure 3.11* (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc2881_en.htm), published 19 April 2011

\(^61\) http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/multirank_en.pdf

useful information for stakeholders and the wider public. An essential element of the Government’s reforms of higher education funding and student finance is that higher education institutions must produce comparable information on entry qualifications, content and employment outcomes and graduate earnings for their courses to enable students to make well informed choices about what and where they study. In the European and global context this is equally important to assist our young people in undertaking study abroad.

44. Arguments put forward in both the EU and Bologna Process contexts include:
- that while existing, private, ranking systems do provide some information for prospective students, these essentially cover a limited number of global higher education institutions, tending to be biased towards top research universities
- in particular they tend to include those which specialise in natural sciences and medicine to the detriment of those that are more focussed on the social sciences and the humanities
- though covering only top institutions, they impact all universities
- they do not adequately reflect such important aspects of performance as teaching quality
- classifications and rankings are not always used for the purpose for which they were intended. They sometimes turn from being information provision tools to funds distribution tools. Governments may be tempted to allocate public funds associated with rankings or classifications. In such cases, perverse incentives are provided for scoring high, thus the adequacy of the tool for transparency purposes decreases
- comparability is affected by biases of language and publication patterns
- rankings do not take proper account of the diverse needs of students.

This is the rationale for several other EU countries’ interest in developing new, European, rankings for Higher Education Institutions. It is argued that such rankings would be provide stakeholders in higher education with a range of information to enable them to identify institutions or study programmes which suit their individual needs; allow institutions to benchmark themselves against others; and provide more transparency on performance and diversity.

45. The UK HE sector’s view is that it is inevitable that additional rankings will be established whether or not HEIs participate in them. While not opposed to them, their policy is to keep a ‘watching brief’ and to challenge any that do not: take into account wider considerations such as the diversity of European HE; reflect the autonomous nature of HEIs and their missions; and the need to avoid imposing data collection burdens or duplicating existing collections.

46. The Government’s view is that if the tool is genuinely designed to be a transparent source of information for students wanting to study in other European countries it might be useful; but if it results in the development of a European ranking system for HEIs in addition to existing international ranking systems, it would be of limited value. The Government remains to be convinced that the tool would represent added value or the best use of funds and effort - which might otherwise be devoted to dealing with the challenges identified in the Commission’s Communication on the modernisation of higher education in Europe. There are concerns about the difficulty of obtaining the voluntary buy-in to the project by a sufficient number of universities across Europe (if a majority do not decide to participate it
will not be viable, and UK HEIs have so far not been keen); the provision of sufficient comparable data (the U-Multirank proposal envisages collecting data on a large number of themes); the verification of the quality of these data; the potential burdens on HEIs to provide additional data; and the costs of the proposal (no details of the immediate funding arrangements or the level of costs are available at present, and anything which will require longer-term funding from the EU budget will need to be agreed with the Member States). There is also a risk that the press and others will turn it into a league table regardless of the breadth and quality, or otherwise, of the data actually included.

**Funding instruments**

6 What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?

**Commission’s Proposals for the new generation of education programmes (2014-2020): ’Erasmus for All’**

47. On 23 November, the European Commission published its proposal to establish ’Erasmus for All’ a single programme for Education; Training; Youth and Sport for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020.63 The Commission will release further details of its proposals over the coming year and Member States will engage in discussions and negotiations on these.

48. The proposal recognises the importance of the new Programme in contributing to the development of knowledge and skills needed to ensure the future prosperity of Europe. It stresses the importance of links between the Programme and the main EU drivers for education and training reform, particularly the implementation of Europe 2020; Education and Training 2020 and Youth Strategies. It also acknowledges that there is a complexity of multiple programmes and actions under the current generation of EU Programmes (2007-2013), which need rationalisation and streamlining.

49. The Commission proposes that the new Programme will have three types of key actions, with indicative funding allocations as follows:

*Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals* (65% of total funding). The benefits of mobility at European level are recognised in the proposal, and it will therefore be strengthened and remain a core element of the new Programme, with a strong emphasis on higher education student mobility. It will focus on four key activities – staff mobility, in particular teachers and trainers; school leavers and youth workers; mobility for higher education and VET students and Erasmus Masters for higher education students; and Youth Mobility including volunteering and Youth Exchanges.

*Action 2: Co-operation for innovation and good practices* (25% of total funding). This will provide increased support to cooperation projects, aimed at developing innovative education; training and youth practices across Europe. It will focus on four key activities – strategic partnerships; knowledge alliances between HEIs and businesses; IT support platforms, including e-twinning; and capacity building in non-EU countries.

*Action 3: Support for policy reform* (4% of total funding). This Action is aimed at strengthening support for European strategic priorities and targets in education and training under, for

63 [http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all](http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-for-all)
example, EU2020; ET2020; the Copenhagen process for the reform of VET.

50. The Commission proposes that access to the new Programme will be open to the main sectors benefiting from the current Lifelong Learning Programmes and Youth in Action. To ensure that allocations to main stakeholders and beneficiaries are not reduced below current levels under the new Programme, there will be minimum allocations as a percentage of the total budget as follows – higher education (25%); VET (17%); adult learning (2%); schools (7%); and youth (7%).

51. The proposal outlines the aim of streamlining the current Programmes which have more than 50 objectives and over 60 actions. It argues that simplification, for example by reducing the number of actions by 85%, will result in large productivity gains. The Commission also wants Member States to establish a single National Agency delivering the programme in each country, to achieve further productivity gains. Allocation of funding would be linked to performance, for example in terms of mobility targets achieved and implementation of agreed work programmes. Allocations would also be linked to activities which contributed to meeting the challenges identified in EU 2020.

UK initial views

52. As the proposal has only just been published and covers BIS and DfE responsibilities, only an initial view can be given. The Government notes with interest the Commission’s proposals to simplify and streamline the existing and complex multiple programmes and concentrate on three key types of action and welcomes the prominence rightly given to the mobility of individuals. It is determined that the new programme is designed so that responsibility for education and training policy and programmes remains firmly with the Member States. The Government notes particularly that the proposal links the new programme funding to progress against, for example, achievement of EU2020 targets; it would object to such a link in the new programme.

53. The Government is concerned that total funding for the new programme is proposed to be €17.2bn for 2014-2020. This represents an increase of 73% over the current provision. Regardless of the positive impact of such programmes, this is in the Government’s view an unrealistic proposal in the current economic climate. Greater financial discipline is needed across all the major EU Budget headings.

54. The Government’s position is that the overall total EU Budget for 2014-2020 should not exceed the 2013 level with a growth rate below the rate of inflation. Negotiations on the funding for ‘Erasmus for All’ should take place against this background.

International dimension

7 The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

55. The Commission intends to publish a Communication on the internationalisation of higher education in early 2013. It has set out a roadmap for developing this Communication. The rationale for this Communication is set in the context of the

64 See [http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/planned_ia/docs/2012_eac_019_internationalisation_higher_education_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/planned_ia/docs/2012_eac_019_internationalisation_higher_education_en.pdf)
Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and the Education and Training 2020 strategy, which stressed the importance of the EU higher education sector being open to the world, and the Council of Ministers’ conclusions of May 2010, which asked the Commission to come up with an EU international higher education strategy.

56. There is a range of existing EU programmes to promote international academic cooperation and international mobility (including the Erasmus Mundus and Tempus programmes), engage in dialogue and peer learning activities with countries outside the EU, and with the Bologna Process.

57. Erasmus Mundus supports mobility in higher education to and from third countries and the development of joint degrees. It complements the current Erasmus and lifelong learning programmes by contributing to the accessibility, convergence of degree structures and attractiveness of European education world-wide. It offers scholarships to attend high quality joint masters courses and doctoral programmes and support university consortia working with different parts of the world.

58. Tempus is a capacity-building programme for the modernisation of higher education through cooperation projects between EU universities and their counterparts for the Western Balkans and neighbourhood countries.

59. The Commission’s proposals for the new generation of education programmes: Erasmus for All, published on 23 November, envisages restructuring and grouping the current programmes under three themes. These are: learning mobility for individuals, cooperation for innovation and good practices and support for policy reform. The five existing programmes for cooperation with third countries will be streamlined into these three key actions.

61 The Commission’s intention is to set out a strategy for the internationalisation of higher education, taking into account the growing importance of HE on the international scene as an essential engine of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the competition from Europe’s competitors and other developments over the last few years. This would include providing a concise review of major developments worldwide in this field including reviewing the strategies put in place by Europe’s competitors, identification of new challenges and presentation of effective solutions, such as strengthening the international branding of EU universities, increasing the number and quality of joint international degrees offered by consortia of EU and non EU universities or developing even further the education offer in major EU languages even in countries where these languages are not spoken. This would reinforce the Commission’s message that Europe needs to have a joint and agreed strategy for the internationalisation of its HE sector, which is more than just an addition of national strategies.

62 The Commission’s view is that this strategy could address the following issues:

- The uneven distribution of international students across EU countries. Older members of the EU dominate the market for international students, and the new Member States have relatively few (the UK is by far the primary receiving country in the EU).

- Other world regions are catching up with Europe as preferred destinations for international students

- The EU is facing shortages in a wide range of occupations. The Commission proposes to undertake a worldwide information campaign highlighting Europe’s higher education strengths to help attract the best talents.
- The EU does not yet have any explicit policy for the internationalisation of higher education, but has developed over the years a number of separate programmes and actions, which address and support internationalisation processes.

- The EU has so far had a fragmented approach to the internationalisation of HE - it has too many uncoordinated HE cooperation programmes with non EU countries.

- Qualifications acquired in Europe are still not systematically recognised in non-EU countries.

- Only a few highly visible universities have a real internationalisation strategy.

63 The Commission states that the Communication itself will not have an impact on the EU budget. The planned follow up measures, including an increase of the visibility and attractiveness of the EU higher education area worldwide will be financed from the future 'Erasmus for all' programme that will have a strong focus on higher education, with an integrated internal and an international component. The objectives of the Communication are to raise the profile of the EU higher education worldwide, enhance the quality and relevance of HE provision, provide an overview of progress, highlight new challenges and present examples of best practice. No substantive new Community actions will be proposed in the Communication.

65. The Government will consider the Communication carefully and analyse the potential effects of the strategy on the UK and our higher education sector. While supporting efforts to address the need for Europe’s higher education systems and institutions to become more international and competitive, and the Commission’s intention to expand and strengthen cooperation on higher education with countries and regions around the world, the Government would want to ensure there is no move on the part of the Commission to impose actions on Member States and that the strategy does not duplicate what is happening in the European Higher Education Area and the Bologna Process. The Government would also want to avoid resources being put into a worldwide publicity campaign promoting EU HEIs to prospective international students, if this went beyond the provision of generic information. It is up to individual MS to market their own HE systems and HEIs: the UK’s HEIs have been very successful at attracting foreign students.

2 December 2011
Q70 The Chairman: Good morning, Minister. Thank you very much for coming along this morning and sparing us a significant chunk of time. I know that you know the score, but I have to give the housekeeping notes to start with. Members’ interests are recorded in the Register of Lords’ Interests and a list of declared interests is on the witness table. The session is on the record. It is being webcast live and will subsequently be available through the Parliamentary website. You will receive a transcript of the session to check and correct and this will be put on the record on the Parliamentary website. Perhaps you could begin by stating for the record your name—I see that you are not accompanied by any officials. If you want to make an opening statement, please feel free to do so, otherwise we will go straight into questions.
David Willetts: I am David Willetts, Minister for Universities and Science. Obviously, I am very keen to answer the Committee's questions. I think that this is a really valuable inquiry, as we are coming up to the ministerial meeting on Bologna in April. I very much look forward to the Committee's report, which we will draw on in our preparation of our proposals for that ministerial discussion.

Q71 The Chairman: Thank you. In fact, that leads nicely into my first question, which is about how beneficial the Bologna Process has been for the UK. You mentioned the upcoming ministerial conference and I wonder whether you anticipate any significant outcomes from that. Perhaps you could also tell us a little more about the Government's desire for the proposed revision of the professional qualifications directive, taking account of the Bologna dimension. Perhaps we could start off with that.

David Willetts: I think that Bologna is overall a good thing. It is of course an intergovernmental agreement. We believe that it has increased the coherence, transparency and comparability of qualifications and credits in Europe. Although one must not be complacent, I think that it is true to say that Britain has had a big influence in shaping the Bologna agenda. It very much ties in with the structure of higher education in Britain, which is a good thing. I notice whenever I am at international meetings that our higher education system is well regarded and well respected. Bologna is also a mechanism for improving exchange of students and researchers through greater mutual recognition and mutual trust. That is a good thing, because increasingly research is an international activity. To be frank, we are just beginning our process of preparing for the April meeting—we are going to have meetings with key stakeholders and, as I said, we will study this Committee's report—and at the moment it is too early to say exactly what will emerge from that. I suspect that there will be commitments to do more to implement Bologna. Although we have done very well in implementing Bologna, other members of Bologna still have more to do, so I suspect that implementation will be an important part of the discussions. On the revision of the Professional Qualifications Directive, our aim is to try to ensure that the levels of education outlined in the Directive are aligned with the Bologna cycles so that training courses towards regulated professions do not have to work to two different benchmarks.

Q72 The Chairman: Thank you very much. How engaged do you think higher education institutions here are with the process? Do you have a view on that?

David Willetts: I think that it is mixed. I would say that in general they are engaged. Perhaps later in the questioning we will focus on areas where we need to do better. In KICs, for example, I was rather disappointed with the outcome of the first round and I hope that we can do better there, but I think that in general we are engaged. We know the structural issues that we face. When we look at the flow of students and researchers into Britain, it is clear that we attract many more in. I personally think that it would be a very good thing if rather more British students had the experience of doing some study or research abroad, so I think that we could do more there. Because our most prestigious universities are genuinely global, they tend to look around the world, rather than simply thinking of connections to the continent of Europe. But I think that, net, there are good levels of engagement, although I am sure that this Committee will have ideas about how we can do even better.

Q73 The Chairman: Some of the points that you have raised will be raised later on during this session. Obviously, the economic situation is a huge challenge for everybody
everywhere, but, leaving that aside for the moment at least, what other major challenges do you see for the Bologna Process in the coming years?

**David Willetts:** There is still more to be done on the frameworks for qualifications. We expect the Bologna follow-up group to focus on their priorities of transparency, mobility and qualifications frameworks, so that is an area where there is more to be done. We in the coalition attach a lot of importance to transparency and the release of data that, for example, prospective students can look at and I think that there is more that can be done across Europe on that type of agenda. One of our strengths in Britain is the autonomy of our universities. I notice in discussions that my European colleagues are looking at reforms that strengthen the autonomy of their institutions. For all of us, when money is tight and times are tight, there is the question of strengthening links with business and the extent to which, without sacrificing their core mission, universities can secure more funding through more engagement with business.

Q74 **Baroness Prosser:** Good morning. I wanted to ask you something about the Innovation Union within the context of the 2020 strategy and all that stuff. What role do you think the EU can play in stimulating closer collaboration between higher education institutions and business? Would you be concerned within that context about duplication between European Innovation Partnerships and Knowledge and Innovation Communities?

**David Willetts:** First, I am broadly in favour of what the Commission is trying to do. We are still at an early stage. It made its proposals for Horizon 2020 just before Christmas and we had our first exploratory discussion in Brussels in December. We broadly welcome the Commission’s proposals. They have tried to reflect our belief that, for example, excellence is the crucial criterion for funding. If you want to achieve regional policy objectives, you do it through the structural funds; you do not compromise on the function of Horizon 2020. There have been problems with the bureaucracy of, for example, securing individual grant funding, which the Commission says it will tackle. For the future, I confess to the Committee that sometimes I find it rather hard to distinguish between a host of different EU initiatives; the exact difference between them is not something on which I would like to be answering on “Mastermind”. It can be tricky, which is why part of the agenda in the EU is sometimes to simplify these things and bring them all together. Sometimes the subtle differences between them escape me.

Q75 **Baroness Prosser:** Do you think that these programmes give the possibility for greater collaboration between British institutions and universities and the institutions and universities of other European countries?

**David Willetts:** Yes, they do. It is a very fair criterion. If you are looking for research funding, they do not want to fund just a single institution; they want to fund an institution that has at least one partnership with another institution in another country. I think that that is an admirable way of proceeding. It is a very useful incentive to getting universities to look outside their national boundaries, which is a good thing.

Q76 **Lord Skidelsky:** I see that the national curriculum is being reviewed for the umpteenth time. Are you confident that modern languages will emerge in a stronger position, especially at the secondary level, from that review? Is that not key to getting our students on to the continent?

**David Willetts:** Lord Skidelsky is right that our weakness in foreign languages is a big problem. I know that my colleague Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, is
absolutely committed to this. It is very much his departmental responsibility and not mine. The fact that modern languages are included in his EBacc measure of GCSE performance appears already to be having an effect on the number of people submitted to GCSEs. The DfE tells me that, from September 2011, 52% of year 9 pupils in schools responding to its survey were due to study a foreign language, which is up nine percentage points from GCSE entries in 2010. We hope that the EBacc measure will help. For the review of the national curriculum, the expert panel has recommended that a language should be statutory at key stages 2 to 4. I know that the Secretary of State for Education is considering that recommendation at the moment.

Q77 Lord Skidelsky: What is your view about how tuition fees may result in fewer European students undertaking Erasmus programmes in this country? Do you fear that they may be a deterrent? In addition, English language teaching on the continent has become a lot cheaper and students may take courses there rather than in the UK.

David Willetts: We have not yet had the final results from UCAS. The very provisional evidence so far is interesting. In total, the number of non-EU prospective students applying to universities through UCAS seems to be holding up, but there appears so far to have been a modest decline in applications from EU students. One could speculate about lots of reasons for that. I accept that our universities face an increasingly competitive challenge from elsewhere in the EU. My view is that globalisation—to use that cliché—is still at its very early stages in HE. One of the competitive challenges that our universities have to face is not just that English language schools on the continent are becoming better but that university courses are being taught in English in continental universities. To be able to do engineering at a German university taught in English is a strong competitive challenge for us. I do not think that we should hide from it. It is a separate and controversial debate but one of the reasons for our reforms is precisely to get a focus back on the quality of the teaching experience. Yes, we should not be complacent, because there are these types of competitive pressure.

Q78 Baroness Henig: Good morning. In a former life, I headed up a university humanities department as dean of arts and humanities and I had a fair amount of involvement with the Erasmus programme. Apart from language issues, on which you have already touched, there were enormous difficulties in getting students on to Erasmus programmes, partly because of financial issues and, as you have mentioned, the teaching experience, which on the continent looked very different for students who were used to a tutorial system, for example. There are also all sorts of issues about assessment. What can be done to encourage a more diverse body of students to engage with the Erasmus programme? The research is all showing very narrow bands of students—for example, language students and a lot of female students—but we really need to broaden the number going on to Erasmus programmes.

David Willetts: I completely agree with you. I am sorry to push the question back to you, but this would be a really useful area on which to get advice from this Committee. It is a bit tricky and one is always wary of a kind of “Auf Wiedersehen, Pet” caricature where we say, “Oh go and study abroad”. It is clearly an enriching experience for individuals personally. Our businesspeople say that one of the problems is around British graduates being monocultural—not having another language or not having lived in another country. There is more that we can do to communicate the value to graduates, including employability, which is one of the things that they increasingly think about. The evidence is that that element of the international experience significantly increases employment prospects. Of course,
financial support is available. I think that at the moment you collect several hundred euros a month as a kind of maintenance payment as part of Erasmus. There is obviously a set of issues around fees and fee waivers. I have just received a letter from Colin Riordan, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex, who has been doing some work on that. As you would expect of Colin, he has come up with ingenious ideas for whether the loan scheme could be extended or could be on some special terms. It is very early days, but the issues are, I am afraid, frankly financial ones about what we can afford. As we have more time, we certainly will consider those types of recommendations as well.

**Baroness Henig:** Would it be possible to forward to the Committee further information on the breakdown of participants in Erasmus by ethnicity, age, disabilities and so on? That would be quite helpful to us.

**David Willetts:** Yes. Whatever information we have I am very happy to share with the Committee.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much. That would be very helpful.

**Q79 Lord Eames:** Minister, in a sense you have touched on this already, but I am interested in the Masters level loan facility. The obvious conclusion is that it is a good idea if it increases mobility. It would make that easier, particularly at the present time. Is that too simple a conclusion and would you welcome it?

**David Willetts:** It certainly has that appeal. There are eloquent advocates of a Masters loan scheme, including, I think, even the NUS in its oral evidence to you. I was encouraged to see the NUS coming here and recommending a student loan scheme. That was very good. So there are arguments in favour. Of course, again, I am afraid that we are operating within financial pressure and, although you would get some of the money back, you could not work on the basis that you would get all the money back. You would certainly have to make a realistic estimate of the funding that you might not get back, which would give rise to a set of public expenditure issues. I cannot in any way commit us to doing it, but it is an interesting idea and we will consider it. But it would cost money.

**Q80 Lord Eames:** If it comes to pass that you can say eventually that it would definitely increase mobility at the Masters level, would the temptation be to say that such success could lead us into another field or other levels? Is that too simple?

**David Willetts:** Sorry. What do you mean when you refer to leading to other fields?

**Lord Eames:** We have succeeded at the Masters level, so to speak, and it has increased mobility. If the thinking that has gone into it at a Masters level has been a success, would the Government be tempted to say, “Well, let’s increase the area we are looking at”?

**David Willetts:** Are you thinking of doctorates or something?

**Lord Eames:** I am thinking about PhDs and so on. I recognise your reservations about finance—of course I do—but should it turn out in the future to be a success and mobility has obviously increased at that level, is a temptation likely to be put to you to move into the doctorate level?

**David Willetts:** I am obviously very wary, especially when someone of your background starts talking to me about leading me into the paths of temptation.
Lord Eames: I deserved that.

David Willetts: You are inviting me to cross several hurdles. I cannot even commit on the loan scheme for Masters courses, let alone going further. All I would say is that I take heart from the fact that by and large these are worthwhile experiences and worthwhile in their own right. But they also have a financial value and therefore you can loan people money and expect a repayment subsequently after they are in employment. The fact that this is now widely recognised as a way of financing study at this level is a sign of progress—people are not as scared of loans as perhaps they would have been a few years ago. But we will have to take it stage by stage.

Lord Eames: I understand. Thank you.

Q81 Lord Cotter: You spoke in your opening remarks about the importance of mobility and we have talked a lot about that. How do the Government intend to boost the mobility of students and academics, particularly in light of the concerns about new immigration rules not deterring international talent from coming to the UK? On a slightly different subject, a lot of concerns have been expressed to me and others about the difficulty of getting people to come to this country under the business portfolio. You have expressed support for the mobility of students. The Academic Exchange Service encourages mobility in Germany in particular ways, so could you delineate how we could encourage it in this country, as there are concerns that the public sometimes do not understand these issues?

David Willetts: Obviously, the Government as a whole work within the framework of the coalition agreement, which commits us to the control of immigration. On the other hand, we absolutely recognise that higher education is an international activity and we welcome the brightest and the best from around the world. That is essential for the flourishing of our universities and the success of British business. For scientists and researchers, as you know, Tier 1 now has a new category for exceptional talent, which is about achievement in science and the arts. We have also made progress in conversations with the Home Office about Tier 5 to make it easier for temporary visiting academics and researchers. There is certainly no limit on students from the rest of the EU but even internationally there is no numerical limit on the number of students coming to Britain, provided that they are properly qualified and things are done legitimately. So I think that we have tried to strike that balance. The German Academic Exchange Service is well respected and I know that this Committee has been interested in it. It has a lot of funding, but I think that in our way in Britain, through the work of the British Council, through the reputation of our universities and through our open system of attracting researchers and students, we have done pretty well. The net figures are striking. We have approximately 400,000 students from outside the UK coming to study in Britain and we have about 30,000 British-born, UK citizens going to study outside the UK. The figure of 400,000 should be a source of great national pride, but the challenge is the 30,000 the other way—you wonder whether some people are missing out on the opportunity of studying abroad to enrich their background and experiences.

Lord Cotter: It would be very welcome if the Minister could commit himself to keeping an eye on this issue, as it is an ongoing concern.

David Willetts: Yes, and it is regularly raised with me and the Secretary of State—we are very aware of it. The Government as a whole are aware that being open to students, researchers and academics and their being able to come here to research, study or give a guest lecture is very important. It is the lifeblood of an open university system and it is very important that that system is kept open.
Q82 **The Chairman:** Just before Lord Foulkes comes in, could you say how engaged you think we are in the development of the European Research Area?

**David Willetts:** I think that we are engaged with it. It is sometimes a bit hard to pin down exactly what it means in practice, but I take it to mean researchers moving around, research projects being shared by researchers in more than one country, mutual recognition of qualifications and all that. We are wholehearted supporters of that. Perhaps I should have said this earlier, but we think that a lot of this can be done through co-operation and intergovernmental action. I take this to be an example of where there are successful EU initiatives but by and large they are not driven by the EU claiming a competence and instructing us to do things, so that we have to wade through a set of directives with an instruction from Brussels. What this shows is that, if you approach it in a constructive spirit and try to work together, you do not need an EU legal competence to make these things happen.

Q83 **Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I wanted to go back to the control of migration and the figure that the Minister mentioned of 400,000. Of course, that is before the new rules have any effect. I agree, as I am sure we all would, on the clampdown on bogus colleges, which is very welcome, but we have read of lots of examples of academics and students having difficulties coming into the United Kingdom. I just wonder what influence your department has not just on the Home Office but on the UK Border Agency, which seems to be almost an autonomous body making its own decisions and not really taking account of the areas that you have been dealing with about getting academics to come in as freely as possible.

**David Willetts:** Often at my meetings with the Home Secretary and Home Office Ministers the UK Border Agency is also represented. There are two levels of discussion. The first is agreeing the overall policy framework and the second is implementation. I think that the UK Border Agency would accept that, in the early days of the tier system, there were, shall we say, some rather eccentric decisions. The last thing that you want is stories going round the world of a visiting academic from the US coming to give a guest lecture, for which he is paid £50 and a sack of port or something in some ancient college endowment, and being asked where his work permit is. There were problems, but, to be fair to the UK Border Agency, it recognised that there were issues. There has been a lot of exchange, including working-level exchanges between Universities UK and the Border Agency, and it has been trying to provide clear guidance and to tackle some of these things, which do cause embarrassment and awkwardness. I personally think that, even in the past 12 months, the situation with that kind of stuff has got better.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I think that we respect your judgment on this. If you say that you are sure that these eccentricities have been ironed out now, we would go along with it. Are you quite confident about it?

**David Willetts:** I cannot give you a guarantee that they have 100% gone, but I would say that, especially with the Tier 5 arrangements for visiting academics, the situation is getting better. The conversations are not just the ones that I have had with Home Office Ministers, who, to be fair to them, want the system to work properly—we work together on this—but also, as I say, at working level. I think that we are making progress.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** And you will keep an eye on it for us?

**David Willetts:** Certainly, I assure you.
Q84 The Chairman: I just want to talk about league tables and data. As you know, there is the proposed U-Multirank tool, to which the Government have already expressed their opposition on a number of logical bases. Is there anything that would change your mind on that? Do you think that there is potential use in a ranking tool that is perhaps a little different from those which already exist?

David Willetts: We are very sceptical about it, to put it very crudely, if it is an attempt by the EU Commission to fix a set of rankings in which we do better than we appear to do in the conventional rankings, of which there are three main ones. It is a dangerous parallel, but I am slightly reminded of some of the attempts with the financial rating agencies to say, “Well, we will come up with our own ratings that will ignore the uncomfortable evidence from Standard & Poor’s” or whatever. So that will not work. We are in favour of more information. If you just put out the raw material for independent groups to do their own rankings, and if they command consent and respect and are trusted, there is no reason why the three main systems at the moment should not face some alternative challenge. There is an argument that they are very heavily weighted to research and that the teaching experience, which is important, perhaps does not get enough weighting in some of the current systems. I would not rule that out, but we do not think that it is a good use of limited EU resource and we do not want to impose unnecessary burdens on our higher education institutions that would compel them to collect data that they perhaps do not already have to collect. They already complain to me about the burden of data collection.

The Chairman: We have asked a number of people this and we are still waiting for some illumination on the proposed European Tertiary Education Register. We wondered whether you might be able to add anything further. I see your officials shaking their heads behind you.

David Willetts: Fine, well let me shake my head then. The Commission has not released any detailed information, so we have not been able to get a handle on it ourselves.

Q85 The Chairman: No doubt, if you do, in time you will let us know. In its evidence, the NUS expressed doubt about the quality of student mobility data and called for the creation of a data collection and standardisation agency at the EU level to improve the situation. Do you have any views on that subject?

David Willetts: I think that the NUS is right about this—it is nice to be able to say that. We accept that the data are imperfect and that it would be worthwhile to improve them. Again, we have to be a bit careful about the burdens of data collection and cost. But if there are cost-effective ways in which it can be improved, that would be worthwhile.

Q86 Lord Lexden: The European Commission is suggesting that it might involve itself in the promotion of European higher education on the wider world stage. Do you support this proposed internationalisation? If so, how should it be done?

David Willetts: There is always that issue of competence creep, to which I referred earlier. I am not against things being done through European co-operation but it should be when universities and governments think that it is worthwhile. I would not completely rule it out but, in reality, as we have heard with the example of the German arrangements and what is done by the British Council, quite a lot is done nationally. We have rather different national systems: if you are sitting in India or China, you will probably want information about how German, French or British universities work, rather than be thinking generically about European universities. But we would be open-minded if someone could persuade us that
this is worthwhile. I suspect that Lord Lexden is not going to be the person to make that case.

Lord Lexden: The Commission talks about developing a strategy. You have probably covered that already, but you might like to say a little more about the validity and possible content of any such strategy.

David Willetts: We would be very wary if it involved any expenditure, because money is tight. We would be very wary if it involved any attempt to establish some EU authority and to impose obligations. I guess that, in general, as I said earlier, the Bologna Process works rather well. I am not convinced that we need a second strand when Bologna is a basis for intergovernmental co-operation. We are very cautious about all this, but we will look at it when it is produced with a degree of wariness as to whether it really will add value.

Q87 Baroness Prosser: This is the penultimate question, as I am sure you will be pleased to hear. Erasmus for All is a proposal to bring together a number of different programmes. Do you think that that is likely to achieve the aim of simplification and greater flexibility? I know that those are not words that normally go with discussion about the European Union, but I would be interested in your view. Do you think that they would be able to move forward and make headway without any further significant increase in funding?

David Willetts: There are two points. The first point is that, in general, as you suggest, it is a good idea to simplify and streamline the process. There should be savings by eliminating the excessive number of different schemes and programmes. That is a good idea, which we would support as improving efficiency. However, the proposal is that the budget for EU mobility programmes for 2014-20 should increase by around 70%, which is completely unrealistic. It is not just that the British Government are committed to saving money and holding down the EU budget; in my meetings in Councils of Ministers at Brussels it is clear that many other member states are also facing budgetary pressures. So that proposal for increased spending is simply impossible.

Q88 Baroness Prosser: How about the role of other funding streams in supporting HE, such as the European Social Fund? Do you see any relationship there?

David Willetts: Yes. The universities of some of the newer Member States in central and eastern Europe sadly suffered terribly through the Second World War and after, but they are now emerging into freedom. When we discuss this, I turn up as a British representative and say that what crucially matters in the funding in the research area is excellence. They come back and say, “That looks awfully like a policy for looking after those who have rather than those who have not”. They are on a route to excellence and we want them to be on that route. It would be great if some of these historic European universities came back as leading universities again. That is something we all want to see. We say, “Look, that is where the structural funds can help”. These Member States are free to choose how to spend their structural funds. It does not need to all go on new motorways. It is perfectly possible to spend structural fund money on investment in research facilities and in university facilities. As they increase their performance, they can then become eligible for research funding under the criterion of excellence. Yes, I want to see that support. But, as I say, we should not confuse instruments and objectives. It is Tinbergen, isn’t it? We allocate instruments to objectives. We have the research funding on the criterion of excellence and we have structural funds to help them develop.
Baroness Prosser: Do you see the relationship between those two, and the background that you have just explained, as relating to this country as well as to Eastern European countries?

David Willetts: Yes, and of course our universities are eligible as well. We think that, in general, this is best in our less affluent regions. We think that there scope there as well.

Q89 The Chairman: This is the last question, which continues the theme of the funds available and Horizon 2020, the new framework programme for research and innovation. It appears that the Government are keen to endorse the Horizon 2020 proposals. We also understand that industry has been less successful than higher education in accessing funds. How do you intend to encourage and facilitate industry to access more funds under this programme heading?

David Willetts: Overall, we have done well out of FP7. We estimate that we are getting about the second largest share of funding. But the Committee is absolutely correct. It appears to be driven by a very strong performance on higher education, which accounts for 69% of all UK FP7 funding to date, whereas British industry gets 17.4% of the FP7 funding coming to the UK. That is a different balance from that in many other member states and is below the average. The average across FP7 is that industry gets about 23.3% of FP7 funding, so there is a challenge there. Our understanding is that it is not that industry applications have a lower success rate; it is that there are fewer industrial bids in the first place. That is where the problem lies. Again, this Committee may have ideas. Certainly, one thing that industry complains about is the bureaucracy and complexity of the procedure. It is a point that I have made to the Commissioner and is one of the reasons why in the proposals for Horizon 2020 there are suggestions for significant simplification of procedures.

The Chairman: Is there general knowledge and awareness in industry about the possibility of accessing these funds? Is that an issue?

David Willetts: I think that that is another area where we could do better. There are national contact points but they are probably not as well known as they should be. Again, working with the Technology Strategy Board, we are looking at this as an area where we should improve our performance.

Q90 The Chairman: In the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework, will the Government be supporting a greater proportion of funds being allocated to this heading?

David Willetts: The Government’s overall position on this is that the EU budget needs to be held down. We do not just believe in fiscal restraint domestically; we think that we have to practise it in Europe. I guess that in our ideal world we would see research as a higher proportion of a smaller total budget. That will obviously be a crucial area for negotiation. The Prime Minister has said that the maximum acceptable expenditure increase through the next MFF is a real freeze in payments. That is our position.

Q91 The Chairman: The last question, which I meant to ask you earlier, is on the European Credit Transfer System. Do you have any particular views on that, given that some critical comment has been made about its not being fit for purpose and so on? Do you think that it could be improved or whether it is worth putting effort into?
David Willetts: Yes, I think that there is still more that we can do, because it needs to be improved. Progress is already being made but, again, I would be interested in this Committee’s ideas. I accept that it is not yet fully fit for purpose.

The Chairman: Any other questions from colleagues? If not, thank you very much indeed for your fulsome and open responses. No doubt you are looking forward to receiving our report.

David Willetts: Thank you very much.
### Analysis of Erasmus cohort 2008/09 by ethnicity and socio-economic group

#### Population by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Erasmus Population</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7,137</td>
<td>75.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British - Caribbean</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British - African</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black background</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Indian</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Pakistani</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian background</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (including mixed)</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>3.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-UK Students</td>
<td>1,308</td>
<td>13.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9,433</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Population by Socio-Economic Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Erasmus Population</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher managerial and professional occupations</td>
<td>2,115</td>
<td>22.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower managerial and professional occupations</td>
<td>2,338</td>
<td>24.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate occupations</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>9.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small employers and own account workers</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower supervisory and technical occupations</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>2.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-routine occupations</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>6.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine occupations</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never worked and long-term unemployed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not classified (including unknown)</td>
<td>2,616</td>
<td>27.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9,433</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Population by Disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Erasmus Population</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No known disability</td>
<td>8,779</td>
<td>93.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind/partially sighted</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf/ hearing impairment</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair user/mobility difficulties</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health difficulties</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autistic Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An unseen disability, e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A disability not listed above</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Outgoing UK Erasmus Students by Gender and Age for the year 2010/11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>M</th>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21.33%</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>78.67%</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>30.10%</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>69.90%</td>
<td>1,359</td>
<td>10.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,508</td>
<td>30.64%</td>
<td>3,414</td>
<td>69.36%</td>
<td>4,922</td>
<td>38.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,264</td>
<td>33.66%</td>
<td>2,491</td>
<td>66.34%</td>
<td>3,755</td>
<td>29.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>38.89%</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>61.11%</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>9.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>44.42%</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>55.58%</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>39.70%</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>60.30%</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38.27%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>61.73%</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38.00%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62.00%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43.18%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56.82%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>0.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>43.14%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>56.86%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.42%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57.58%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.37%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.63%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12,834
Engineering Professors’ Council – Written Evidence

The Engineering Professors’ Council (www.epc.ac.uk) provides a forum for senior academics responsible for engineering teaching and research in higher education. It has over 1600 members and represents virtually all of the universities in the UK which offer degrees in engineering.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

1. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

The EU’s prime focus should be in encouraging member states to invest more in higher education to move closer to international investment levels, where we in the UK lag by a large margin. There are also issues concerned with the investment when made, such as in the UK the lack of investment in teaching equipment (labs and software) and the declining number of academics with relevant experience to educate engineers.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

The Bologna process originated as a means to enhance European higher education by adopting a common framework for higher education awards. It was then adopted by the European Commission as an implementation tool to further European economic progress. We share concerns that have already been expressed to the Committee about the risks to university autonomy from attempts to direct developments through EU instruments. The original Bologna process did not achieve many of the hoped for outcomes and much still needs to be done, but this is best done by consensus of all EHEA participants.

There is a need for specific funding instruments to continue to drive the Bologna process forward for the next decade at least; we are broadly content with the funding proposals in para 3.5 of the Commission’s paper, subject to the comments above.

Mobility

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

Mobility is a complex area. At the undergraduate level much depends on the fit of the curricula, the language of study, the timing of academic programmes, and the financial restrictions. The proposed loan guarantee for Masters students is a positive move which may offset some of the disadvantages to the UK by other European countries introducing many masters programmes at low cost, compared to the UK. The other dimension is that of the Bologna process, and whether the one year short duration Masters programmes in the UK will maintain a positive quality image. At the postgraduate research level the Marie Curie programme has been of great value to the UK, and should be strengthened.

Targets and league table

4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?
This is in principle a laudable aim, provided that the Commission’s estimate of 35% of jobs requiring degree-level training is accurate. If graduate unemployment rises, and debts due to student fees become similar in context to what is currently happening in the US, and to a lesser extent in the UK, with the “Occupy” movement now concentrating on graduate debt, this may lead to unrest.

5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?
League tables are now a fact of life in higher education. The more sophisticated league tables, such as the Guardian, enable users to stipulate their own priorities for weightings to express their own wishes, which is good. U-Multirank appears to have this attribute. However there are many details to be ironed out before it will come into being; and we are aware of concerns over the viability of HEIs providing the data required on top of the existing public data requirements. Also League table drive behavioural change. For example, the research assessment exercises have changed the academic skill set leading to a decline in the number of academics with the relevant experience to teach engineering. Therefore designing league tables should include an understanding of the likely unintended consequences.

Funding instruments
6. What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?

Horizon 2020 is immensely important for UK researchers. The income is equivalent to another Research Council.
The target areas of energy efficiency and renewables, innovation and SME support are important, with a view to Europe 2020 and the UK in particular. These funding instruments should be strengthened.

International dimension
7. The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?
The Tempus programme has Joint projects and Structural measures to develop, modernise and disseminate new curricula, teaching methods or materials, as well as boosting quality assurance and management of higher education institutions. These are far reaching aims, and should be strongly supported.

Other issues not covered above
8. We are concerned that the UK government’s encouragement for 2-year degrees runs contrary to the Bologna agreement that first cycle degrees should be of a minimum of three years duration; any “graduates” from such programmes will almost certainly find that their degrees are not recognized widely, if at all, outside the UK.

21 November 2011
1. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

- EU investment in higher education, research and innovation is needed as every Euro spent at European level on universities will add value by bringing people together, pooling knowledge, promoting networking and clustering, thus creating synergies that could not be achieved at national level alone, and boosting EU competitiveness.

- At present the EU lags behind its global competitors concerning educational investment. Increased European level funding has a particularly important leverage function.

- The sharing of institutional strategies and of innovative good practices is of particular importance for enacing quality, attractiveness and impact as is the further development of learning mobility as proposed in the new ERASMUS for All’ programme.

- Increased investment in higher education mobility, exchanges and collaboration brings long term benefit to European societies and economies, and enhances cohesion and understanding. It also benefits the sectors in which higher education graduates will ultimately be employed.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

- European exchange and mobility in higher education is funded to a significant degree through EU funds. These exchanges have made a significant contribution to the development of the European internal market and to the implementation of Bologna reforms. They have also enhanced the international visibility of Europe, for example through the ERASMUS Mundus programme.

- EU policy and funding support can further enhance the implementation of the various Bologna priority Action Lines in a more coherent manner, for example by ensuring
that the focus of any increased support to mobility is on improving the quality of mobility, through emphasising the importance of using the Bologna tools in all cases to ensure that mobility is relevant and recognised, e.g. by using ECTS credits, detailing learning outcomes, including Diploma Supplements etc.

- Additional support for mobility will also help to increase the level of mobility in Europe, thus contributing to meeting the Bologna 20% mobility target. Similarly, EU support proposed for mobility beyond the boundaries of the EHEA will also help to meet the Bologna goals - presently under discussion in a proposed EHEA mobility strategy - in this respect.

- There is also good cooperation and synergies between the European Qualifications’ Framework (EU) and the Bologna/EHEA Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area. This is crucial for recognition and for the mobility of students and graduates, thus important both for the higher education sector and the labour market. Qualifications’ Frameworks also foster the transparency of education programmes.

**Mobility**

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged onto the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

- Student mobility can be boosted by the increased funding proposed by the EC and by improving the quality of and support to mobility as indicated above (answer to Q2). Increased mobility would also result from the improved transferability of national grants and loans’ schemes in the EU. These issues are being addressed also through a Bologna Process WG.

- Increasing young researchers’ mobility – also a priority for the European Research Area – requires, in addition, addressing the open questions relating to career structures, status issues, social security and pension rights, both across the EU and also in relation to international mobility. The Marie Curie Scheme and the European Research Council grants for young researchers have proved to be particularly successful ways of promoting young researchers mobility.

- We believe that the proposed European loan guarantee for Masters students is a helpful addition to the options on offer as long as it is complementary to and does not replace grant funding.
Improved participation of students from European countries with lower income levels can be facilitated through additional funding. As the Erasmus grant covers only a fraction of the actual costs, socially balanced participation depends on the provision of additional funding from national/regional sources, or donors. European governments should be encouraged to provide these, e.g. out of the structural funds, where this is possible.

In addition, EUA has proposed to the EC:
- Funding for European doctoral schools to ensure better quality, visibility, European and international recognition.
- To take up professional training for university staff as one of its priorities. Enhanced autonomy and more diversified mission can only succeed if driven by professional leadership and administration. This is so far still an widely untapped area for joint European learning.

In addition, the EC should support initiatives that improve recognition at all levels (of temporary student mobility, of degrees, recognition of prior learning, and also the recognition of professions). It is important that students, but also future professionals, can have confidence that study periods and degrees are recognised in transparent processes and with a high level of probability. This requires enhancement at institutional level, where recognition not always get the right level of attention throughout an institution, and is considered as in important and quality assured task. Important is in this context also the processes for professional recognition that are currently under revision.

With regards to the mobility of professionals and researchers, social security and pension issues have to be improved cf remarks made above).

**Targets and league table**

**4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?**

EUA believes that it makes sense to set these overall targets for the EU although it is clear that some countries have already reached the targets and others are far away from them. This reflects recognition of the diverse levels of development of different higher education systems and the need, overall, to make use of the EU’s human resources and to increase the number of highly trained professionals across the EU. It is important that each system considers the most appropriate targets and how to reach them.
5. **What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?**

- EUA has published an in depth comparative analysis of all global rankings. This study shows the flaws in the methodology of these rankings and the fact that they favour very strongly large, research intensive institutions.

- Across the EU there are many diverse institutions with specific profiles and mission. They are pursuing excellence in their chosen missions which are often to contribute to the development of their region and to serve their local populations through the provision of higher education and training, also retraining, as well as through cooperation and support of different kinds to local industries, enterprises and other bodies.

- The major societal contributions made by the large majority of EU universities are thus not reflected in the existing global rankings. The EU Multirank, by trying to gather data on, and thus reflect the diverse missions of higher education institutions in Europe, is trying to provide a means of improving information on the broad range of offerings and services provided by European higher education institutions. Its purpose is to demonstrate this diversity rather than to provide an additional ranking.

- However, it remains to be seen whether this project will be successful. It depends upon the existence of the relevant data and information across Europe. This is a challenge. For example, while it is relatively easy to count research publications, it is notoriously difficult to find objective and direct ways of determining the quality of teaching and learning. In most cases, also in the case of U-Multirank, it appears that proxies are still being used.

---

**Funding instruments**

6. **What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?**
• EUA supports the increased budgets proposed for the EU higher education, research and innovation programmes, thus in particular Education Europe/ERASMUS for ALL and Horizon 2020 bearing in mind the contribution that investment in higher education and research can make to efforts to overcome the current crisis. Europe cannot afford to run the risk of losing a generation of talented people, or of a serious decrease in research and innovation activity while our competitors are investing heavily in universities and the next generation of young people who will be the innovators of tomorrow. EUA has adopted position papers on the Innovation Union and Horizon 2020. http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/eua-policy-position-and-declarations.aspx

• EUA also supports the EC decision to make research and innovation one of the key priorities for regional policy 2014-2020, and for mobilising the Structural Funds, as a means of promoting economic and social cohesion. EUA sees this as a part of an integrated approach to promoting research and innovation across the EU, in all regions. The EUA hopes that the ‘smart specialisation’ intended will be a true cooperative process fully involving and consulting academia and civil society in all regional discussions and strategy development.

International dimension

7. The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

• EUA considers that this agenda can be furthered through the development of a common higher education international strategy for Europe, as announced in the Modenisation Agenda.

• EUA has surveyed its members on the basis of the ERASMUS for ALL proposals and feedback indicates the importance for universities of enhancing both European and international mobility. Higher education institutions are increasingly international in their outlook and partnerships, and in their teaching and research activities. It would help to function within an agreed European framework, including also coherent funding possibilities. A common European strategy would also lead to a better visibility of European higher education, study and funding programmes, thus benefitting all Member States and offering orientation in particular for those countries currently developing or revising their internationalisation strategies.

• EUA hopes that in the context of the ERASMUS for ALL Programme the various EU funding instruments for higher education cooperation and mobility in different world regions will be brought together and simplified so that they are more accessible for higher education institutions trying to develop their European and international links.
THURSDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2012

Members present
Baroness Young of Hornsey (Chairman)
Viscount Bridgeman
Lord Cotter
Earl of Courtown
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Baroness Henig
Baroness Prosser
Baroness Scott of Needham Market

Examination of Witness

Lesley Wilson, Secretary-General, European University Association (EUA)

Q108 The Chairman: Good morning, Ms Wilson. Thank you for coming along today. You are our last witness on this subject. We have had very interesting written submissions and witnesses so far. I would not say that there has been huge consensus but there were some very interesting divergences of opinion, so we are very much looking forward to hearing what you have to tell us today.

I should let you know that Members’ interests are recorded in the House of Lords Register of Interests and a list of declared interests is on the witness table. The session is on the record. It is being webcast live and will subsequently be accessible via the parliamentary website. You will receive a copy of the transcript of the session to check and correct, and it will be put on record on the parliamentary website. Could you begin by stating your name and official title for the record? If you want to, you can make a brief opening statement but that is entirely up to you.

Lesley Wilson: Thank you very much. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Lesley Wilson. I am the Secretary-General of the European University Association. For an opening statement, I shall say just a few words about the organisation so that you know where I am coming from. We represent 34 national associations of universities, among them
European University Association – Oral evidence (QQ 108-124)

Universities UK, and around 850 individual universities in 47 countries—a broader range of countries than the European Union. Our purposes are twofold. One is to lobby on behalf of the interests of universities at European and international level. We normally do not get involved in national discussions; we feel that they are often the responsibility of our national members. We also help universities respond to the challenges that they are facing, and which we all know are growing by the day. That is all I want to say by way of introduction.

Q109 The Chairman: Thank you, that is very helpful. Thank you, too, for your written submission. I should like to kick off by asking you how beneficial and tangible, in your view, the Bologna Process has been for European higher education institutions, and how much emphasis is placed on the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement across Europe? It is fair to say that the Government here have been a little critical of the European Credit Transfer System, so it would be interesting to hear your views on what its benefits and some of the downsides might be.

Lesley Wilson: For most of Europe—again, I talk about there now being 47 countries involved—the Bologna Process has been an enormous voluntary movement, which has brought about considerable change across Europe. That is not to say that the benefits have been the same for all the countries involved in the process. However, every single one of these 47 Governments and the 47 university systems has taken part on a voluntary basis. There is no coercion or legislation. It is up to countries to decide whether they want to take part in these reforms.

For most of Europe, it has led to a considerably more flexible system of degrees. Most countries in continental Europe did not have Bachelors degrees, Masters degrees and doctoral degrees before the Bologna Process, so it has increased the flexibility of their systems. It has increased the internationalisation of our system because a coherent system of degrees has made it much easier for universities across these countries to co-operate with one another and to become more attractive to international partners. These are the major benefits. The process has also allowed all these countries to have—I hope, since we have contributed to it as universities sitting on the governing body of the process—very broad, flexible European agreements on the structure of degrees, roughly what they mean and quality assurance through very broad standards and guidelines that allow each national or federal system to decide on the details that make sense in their system.

This broad framework has, as I say, also considerably increased the visibility of European higher education to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, two of the elements in this European framework—on which you raised questions—are the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement. The European Credit Transfer System, contrary to the development in the US, started off to allow Erasmus students to count their credits when they went abroad at the very beginning of the scheme. It was introduced by the European Commission in the late 1980s. When the Bologna Process came along, there was a discussion about how to agree on what we mean. We saw that we had enormous diversity in our university degrees. How could we find a common currency that might help us to understand each other? If we define it in a common way, we should be able to assist our students in moving abroad, using these credit systems. Hence the European Credit Transfer System became more widely used and has been introduced in national legislation in all those countries, which means most European countries.

It has developed further, not only as a credit transfer—that is, not only for mobility between countries—but as a way of accumulating credits within your own system. It helps contribute to lifelong learning because it allows people in those countries where prior
learning can be accredited to use those credits to come into the system, perhaps go and do something else and come back in at a later point.

The Diploma Supplement was developed by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the European Commission as a way of giving all students a transcript of records that would refer to the same points. It has also been used in the Bologna process as one of the tools for making things more transparent. It allows students, at the end of their studies, to have a piece of paper, which should normally be produced in the language of the country and another major language—that, of course, tends to be English. These two tools—both the credit system and the Diploma Supplement—have been very helpful to students.

I realise that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland there have been issues about this. All I can say is that in most of Europe—99% of countries—there is agreement over the usefulness of both the credit transfer system and the Diploma Supplement. That does not prevent some countries using their own credit systems, provided that they are somehow compatible with the principles of the credit transfer system. As we move forward, given that we have, as you know, national qualification frameworks that describe the qualifications, the credits are a very important element of that. It is very important that there is agreement in each national system on what that means and that it corresponds to the overall understanding, so that it benefits individual systems and allows comparison between them.

**Q110 The Chairman:** Before Lord Foulkes comes in, do you have any evidence of students’ views of the usefulness of both those schemes in seeking employment or furthering their studies?

**Lesley Wilson:** The credit transfer system has proved to be extremely helpful for students, as long as their academic mentors are able to describe the learning that is covered by these credits. The problems are not in the mechanics of the system as such. One issue that is particularly important and causes problems for students is that there is not perhaps sufficient agreement beforehand on the workload that they are expected to accomplish. Hence the next step in development of this across Europe is to concentrate much more on something that the UK has been doing for a long time—learning outcomes. Then it is a question of linking the credits to the learning outcomes in order to have a better idea of the significance for each student’s studies. The Diploma Supplement has clearly proved helpful to students who wish to continue their academic studies, but one issue that is often brought up is that it is not a tool that is well known in the outside world by the various employers. There would be a need to look at the Diploma Supplement again and think how it could be brought up to date as well, to also take into account issues such as learning outcomes. I do not think that the credits are included at present, or they do not need to be, in the Diploma Supplement. It is the first time there has ever been a transcript that students can use around Europe and be sure that it means the same thing in each country.

**Q111 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** You said that England, Wales and Northern Ireland do not participate in the European Credit Transfer System—presumably Scotland does.

**Lesley Wilson:** Scotland does, yes.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** How is that Scotland manages to participate but not England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

**Lesley Wilson:** This is up to national authorities, which have different responsibilities for education in different countries. Each authority has to decide whether it thinks it is a relevant system to deal with.
**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I accept that and of course I understand that devolution means that it is decided in Scotland. What I do not understand is that, if the Scottish authorities feel that it is appropriate, why do you think the English, Welsh and Northern Irish authorities have not felt it appropriate?

**Lesley Wilson:** I really do not feel I can answer that question. I do not really see why, if all the rest of the 47 countries in Europe feel that it is an adequate system, it has not been used more widely or adopted in the rest of the United Kingdom. There have been many discussions on this point over the years and the agreement in the end was that, as long as there is a translation mechanism between the system that is used in this case in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, that should be adequate. But of course it complicates things.

**Baroness Henig:** Is it for universities to make this decision or is it done at a higher level?

**Lesley Wilson:** Normally it would be done by universities and policy-makers together. I know that there have been developments in recent years in the rest of the United Kingdom but you should ask my colleagues from Universities UK.

**Q112 The Chairman:** What do you see as the major challenges for the Bologna Process over the next decade or so, and what would you like to see emerge from the next meeting in April?

**Lesley Wilson:** At this very difficult time for many countries—as you know, all around Europe there are severe economic problems and countries are responding in very different ways—some countries are investing considerably in higher education and research, despite their problems; other countries are not able to do so. This makes it very difficult for universities on the ground because curricula have to be reconsidered; they have to take account of new challenges; students need new skills, and so forth. This requires a considerable amount of support to larger numbers of students. There is broad agreement that we need to improve access to higher education for a much broader range of students across Europe. These challenges and goals are clear across the Bologna states but the main challenge is how to implement these in a very concrete way to provide the incentives that are required to support a broader diversity of students entering and being successful in higher education. Secondly, as you know, a 20% mobility benchmark has been set across the countries, not for each individual country, and that will also be one of the big challenges in the future. Thirdly, the interaction with the rest of the world is very important—there is a global dimension and we must not be looking inward.

**The Chairman:** We will come on to that issue of internationalisation later. For now, Lord Cotter has a question.

**Q113 Lord Cotter:** As you say, these are difficult and challenging times, so how can European universities retain their competitive edge regarding the US and China? Supplementary to that, do you think that a greater proportion of the EU budget should be devoted to research, education and innovation?

**Lesley Wilson:** In terms of how universities can either build up or maintain their competitive edge, it is less true in this country but across Europe an enormous process of diversification of higher education systems is going on. In other words, there has been less tradition of every single university considering its own mission and profiles; in a lot of countries it has been one system with open access for all and every university considered in the same way. Systems all across Europe are realising that this is not possible. You need to
have some universities concentrating more on a global dimension and research at a high level; you need other universities looking at their local environment and so forth. Looking at Europe as a whole, this element is going to be very important. Universities need the autonomy to be able to decide on their own mission and profile and implement that, whatever it may be. That also requires national authorities to look at the different incentives that are provided for different universities to be able to implement their goals, be it targeting a particular population, looking more internationally or whatever. This is a really big challenge for the whole of Europe, and universities need to be able to take a number of decisions themselves on how they are structured and organised, and how their academic courses are managed. That will be very important in the future. They need to think about the changing demography of Europe, which is going to be a particular challenge for universities. Looking forward to the next 10 or 20 years, many parts of Europe will suffer considerable demographic decline and we need to think about that not just in one country but more generally across the Union and beyond. Otherwise, we will see parts of Europe losing their populations and that would not be beneficial to Europe as a whole.

In answer to your second question, that probably is the reason why, given the challenges that Europe as a whole is facing and the contribution that is expected in terms of higher education, research and innovation to help maintain Europe’s prosperity, and hopefully develop it further, it makes sense to invest more in young people, young researchers and promoting innovation at European level. That is also the policy of our association. Bringing people together and allowing them to exchange experience and giving them the incentives they need to further develop their co-operation is beneficial and can be more helpful than funding at national level alone. For example, the grand challenges in research, whether looking at health or energy issues, are global questions, cannot be addressed significantly by national institutions alone. You need to bring together all the different competences that are required to address these issues. This can be facilitated by the right types of funding at European level.

Q114 Viscount Bridgeman: Continuing the innovation theme, one of the flagships of Europe 2020 is the Innovation Union, is it not? It refers to a more strategic approach to innovation being adopted to increase the EU’s competitiveness. One of its themes is the triangle of research, education and innovation, which overcomes barriers and good ideas once the market moves more quickly. Can you tell us more about these triangles? I think France is particularly successful in bringing the private and public sectors together and transferring people between the two. What role can the EU play in stimulating closer collaboration between higher education institutions and business? Also, how promising are the opportunities under the European Innovation Partnership and Knowledge and Innovation Communities?

Lesley Wilson: You are right: this is one of the key actions in the Innovation Union document. Having listened and talked twice recently to Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn, the Irish Commissioner for Research, I know that her main goal is to promote innovation. The interesting thing at the moment is that you see the link at the level of Bachelors, Masters and doctoral programmes. At the level of the education programmes, the main thrust of EU support will go into partnerships that focus on bringing universities together with businesses and other partners, be they national authorities, the health service or whatever, so that they can promote co-operation even at the Bachelor or Masters level.

If you then move on to further research, there is the same logic, and the same intentions and goals have been set. The question is how to go about doing it. We have sent out all
sorts of questionnaires to all our members. Of course, the universities often come back and say that they would prefer to work with other universities. Therefore, there is a need for incentives to promote further university-business co-operation. The question is how to do it.

One of the main ideas that President Barroso brought up in his first term was that of the European Institute of Technology, which is now the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and is, I think, the programme that you referred to. It is very interesting because it has launched knowledge and innovation communities—KICs. They are enormous partnerships, only three of which have been launched. Money is given to them by the EU but they require substantial investment from business. This is very important because any programme that is to be successful needs the support of the business community; otherwise, it does not make sense from either side.

One KIC, on climate, is managed by the former Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Imperial College, Mary Ritter. It is a very interesting example. I have listened to Mary talking about this several times. It gets universities to look at the themes from an interdisciplinary perspective and it looks at innovative ways of bringing them together with major industries that also have an interest in this area.

Of the three KICs that have been launched over the past few years, one is on energy, one is on climate and one is on information and communication technology. We are all waiting to see whether they will be successful. At the beginning there was a bit of a problem with the university position generally, be it through Universities UK or our position. The Commission would have liked these partnerships to offer degrees. However, we have lobbied very hard, as have all university bodies, to say no. Universities provide the degrees; they have to make sense from a university perspective. The whole purpose of this co-operation is that it should make sense from the perspective of industry, which has its role to play, and make sense from the perspective of universities, which have their role to play. This is going ahead and, as I say, the example of the climate KIC shows that there is considerable interest from a large number of universities.

The second element is that there was a decision to launch European Innovation Partnerships. Here again, the European Parliament has launched three pilot projects and everybody agrees on the goals, but it is important to look at the results of these pilot projects to make sure that we are going in the right direction. There is agreement between all the partners that this is what needs to be done. There are many smaller examples of university-industry partnerships that are already financed at the European level through the framework programme. These things work but the intention in the future is to increase massively the investment in this area. Hence these enormous partnerships through the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, which does not have a home; it has a small organisational secretariat in Budapest, but it is not a big or new organisation. It is made up of networks of institutions. These have been launched and we are waiting for the first results. It will be important to evaluate what has been achieved through these new initiatives before the start of Horizon 2020—before 2014, when the new money comes online.

Everyone realises that we have to do this. It will be the key to success. It is one thing that can be done at the European level through different European companies and universities working together. However, there is also still considerable ongoing discussion over the form of these partnerships and the best way to achieve the results that we all know need to be addressed.
Q115 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Turning to Erasmus, if one is looking at it optimistically, more students are participating—nearly 13,000 last year. On the other hand, we are still behind other countries. In your view, are the benefits of participation properly understood by both students and governments? What more should we be doing to encourage that take-up to continue increasing?

Lesley Wilson: I have been thinking about this. I find it a particularly difficult question to answer. As somebody who grew up in the UK but, as a result of a European exchange, studied and worked in a number of European countries, I cannot understand why more UK students are not interested in this European experience. On incentives, maybe it is important for the universities themselves to see the value of working together at a European level and not just internationally. Because the UK has such a broad international outreach, it is perhaps difficult sometimes for some universities to understand what they could gain from stronger European partnerships.

We often come back to the same questions of language, culture and understanding, that you need to benefit from your stay in another European country. Language learning is an issue in the UK. It is an issue for universities; the students need to be properly prepared. If they are to benefit from their studies, even if these take place in English, they still need to be able to communicate in the language of the country in which their university is situated.

We have often taken part in conferences of UUK and other British bodies. They come back to the same issue: we do not necessarily have the contacts. Many academics in British universities will say, “Our contacts are international”. They will have contacts in Australia, the United States, Canada or now Asia, but they are less in touch with their European counterparts. I think it is changing. Coming back to the Bologna process, there has been an understanding that, even if only for competitive reasons, the rest of Europe is getting its act together quite nicely, especially since the introduction of Masters programmes.

There are also questions of competitiveness. For example, people from emerging nations in Asia will come over to us because we are a one-stop shop, and ask, “Can you tell us about European higher education?” Then they ask about fee levels and say, “Can we do a Masters course somewhere in Europe on a given subject? What would it cost, compared to this country or that country?” Given all these developments, I would think that competitiveness might be an incentive. There are many people who understand this now. Maybe this is also a reason for more engagement with Europe. We can build European partnerships together. There are many opportunities for building joint partnerships with other European countries and then reaching out and working together internationally.

Q116 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Given the language problem, which has been a frequent theme, and the lack of cultural outreach—in many sectors of society, but not all, it is not necessarily assumed that it is normal to leave your country and go abroad—and the financial and practical problems that people face, is there any merit in considering programmes that are shorter than a year, so that the whole thing does not feel so daunting or expensive?

Lesley Wilson: I think there is. It does not need to be a year. The key issue is that there is an agreement with the other university on what the student is going to learn during their period abroad. It depends on the structure of the academic degree. Shorter periods would need to be at least three months, or a trimester or semester, depending on how it is organised. What we are seeing now, thanks to the Bologna Process, are joint degrees, which work particularly well. These are more integrated degrees, so maybe six or seven universities decide that they want to work on a Masters in social studies because there is
European University Association – Oral evidence (QQ 108-124)

some kind of regulation at European level or whatever and they say they will offer the
students three months here, three months there—maybe some summer schools here or
there. They are much more integrated and therefore for the tutors and students it is a
much more understandable experience and there are clear benefits compared to the big
exchanges with students going both ways. There is certainly a huge interest in it and it is not
going away. They are very expensive in terms of time and effort but, every time we survey
this, the interest in them is not decreasing. It is obviously something that satisfies both the
staff and students involved. It might be something that, if the fees questions can be resolved,
would be helpful for students here.

Q117 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Coming back to the question of fees, do
you feel optimistic or pessimistic about England as a destination for European students
because of fees and competition from other European universities offering courses in
English?

Lesley Wilson: As someone who has a son in a UK university, I think more needs to be
done to explain the present policies and to make clear how the system that has been put in
place in the UK works. It is not very easy for people around Europe to understand that it is
not just about tuition fees and that the system is a lot more complex and has checks and
balances that they perhaps do not understand. I think that is really important. Related to
that—and it is a difficult question and one that I have asked over the last year—is precisely
what the new policy means for exchanges and students who wish to come in and students
who wish to go out, and universities that wish to develop joint degrees with other European
universities. These questions need to be very clear to all concerned, otherwise it is, “Oh, it
is too complicated and there are these fees and we do not know what is going to happen”.
It is difficult to understand from the outside. The whole fees topic across Europe is very
difficult, and some countries have very principled positions about tuition fees.

Q118 Baroness Prosser: Given all that, I am not sure what your thinking will be on
diversity of involvement. You spoke earlier about the demographic changes going on in
Europe and reduced populations, which must make it all the more important that
Governments ensure that everyone gets a fair chance. How could we get more diversity
into the Erasmus programme, in particular?

Lesley Wilson: You are quite right and this will also be discussed in the upcoming Bologna
ministerial meeting: how do we go from what has been a wonderful first 25 years of
encouraging more mobility to encouraging different types of students and giving everyone an
opportunity? There are two barriers. What always comes through in the questions that
come back is the fact that students whose parents have not attended higher education and
have not been mobile have a much more difficult threshold to get over. So they need to
have mentors inside the universities. Even though more young people are travelling anyway,
they still need to get over this first hurdle.

Baroness Prosser: Like a buddy system.

Lesley Wilson: Yes, something like that, so they realise that it is not something that they
cannot manage to do. Often people refer to just the financial issues involved but I do not
think that it is only a financial problem. I really think it is a much broader issue. Both of
these questions need to be addressed. One of the things that the Bologna Process has been
working steadily but surely on is on the portability of grants. The loans are a completely
different issue, but students who receive grants need to be able to take them with them
when they go abroad. The Erasmus grants only provide additional support for mobility and
even then that is not sufficient in most cases. Students need to know that they can do it and they need to be able to take any grant support with them, otherwise they will not be able to survive. There needs to be additional funding. In some countries there is a lot of regional funding; for example, some countries, such as France, have strong regions so that, even if the national Government does not provide the support, the region supports the university. This is often how they provide additional support to those who do not have sufficient income from their parents.

**Baroness Prosser:** We have the fee waiver system. I agree entirely that it is not just about money; there is a whole range of other issues. But do you think it is important to continue the fee waiver?

**Lesley Wilson:** It is crucial; otherwise you have yet another huge hurdle to add to all the others. Again, it is not just the hurdle itself but it is also the complications and procedures involved for the individual student and their family. Until now, if they have sufficient resources, parents or family can cover the costs, but now we need to find ways of making sure that those students who do not have these resources are able to take part.

**Q119 Baroness Henig:** What are your comments on the Commission’s proposal for the Masters student loan guarantee scheme, which is intended to facilitate mobility? Do you think it could be improved in any way? I am very interested in the time period here, whether we are talking about a year or less than a year, and how that fits in to the studies that the students are doing already. Obviously mobility is key, but it is presumably a question of balancing mobility against financial issues. What are you thoughts on that scheme?

**Lesley Wilson:** We have just been asking Commissioner Vassiliou about this. We get many questions on this topic as well. The Commission seems to be working very hard on this option. Coming back to the issue that we have just discussed, I was very interested to hear that Commissioner Vassiliou hopes that a loan scheme will benefit those students who do not have their own financial support to go abroad and that it will be important leverage in broadening the diversity of those students who are able to take part and be mobile. I agree that the important thing here is that it is the complete Masters study. We have no information about whether they are looking at one year or one and a half years. Masters courses in Europe tend to be at least 90 credits, which is a year and a half, but there are no details on that. The Commission is still negotiating with the European Investment Bank. All we know is that the scheme will be administered at national level but with a European guarantee for a complete Masters course, and that the funds will be sufficient to cover the costs of both the mobility and subsistence costs of the students who are successful in obtaining this loan. Hence it should be accessible and sufficient for all students.

**Baroness Henig:** This is presumably where the credit transfer system comes in, because a lot of Masters courses in the UK are in fact only a year. Therefore, to express it in terms of 90 credits would be much more helpful in accessing this scheme than doing it in terms of a year, a year and a half or two years.

**Lesley Wilson:** I do not know any of the details but we will be continuing our discussions with the Commission on this point.

**Baroness Henig:** We clearly need to watch that, otherwise the UK will be disadvantaged.

**Lesley Wilson:** Yes. This is a long-standing discussion.
Baroness Henig: It is rather a saga, is it?

Lesley Wilson: It is indeed.

The Chairman: Perhaps that is one of the points we might follow up on once we have completed our report, because obviously it will not have panned out before we do the report. But we will keep an eye on that, so thanks for that.

Q120 Earl of Courtown: We have been discussing mobility. Moving on to the mobility of researchers, I see that the Commission is intending to enhance infrastructure and academic mobility “to achieve a genuine single market for knowledge research and innovation”. I also see from your evidence that one area that could be construed as a barrier for young researchers is career structure, status issues, social security, pension rights, et cetera. Can you tell the Committee how much progress has been made in the development of this European Research Area, how these barriers have been broken down and what measures are helping to take them away?

Lesley Wilson: This goes to the heart of everything that we have discussed until now. On Monday there was the launch conference where Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn presented her views on the extent to which the European Research Area was developing nicely. She talked about the main obstacles, including the central question of the young researchers and their careers. Interestingly enough, her conclusion is that although she would like to legislate, she thinks that she would never get agreement on legislation, so she would like to go into partnership with the stakeholders. But I think that is putting the burden on universities to solve some of these problems, when it is really not in their remit to do that. With doctoral and post-doc programmes, the mobility of researchers is developing very quickly. There are also young researchers who move outside of Europe to carry out their PhDs and their post-docs. I have just come back from a meeting with the Commissioner in Boston, at Harvard and MIT. We met 350 young researchers and they all want to come back to Europe. It is very interesting. I mention that because these young people want to come back and their question is, “What is Europe doing to provide us with the appropriate research environments?” Much has been done. There are many more opportunities now, such as through the European Research Council, for example, which provides bureaucracy-free top-level grants to the best scientists. We have Marie Curie grants and so forth. We have national grants that have different conditions; they are not always open to other nationalities. So we have national actors and European actors, we have the young researchers who want to move around, and the question is: how can we improve this?

One of the key issues is pensions. The issue at European level is whether supplementary pension schemes can be created. We all know that this is one of the most difficult issues across Europe—I could tell you a personal story, having worked in six countries, about how difficult it is; in fact, it is well nigh impossible at the moment. Until we have answers to this issue, I do not think we will solve the problem. Even some of the most competitive German universities cannot afford to buy in a top-level researcher because then you have to buy in all their pension rights from across Europe. This is how the situation is. It is very unfair on young researchers to say, “Don’t worry about that, you can sort it out later”, because at the moment that is not the case. As I say, despite the Commission not wanting to legislate and not being able to legislate on these issues—rightly so—nevertheless it is a responsibility of the member states to come together and really think how, if we are serious about the competitiveness of Europe and the importance of research—“the single market for knowledge”—we find solutions to these issues. This is the most pressing question. The
second one, which is almost as difficult, is the fact that every country, given the different traditions, has a different career structure for its young scientists.

**The Chairman:** There is a whole heap of further questions for us to look at once we have finished this report. We could go on for ever on this.

**Q121 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** This has been a particularly useful evidence session, I must say. Can we move on to league tables and data and U-Multirank, which is described as, “a new ... performance-based ranking and information tool for profiling higher education institutions”. It has been getting the thumbs down from the Government and the NUS. Two weeks ago we heard that the universities are fed up with league tables and how misleading they are. Can you see any advantage in the U-Multirank and how it might be made useful?

**Lesley Wilson:** Because of all the things that you have said, we tried to decide what we could do as an organisation. If anybody is interested, we did a comparison of all these often useless league tables.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** You have a league table of league tables.

**Lesley Wilson:** We have an explanation of what they do and what they do not do. We do not want to slander anybody. We will update it every year because it is impossible for universities to understand all the various rankings, what they do and what they do not do. It has probably been our most popular publication.

It is clear from all that that the big challenge comes from all these global rankings being based, in a nutshell, on the model of Harvard and the top US research universities. In Europe we have hundreds of good universities but they are not at all comparable to Harvard for very good reasons. We do not want them to be comparable to Harvard, Berkeley or Stanford. The model for the rankings is based on research publications and citations, which are just about the only things that you can count. I am summarising the whole thing in about two sentences.

The intention of the Commission came from the French Minister at the time. It was very difficult for France to see that none of its universities was anywhere near any of these league tables. It was Madame Pécresse who launched this discussion. I have to say that we were very much against it at the beginning. On the other hand, the intention is right. The intention is to say that most of these global rankings concentrate on the research function of the universities. Most national systems now want to see a range of institutions fulfilling different purposes. Therefore, is there any way that we can collect data that will allow us to say something about the teaching function of universities, the extent to which the university serves the needs of the region and other such matters?

That is what the U-Multirank is trying to do. Whether it will be successful is another matter. It is extremely difficult to assess the quality of teaching objectively from one indicator. You can count a publication but you cannot look at someone who has successfully completed a degree, or at a teacher, and say, “Yes, that is good”. People look for proxies, such as how many graduates. However, all these things are dependent on other ratios. How many graduates might depend on how many teachers. It depends on whether you had enough people on your course. It is objectively difficult to collect data, which is the challenge of the U-Multirank. The team trying to do that has started to collect data but in future there will most probably be no more funding. Therefore, the question is: how will they collect the data? Will the universities be willing to give them data? Do the data exist?
If you want to find out about the third mission of a university, very few universities have data. There are certainly very few comparative data, even at a national level. I am not even talking about the European Union level. It is just a new concept in many countries. That is the challenge for the U-Multirank. If it takes another five years to do this, we might all be somewhere else by then.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** That is very interesting. You have put a positive slant on it, which we have not heard before. However, what I also had not heard is that these league tables and rankings are based on Harvard.

**Lesley Wilson:** The top 100 US research universities are the model. It all started with Shanghai.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I was talking to a Cambridge professor yesterday who said that Harvard is, in financial terms, just streets ahead of every other university, even Yale. How can any institution compete if the league tables are based on a Harvard model?

**Lesley Wilson:** Absolutely. You have given the answer.

**Q122 The Chairman:** It is a very interesting discussion. As Lord Foulkes said, you have given a completely different perspective on it, which I am sure we all find very useful. Many thanks for that. A number of us have been involved in universities. I participated in the research assessment exercise so I know that, even with looking at publications, there is still a huge amount of subjectivity in the judgments that are made, as well as vested interests. I for one would be interested to see your publication on the league table of league tables. It would be very useful if you could send us either a link or a copy. Thank you very much.

The next question falls to me and is on the internationalisation of higher education. We have talked a little about this and I can take something of a guess at where you will stand on it. We should like to find out your view on if and how the EU can engage in the internationalisation of European higher education. If you think it would be a good idea, how would it go about doing that? Would pan-European promotion of HE add anything when some institutions are already making such huge progress in this area? As I think you said earlier, and as was certainly borne out by our visit to UEL last week and by other submissions, the international is almost embedded in the whole idea of a university, particularly, although not exclusively, for those who are engaged in research. What is your position on that?

**Lesley Wilson:** You are right; every university is international in one way or another. It is part of being a university. Again, the question is whether anything can be added by European Union engagement with that. If we start on the educational side, we can see from the requests to our organisation to become engaged that many universities—although not the global universities, which are engaged anyway—are seeking to enhance their international co-operation in one way or another. Sometimes they can do it themselves with partners. At other times, it is very helpful for them to work within a framework. At the moment these frameworks are purely national. To take this to its most absurd conclusion, in Vietnam, for example, you will find a German university for Vietnam, a French university and a Belgian faculty. It might have been more helpful if these had been considered together and there was one organisation, rather than three doing the same thing. You see that different countries have different policies, which is fair enough. It often depends on history or geography when looking at different countries and international partners. However, a discussion on these topics would be helpful.
The Chairman: Might some of these structures that already exist or are about to exist, such as some of the research partnerships and Knowledge and Innovation Centres, be channels for doing that kind of thing?

Lesley Wilson: I talked briefly about the meeting in Boston that I was involved in, at which 350 young researchers were present. That was interesting because of what the research part of the European Commission had decided with the Member States. It was managed through the Member States; there was an initiative for all the Member States to come together. The meeting was organised by the European Commission on behalf of a committee of the Member States. In research, people have understood that we have to think together. We cannot all go to China and do the same thing, or go to India and compete with each other with our limited resources. It makes more sense to share information, to be aware of what other people are doing and to think about what we can do together that would make sense.

The same thing is valid in higher education. Perhaps it would be interesting to think of the common issues. Under the previous UK presidency—four or five years ago, I think—a China forum was organised. That made sense. All the Member States were there and the universities took part. The forum tried to channel their efforts in the same direction so that everybody would benefit. Therefore, I do not think it is about saying that universities that are already very international should not continue that strategy. It is more about thinking about how we can make the best use of resources.

We have a European area that has become very visible through the Bologna Process. Sometimes, in other parts of the world, I have my hands behind my back when people say, “Gosh, aren’t you lucky in Europe? You have managed to solve all your problems”. That is the perception from outside—that Europe has become much stronger in higher education and research through these developments, even though we know fine well that we are struggling with them and with thinking about how to move forward. Therefore, the initiative of promoting some kind of common action in internationalisation is important.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. Lady Henig has the final question.

Q123 Baroness Henig: Perhaps I can preface my question by saying how valuable and instructive I have found your evidence this morning, particularly because of the breadth of the experience and expertise you have at EU level. It has been really helpful, so thank you for that. On funding, we know that the Commission has proposed a new funding programme for higher education—Erasmus for All, which I am sure you are familiar with—plus there is the idea that higher education institutions can also benefit from funding under the structural funds and Horizon 2020. How significant do you think these funds could be in supporting the EU’s recovery from the financial crisis and making it more competitive globally? Also, in view of your experience, do you have any suggestions for how you think EU investment in higher education could be most effectively mobilised?

Lesley Wilson: Just a little question!

Baroness Henig: In two minutes.

The Chairman: Sort out all these problems, please.

Lesley Wilson: That is a challenge. In terms of Erasmus and Erasmus for All, we are back to the question of the added value. I think the universities will be pushed to develop innovative partnerships that really improve the skills of the graduates. We have to move beyond just increasing the money for Erasmus. If that is done, there should perhaps be additional
conditions; for example we have to make sure that the learning agreements are there and that the outcomes of the Erasmus scheme are there for all the students. That is important. But I really think it is going to be about pushing universities to undertake partnerships with business, local authorities and all sorts of different services. That is where the EU can add value, because it is not necessarily something that the universities would do themselves. In terms of the research and cohesion funds, it is terribly important to make sure there is what is called “smart specialisation” by the regional development funds, structural funds and social funds. The new Member States are not new any more but their participation in all the programmes is not as it should be. Especially in the research and development projects, there really needs to be a way of making sure that they can contribute more than they do at present. It is not good for the whole of the EU if there is such a difference between one part and another. That is one of the biggest challenges, to somehow mesh the research and innovation funds and the structural funds. I can see the interest. You can see it from the Erasmus figures. You can see that there is an interest and an enormous benefit for young people from Central and Eastern Europe—and beyond, when I think of the other funds available, because that also includes the additional funds now for the Arab countries and the Eastern Partnership. That is particularly important because otherwise we are not making the best use of the funds that we have. That is from my experience, having lived in Romania for five years, and seeing the enormous amount of talent but the fact that it needs to be integrated. That is the one thing I have not mentioned until now, but I think it is important.

Q124 Earl of Courtown: I see that you started with Erasmus in 1988. Is it all that it is cracked up to be? What is the best thing about it and what has been your biggest disappointment?

Lesley Wilson: I think it is great because it gives young people the opportunity to move, to learn and to have different personal, social experiences as well as a different learning experience. The skills that they develop are skills for life and are absolutely the skills that we need to make our economies perform better as well. They are not just personal skills.

Earl of Courtown: And the disappointment?

Lesley Wilson: The disappointment is probably that the disadvantaged students do not have the opportunity to participate. It is costly. You could say that Erasmus has been successful because it has given a little bit to those that had and allowed all of them to go, but we have not cracked these issues. We need a big benefactor to come and help us.

The Chairman: Ms Wilson, thank you so much. I would like to reiterate what colleagues have already said about the thoroughness and generosity of your responses. It has been a delight to have somebody who is able to speak with knowledge of the UK and the wider EU; often we get things that are quite narrow. So thank you very much indeed. If you have any further thoughts, please feel free to e-mail us but certainly we would like to see your league table of league tables, please. Thank you very much.

Lesley Wilson: Thank you.
Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

1. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

1.1. In this area one of the most significant practical constraints on the EU is that there is little treaty basis for EU action. As a result, most effective action comes from member states governments and stakeholders acting in their own way and only where they are convinced of the national case for collaborating in EU objectives. The Commission’s communication (European Commission, 2011a) recognises many of the limitations of this approach. Commission initiatives tend to be piecemeal and dependent on using powers and funding associated primarily with other policy sectors, such as ERDF and ESF. A more effective EU contribution would depend on a more coherent and integrated policy for HE which can only result from a secure treaty base, probably specifying the Commission’s capacity to make proposals on HE through the ordinary legislative procedure. These could usefully take the 10 objectives from the Berlin 2003 Bologna inter-ministerial conference as their starting point. Such a treaty change however would depend on a variety of sensitive political calculations across the EU as a whole, and it must therefore seem unlikely at this time. It would also have an impact on the Bologna process, one of whose attractions is that it is a voluntary arrangement. Neither EU member states nor non-EU states now participating in Bologna would necessarily welcome it if Bologna agreements became binding in EU law.

1.2. A further major issue is the need for clarity and rigour in strategic direction. The Commission documents re-state the tension at the heart of these reforms between the two main sets of objectives: on the one hand, one aim is to achieve international excellence in research for some universities, and on the other hand, another aim is to raise the standards in teaching and research across the full range of HE institutions; this second aim is directly and positively associated with objectives related to increasing student numbers, raising the quality of the general learning process and responsiveness to labour market concerns about the employment capabilities of significant proportions of the age cohort. Experience of reform in the Bologna process suggests strongly that these two sets of objectives are only compatible with one another with great difficulty. International excellence in research is expensive; even in individual countries it cannot only or even mainly be funded by support from the private sector, or by cross-subsidy from recruitment of increased numbers of non-EU students. Across the wider Europe, the success of one country in achieving international status is at least partly at the expense of others, and may mean sacrificing the raising of standards more generally in the country concerned. The Sorbonne declaration of 1998 from which Bologna derives (based on the vision of the Attali report of 1998) was originally intended as a ‘race to the top’ in research and teaching, to be funded by savings from the reduction in the length of degree programmes. Little is now heard of this in the Bologna process. It has been superseded by greater focus on the second set of objectives, those related to deepening and widening the student experience. The Commission communication implicitly conceded this with the statement ‘too few HE institutions are recognised as world-class in the current,
research-oriented world rankings … and there has been no real improvement over
the past years.’ (p.2)

1.3. Since treaty change in this area is unlikely, and perhaps not even desirable, another
strategic contribution the EU can make would be to clarify its own priorities and make
appropriate funding available in a coherent and consistent manner. From the
Communication, it appears that the choice has been made to prioritise the raising of
standards across the full range of activities and HE institutions – a ‘race to the middle’.
If this is so, it should be applied consistently and imaginatively. There appears to be a
strong constituency in support of this approach, but the rhetoric of ‘world-class’ and
‘excellence’ in the Communication risks confusing the strategic direction of policy at
EU level. As argued above, EU HE in general cannot fund the raising of standards only
by recruiting more non-EU students, who are expected to be recruited by the ‘world-
class’ institutions in the main. The EU could make an important contribution by
pressing EU member states, and perhaps other Bologna members, to commit
appropriate levels of public funding to the aims of raising standards in teaching across
the full range of tertiary education, of raising standards of research in universities and
more generally of implementing the Bologna reforms fully and consistently. This
should be in addition to other sources of funding.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the
European Higher Education Area?

2.1. Bologna is hampered by at least two major structural difficulties at present. These are
related to one another. The first difficulty is the change in the way decisions are made
in Bologna, and the second concerns how they are implemented at national and sub-
national levels. Now in its twelfth year, Bologna appears to have developed some of
the features of a closed and consensual policy community. Its deliberations and its
decisions, often no doubt rather technical, are not widely publicised. Involvement of
the academic, student and business community beyond the existing peak organisations
would help Bologna develop a wider base of support and perhaps give it increased
momentum. This could only be done with the increased support (already
considerable) of the European Commission. The most recent student report on
Bologna referred to the reform agenda as one of ‘diplomatic gestures and dances’
(ESU 2010 p.3), and called for more student involvement. It listed 40 separate
recommendations. These would be a useful starting point for the EU, and a significant
number of them are already within its scope. The report by Education International
(EI 2010 pp.i-ii) referred to the deterioration in working conditions in HE across
Europe since 2005 revealed by its survey. It argued that ‘academics’ involvement in
the reform process has remained weak, notwithstanding involvement at the European
level, leading to a lack of ownership by academics of the Bologna reforms’. The
second problem, more specific but central to the process, is that as the Leuven
communiqué indicated, Bologna scorecards are regarded as unreliable even by
Bologna participants. It would not be difficult to devise more reliable non-
interventionist forms of reporting, and the Commission has significant experience of
how to do this. This would also contribute to the development of reliable league
tables, as discussed below.
Mobility

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

3.1. The underlying problem of diversity in Erasmus can only be resolved by significant changes to language teaching at primary and secondary levels in specific countries, especially but not only in the UK. Beyond that, improvement of a more limited character might follow if professional associations were more committed to harmonising training in their specific sectors, if students were incentivised to travel to learn by an appreciation of the practical career benefits, such as enhanced employability, and especially if there were full recognition of studies abroad. These would all entail proper formalisation of learning agreements and the automaticity of ECTS or an equivalent.

3.2. There is a conflict of aims here also. Erasmus has been presented until now mainly as concerned with the liberal aims of HE such as cross-cultural skills and global and European citizenship. The Commission document refers to these but seems more focussed on Lisbon strategy issues such as employability, EHEA and labour market improvement. These differences have major impacts on funding and on curriculum developments. If the commission is proposing a shift to labour market concerns this should be made explicit and should not be diluted by efforts to maintain the liberal rhetoric.

3.3. In practice, HE institutions seem to see Erasmus as a potential source of funding also, and therefore focus on internal flows rather than external. The loan guarantee is a welcome proposal, but it would mainly benefit students who are already disposed to travel to learn and who may already have participated in Erasmus; furthermore, it is likely that it would attract students predominantly to countries and institutions offering one-year Masters, and it would therefore be opposed by countries committed to the Bologna 3+2 model.

3.4. The potential for mobility of researchers has been much improved in recent years, and I do not see a need for major initiatives beyond those already undertaken. The ERA is significant for STEM subjects but of little impact outside those.

Targets and league table

4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

4.1. The 40% target in Europe 2020 may be intended as a proxy for the strategic choice to prioritise the general raising of standards and of scope of provision, because it clearly cannot be compatible with the ‘race to the top’ strategy that targets resources and effort on a few high profile universities. If it is not directed at this choice, it risks being empty of substance. It also glosses over one of the other important choices, which concerns levels of funding and sources of funding referred to in the first answer above. As an instrument of raising the employability of the European work-force, it is also subject to the usual concerns about the diversities in standards and accreditation processes across Europe.
5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

5.1. The European Commission and some member states are understandably frustrated by the limitations of the current rankings, dominated by research universities with Anglophone profiles, but this tool does not yet convince. First, it is not clear what the impact of the initiative will be, in terms of the challenge to the dominance of the existing rankings. The main audiences for these league tables are government departments, STEM-based multi-nationals and students considering international options for their university studies, especially in East Asia. Arguments for the usefulness of the U-Multirank would be more convincing if there were solid survey evidence that these audiences were likely to use it. The Commission document claims that ‘Evidence shows that the U-multi-rank is feasible and is supported by education stakeholders’ (para.3.1), and cites the staff working document. The working document may provide some limited evidence that the tool is feasible, after further development to address some emerging difficulties, but it does not appear to address the issue of the extent of support among the potential users (Commission working document para 1.1 pp.4-5). Second, the initiative depends on the availability of reliable data covering a wide range of indicators. It therefore depends on rigorous reporting mechanisms which are not yet in place and whose development remains uncertain.

Funding instruments
6. What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?

6.1. As argued above, these lack strategic focus and co-ordination and are insufficient without real commitment of member states to the full package of measures.

International dimension
7. The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

7.1. Though limited in funding and scope, these initiatives have had a demonstrable impact on flows of students and staff beyond the usual sources and routes. There is always concern about the funding limitations, but if further development is agreed other factors may also be relevant. In particular, the current subject base is strongly oriented to STEM subjects, though these are not necessarily the most cost-effective or the most popular with students. Also, the current procedures are complex, time-consuming and not always transparent; this limits the appeal of the programmes to potential beneficiaries and institutions. Finally, the geographical spread is balanced towards a restricted number of states; support for those whose infrastructure is not yet able cope with Tempus procedures may help extend the scope.

References
Professor Paul Furlong, Cardiff University – Written Evidence

Education International (2010), *Enhancing Quality – Academics’ perceptions of the Bologna Process*, Brussels

European Commission (2011a), *Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems*, COM(2011) 567 final

European Commission (2011b), Commission working document on recent developments in European higher education systems, SEC(2011) 1063 final

The European Students Union (2010), *Bologna at the finish line – an account of ten years of European higher education reform*, Brussels

17 November 2011
Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) – Written evidence

1. I am pleased to write to you in response to your invitation for views and evidence about the Commission’s Communication on the above topic. I will focus on those issues of particular relevance or interest to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

2. We welcome the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation and, especially, the focus on the role that higher education can play in helping to achieve this. However, we would wish to note that as education is a member state competence, the EU’s ability to achieve the stated goals in the Communication is relatively limited. Thus one of the key positive roles that the EU can take is to facilitate the sharing of information and best practice between member states.

3. With these points in mind, we believe that it might be useful for greater European consideration of the following:

- wider support for work-based learning, especially that which develops technical skills for new technologies;
- sharing of information and best practice in identifying and mitigating risks to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects or skills relating to STEM and other subjects of national/European strategic importance; and
- funding for ‘Knowledge Alliances’ which bring together industry/HE to design and develop new courses, at both member state and EU level.

4. It will also be worth considering the key role of higher education in making Europe an attractive place to do research and development. Universities that have a track record of performing well in terms of their research and knowledge exchange can provide crucial access to excellent researchers and facilities. In this context, excellence should continue to be the key criterion for allocating European funding in order to maximise HE’s contribution to European economic and social development.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area

5. The Bologna Process’ intergovernmental approach has proved to be successful, with significant progress across the signatory countries on engagement with various action lines. This concerted action has had the positive affect of achieving greater transparency and comparability in higher education and thus increasing the possibilities for and likelihood of greater student mobility across the European continent. The EU’s education contribution in the areas of financing mobility programmes, facilitating information and sharing good practice is important. In particular, the Erasmus Mundus programme is a strong example of EU facilitation for European HE cooperation. However, for continuing, closer European cooperation in higher education, it is essential that member states lead policy development themselves, not least because the Bologna Process involves non-EU members.
6. It is key that the EU does not seek to act outside its legal competence by allowing the Bologna decision-making process to lead policy deliberations. With this in mind, we think it important, for example, to have further information and debate about the purpose of the proposed ‘European Tertiary Education Register’ before its further development.

Mobility

7. We are supportive of efforts to boost mobility of students and researchers and to encourage a more diverse body of students to participate in the Erasmus programme. We believe that this might be developed by further investments in the European Framework for Research Careers.

8. With regards to any new schemes, we would support the principle of greater student and researcher mobility, providing that they add value to existing programmes and do not affect member state autonomy.

9. Furthermore, although this inquiry does not seek to consider domestic funding issues, it is worth noting that the significant changes being made to England’s funding system may have an impact on mobility.

Targets and league tables

10. The EU’s target that 40% of young people should successfully complete HE or equivalent studies by 2020 is interesting. The government is generally reluctant to set targets in areas similar to this. Additionally, we would welcome the inclusion of reference to continued progress being needed to ensure that a diverse range of students from all backgrounds is reflected in the student population, noting the contribution this makes to a successful student experience, as well as social mobility crucial to securing long term economic growth and an engaged society.

11. With regard to the proposed introduction of a European universities league table, it is not clear what value there would be in the introduction of the ‘U-Multirank’ tool as, to some extent, it would include some of the same information used by existing ranking systems. We would be concerned about spending significant time and money on this unless it has a clear purpose. We acknowledge that significant effort has been made in the development of U-Multirank to overcome some of the limitations of traditional league tables. However, we would advise caution in providing any form of official sanction to any one form of ranking tool given that universal ranking systems have a history of lacking real comparability and robustness. The OECD’s project regarding the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) has long debated the ability to make genuine comparisons across international HE. Accordingly, we would query the introduction of ‘U-Multirank’ if it is simply used to rank universities, rather than increasing transparency and expanding knowledge of the diversity of higher education institutions and systems in Europe.

International dimension

We welcome further internationalisation of European higher education and believe that this could be delivered in part through the extension of the Erasmus Mundus programme and the projects and partnerships that it supports. There are wide-ranging benefits of continuing and extending the programme, from increased student mobility and study
opportunities to making students more attractive to potential employers. Additionally, we think the change over recent years to develop curricula to have a more international aspect is to be welcomed.

21 November 2011
million+ is a university think-tank which provides evidence and analysis on policy and funding regimes that impact on universities, students and the services that universities and other higher education institutions provide for business, the NHS, education and the not-for-profit sectors. million+ welcome the opportunity to respond to the European Union’s Committee’s call for evidence on the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe and the EU’s Contribution.

The European Union makes a vital and valuable contribution to the success of UK higher education. We support the progress of the Bologna Process, now in its 12th year, which has stimulated far-reaching reforms through its useful focus on the synergy between education, research and innovation and its work on learning cycles, mobility, recognition and internationalisation.

To fully support higher education’s contribution to job creation, growth and innovation, it is important that EU initiatives and interventions:

- recognise the currently impressive contribution of Higher Education in member states;
- focus on maintaining and enhancing the entrepreneurialism of higher education’s contribution to economic prosperity and development;
- support the development of an economic context in which that contribution is maximized.

The remainder of this submission discusses these issues in more detail.

Innovation

It is encouraging that the Horizon 2020 framework recognises in its third objective the importance of the multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary work in which modern UK universities excel. Future competitiveness will depend on the emergence of new ideas, processes and technologies from all disciplines that support high value added industries. This requires both a shift towards high-value added roles across the economic spectrum and the development of new ways of measuring innovation. The NESTA research report *The Innovation Gap* (2006) notes that:

“…Traditional indicators ignore major sectors of the UK economy. With innovation seen as fundamental to developed economies in an increasingly interconnected world, a paradox is apparent in the continued economic expansion of the UK despite its supposed under-performance. The resolution of this paradox lies in the way in which innovation has typically been measured. Traditional indicators have captured only a limited amount of the innovation and innovative potential that exists in the UK”

Universities that affiliate to million+ have been particularly effective in recognising that innovation is a permeating characteristic of a knowledge-based economy and not a feature...
of particular sectors within it. It is encouraging to see that the Horizon 2020 framework includes innovation service and social innovation alongside research and technological development and it is important recognition of the innovation as permeating feature of all economic sectors is sustained. More accurate measures of innovation and innovative capacity than patent numbers, percentages of researchers in the labour force, and the stimulation of ‘research jobs’ traditionally defined, must be used consistently in the formulation of EU policy if the full requirement for innovation is to be recognized and supported.

The EU must also recognize the changing structures and economics of sectors. The Green Paper *Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries*\(^\text{67}\) defines cultural industries as producers of cultural artefacts that may be without functional purposes, and which are used by creative industries, whose outputs are mainly functional. These definitions no longer represent the dynamics of creative industries and the enormous contribution of the creative industries to the competitiveness and profile of the EU may be undermined by policies founded on it. Similarly, the economics of current creative industries, including the changing roles and values of new forms IP, must be recognized in any policy on innovation.

Maintaining a focus on the development of entrepreneurial, creative and innovation skills within all learning cycles is important, likewise recognizing that the doctoral cycle is not the only, or even the most substantial, contribution of universities to developing a knowledge-based society.

**Participation in Higher Education**

A knowledge-based economy requires enquiry and creativity to be available and supported across all areas and levels of contribution. This, in turn, necessitates extensive financial and human capital over the long-term, including attracting the best and brightest to join the next generation of university academics. There is massive investment in higher education internationally and the scale of global competition is such that participation targets that support a diverse and thriving economy, high value-added knowledge-work and global social and cultural standing must be maintained and extended.

It is vital that EU support for excellence mobilizes fully and inclusively the talents of the populations of member states. A high quality mass higher education is expensive, but the attainment of high-levels of graduate knowledge and skills is a pre-requisite of a knowledge economy. To this extent it is also vital that rewards and recognition of excellence in teaching does not lag behind that of excellence in research and is not presented as an alternative to it. The competence and motivation of teachers who are researchers, rather than of teachers and researchers, must be nurtured if the staff most capable of supporting new generations of graduate employees are to be encouraged to continue with the challenge of maintaining what is still primarily identifiable as a dual-track career.

\(^{67}\) COM(2010) 183
Graduate Skills and Employment

The Higher Education (HE) ‘economy’ across the EU and within each member state is a diverse system developing graduates with diverse skills that reflect differing regional contexts and institutional priorities.

Many UK universities have been responsive to local, national and international agendas in defining their offerings. Universities work closely with business and other organisations that employ their graduates, to provide curricula that support the ambitions of those organisations and of the graduates they supply to them, and represent a wide range of institutional profiles and offerings that cannot and should not be conflated to a single mission-group profile. It is vital that this entrepreneurial approach to defining and developing high-level knowledge and skills in curricula that reflect the specific priorities of the graduate markets that each institution supplies is not restricted by a drive towards a system-view of higher education. A more managed approach would not allow HEIs to match their curricula to patterns of demand for particular specialisms and skills and should therefore be avoided. A system of regional hubs of excellence and specialization appropriate to context would enable regional economies to thrive.

The articulation of graduate knowledge and skills in terms of contribution to subsequent employment is an important area of work for HEIs. For instance the University of Bedfordshire has developed Graduate Impact Statements that express student achievement in specific subjects in terms that identify how graduates will be able to contribute to the operation and development of the organisation that they join. This provides a stimulus for employers to consider not only the immediate fit to requirements but also a graduate’s potential to contribute to organisational development. If employers are to be encouraged to take a longer-term view of their recruitment, development and deployment of graduate knowledge and skills then these types of initiatives are important.

Improving employer uptake of, and support for, Masters-level continuous development for graduate employees is an area to which the EU could add value. The EU should not press for uniformity in the second cycle beyond the requirements of its member states’ diverse economic contexts, but should recognise and promote continuous professional development and lifelong learning more broadly at Masters-level by supporting and recognising the transfer and accumulation of credit on a portfolio basis and as a priority of more value to EU economic growth and innovation than overarching uniformity of qualification structures and awards.

The focus on increasing the absorption of skills and knowledge must be continuous. A broad range of policies and structural shifts at firm and at economy level will be required to create the full set of conditions for high performance workplaces that are capable of absorbing graduate skills, and this is an area in which EU policy must support the exploitation of higher education’s value to economic development.

SMEs

More and more graduates are going to work in, or to set up, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMESs) and most will have portfolio careers that include SMEs. SMEs are vital

68 SEC (2011) 1063, section 2.4
to innovation so supporting the links between higher education and SME, and realising the full potential of higher education to contribute to SME innovation and organisational development, is essential.

It is not always the case that SME growth is necessary or likely. With creative sectors, entrepreneurial and creative drivers combine to create businesses that contribute best to systematic innovation through being encouraged to continue to innovate at an organisational scale that facilitates that innovation, rather through incentives that drive unnecessarily towards a particular size that represents a contribution to economic growth by only the crudest measures.

**Research Skills**

In its support for third cycle development, it is important that EU policy recognises that research skills must be defined broadly, to include the capability to innovate in policy, in design and in practice, and to work in ways that avoid over-rigid adherence to a pipeline, lab-to-line model of research and innovation. Policy should recognise fully the diversity of sources and outputs of innovation at an advanced level, and the varied contexts in which such advanced level studies may be undertaken, including the workplace itself. In this context, support for initiatives such as the development and calibration of professional and practice-based doctorates, and the dual supervision of research between HEIs and employers will be an important aspect of future policy. The ‘European Industrial Doctorate’ represents a welcome contribution to this. The importance of this level of innovation to SMEs must also be recognised, and priority given to the support of third-cycle participation in sectors such as the creative industries to which SMEs are fundamentally important.

**U-Multirank**

million+ support the focus on transparent information to both applicants and to employers, and in particular to applicants from underrepresented and non-traditional groups. However, it is far from clear that current league tables provide this, much less that a further addition to the ranks in the form of the U-Multirank tool will improve the transparency of useful information. League tables support the continuation of a hierarchy of academic esteem that is not appropriate to an inclusive and excellent higher education provision across Europe. They also have a distorting effect on the nature of universities as learning institutions, ignoring the fact that a world class research reputation is at variance with the nature of universities committed to the education of the young at a level of integrative excellence that selective and fragmented rankings cannot recognise.

The mobility of expertise need further support across HE sectors that have differing resource patterns and working conditions, in a context in which the requirement for institutional competitiveness (including league-table positions and performance related funding mechanisms) may prioritise competition over collaboration. It is essential that the EU decide whether it is seeking as a priority to have a number of HE institutions identified as world class on the basis of global comparisons, or whether it is seeking to engage its higher education institutions in collaborative developments that will stimulate economic growth and innovation and produce a highly skilled workforce so that the EU economies are identified as world class. The two are far from complementary.
Mobility

Student and researcher mobility is vital, and much has been achieved through the various EU programmes. Much progress has been made in securing credit recognition across first-cycle programmes and the mobility of learners across institutions and member states although it is possible that the new fees and funding regime in England may impact on the participation of students at English universities from 2012/13 onwards.

A more cautious approach to the alignment of Masters-level provision is required. Since graduates will increasingly have portfolio careers in which periodic development of advanced knowledge and skills will be required, Masters-level provision will need to be flexibly responsive to the requirements of individuals and organisations. Masters-level provision is increasingly and appropriately demand-led, and modern universities are supporting effectively the requirements of employers for specific developmental interventions, including short-courses, work-based learning and customised provision. Such provision is, appropriately, less amenable to uniform structures and patterns than is provision within the first cycle. This variability is critical to the role of higher education in up-skilling the workforce and in maintaining the leading-edge practice of the graduate employees on whom organisations rely for their development, and should be maintained.

For some students, the financial, career and family implications of mobility remain a challenge and a Masters Degree Mobility Scheme would be a welcome boost to the diversity of the student population benefitting from a cross-member-state experience. However, providing an EU-wide system for supplying and/or guaranteeing loans will be challenging technically and will need to be calibrated against commercial rates if it is to extend real opportunity to a diverse student population.

Researcher mobility is also an important goal, but a more fundamental objective has to be that of ensuring that the EU generates researchers in the numbers required to support a knowledge economy, so that HE research is not vulnerable to dependence on international researchers and a consequent potential loss of research expertise and innovation. The mobility of established expertise to generate and support early researcher groups may be more practical and more catalytic than the mobility of individual early researchers, and the deployment of technology may be vital.

5 December 2011
million+, The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)

Transcript to be found under Russell Group
Supplementary written evidence

About million+

1. million+ is a university think-tank which provides evidence and analysis on policy and funding regimes that impact on universities, students and the services that universities and other higher education institutions provide for business, the NHS, education and the not-for-profit sectors.

2. Following the oral evidence given by Professor Les Ebdon, Chair of million+ to the House of Lords EU Committee on Thursday 19th January 2012, million+ were asked to submit supplementary evidence on the impact of the Government’s higher education reforms on the subject choices of university applicants.

3. On 30th January 2012 UCAS released statistics covering applications up to the equal consideration deadline of 15th January 2012. UCAS deals solely with applications for full-time undergraduate courses so please note that these statistics refer to applications to full-time undergraduate degrees, foundation degrees and other HE qualifications only.

UCAS Application Trends 2012

4. Overall applications via UCAS for full time courses fell by 7.4% year on year. The greatest reductions were amongst men (-8.5%), mature applicants over the age of 21 (-11.0%), EU applicants (-11.2%) and amongst English applicants (-9.9%). Applications from international students increased by 13.7% but this headline increase should be treated with caution as many international students do not apply via the UCAS route.

5. There are no clear application trends in terms of region or institutional pricing strategy. Subject related trends for all universities and colleges across the United Kingdom are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: UCAS Applications by JACS3 Subject Group to 15th January

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JACS3 Subject Group</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Diff (+/-)</th>
<th>Diff (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A Medicine &amp; Dentistry</td>
<td>94,374</td>
<td>97,409</td>
<td>-3,035</td>
<td>-3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B Subjects allied to Medicine</td>
<td>329,733</td>
<td>323,059</td>
<td>6,674</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C Biological Sciences</td>
<td>201,653</td>
<td>210,832</td>
<td>-9,179</td>
<td>-4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group D Vet Sci, Agr &amp; related</td>
<td>24,747</td>
<td>25,347</td>
<td>-600</td>
<td>-2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group F Physical Sciences</td>
<td>93,587</td>
<td>94,133</td>
<td>-546</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group G Mathematical &amp; Comp Sci</td>
<td>42,148</td>
<td>43,376</td>
<td>-1,228</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group H Engineering</td>
<td>117,221</td>
<td>118,823</td>
<td>-1,602</td>
<td>-1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group I Computer Sciences</td>
<td>76,855</td>
<td>82,096</td>
<td>-5,241</td>
<td>-6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group J Technologies</td>
<td>8,340</td>
<td>10,146</td>
<td>-1,806</td>
<td>-17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group K Architecture, Build &amp; Plan</td>
<td>35,825</td>
<td>42,810</td>
<td>-6,985</td>
<td>-16.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69 This category includes Higher National Diplomas, Higher National Certificates, Certificates of H.E and Diplomas of H.E.
In terms of subject choice, Table 1 shows that applications for STEM subjects have fallen by just 2.2% compared to 10.1% for arts, humanities, languages and social sciences and an 11.7% fall in applications for combined degree courses. The relative strength of STEM subject applications, particularly in medicine and dentistry, subjects allied to medicine, biological sciences, veterinary science, physical sciences, mathematics and engineering, indicates that the long-term, above average rate of increase in STEM applications (see Table 2) continues. However this trend is not universal amongst STEM subjects as applications for technologies and architecture related subjects have fallen by more than 16%.

Applications for the majority of arts, humanities languages and social science subjects have fallen at a greater than average rate. The greatest decreases have been in European (-11.2%) and other foreign languages (-21.5%) which has significant long-term implications for UK competitiveness, and creative arts and design (-16.3%) and mass communications (-14.6%) have also seen substantial falls. Applications for law, businesses studies and education have all fallen but by a below average rate.

The reduction in applications for education (-6.9%) and social studies (-12.1%), a subject band that includes social work, is noteworthy and perhaps concerning, given the ongoing need for teacher training and social work recruits. It is not possible to disaggregate subject choices by age, gender, nationality or institution but education and social work tend to attract a high proportion of mature applicants so it is likely that the greater decline in mature applications (-11.0% compared to -6.5% amongst 17 – 20 year olds) has had an impact.

### Table 1: Application figures for 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Applications</th>
<th>Applications</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L Social Studies</td>
<td>190,115</td>
<td>216,272</td>
<td>-26,157</td>
<td>-12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Law</td>
<td>103,613</td>
<td>107,726</td>
<td>-4,113</td>
<td>-3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Business &amp; Admin studies</td>
<td>260,879</td>
<td>276,637</td>
<td>-15,758</td>
<td>-5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Mass Comms and Documentation</td>
<td>47,575</td>
<td>55,723</td>
<td>-8,148</td>
<td>-14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q Linguistics, Classics &amp; related</td>
<td>62,266</td>
<td>67,970</td>
<td>-5,704</td>
<td>-8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R European Langs, Lit &amp; related</td>
<td>21,675</td>
<td>24,406</td>
<td>-2,731</td>
<td>-11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Non-European Langs and related</td>
<td>6,165</td>
<td>7,852</td>
<td>-1,687</td>
<td>-21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Hist &amp; Philosophical studies</td>
<td>73,967</td>
<td>79,786</td>
<td>-5,819</td>
<td>-7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W Creative Arts &amp; Design</td>
<td>227,729</td>
<td>271,931</td>
<td>-44,202</td>
<td>-16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Education</td>
<td>80,578</td>
<td>86,564</td>
<td>-5,986</td>
<td>-6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Languages &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>1,074,562</td>
<td>1,194,867</td>
<td>-120,305</td>
<td>-10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined arts</td>
<td>55,042</td>
<td>65,640</td>
<td>-10,598</td>
<td>-16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined sciences</td>
<td>33,898</td>
<td>37,315</td>
<td>-3,417</td>
<td>-9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined social sciences</td>
<td>26,581</td>
<td>30,151</td>
<td>-3,570</td>
<td>-11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined sciences &amp; social sciences / arts</td>
<td>78,671</td>
<td>95,615</td>
<td>-16,944</td>
<td>-17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined social sciences with arts</td>
<td>51,007</td>
<td>59,373</td>
<td>-8,366</td>
<td>-14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined General, other combined &amp; unknown</td>
<td>24,321</td>
<td>27,881</td>
<td>-3,560</td>
<td>-12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>269,520</td>
<td>305,085</td>
<td>-35,565</td>
<td>-11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2,368,565</td>
<td>2,547,983</td>
<td>-179,418</td>
<td>-7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Applications for combined subjects have all fallen significantly in line with the long-term trend away from combined subjects seen in Table 2.

### Table 2: UCAS Applications Compared: 2006 – 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject group (JACS)</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>% Total</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>% Total</th>
<th>PP Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Medicine and dentistry</td>
<td>21,590</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>25,068</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Subjects allied to medicine</td>
<td>42,195</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>95,560</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Biological sciences</td>
<td>34,282</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>48,165</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Veterinary sciences, agriculture &amp; related</td>
<td>4,523</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>7,982</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Physical sciences</td>
<td>14,499</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>20,672</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Mathematical and computer sciences</td>
<td>24,722</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>33,407</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Engineering</td>
<td>21,138</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>31,202</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Technologies</td>
<td>1,630</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2,422</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Architecture, building and planning</td>
<td>9,202</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>11,283</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEM</strong></td>
<td><strong>175,787</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>277,772</strong></td>
<td><strong>39.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J Social Studies</td>
<td>36,627</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>55,396</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Law</td>
<td>20,644</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>27,074</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L Business and administrative studies</td>
<td>52,177</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>75,756</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Mass communications and documentation</td>
<td>9,303</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>13,580</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Linguistics, Classics and related studies</td>
<td>12,583</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>15,046</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O European languages, literature and related studies</td>
<td>4,581</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5,309</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Non-European languages &amp; related</td>
<td>1,205</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1,446</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q Historical and philosophical studies</td>
<td>14,652</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>17,814</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Creative arts and design</td>
<td>55,970</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>75,977</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Education</td>
<td>17,078</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>23,631</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts, Languages &amp; Social Sciences</strong></td>
<td><strong>225,360</strong></td>
<td><strong>44.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>311,029</strong></td>
<td><strong>44.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>-0.1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined sciences</td>
<td>2,262</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3,486</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined social sciences</td>
<td>2,501</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3,498</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined arts</td>
<td>8,996</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>10,517</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences combined with social sciences or arts</td>
<td>10,047</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>13,546</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences combined with arts</td>
<td>7,008</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>8,598</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General, other combined and unknown</td>
<td>1,546</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1,903</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preferred subject group</td>
<td>74,803</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>71,823</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Combined</strong></td>
<td><strong>104,901</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>109,885</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>-5.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>506,304</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>700,161</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

10. These figures are not the end of the story. Applications stay open until the end of June and there are further opportunities in clearing. One in four students are over 21 when they enter university and they often apply later and not through UCAS.

11. million+ is also concerned by the fall in mature student applications. The overwhelming majority (90%) of current mature students are studying for a degree for the first time and there is a risk that people who missed out on university the first time around have been deterred from applying under the new fees system. The Government has to date targeted its university campaign on school leavers and million+ has urged Ministers to refocus the campaign on prospective mature students.

12. Media narrative around a ‘squeezed middle’ of 18 year old applicants should also be treated with caution as it is based on ward level POLAR2 data which provides a relatively crude measure of advantage and disadvantage. The socio-economic profile for 2012-13 entrants will only be known when the analysis of enrolments is published by HESA in early 2013.

13. The UCAS statistics at 15th January indicate that the study of modern languages do not appear to have been incentivised by the new fees regime in England. Notwithstanding this, as Professor Ebdon pointed out in his oral evidence to the Committee, there is more that the Government could do to support Erasmus study by confirming the continued funding of fee waivers and ensuring that they are available on a more flexible basis and provide fee waivers for shorter periods of study which are less than a full academic year.

February 2012
Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) and Businet – Written evidence

Summary

Our more detailed response sets out how the EU’s 2020 aims to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation can be aided by high-quality college-based HE provision. We share the Commission’s overall aims whilst noting that it has neither power nor intention to intervene in HE delivery within Member states. The following support initiatives for European providers of higher education might be considered. At operational level:

1. Good practice conferences should be promoted and managed through the EU to showcase innovative educational ideas covering curriculum design, partnership working, staff and student mobility, internationalisation at home, project activity, and research.

2. EU-wide annual dissemination of market intelligence data drawn from across all sectors which accurately predicts where the higher level skills shortages and thus opportunities for graduate employment will be located regionally, accompanied by a broad description of which knowledge and skills sets will be needed.

Strategically, we suggest that:

1. A holistic approach to HE and higher-level skills is needed, both in England and in Europe. This must reflect the reality of a work-based, ageing European population who may wish to pursue HE otherwise and elsewhere than through a traditional full time course at a university.

2. A universal Europe-wide Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance service will benefit adult entrants to HE. Within England, the detailed face-to-face discussions appreciated by adults who are in work but who are contemplating HE are not available to them - this service is limited to those who are unemployed.

3. Better, targeted, information about HE opportunities for those already in work.

4. More measurers to promote mobility of students and skilled labour across the EU.

5. The 40% target for participation in higher education across the EU by 2020 is a crude aspiration. A more focused approach, directed towards encouraging participation in programmes where graduates would be entering employment sectors known to be/anticipated to be areas of skill shortage by 2020 would be of greater value to students and European HEIs in their longer term planning.

6. National measures to facilitate and support dialogue between employers and HEIs. These are currently bottom-up rather than top-down.

7. A Quality kite mark initiative from the EU is suggested. This would drive forward a shared EU-wide concept of quality.

1. Introduction

1.1 This response is produced on behalf of the Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) and Businet. Further details of both groups are given in Note 1 to this response.
1.2 The Mixed Economy Group represents those English Further Education colleges (FECs) which have a significant, established, strategic and developmental role in the provision of Higher Education (HE). Currently, 39 colleges belong to the group, all of which have a minimum of 500 HE FTE; half have more than 1,000 HE FTE. Member colleges focus on the complementary aims of widening participation amongst groups and individuals currently under-represented in Higher Education and working with employers to ensure that higher level skills are developed and recognised in the workplace.

1.3 The Businet network is currently represented in 21 European countries with a membership of nearly 100 institutions. Members are drawn from across the full range of higher education providers, a number of which are private institutions. All members share a strong vocational orientation and enjoy established robust relationships with the employers with whom they engage. The employer base incorporates both public and private sector enterprises and in the case of the private sector covers a broad spectrum from small companies to multinationals. The current General Manager and immediate past President of Businet are both based in New College Durham, a MEG member college.

1.4 What follows are our combined views on the lessons that can be learned from the English experience of HE in FE at a time of great change and the European perception of that experience as seen through the eyes of our Businet partners. We know that Governments across the UK and Europe are increasingly concerned to see positive outcomes from their investment in higher education. Equally, students are increasingly aware that a first degree in itself is no guarantee of employment. Economic growth in any country in times of a world recession is difficult, but it will be led by the application of higher-level skills to current technical barriers. A credible, modern system for the provision of HE is thus of interest to policy-makers, providers of higher education, students and employers in all nations.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Many of the issues and solutions raised in the EU Commission’s communication\(^{70}\) have direct parallels in the current situation facing HE in England. There is a shared concern to increase the percentage of the population with a degree-level qualification and to do so in a setting of an ageing population. There is a shared need to do this at minimal cost to the public purse and to deliver HE in a wider variety of forms and between a wider variety of institutions than has previously been the case. We have common cause in seeking to widen participation in HE and promote greater social mobility. Note 2 sets out the distinctive role of the English FE college in delivering HE and we consider this relevant to the European Commission’s proposal.

2.2 Overall, our purpose in this response is to stress the need for a holistic approach to the modernisation of HE. A new, EU-wide definition of HE is urgently needed, which must cover higher-level skills and professional training as well as the more traditional academic understanding of the term. Under this new definition, the modernisation

\(^{70}\) Supporting Growth and Jobs: An agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education systems. September 2011
process must link operational matters as well as policy principles. The view of the MEG membership is that an artificial distinction is currently drawn in England between policies for Skills and policies for HE. Until a holistic approach is adopted to policy development across both sectors, it will always be difficult to address the needs of those who wish to pursue higher-level skills, whether from the work-place or from school. We also share the Commission’s concern to ensure that transition and progression between FE/HE/Skills is made more streamlined and that any artificial barriers are removed.

2.3 We agree with the Commission that there is a need for a more diverse HE landscape which can respond to the needs of learners with differing aspirations and expectations. We believe it is essential that the systems and structures for the design and delivery of HE are made more open and accessible and not simply derived from the traditional model based on three year full time honours provision. As FE colleges, MEG members enrol students from their local communities who might not otherwise be able or willing to study. They provide higher level skills qualifications in a range of vocational disciplines to support local employers. Colleges also offer value for money by focusing on teaching and learning, with smaller class sizes and longer student contact hours. Colleges also understand the needs of students for support in their learning and offer a real alternative to a “traditional” HE experience. Part time and mature students feature strongly in the college offer.

2.4 In terms of promoting student progression to HE, colleges play a major role in the social mobility agenda shared by all political parties. Some English colleges have progression rates of 33% for students moving from the college’s own Level 3 provision to college-based HE. Given that the majority of these students do not come from families with a tradition of university education, this is a major contribution to local social and economic development.

2.5 Many European countries are now reviewing their HE funding and finance arrangements. MEG has concerns that the new fees regime in England could act as a disincentive to students drawn from backgrounds historically underrepresented in HE. Although the impact of new Access Agreements and National Scholarship Funds cannot yet be judged, there are concerns that the inevitable bureaucracy which surrounds all such schemes will act as a further disincentive for such students.

2.6 It is also uncertain as to how employers will be able to pay the fees of their employees without incurring a penalty for early repayment. Such a penalty would be perverse, given the drive to encourage employers to assume financial responsibility for their employees’ training. A change in mind-set is needed by employers: many simply refuse to pay for any training at any level. There is a need to reinstate a sense of employer responsibility for the development of employees, on the basis that this will be repaid in terms of both staff loyalty and higher company profit margins.

3. Specific Issues

3.1 Teaching and Learning

FECs teach year round and outside of normal working hours. Despite their varied backgrounds, staff have a shared commitment to teaching and learning, which is
viewed as the prime activity of all college staff at both FE and HE level. It is a condition of service that all staff employed in an FE college possess or are in the process of gaining, a teaching qualification. This requirement extends to those who teach HE.

3.1.1 The focus is on recruiting staff with current and credible skills rather than using a large component of the college budget to fund staff to undertake academic research. College teaching staff are recruited primarily as teachers. Discussions with the NUS have demonstrated that HE in FE students value teaching skills. Good teaching has much in common across all sectors and should be encouraged and developed. Teaching and learning is the core purpose of most HE in FE and not Research, as in many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

3.1.2 HE in FE staff do not always enter teaching directly from an academic background. Most have relevant industrial experience, giving them immediate credibility with employers working within the same sector. They are able to contextualise the more academic learning undertaken by students, helping them to see the point of theoretical components in largely vocational courses. Recent BIS and HEFCE consultation documents acknowledge the “dual professional” status of HE teaching staff. This is a distinctive feature of HE in FE and one which could be built upon in order to create a cohesive programme offer which retained credibility with employers.

3.1.3 An English HE in FE professional is emerging, who is at the cutting edge of his/her profession and has expectations in terms of CPD but wishes to teach rather than focus on traditional academic research.

3.1.4 Like some HEIs, FECs also work closely with Chartered Institutes and other professional bodies, thereby ensuring that course content is always up-to-date and acting as a bridge between employees and relevant bodies in terms of CPD. Impact is enhanced by the industry-active status of many PT FE staff.

3.2 Widening Participation

3.2.1 In certain institutions the higher skills offer clearly helps to fill regional skills gaps that HEIs are unable or unwilling to address. The currency of the HE in FE offer in the form of Foundation degrees is strong: it is subject to annual review and regular updates, ensuring that it meets the needs of a changing job market.

3.2.2 In the North East of England and in the South West, it is the FE sector which is addressing HE cold spots, through the provision of a range of vocational courses which can be pursued on a full time, part-time or distance learning basis.

3.2.3 MEG understands the Europe-wide pressures on public funding. However, some of the implications of the new funding approach carry significant risk that students from widening participation backgrounds will be more reluctant to participate.

3.2.4 The level and quality of support for non-traditional HE learners is much more intensive and specialised than that found in conventional HEIs. The support structures continue through from FE and can remain in place for the duration of
Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) and Businet – Written evidence

...each student’s higher-level study. The emphasis on retention and achievement is much more pronounced than in HEIs.

3.2.5 With regards to learner progression into employment or up skilling, FECs and the students who choose to study there place a distinct emphasis on jobs and employability for graduates, usually aligned to local job markets. Promotion and career progression are regarded as important for those already in work but studying part-time.

3.3 Employer Engagement

3.3.1 FE Colleges work with employers: this is part of their identity and comes from a long tradition dating back in many cases to the early years of the last century or earlier. For much of their history they have worked with part-time as well as full time adults, and are aware of the particular needs of those who are learning whilst earning.

3.3.2 Crucial to this is the degree of confidence that employers have in their local colleges. This is hard-won, and reflects a heavy investment in time by business support staff, tutors and assessors, who all nurture the HE/employer relationship. The proven ability of FECs to re-tool to meet new demands rapidly and to a high standard maintains this crucial factor.

3.3.3 Foundation degrees (Fds) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are large components of the HE in delivered in English FE colleges. Fds must involve employers in the design of the qualification and employers sit on the Programme Boards convened to monitor Fds and HNs. As such, they offer a valuable source of information for college staff and can help to ensure that programme content is current and relevant.

3.3.4 Delivering employability is not the sole responsibility of colleges and universities. There is also a need for employers to take more interest in the curricula offered by local HE providers. It is easy to complain about graduate employability - but past and current research suggests that relatively few employers take a proactive role in this process.71

3.3.5 MEG colleges work with employers and validating universities to offer Fds. Based on the experience of many colleges, there is a tension between the employers’ needs for higher level skills and the universities’ requirement for a high level of academic content in a skills-based qualification. Methods of assessment are also a source of tension, as those who possess vocational qualifications are unlikely to have the essay-writing skills expected in traditional written assessment.

3.3.6 Finally, within England apprenticeship numbers are set to increase significantly. A key role for colleges will come in ensuring that routes exist to higher level technical qualifications for the young people and adults who are recruited to this scheme. It is unlikely that HEIs will have the staff expertise to rise to this challenge, particularly in areas where there is not a tradition of higher-level qualifications.

3.4 **Student Mobility**

3.4.1 We consider that student and staff mobility can be strengthened through the operation of effective networks. As a network organisation Businet is aware of the volume of mobility movements which have been generated over many years by its member organisations coming together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence.

3.4.2 Businet members confirm that the volume of mobility activity they engage in has been enhanced significantly by their membership of the network. Experience suggests that the most effective promotion of Erasmus opportunities, for example, is provided by students who have participated. Erasmus ambassadors drawn from the UK HE community who are engaged to present their experiences to prospective Erasmus students are likely to have the greatest impact in raising the mobility figures for UK students studying in other members states. Crucially, the extensive opportunities for UK students to study at institutions in other members states where the language of tuition is English are perhaps not as well-known as they should be.

3.4.3 Linked to this, mobility of labour to fill higher-level skills shortages can also be encouraged through more and better course transfer arrangements between two or more EU HE institutions. Individual Businet members report active recruitment of skilled English-speaking HE graduates to fill vacancies in their home countries - but the means of circulating such vacancy information is haphazard.

3.5 **Value for Money**

3.5.1 Colleges have a lower cost base. All of their resources are devoted to teaching and student support. College staff are teachers, not researchers, and they develop their skills accordingly. College resources are directed towards the success of their students, without the distraction of primary research or the need to publish papers. Because of the greater number of hours taught by staff, the flexible approaches taken to staffing by colleges and lower salary and facility costs, college-delivered HE provision offers better value for money for all concerned.

3.6 **Opportunities to Promote Alternative Progression Routes into Higher Education**

3.6.1 Research funded by fdf and MEG\(^\text{72}\) revealed that Work-Based Learning and HE teams can work in silos within the same college. By enhancing staff CPD, building HE modules into existing Apprenticeship programmes and ensuring that Fds /HNs are discussed at employer programme boards it is possible to cover gaps in the knowledge of all parties.

3.6.2 Knowledge about Higher Level Apprenticeships, in particular, is uneven, with many school and FE college advisers still not having a secure grasp of the options available. Employers are still unaware of the opportunities in their sector, suggesting that Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies could play a greater role in clarifying...

---

\(^{72}\) Apprenticeship Progression: interim report on action research. (fdf/MEG 2010)
and promoting this route to HE. More data is needed, which should be more readily accessible to adults, students, staff and employers.

3.6.7 The development of more flexible routes between FE and HE, and an analysis of the benefits of two-year “Accelerated courses” of HE will be helpful in opening up HE to adult students.

3.7 Access to Information about HE

3.7.1 We support the Commission’s wish to improve the current arrangements. Taking the example of the current NSS and proposed KIS criteria within England, we note that many of these benchmarks are not easily applied to HE delivered in FECs or, more importantly, may not be of interest to the students who propose to pursue their HE in this environment. This generally-older group of students are less interested in the more social aspects of HEI provision, for example, but value a high level of teaching hours and evidence that staff have a teaching qualification. For students intending to pursue a vocational qualification, staff currency in their profession is an important selection criterion but one that is rarely easy to establish.

3.8 Quality Issues

3.8.1 The goals of Bologna can only ultimately be realised when the language of European HE and the quality systems that support and regulate HE across the Member states, are sufficiently closely aligned that the remaining barriers are eliminated.

3.8.2 We consider that in terms of quality systems the work of the English Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) provides a model which could be rolled out across the EU. We recognise the many barriers that may restrict such an approach, but nevertheless believe that the UK’s contribution to quality assurance and enhancement offers an approach which provides a route towards closer integration between HEIs in the Member states.

3.8.3 If such difficulties can be overcome, we consider that the QAA approach to the guardianship of quality has many merits. We propose a Kite Marking initiative which draws heavily on the English experience of quality assurance.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Against this background, MEG and Businet offer the following advice to the EU Commission. At operational level:

4.1.1 Sharing of good practice has been in our (MEG and Businet) experience one of the most powerful tools in driving forward positive change. Good practice conferences could usefully be promoted and managed through the EU to showcase innovative educational ideas covering curriculum design, partnership working, staff and student mobility, internationalisation at home, project activity, and research.

4.1.2 EU-wide annual dissemination of market intelligence data drawn from across all sectors which accurately predicts where the higher level skills shortages and thus opportunities for graduate employment will be located regionally. These data sets will assist institutions in their forward planning, their promotion of study
programmes to prospective students, their development of new (and innovative) curriculums and by extension their engagement with employers to inform and support such development work.

4.2 Strategically, we suggest that:

4.2.1 A holistic approach to higher-level skills and traditional HE is needed, both in England and in Europe. This must reflect the reality of a work-based, ageing population that may wish to pursue higher study otherwise and elsewhere than through a traditional full-time course at a university. Greater acknowledgement that HE can be delivered in a number of institutions, can cover professional as well as academic training and can serve a number of different markets is needed. If this could be referenced in advertisements and in information about student finance it is likely that more adults will then consider progression from vocational routes.

4.2.3 An EU-wide, universal Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance service will benefit adult entrants to HE. Within England, the detailed face-to-face discussions appreciated by adults who are in work but who are contemplating HE are not available to them – after age 18, this service is limited to those who are unemployed. Access to impartial guidance is therefore uneven and currently omits the very group that the English (and European) Government is trying to draw in to HE in order to up-skill the workforce. Across the EU, similar unfettered access to impartial guidance will reap similar benefits.

4.2.4 Older students are more likely to be in full-time employment. All relevant information about HE needs to be readily accessible, relevant and easy to understand. Information benchmarks must cover areas of interest to this age group, rather than focus on the interests of a more traditional school leaver cohort.

4.2.5 Mobility of students and thus national economic vitality will be increased by more course transfer agreements between EU institutions and by the provision of employment data on a sector-by-sector, country-by-country basis. Eg Denmark is actively seeking higher-skilled nationals from other countries to fill skills shortages.

4.2.6 National measures to facilitate and support dialogue between employers and HEIs. We note that it seems more common to find HEIs engaging with employers from the standpoint of their own organisational interests rather than from a broader view of the economic wellbeing of their individual Member state or the European Union as a whole. This offers a bottom-up rather than a top-down model. Although the latter may be more difficult to accomplish it would seem that there is an imperative to promote a “bigger picture” approach.

4.2.7 The 40% target for participation in higher education across the EU by 2020 is a crude aspiration. A more focused approach is to devise more specific targets which are directed towards encouraging participation in programmes where graduates would be entering employment sectors known to be/anticipated to be areas of skill shortage by 2020. This would be of greater value to HEIs in their longer term planning.
A Quality kite mark initiative from the EU is suggested. This would drive forward a shared EU-wide concept of quality. Funding should be made available to support this initiative.

5. Conclusion

We believe that we have a unique view of the HE (and higher skills) agenda across Europe and England. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the MEG and Businet view in more detail with Committee members.

Note 1

About MEG and Businet

MEG colleges have a focus on the delivery of higher level vocational skills. This is seen in the heavy commitment to qualifications which link the colleges with their local employers. The ability to gain Foundation degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) consolidates this focus, enabling greater control of the means to meet employer need.

MEG has a high profile. This is based on its measured and evidence-based approach to policy issues which is in turn drawn from its members’ contributions to discussions and research papers. The group serves as a network for senior practitioners of HE in FE, enabling them to discuss policy and practice informally between regular termly meetings. MEG carries out research on a regular basis and is regarded as a source of informed opinion by a range of Government, academic and employer organisations.

Businet was founded in 1987 by a group of European higher education institutions seeking to develop European programmes in business and to promote academic, employment based and cultural opportunities for their students and staff. The current General Manager and immediate past President of Businet are both based in New College Durham, a MEG member college

Businet holds two Conferences each year, one for academic staff and one for students. The themes of these conferences are, respectively, future issues in European higher education, and employability skills.

This response to the House of Lords Call for Evidence therefore brings together the expertise and experience of both membership organisations. We have read the European Commission’s communication “Supporting Growth and Jobs: An agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education systems” and are familiar with other EU documents such as “New Skills New Jobs” and the recent Flash Eurobarometer survey on employer views of student employability. Views expressed during the recent annual Businet conference in Istanbul make it clear that members have a good understanding of the issues in their own countries and are aware of the role of the European Commission in relation to the policies being considered or pursued by their own governments.

We recognise that the Commission cannot intervene in the policy-making of individual Member states, but equally we welcome its role as an impartial observer/adviser. It has a unique over-view of the current arrangements for HE across the Member States and can offer a valuable perspective on what is working well and where more effort has to be made.
Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) and Businet – Written evidence

Whilst it cannot and should not intervene in national decision-making, we consider that the points made in “An agenda for Modernisation” are valid ones, given the current financial, educational and skill landscape facing most member states. More specifically, the points made in the communication closely replicate those made in the recent White Paper on Higher Education issues by the Business, Innovation and Skills Department in June 2011. MEG was broadly supportive of that document and is thus minded to endorse many of the points made by the EU Commission.

Note 2

The role of English Colleges in the delivery of HE

This can be summarised as:

- Working locally with communities and employers
- Providing progression routes for students from FE levels 1-3 to higher technician levels, for both full-time students and part-time students in employment
- Employing tutors and other professional staff who are often actively employed elsewhere, undertaking relevant professional/higher technical skills and activities which can be contextualised into the teaching/learning process
- Delivering the majority of apprenticeship programmes across the country. They are therefore best-positioned to develop and deliver progression routes to higher-skills development locally

21 November 2011

73 Students at the Heart of the System BIS June 2011
National Union of Students – Written evidence

The National Union of Students (NUS) is a voluntary membership organisation which makes a real difference to the lives of students and its member students' unions. We are a confederation of 600 students' unions, amounting to more than 95 per cent of all higher and further education unions in the UK. Through our member students' unions, we represent the interests of more than seven million students. Our mission is to promote, defend and extend the rights of students and to develop and champion strong students' unions.

NUS welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Committee on the EU’s contribution to the modernisation of higher education in Europe following the European Commission’s recent Communication on the subject.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

1. In the main, our views on “how EU intervention [can] most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition...” (Q.1) will come with our response to the other inquiry questions. In general terms, we welcome the strategy, and are of the view that it represents one of the most comprehensive efforts to date to set clear and identifiable targets for pan-European improvements – whilst recognising member state autonomy, not least within higher education.

2. Where intervention is most required, and would have the most impact, is the provision of targeted support to member states in ensuring harmony with EU level policies and procedures, where too often disparity remains (e.g. in credit recognition, portability of grants and loans etc.) As we look to the next Bologna ministerial summit, we are hopeful that the recommendation for each member state to produce its own mobility strategy is adopted, and we would encourage the UK to play its full part in this.

3. Intervention should equally come in the promotion and communication of European initiatives (such as Bologna) – too often a lack of sufficient information, advice, and guidance, is a deterring factor to participation in these for students.

4. We believe that one area which requires urgent attention, and which can happen at an EU level, is the collection mechanisms for data relating to student mobility. At present there are a number of different agencies responsible for the collection of a variety of statistics. For many member states, this can mean they are unaware of how many students – and more importantly what type – are undertaking study abroad, where they go, or what they do while there. We would recommend a standardisation of data collection, with one overall agency responsible at a supranational level.

The bologna process and the European Higher Education Area

5. We are fully of the opinion that one of the first, and most urgent, requirements is a full understanding of, and respect for, the social dimension of the bologna process. This must go further than simply a target for participation in European education, and extend to a clear commitment to tackling both cause and effect of under participation amongst
certain groups. As such, we would support moves to an outcome based system of targets and measurement, as opposed to the current system of inputs. Going in hand with this, and Para. 4, above, we believe that there must be robust research conducted into socio-economic demographics and barriers of students.

6. There is still work required around the ECTS, not least its uniformity of adoption and process within each member state (though we recognise that some of this would require legislation – a wholly autonomous area for member states). We would welcome moves to an ECTS “plus” system; this would recognise all prior learning and ensure proper lifelong learning, with ease of credit transfer through degree level (further education – higher education; bachelor – masters), and also across member states. Connected to this, we believe work should be done at the EU level on a standardised (but flexible) learning agreement, which would be accessible to all students, institutions, and employers to better inform study abroad, and expected outcomes.

7. We wholly welcome the increase in funding for education (and programmes such as Erasmus specifically) within the latest EU budget, and believe this can have only a positive impact on student opportunities. However, we equally believe that thought should be given to its use – we would be wary of it simply being used to fund “more of the same”, without specific consideration being given to increasing access and amount of funds to the most at risk students. Moreover, there needs to be greater consideration of disparity between high and low cost countries.

Mobility

8. We would fully support a move towards formal recognition of shorter mobility windows – going down to as little as two weeks. We believe that there is no reason to believe that these would be any less academically rigorous than longer mobility windows (provided there were specific learning outcomes agreed beforehand), and moreover would a) encourage more students with responsibilities who may not be able to participate in longer windows, and b) act as a potential stepping stone onto longer mobility.

9. Taking Para’s. 7 & 8 together, we feel that students should be able to “share” a semester and/or year mobility funding amongst themselves. We envisage a situation where a group of students would undertake a joint research project as a part of their studies, with each participating in a short mobility period as part of this either as a group, or consecutively as individuals over the duration of the project.

10. The available evidence shows us that too often those students who are most likely to be mobile are: female; without a disability; young; not from a minority ethnic background; from a high performing school; and, from high socio-economic backgrounds. This is clearly untenable – not least in terms of the social dimension and wider responsibilities to social mobility – and more should be done to target information, advice, and guidance to these students. Moreover, effort should be made to find a way to better target funding and resources towards these students also. As part of

---

74 For an extended report on NUS’ position on demographics and barriers, and potential ways to increase mobility, see: [http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/scotland/2991/](http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/scotland/2991/)
75 Cf. Attainment in higher education: Erasmus and placement students (HEFCE, 2009) and Survey of the socio-economic backgrounds of Erasmus students (Otero and McCoshan, 2005)
the overall Leuven benchmark of 20% mobility, consideration should be given to having a separate target for the most at risk students within this.

11. The commission should return to the concept of virtual mobility, which again promotes early experiences of internationalisation, and can be a natural precursor to physical mobility.76 Whilst some excellent work was done as part of the REVE project, this was too often theoretical in nature, and has received limited pick up since its end. Member states and institutions could be incentivised to return to this work through existing programmes such as Tempus.

**Targets and league tables**

12. Whilst we welcome the commission’s efforts to produce a league table which removes much of the prominence given to research intensive institutions, we remain sceptical of how and if this will work in practice. We wholly welcome any improvements in the provision of public information – and, using a UK perspective in the main, this remain an important topic – but are of the opinion that this can be achieved simply and to the benefit of students, without the need to introduce (yet another) a potentially subjective and confusing rankings system. Any approach to provision of transparency and information must be holistic in its nature – and reject any notion of “consumerism”. Equally, we are fearful that a politically driven rankings system could, in the future, be used as a means, method, and justification for funding decisions.

13. We are wholly supportive of the target for 40% participation in higher education; however, this must come with efforts to ensure it is both balanced, and reflects the make up of society writ large. Above all we must ensure that pre-existing commitments are adhered to, and that “the student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education at all levels [reflects] the diversity of our populations”.77 Barriers to participation are not things which are confined within borders, but equally national differences in social characteristics and demographics can present unique national issues. As such, we would welcome EU intervention into those countries which face the greatest challenges in participation. Moreover, we feel that this could only be strengthened by a pan-European research project which truly tackled barriers and participation within each member state. The social dimension of Bologna must remain front and centre in any efforts to increase participation. We should also recognise that the UK has already surpassed the 40% target but should maintain its progress towards wider participation.

**Funding instruments**

14. We welcome the renewed focus on core and strategic objectives within education under the Education Europe programme. Each of the programmes and strands of work that the EU is currently engaged in all have great merit, but none should be viewed in a vacuum. As the largest part of expenditure, Erasmus should continue to be promoted, and should equally come with reform (as detailed above). According to analysis by the Centre for higher education policy studies, using Directorate-General figures, there is a huge


77 London communiqué, 2007
disparity in terms of member state surplus/deficit of Erasmus funding (comparing spend against budget) – ranging from a 71% in the UK, to a 64% deficit in the Czech Republic. It is clear that any bringing together of funds must radically rethink how they are spent.

15. Moving the social dimension on, work must be done to ensure that available structural funds are used to support work in increasing participation. It is not only necessary that those most at risk at encouraged into education, but once there they must then be in an environment that is engaging, innovative, and creative to ensure they remain. As such, as part of Education Europe, and the bringing together of the various strands, a greater focus on putting the learner at the centre of their learning experience, and greater efforts made on curriculum reform and pedagogy.

16. The above could especially be achieved through the EU’s Cohesion Policy which puts innovation at its heart; with this there should be clear links to funds on improving access, quality and outcomes – equally we would not wish to see objectives become so narrow and focused that they automatically rule out potential bids. Also, it should be noted that we are hesitant at the proposal to have ex ante and post ex conditionality on cohesion funds – whilst progress must be made in the medium term, towards long term objectives, there is a fear that such blanket conditionality will hinder those whom cohesion policy is meant to most help. Provision of transitional funding is welcome, to ensure that progress is not lost by any country whose income has increased beyond the maximum threshold.

International dimension

17. As stated previously, one area for urgent attention – and indeed a requirement before any truly meaningful work around the internationalisation of higher education can be undertaken – is that of data collection. Many member states lack the necessary agencies and/or expertise to collect such information on students who choose to study internationally, and many others simply do not collect the information, and leave it to the accepting country. Right across the EU we need to be in a clearer position to understand what students are studying abroad, and what they’re doing.

European Masters level student loan

18. NUS believes that postgraduate opportunities should be available to all those with the ability and aspiration to undertake study at this level. We would therefore welcome the introduction of a transferable loan guarantee system for European Masters. This would be a step forward from the current situation of limited availability of financial support and 70% of postgraduate taught students funding themselves as well as the wider environment of cuts to public funding for higher education and increased student undergraduate debt.

19. We would however want guarantees surrounding the rate of interest, length of repayment and the point at which graduates start repayment. A system of loans that has commercial terms and conditions attached would not be acceptable. To be clear, anything that exceeds 'real' interest rates (i.e. no subsidy from the Commission) would change a favourable policy into a deeply damaging one. We strongly believe that there should be significant subsidy from the Commission so that mobility loans do not attract real interest rates.
20. If such a loan system was introduced we would also want there to be appropriate monitoring of access to the loans to ensure that it is supporting a widening of access.

21. The European Students’ Union takes the position that it stands for a public, quality and free education. This is a laudable aim but when the UK currently has no public financial support system for postgraduates, let alone during a mobility window, we disagree that the mobility loan would represent anything other than a positive move for UK postgraduates. We do not support ESU in calling for proposals to be scrapped.

21 November 2011
THURSDAY 15 DECEMBER 2011

Members present
Baroness Young of Hornsey (Chairman)
Viscount Bridgeman
Earl of Courtown
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Baroness Henig
Lord Lexden
Baroness Scott of Needham Market

Examination of Witness

Liam Burns, President, National Union of Students

Q51 The Chairman: Liam, I am sorry that you had such a difficult journey here this morning.

Liam Burns: Huge apologies.

The Chairman: Thank you for bearing with it and not turning round and running away. I will go through some housekeeping notes. Members’ interests are recorded in the Register of Lords’ Interests. A list of declared interests is on the witness table. The session is on the record. It is being webcast live and will subsequently be accessible via the parliamentary website. You will receive a transcript of the session to check and correct. This will be put on the record on the parliamentary website. Perhaps you could begin by stating for the record your name and official title. You may wish to provide us with a short opening statement or go straight into questions.

Liam Burns: Sure. I am Liam Burns, President of the National Union of Students. We submitted written evidence, so I am happy to go straight into questions.
**Q52** The Chairman: Thank you. The first question is around the Bologna process and things that stem from that. Could you let us know how beneficial the Bologna process has been to date? Also, could you tell us a bit more about your proposed European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme?

**Liam Burns**: We think that the system as a whole has been hugely beneficial. It is evidence of one of the few voluntary European initiatives that has galvanised lots of political rhetoric around what we want to see in higher education. Clearly, there is no actual competency within European institutions. None the less, we welcome the focus on things such as mobility, the social dimension, the transferability of credit and quality assurance in general. Although we had many of these things—many of the Bologna reforms adopted a UK model—Bologna added extra scrutiny and focus on the sector, which was incredibly helpful. There are areas such as mobility in which we are still lacking, particularly in the UK. Our research suggests that one of many issues that UK students find difficult when deciding to take a study period abroad is the fear that their credits will not be recognised. Is there going to be duplication? Are they going to have to repeat their year as soon as they get back? We are quite clear that properly implementing the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme would aid that.

There is a bigger problem for the UK in that regard. I am not convinced that England’s credit and qualification system is robust enough to support the mobility that we want to see. None the less, ECTS should be a mechanism for saying what we are aspiring to.

**Q53** The Chairman: Do you think that the social dimension of the Bologna process is more important than the academic side?

**Liam Burns**: In the context of the UK, yes. We already had in place many of the academic changes in infrastructure. We already had a three-cycle degree programme and robust quality assurance. We were one of the first countries to be accredited in terms of quality across the European sector. But in a social dimension, it will not surprise the Committee to hear that we have many concerns around widening access and participation and around how education is funded. There are many other things that, although peripheral to the core mission of Bologna, are important to students, such as access to additional welfare funding and accommodation. So the social dimension has always been something that we in NUS UK have championed, perhaps more than other national unions across Europe.

**Q54** The Chairman: Finally from me for now, could you tell us more about the role of the Bologna Experts?

**Liam Burns**: Sure. “Bologna Experts” is perhaps an unfortunate name. They are meant to be more like Bologna advocates. I was one of the first student Bologna Experts in the UK—hence I find the title difficult. The point of it is that you have a resource of advocates who can speak at conferences and events and explain the point of the European higher education area and the different aspects involved. There are lots of misconceptions both in the UK and in other states. In the UK people are often concerned about the Masters structure and whether it puts us at an advantage or disadvantage across Europe. They are often concerned about the implications for mobility and about what they will be asked to do. The 20% target has been met with some scepticism in this sector. Outside the UK, lots of reforms to do with things such as education funding have been attributed to the Bologna process when technically they were nothing to do with it. So the Experts are about dispelling myths and also about feeding back so that the British Council, which is the agency that manages the Bologna Experts, has intel on what information the sector needs.
The Chairman: So it is a bit like an advocacy role.

Liam Burns: Both advocacy and intel. Within the Bologna Expert pool, they drill down on specific expertise. I know that in the process of creating action lines to learning outcomes, which was a big focus of the Bologna reforms, and matching them up with credits, there are specific Bologna Experts who can give what amounts almost to consultancy in that area. They are deployed as and when necessary.

Q55 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Welcome to the Committee. I will go on to the Europe 2020 strategy. As you know, it emphasises the importance of education and training in job creation, competitiveness and so on. Do you think that the emphasis by the Commission on collaboration between education and business tends to distort education provision, and should other factors be given more importance in the development of higher education?

Liam Burns: We fully support the core part of Europe 2020 and the commitment to the target of 3% of GDP. In the current context of economies across Europe, it might have been incredibly helpful to invest in education rather than withdrawing funds. On the question of collaboration, we support it from a UK perspective. I have not seen evidence yet that collaboration with business and enterprise has distorted the mission of higher education. I think that they have worked collaboratively on curriculum development in a way that is helpful to students’ employability and so on, rather than being predatory in terms of using public funds for their own business needs. I cannot say whether that is the case across the whole of Europe. I cannot speak on behalf of colleagues in other national unions, who have incredible amounts of concern about what it looks like for business to be involved—more so because the concept of autonomous institutions, which is almost taken for granted in the UK, certainly should not be across all other Member States. From the perspective of NUS UK, we have little concern about the idea of greater collaboration. We think that it is probably positive. In other Member States there are probably more localised debates happening.

Q56 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Do you not think that some departments that are less associated with job provision and that do not provide a direct path into a job—unlike medicine and dentistry, for example—have declined? Some traditional academic departments seem to be on the decline. Do you not think that the emphasis on job creation, business and wealth creation has squeezed those departments?

Liam Burns: Sometimes we in the NUS have a somewhat schizophrenic approach to this question. We absolutely agree that education in and of itself is a treasure in the UK and should be protected. I suggest that if there are concerns about the move towards a utilitarian approach to the portfolios we have, there are bigger fish to fry than the Europe 2020 strategy. There are far more domestic policies that will drive that. I am happy to explore that more if the Committee would like me to.

Time and time again we do research and find that more than 80% of students say they chose to come into higher education for a better job and more prospects of employment. We certainly cannot ignore that as the intention of students who come into the sector. The other thing that we can go on to explore is widening participation. The point of mobility—I will frame this in a European context—is that we know that things like Erasmus are disproportionately skewed towards a certain demographic of students, who are perhaps not those who could benefit most. When you marry that up with the fact that employers say that they treasure greatly the prospect of their interviewees having had experience of
studying elsewhere in Europe, and with greater collaboration through the prism of more people having employment, including more people from a wider range of backgrounds having more employability, that is a good thing. You get more capital by working with business in that sense. Once again, I hear your concerns. I think it is worthwhile for the Committee to scrutinise the Europe 2020 strategy, but there are much bigger issues domestically than there are at European level.

Lord Lexden: Can I break in? I am bursting to ask a supplementary question, but sadly I cannot because I have to go down to the Chamber. I am terribly sorry. I look forward to reading your evidence in due course. Many apologies; the loss is mine.

The Chairman: We have been talking about Erasmus and mobility, which leads nicely into Lady Henig’s question.

Q57 Baroness Henig: Perhaps I can focus on the issue of greater mobility and how one achieves it, especially in the current financial climate. Could you say something about what you see as the obstacles to mobility and tell us more about the role of “mobility strategies”? You suggested in your evidence that you were hopeful that the next Bologna ministerial summit would endorse them. As an additional point, do you welcome the Commission’s proposal for a European Masters-level student loan guarantee facility?

Liam Burns: Okay. You will not be surprised to hear that I have quite a lot to say on this. We have worked on it for a good few years, both in NUS Scotland and NUS UK. Issues that we have identified include credit transfer. Are you going to have to repeat your year when you come back? Finance plays a huge part. I will come back to that and suggest a lack of awareness of what the Erasmus grant can offer. It will be no surprise to anyone that language ability comes up. Again, considering the English provision across many institutions in the rest of mainland Europe, that might be the result of a lack of awareness. Before I go on to more evidence-based stuff, the last issue is one we know colloquially as the boyfriend/girlfriend effect. They have to spend time apart and that bleeds into having to give up your accommodation, part-time job or something like that. Especially in a three-year degree, the security of knowing that you can regain those things is an issue. We have some evidence on this. A pre-1992 civic university in the north of England did some surveys. It found that 75% of students said that their current employer would be more likely to employ someone who had studied abroad; 87% said that their experience abroad made their interview more successful; 86% said that evidence in their CV of their study abroad gave them an advantage; and 98% said that their time abroad had improved their cultural awareness. It was HEFCE78 that did this research.

I will come back and link this with knowing that those who have the Erasmus experience are predominantly female and from higher social and economic backgrounds. They are less likely to have a disability. Lots of factors suggest that this is reaching—to use a crude term—the more privileged. The fact that employers are more likely to employ them and that the less privileged are not getting these opportunities is a mass problem. Whenever we talk about barriers, there needs to be a refocus, especially in the UK, on balancing mobility. This is not about volume but about what type of student gets this opportunity. There is a distinctively UK tinge to this. We probably need to focus on it more because if we get drawn into the trap of simply increasing volume, my worry is that the money could be better spent elsewhere.

78 Higher Education Funding Council for England
We have picked up on a few other solutions to issues. There is a massive role for advocates in this regard. As I said, finance came up as a major issue, yet we know that the Erasmus grant is quite generous. Equally, the language provision could be explained better. Peers of that nature, and peers from backgrounds where people do not traditionally take up opportunities like this but who have done so, would make a step-wise change if people are feeling insecure about doing things like this. We have long advocated that institutions are far too conservative in how they structure their curriculums. We have long championed the idea of “mobility windows”—the idea that you take not a whole year but a semester abroad, and that you structure the curriculum so that it does not interfere with prerequisites in terms of progression to the next year. The arguments we always receive are things like, “It’s just not possible in terms of prerequisites”. We have evidence that that is just not true. Another argument is, “Bodies that accredit professional degrees will not allow it”. Again, we have lots of examples where that has been worked around. So scrutiny of the curriculum would be helpful.

You asked about Masters loans. We are in favour of the Commission taking forward this initiative. Again, this is a very UK opinion. The European Students’ Union is opposed to the idea, so I have to caveat my support. The reason that we are supportive is that 70% of postgraduate students are funding themselves anyway at the moment. Postgraduate funding is a huge problem domestically, never mind in any context of mobility. So any move that could give access to funding to allow people to take up these opportunities would be beneficial. A caveat is that we would expect the principles behind our current student loan system to apply to this as well. So it would be subsidised and would not charge commercial rates, and there would be things such as repayment thresholds and cut-offs. This probably goes into a wider debate about how postgraduate studies are funded in the UK. Having two disparate systems would be unfortunate. None the less, if the proposal is for a subsidised system, we think that the Commission is right to pursue the objective.

**Q58 The Chairman:** That is very helpful. You said earlier in the exchange that the issue of the lack of diversity among students was a distinctively UK problem. Is that because research on that subject has not been done in other areas, or because it simply is not an issue?

**Liam Burns:** Do you mean why is it a UK issue?

**The Chairman:** Yes. You said that the lack of diversity in students was a distinctively UK problem.

**Liam Burns:** I think that it is down to raw volume. We have a fairly small proportion of students in the programme compared to some other countries, although it is increasing. That means that the skewing is more profound. It is no surprise that it is predominantly language students who take up Erasmus opportunities, but that skews the figures because we know that language students are more privileged in all sorts of ways.

**Q59 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** A lot of what I was going to ask has been covered. I will just say that we like to be evidence-based and it has been really helpful that you have constantly referred to evidence. Could you say a little about the sources of that evidence and of the numbers that we are talking about? That would help us to get a fix on how robust the figures are.

**Liam Burns:** Sure. Where we stand at the moment—I apologise if I am telling you what you already know—is that the total for 2010-11 is about 13,000. These figures are from the
British Council, which is the Erasmus agency for the UK. That is a 9.5% increase on 2009-10, which is impressive and something to be celebrated. Of that total, 6.5% was accounted for by mobility in terms of studying and 16% was work placement-based. We will come to this. The fact that the Commission brought into one guise all these funding streams—Socrates, Erasmus, Tempus—is a good thing for that reason. We should not treat work placement, learning and teaching in isolation. We did our own research on the question of barriers. We ran a survey with HSBC on student experiences and asked questions around mobility. We found that 28% of students decided not to study abroad because of uncertainty about language; 11% were unaware that opportunities were there at all and did not know that they could do it; and 37% cited financial implications, which comes back to my point that in reality there are good financial offerings, certainly currently, around the prospect of taking an Erasmus year. Do you want more evidence?

Q60 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: No, that is fine. Do you have access to similar work that has been done in other EU states? I am interested in whether people give the same sort of reasons for not participating.

Liam Burns: Only in a qualitative sense. For, I think, eight years now the European Students’ Union, every two years, has done something called Bologna With Student Eyes. Each time it produces an answer to the ministerial summit. Ministers do something called stock-taking, which is about the sector measuring its performance in relation to Bologna. Mobility is part of this. The ESU always gives a fairly different perspective on performance and is usually quite critical. The answers from other countries about reasons are often similar, but minus language provision. It will not be a surprise that our pre-16 education has a lot to do with that. However, to be fair, we are a lot better in our social dimensions: for example, students know that they will get some form of grant and that there is a robust quality system behind their institution. That is quite good in the UK. In terms of quantitative evidence, the answer is no. That is one point we made in support of a supranational agency that can collect this sort of data. We are not clear that we have evidence for what goes on in other Member States.

Q61 Earl of Courtown: I have been looking at the position of first degree eligible UK students on the Erasmus programme. When they spend a full academic year abroad, the fees will be waived and met by the relevant council. I gather that the continued operation of the fee waiver scheme is under review. I probably know the answer to this: do you think that the Government are doing enough to support Erasmus opportunities in the UK?

Liam Burns: We do not think so. We certainly support David Willetts’s intentions in setting up the high-level group to look at this issue in particular. That was a welcome move. We are concerned about the uncertainty of the fee waiver and do not think that enough has been done on the money-in-your-pocket aspects of student support. Some of that concerns the question of awareness and some does not. France, Germany and Spain offer additional grant support for mobility to students, over and above what the Erasmus grant offers. That is something we should look into—and it should be targeted at groups that we do not reach at the moment. On the fee waiver, we have suggested that the currently proposed student loan system should be extended to Erasmus-year students and capped at 25% of what the year would cost. The intention is to send a clear message to the institutions that they should not charge more than 25% of what it would cost the student to take the year abroad.
Q62 Earl of Courtown: You mentioned in an earlier answer the low percentage of students who take up the Erasmus opportunity and suggested that the reason was that it was not well enough advertised. Was the figure you mentioned 10% of your sample?

Liam Burns: Yes—11% were unaware of the opportunity.

Earl of Courtown: I am surprised; I would have thought that the figure would be higher. Many students are not aware of it. I am the father of two youngsters who are going through university. I do not think that they have a clue about what is going on.

The Chairman: I beg your pardon; we are just sorting out the logistics of what our next question will be. You covered in your responses to our earlier questions most of what we want to address.

Liam Burns: Perhaps I might make an additional point on the question you asked. One thing I cannot give a definitive answer about, because I just do not know, is the effect of removing core funding for teaching in the UK in portfolio areas. Funding for bands B and D, covering the humanities and arts, has been completely removed. That skews a lot of institutional decisions on how students perceive going to study a subject abroad. There is still a subsidy for the core teaching of science and STEM subjects, but not for teaching the arts. That equates to £20 million to £30 million that could be passed on to students in fees. I worry that we are not clear yet how institutions will fall in making decisions on how they fund the teaching provision for someone who studies abroad.

Q63 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I will pick up on something that you said earlier about the European Students’ Union having a different view from yours. Is that based on having different experiences in different countries or on having a different political perspective?

Liam Burns: It would be fair to say that different national unions across Europe have very different politics. This was debated in a recent conference and the UK proposed support for the initiative. It did not pass. The arguments used—quite insightfully, as you said—centred on the experience of how student loans and fees come to bear. Whereas we are used—for the moment—to a fairly benign form of student loan system that has lots of protections involved, other countries are not. They are worried. I think that only two countries still have completely free education. The idea of regressing and introducing a loan is understandably not within their politics. We are clearly in a different environment and unfortunately it is a deficit model. When there is no coherent funding for postgraduates, at least a subsidised loan system would be a step in the right direction.

Q64 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Within the ESU, which national unions have the biggest influence? Is the NUS very influential, or is it the French, German or Italian students’ union?

Liam Burns: It would be fair to say that different national unions across Europe have very different politics. This was debated in a recent conference and the UK proposed support for the initiative. It did not pass. The arguments used—quite insightfully, as you said—centred on the experience of how student loans and fees come to bear. Whereas we are used—for the moment—to a fairly benign form of student loan system that has lots of protections involved, other countries are not. They are worried. I think that only two countries still have completely free education. The idea of regressing and introducing a loan is understandably not within their politics. We are clearly in a different environment and unfortunately it is a deficit model. When there is no coherent funding for postgraduates, at least a subsidised loan system would be a step in the right direction.

Liam Burns: Well, I will try to be succinct. The UK is not overly influential in ESU. There is almost a mirroring of national politics in terms of our engagement with the European Students’ Union that we have tried recently to rectify. In terms of other influences, people act in regions. The Nordics and Baltics have a bloc and there is a Mediterranean bloc. I do not know enough about the politics of the ESU to give you a pundit’s response, but we get a good hearing because people recognise that we are one of the biggest and most resourced national unions in the ESU—but that is not to say that our politics always align.

79 Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
Q65 The Chairman: In your written evidence you called for improved data collection mechanisms relating to student mobility, including the creation of a data collection and standardisation agency at supranational level. What do you think about the proposed U-Multirank tool? We have had a number of different perspectives on it, depending on how it will be used, how it will function and how it will be interpreted. What is your view? Might it place more burdens on higher education institutions in terms of reporting?

Liam Burns: I caveat this by saying that I will represent as much as possible, but I used to work for the European Students’ Union and, if I am being honest, my interactions with the Commission made me deeply sceptical about any initiative coming from it. U-Multirank cannot be taken in isolation from other issues such as AHELO,80 which has not concluded yet. It is an attempt to map learning outcomes across Europe. The idea is that a mechanic’s course in Germany should not be different from a mechanic’s course in France. The programmes came simultaneously, which I do not think is a coincidence. My worry about U-Multirank is the “rank” part; I do not have a problem with the “U” part. The concept behind it is that “multidimensional” means that the individual says what is important to them in terms of choosing an institution. The idea is to create an infrastructure online in which you can say, “I am passionate about taking a year abroad,” and it will do formative assessment and so on, covering different aspects of education, including sport, which is important, and will then come up with almost a bespoke presentation of information. The problem with U-Multirank is that it was always explicit that they then wanted to rank. I argue strongly that league tables in the UK are subjective in the extreme, so how on earth are you meant to then take a number or a letter and transpose it across the whole of Europe? It would be utterly meaningless and actually quite dangerous in terms of the student basing their choice on a fairly subjective assessment of one area. Qualitative information is not a problem; trying to provide that across Europe is probably a really positive step.

The other thing that is more of a concern to the European Students’ Union is how Governments will use that tool. This was pushed for largely during the French presidency; Valérie Pécresse was the biggest advocate of it. That was at a time when they were having debates around funding their higher education system. I would never suggest that this was why it was championed by the French presidency, but there were concerns from national unions that this would translate into the competitive funding of institutions, based on this ranking. That would be deeply unhelpful. However, the provision of information is positive.

Equally on that, just in case I do not get to say it elsewhere, I think that there are decisions to be made in the UK about choice and about how we present to students the available options in terms of institutions. For instance, I do not think that it is tenable any longer for UCAS not to have European institutions in its course search. There has been a large push by the University of Maastricht—in percentage terms, not absolute terms—to recruit from the UK. In its business-savvy way it spotted that it is now cheaper than UK institutions.

My worry is that you have to have a tremendous amount of social capital behind you to have the confidence to think about studying in another part of Europe, when it could benefit people from all sorts of backgrounds. There is an element of U-Multirank trying to level the playing field of choice across Europe, which is fine and will probably make Europe more competitive as a result. But the UK needs to know how to reciprocate.

Q66 Baroness Henig: I will preface my question by commending you. I am finding your evidence extremely useful, particularly the combination of your strategic grip and your

80 The Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
knowledge about what is happening at the grassroots. That combination is giving us many insights and I thank you for it. I will move on to the funding proposal called Erasmus for All. Do you think that it achieves its aim of simplification and flexibility, and are there any aspects of it that you particularly like or dislike? There is also the element of the UK trying to ensure that it receives a greater proportion of funding from the new programme, especially under the Erasmus higher education heading.

Liam Burns: Our response to the EU Green Paper on these issues pushed for the idea of a more coherent approach to these programmes. At the moment we have to straddle the Erasmus, Tempus and Lifelong Learning programmes in their entirety. It is a trick that we in the NUS have always missed. There is so much funding out there that student unions could access, but it is so complicated to access it because the Commission is not an easy body to navigate. Bringing together programmes in a coherent sense is really positive. My understanding is that it has resulted in—perhaps the Multiannual Financial Framework? Anyway, it has resulted in greater total investment in those programmes. That is to be welcomed. I still think that there are challenges with the Leuven commitment of 20% by 2020; I am not sure that the funding of Erasmus for All will match that. I do not think that the aspiration can be realised with the resources allocated.

Baroness Henig: And otherwise? What about the general direction?

Liam Burns: Wholly positive. There is a colloquial aspect to this; it mirrors a problem in England. We treated Tempus, Socrates and Erasmus in very isolated ways. In primary school, high school and university you would access different programmes depending on whether they were vocational or academic. That seems a mistake. If you are trying to create from an early age an outward-looking sense in students and pupils—I am talking about early years here—the challenge is to make it very easy for the education sector as a whole to transcend all the different stages when providing opportunities for mobility. Again, that comes back to the fragmented nature of post-16 education in England. The sector is very hard to navigate and there is no coherent qualifications framework that is adhered to in any proper way. So again, you would have to marry it up. There is now one funding scheme for mobility, but how will the UK co-ordinate its provision post-16—and earlier—when it straddles two different departments of government? There will probably need to be a push to ensure that we capitalise on the fact that there is now one funding stream on a Commission level.

Q67 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: I agree with everything that Lady Henig said about your evidence: thank you. The Commission is making some suggestions about how it could support the internationalisation of higher education and is promoting the EU as a study and research destination. There is also the question of relations with partners beyond the EU. I am interested in your views on the extension of that work beyond the current institutional framework. I am also interested in relations with the developing world. How do we ensure that they and not we benefit, and that we do not end up draining talent out of developing countries?

Liam Burns: I will take the latter question first because unfortunately I do not know the answer. Brain drain has been a concern of the European Students’ Union for a number of years. Its lobbying brought it to every ministerial summit. One is due in April 2012. I presume that David Willetts will attend. Every ministerial summit now addresses what is called the international dimension and specifically brain drain. I do not have a solution, but it is a concern. If we trace Bologna back to its origins, we see that it was solely about
competition. I heard a German vice-chancellor say that the process had been hijacked by the stakeholders. He meant that Bologna was meant to be about competition, but ESU did its job incredibly well and suddenly the social dimension was in there, and the notion of quality was far more about how a student receives education than how we tell America that it is not as good. In that spirit, we have to be careful that we are not simply taking people from other parts of the world and not developing the infrastructure there.

Q68 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Staying on that theme, was this a particular bee in the bonnet of the ESU or did it have evidence that this was happening and was a very real danger?

Liam Burns: I cannot say “evidence”, although I can look into this and come back to the Committee. My understanding is that we had projects and interactions with other continental student unions outwith the European Union. Through those discussions, we became aware that their infrastructure was not developing because we were sucking people into Europe. Now the idea is that if we can do that in a balanced way—this is why we talk about balanced mobility—and people go back to their origins, we hope that one day they will not need to come to Europe. For lots of reasons that will not be the objective of the Bologna process, but from a student point of view it would be welcome. Unfortunately I have absolutely no suggestions on how to do that. I will go back to the issue and send the Committee a follow-up note.

You asked about internationalisation. We think that that would be positive. The Committee will have noticed that “internationalisation” means myriad different things to different people. I am not going to blanket-condemn the sector for this; I know lots of vice-chancellors and pro-vice-chancellors who from our perspective absolutely understand that internationalisation is about cultural capital, outward-looking graduates, the curriculum and attracting international students for more than just the fees that come with them. There are other institutions for which “internationalisation” just means balancing the budget. If the Commission is going to make clear the principles of what internationalisation is about, that is positive.

Strategies that we would suggest for the UK would include funding—because outward mobility is just as much part of internationalisation as anything else—and advocacy and championing. We have people coming in and out of the UK. That will become increasingly challenging with the Government’s changes to UKBA81 regulations. We will have to face that challenge head-on. On the curriculum, we should send a strong message to the sector that keeping a status quo approach is not good enough in a globalised economy. We need to think out of the box about how to give different types of opportunities. They will not always be a year for an Erasmus undergraduate; we accept that. It could be two weeks, a semester or virtual mobility, which has not been given enough discussion in this sector. All these things need to be brought within the curriculum rather than left as bolt-ons for the student to seek out, because the only ones who will seek them out will be those with the social capital to know how, which will not reach the people we most want to get to.

Finally, there is the early years argument. I will not labour that because no doubt you have heard it time and time again. If someone turns up at a university campus at the age of 18, you cannot expect to make much of a difference to their intention whether or not to study abroad. That decision will have been made a long time previously, subconsciously or consciously.

---

81 United Kingdom Border Agency
Q69  **The Chairman:** Thank you. I have one last question. Do you have any views on the potential contribution to higher education of other financial instruments such as the European Social Fund? Has that crossed your path?

**Liam Burns:** I cannot speak in an authoritative way. One reason for our being in favour of Erasmus for All was that it had become clearer how the structural framework could add to that funding. One of my biggest pleas is that we should make sure that student unions can access the money in a coherent way, because they are incredibly interested in this area and have done fantastic work around both outward mobility and the experience of international students coming to the UK. Whatever our response from a UK perspective, we should make sure that lots of different actors can access funding. It should not just be institutions; student unions will also have a valuable role to play.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much indeed. I will reiterate what my colleagues said about the detail and high level of your contribution to our thinking. I hope that you will have an opportunity to look in detail at our report when it comes out. Thank you very much for your evidence today and for your written evidence.

**Liam Burns:** Thank you for your time.

**The Chairman:** And for struggling through the London traffic.

**Liam Burns:** Apologies again. If you would like evidence on the Tube network, I would be happy to give it.
Northern Ireland Assembly – Written evidence

1. The Committee agreed to respond specifically on Question 4, “How desirable is the EU's target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?”

2. The Committee believes that higher education adds significant value to the social, economic, cultural and educational capital of Northern Ireland. It contributes to the development of an internationally competitive knowledge-based economy and helps to develop the higher skills necessary to support growth.

3. In order for this country to develop these economic skills, it is vital to maximise the numbers going forward into higher education. For this reason the Committee supports the on-going formulation by the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning of a Regional Strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education. This Strategy aims to reach groups currently under-represented: students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with physical and learning disabilities, as well as young people from families with no experience of third-level education.

4. Current participation rates in higher education in Northern Ireland are higher than in any other region of the United Kingdom. In 2008-2009 almost 50% (48.2%) of school leavers entered higher education, and, of these, 41.7% came from socio-economic groups 4 – 7. This compares favourably with 32.4% in England and 28.2% in Scotland.

5. The Committee has identified a wide range of social benefits which accompany participation in higher education – decreased likelihood of obesity, smoking or suicide – and believes that lower participation by disadvantaged groups is economically wasteful when global competition demands the full use of all available skills and resources.

6. The Committee recognises that increased participation may occur through routes other than the traditional full-time study for a three or four year degree, and that there is a real and pressing need to encourage mature students and adult returners to address the skills gap in the existing work force.

7. The Committee believes that specific funded initiatives added to the core funding of the local universities have been effective in widening participation, as well as specific projects such as “Step Up” and “Discovering Queen's”, where the universities have actively gone into both primary and post-primary schools to promote participation in higher education.

24 November 2011
1. The Europe 2020 strategy puts knowledge, together with research and innovation, at the centre of European strategy to increase competitiveness for the next decade. Europe 2020, therefore, broadly relates to higher education in two ways: completing the European Research Area (ERA) by 2014; and for achieving economic and social targets necessary for a knowledge-based economy. In making knowledge, research and innovation the central feature of the Europe 2020 strategy, the role of higher education and Universities will be integral to the realisation of increasing European competitiveness.

2. While higher education remains a matter for national competence within the EU, two increasingly interrelated but initially separate processes are having profound impact on higher education. Firstly, the Bologna declaration signed in 1999 established an intergovernmental initiative, which was designed to make European higher education more compatible and comparable by the creation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Bologna Process has more recently evolved into harmonisation of degree structures and a concern with quality assurance standards for education. Secondly, as part of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Research Area (ERA) was established in 2000. Its initial aims were to overcome fragmentation of national research systems, and to increase spending on R&D to 3 percent of GDP.

3. Over time, however, these two initially separate processes have gradually become more closely interwoven, and the ERA has taken precedence as the core focus. To give a brief summary of background: Education Ministers meeting in Berlin (2003) noted the importance of research as an integral part of higher education. The Bergen Communiqué (2005) of education Ministers stressed the importance of research training and doctoral level qualifications needed to be fully aligned within the EHEA overarching framework. At the European level, the European Commission has become a full member at Bologna ministerial meetings, and has stressed the need for higher education to contribute to the Lisbon Strategy. The European Commission has called for modernised curricula and more effective funding and governance of higher education, and in 2007 the European Commission called for mobility in higher education to support the ERA. Furthermore, the adoption of Article XIX on Research and Technological Development and Space- in the Lisbon Treaty has further strengthened the European Research Area.

4. As a result of the changes outlined above, the Europe 2020 strategy is a continuation of the Lisbon Strategy, further linking knowledge and the role of higher education to research and innovation. In accordance with Europe 2020 flagship initiative 'Innovation Union' a common strategic framework for funding research linked to major "societal challenges" identified by the European Commission to be climate change, energy security, transport, health and ageing, environmental friendly land management and resource efficiency (among others) has been adopted. The Commission has proposed to allocate €80 billion under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2014-20 to the common strategic framework for research and innovation (Horizon 2020). I note, however, the current Open Letter to the European Commissioner for Research and Innovation calling for a substantial and independent Social Science and Humanities centred research programme to be incorporated into the next MFF.
5. The European Commission communication on the modernisation of higher education, COM (2011) 567, is designed to achieve the economic and social goals of the knowledge-based economy, in line with Europe 2020 flagship initiatives 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs' and 'European Platform against Poverty'.

5a. However, what is less clear is how European initiatives for the modernisation of higher education and flagship programmes designed to achieve 40 percent of young people in higher education or equivalent studies by 2020, will actually ensure that the socially disadvantaged are the real beneficiaries of these projects. Here, I would like to draw the enquiries attention to the recent Eurydice report: 'Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and the Social Dimension 2011'. On p10-11 of the report a distinction is made between policies that are designed to foster equality of condition or equality of outcomes. Moreover, dependent on which definition of equity is adopted, quite different policies may result. The Eurydice report also argues that funding will need to be linked to achieving these aims.

5b. With regard to funding the economic and social goals of the modernisation of higher education, there are numerous Europe 2020 initiatives for achieving the priority of "inclusive growth" that require funding such as lifelong learning, vocational training, mobility as well as workforce flexicurity initiatives. It therefore remains unclear how much of this funding will be designated to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and under which initiative. Furthermore, it appears the Europe 2020 priority for "inclusive growth" will be primarily financed from the structural, cohesion and in particular the European Social Fund (ESF).

21 November 2011
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – Written evidence

Introduction to QAA

1. QAA’s mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education.

2. The primary responsibility for academic standards and quality rests with individual institutions. We review all UK higher education institutions, and report on how well they meet those responsibilities, identify good practice, and make recommendations for improvement. We also work with the higher education sector across the UK to produce the essential reference materials and key guidelines on how academic standards should be set and maintained, and on the quality and improvement of learning opportunities.

3. QAA takes a leading role in international developments in standards and quality. We enjoy a close relationship with international quality assurance agencies, monitoring and reporting on advances around the world.

4. We contribute funding to the UK Higher Education International Unit, and participate in its European Coordinating Group and International Strategic Advisory Board, contributing to the development and approval of its policy and responses to European higher education and research developments and recommendations.

5. QAA is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). ENQA is the umbrella organisation for quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area. Our membership of ENQA ensures that the UK has a voice in European quality assurance policy direction. This is critical for student mobility and helps to ensure the continued competitiveness of UK higher education internationally. ENQA is a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up Group.

6. QAA has ensured that we meet the expectations of the Bologna Process, for example by verifying that UK higher education qualifications align with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), and compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

7. Higher education has an important contribution to make in achieving the aims of Europe 2020: to boost jobs, growth and innovation.

8. To achieve these aims, universities and other higher education providers must have sufficient autonomy and independence in developing and running programmes, and in the selection and admission of students (including the authority to recognise qualifications and learning from elsewhere). They must also have the capacity to
partner effectively with business and industry to develop flexible and innovative programmes, meeting the specific needs of local economies.

9 Supporting diversity of provision and the sharing of information and good and innovative practices across EU member states and their higher education institutions will contribute to achieving Europe 2020 rather than promoting or adopting uniform practices and processes.

**The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**

10 The Bologna Process is based on voluntary inter-governmental cooperation rather than a treaty-based union. This consensual approach is one of the strengths of the Bologna Process, demonstrating a shared will by very diverse higher education systems to work towards common aims.

11 There is understanding across participating countries that embedding Bologna principles and instruments implies greater structural change. The time this takes in each country will depend on the nature of the higher education system and the scale of change required. There is no 'one size fits all' model for implementation in terms of timing and processes within participating countries, reflecting the diverse sector that Bologna operates in.

12 Since the beginning of the Bologna Process the EU has added value to the Bologna Process through:

- all 27 EU member states becoming participating countries in the Bologna Process, hence the majority party
- with the exception of Norway, the Bologna Secretariat being located in and supported by an EU member state, which also hosts the biennial meeting of ministers responsible for higher education in the EHEA
- the majority of open Bologna seminars and workshops being held in EU member states to exchange good practice across and between participating countries
- the European Commission as a consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up Group, contributing to the steering of the process
- the contribution of significant funding from the European Commission for Bologna Process activities and initiatives, facilitating the sharing of good practice and information. This has also included the appointment and funding of teams of national Bologna Experts to support the implementation of Bologna Process objectives especially at institutional level.

These EU contributions are essential to the continuation of the voluntary inter-governmental cooperation that is the EHEA.

13 At times, European Commission funded and 'owned' activities are promoted as 'Bologna' without any reference to them in communiqués, or offering all EHEA participating countries the chance to contribute to further development and review. This could cause confusion. It is important to retain clarity as to what activities come within the scope of the Bologna Process and what comes under the scope of the EU.
Mobility

14 The Commission's support for mobility schemes through the provision of grants to students is essential. As individual states' funding for student mobility could be reduced in current challenging economic circumstances, we can expect an even greater emphasis on the Commission's support.

15 There is a need for greater flexibility in some of the mobility programmes, through shorter periods of mobility or the eligibility of different types of activity, to accommodate a wider range of students and activities. For example, the inclusion of work placements in the Erasmus programme has contributed over the last three years to an increase in the number of outgoing students, reversing what had been a long and steady decline in the number of UK participating students.

16 Work is currently underway in the Bologna Process on the 'social dimension', including efforts to support and promote student mobility. We would welcome greater assurance that the Commission's own efforts complement, not duplicate, this important area of work.

17 There is a lack of clarity regarding the details of several of the Commission's proposals on mobility. We support schemes that genuinely increase mobility, but would welcome more information from the Commission regarding exactly how these proposals would add value, as well as confirmation that they would not threaten the autonomy of member states. These comments apply to the 'Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme' and the 'European level student loan guarantee facility' but we would also want more information about the proposed 'analysis of potential student mobility flows' and any impact on member states and universities.

18 QAA assures the quality of UK higher education however and wherever it is delivered. Guidance published by QAA makes it clear that the management of quality and standards of UK higher education delivered through franchise and partnership arrangements remains the responsibility of the awarding institution. We would therefore seek clarification of the meaning of 'take into account the judgements of the European Court of Justice and of Quality Assurance standards to support the quality of franchise education', from the Commission's proposals.

Introduction of league tables

19 In UK higher education, there are no official league tables. Institutions publish extensive information about themselves, while students and the public can access sources of good information, such as QAA's review reports. From 2012, institutions in England will receive a formal judgement from QAA on the reliability of the information an institution provides about itself, further assuring the public and informing good student choice.

20 There remains a lack of clarity as to the purpose and nature of the Umultirank tool. We would welcome clarification as to whether it is intended as a ranking tool or, as is stated in the Umultirank website, a 'transparency tool', making it easier for students and researchers to make informed choices as to where to study and where to work.
21 There is no apparent transparency regarding the future governance, funding for and cost of this project, nor how data submitted on questionnaires by institutions will be validated, and this is a serious concern in terms of the quality assurance of the process. This is especially pertinent if the outcomes of it were to be used by the Commission to, for example, allocate funding on the basis of all or some of the dimensions included in the institutional profile.

22 At the Bologna ministerial meeting in 2009, ministers agreed that the Bologna Follow-up Group should monitor the development of transparency initiatives including rankings and report back to the next full ministerial meeting which will be held in Bucharest in April 2012. This proposal from the Commission is therefore outside the Bologna Process and is being promoted before the findings of the Bologna Follow-up Group working group on transparency have been published.

Internationalisation: beyond Europe

23 The development of an EU strategy for internationalisation has been on the agenda for some time, but without any clear, convincing statement as to its need or purpose. Current programmes with other countries and regions, such as Tempus, already provide a useful means of fostering the sharing of information and practice and institutional cooperation including in some cases student mobility around the world.

24 There may be even greater need for EU support for such individual programmes given current economic crises when international cooperation of this type falls down the funding priority list.

25 Consideration should be given to whether funding for internationalisation could better be spent supporting higher education institutions in developing their individual international strategies and profile producing a multiplier effect and more sustainable benefits.

Conclusion

26 We have confined our evidence to those areas where we have some experience and knowledge through participation in European projects, membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance and activities to confirm the compatibility or compliance of QAA’s standards or processes with Bologna Process instruments.

27 There are however several unknowns in terms of intent and detail in the Commission’s communication and on which comment will have to wait until further information is available. We have highlighted some of them above but others include a potential ‘European Tertiary Education Register’ and ‘a quality framework for traineeships’.

28 We would recommend that the EU continues to support and fund projects that bring about mutual understanding and strengthen the position of higher education
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – Written evidence

in Europe, adding value but not duplicating activity or the competence of member states in the EU and participating countries in the European Higher Education Area.

21 November 2011
The Russell Group of Universities – Written evidence

1. Introduction

1.1 The Russell Group is pleased to have the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Sub-Committee’s inquiry. The topic of the EU contribution to the modernisation of higher education in Europe is important to the UK’s higher education sector, students and the economy, and to European ambitions for growth and jobs.

2. The Russell Group and Europe

2.1 The Russell Group is an association of 20 major UK research-intensive universities. Russell Group universities are highly involved in Europe, with 33,000 non-UK EU students (22% of the UK’s undergraduate students and 55% of the UK’s PhD students from the rest of the EU) and over 14,000 EU staff (46% of UK higher education staff and 70% of research-only staff from the rest of the EU). Our universities also contribute significantly to the UK’s success in securing EU research and innovation funding: 13 of the top 50 higher education recipients of Framework Programme 7 funding, and all the UK institutions in the top 50, are Russell Group universities.

2.2 Russell Group universities are leading contributors to Europe’s strengths in higher education and research. They are world-class and globally connected collaborators for many European research partners. The combination of teaching and research excellence in Russell Group universities creates an ideal learning environment for students and the next generation of researchers from across the EU and beyond.

3. Context

3.1 Within the EU, the main responsibility for higher education rests with member states and with universities themselves. We note that the Committee’s inquiry will not address domestic higher education issues. However, the contribution of EU proposals to growth and the international competitiveness of the EU and UK through our leading universities needs to be understood within the context of domestic policy and funding and the increasingly global higher education environment. Russell Group academics collaborate daily with researchers around the world and thousands of students benefit each year from exchanges to and from our universities. Russell Group universities are engaged in partnerships for education and research with universities and public research institutions across the globe and attract international investment from multi-national research-intensive companies. But Russell Group universities face increasing international competition from China, India and other European countries. Countries like the US, China, France and Germany are investing massively in their best institutions. It is vital to the UK that our institutions are able to stay competitive.

3.2 However, it is also worth noting that the best institutions in the rest of the EU are increasingly competing as well as collaborating with our universities in attracting international students and research prestige. Other governments are actively promoting international student recruitment. France and Germany in particular are

---

82 For more information about the Russell Group see www.russellgroup.ac.uk
increasing resources and concentrating them in a small number of their institutions to enable them to compete with the best in the world.85

3.3 The Commission has set out a number of key issues for member states and higher education institutions, including the quality and relevance of higher education, mobility, and linking higher education, research and business for excellence and development.86 Russell Group institutions are recognised as world-leaders in many of these areas and may provide positive models for the modernisation of higher education in other parts of the EU.

(a) They are all highly international, with 84,000 non-EU students and nearly 13,000 non-EU staff.

(b) Russell Group universities work hard to ensure that they continue to have high levels of student satisfaction and the lowest drop-out rates.87

(c) Russell Group graduates are highly sought after by employers around the world, with an approximate average wage premium of up to 10% for a graduate from a Russell Group university compared to a graduate from a modern university in the UK.

(d) They work extensively with industry and public services. With just 12% of all UK higher education institutions in the Russell Group, we generate 68% of all business and charity income in the UK sector.

(e) Our universities are committed to ensuring that every student with the qualifications, potential and determination to succeed at a Russell Group university has the chance to do so. We spend millions on financial support and outreach activities aimed at widening access to our universities.88

3.4 There are many aspects of the EU’s policy recommendations with which we would agree. For example, the Commission highlights the importance of institutional autonomy and reducing restrictions in order to enhance the effectiveness of public investment in universities. It also notes the need for diversity, with not every institution able to compete for world-class research ranking, and the importance of an environment with critical mass and research excellence in doctoral training. Other EU member states have understandably chosen to concentrate their resources in leading institutions in order to compete with the best universities globally. World-class universities, with their heavy concentration of brainpower,

---

85 The German Government is implementing an ‘Excellence Initiative’ to make Germany a more attractive research location and increase its international competitiveness by focussing attention on a small number of outstanding universities. The initiative will invest €2.5bn over 2012-17, in addition to €1.9bn already invested. The French higher education sector is benefiting significantly from their stimulus spending plan, and will receive €7.7bn through an “Excellence Initiative” (IDEX). Ten campuses will be created, bringing together France’s leading institutions to compete with the best universities in the world. France’s Budget for 2012 is set to increase higher education funding by 2.5% (€373m). In the same year universities will benefit from €167m additional investment as part of a €5bn “operation campus” to invest in the top university campuses.

86 Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems, 2011, September 2011.

87 The average drop-out rate for Russell Group universities is 4.2%, compared with the UK sector average of 7.9%.

88 In 2009-10 alone English Russell Group universities spent £82.2 million of their extra fee income on bursaries. By 2015-16 Russell Group universities in England plan to spend £153.7 million of their additional fee income on financial support for students. This represents an average per institution of £9.6 million with some of our universities spending as much as £17 million. Overall, this amounts to over £5.9 million more per institution than the sector average of £3.7 million.
established excellence, and the sheer numbers and facilities to achieve global impact, are best placed to attract investment by leading global companies.

3.5 The continued success and ability of Russell Group institutions to engage fruitfully with Europe will be important to achieving the ambitions of Europe 2020, growth and jobs. EU and UK policy makers should champion the role of leading research-intensive universities in contributing to the further development of EU proposals and the Bologna process.

4. **Europe 2020**

4.1 From the Russell Group’s perspective, EU intervention in higher education has contributed most to growth and jobs where it has provided resources to support the mobility of students and through targeted funding for research on the basis of excellence. To help higher education most effectively contribute to the strategic objectives of growth and innovation, the EU should increase these targeted resources.

5. **Bologna process and European Higher Education Area**

5.1 The EU adds most value through its support for mobility, for example through Erasmus and through the Marie Curie actions, which supports mobile researchers. We welcome the Commission’s proposal that such funding should increase under Education Europe.

5.2 It is essential that the Bologna process should remain separate from and complementary to the EU’s policy development. The notable achievements through the Bologna process have been achieved because it is a voluntary agreement of many nations, including non-EU participants; member states rightly have the competency over education. It will be important that the consolidation of the Bologna process maintains flexibility to accommodate the wide range of qualifications and HE systems operating across the EHEA and the autonomy of higher education institutions.

5.3 The UK’s representatives will need to pay close attention to the perception of UK’s one year second cycle (Masters) qualifications in Europe, and make clear that their value is demonstrated by learning outcomes and quality alongside hours and workload. Improved mutual understanding of the nature of PhDs in different countries could also help wider collaboration and international experience – PhDs are broadly treated as research students in the UK, whereas in other countries they are treated as academic staff. However, doctoral education itself should not be over regulated. The focus should remain on the outcome of the advancement of knowledge through research.

6. **Funding instruments**

6.1 The pursuit of excellence in research funding arrangements under Horizon 2020 will be a vital investment in Europe’s economic and social future. We strongly support EU ambitions for smart growth through an increased proportion of EU funding dedicated to research, education and innovation, which should place a higher priority on funding for the very best frontier research and the next generation of mobile researchers. Investment in basic, curiosity-driven research is essential, to drive economic growth and innovation across the EU, and funding from the European Research Council should be increased to reflect this priority. Russell Group universities have been some of the most active contributors in the development of research and innovation in Europe through the current Framework Programme, especially the Ideas (ERC) and People (Marie Curie actions) elements. These
programmes are particularly welcome to institutions such as ours because they support basic research and focus on excellence at a European level.

6.2 The effectiveness of the EU’s overall contribution could be enhanced by a greater use of Cohesion funding to support learning, research and innovation. This could help to develop new connections and centres of excellence across Europe’s nations and regions. Horizon 2020 and Education Europe will add most value by focussing on excellence in allocating limited resources rather than geographic cohesion.

7. **Targets and League Table**

7.1 The Committee has asked for views on the EU’s target for 40% of young people to be completing higher education by 2020. Ultimately, whether or not such a target is desirable depends on whether national higher education systems are able to ensure high standards and sustain a quality learning and student experience for an increased number of students. In some contexts, including the UK, where the HE participation rate is already close to 40%, maintaining quality is more important than increasing overall student numbers. Expansion of participation at the expense of quality may not deliver the economic and social benefits that the EU is seeking.

7.2 The Committee has also invited views on the ‘U-Multirank’ tool. Transparent and robust data about higher education is undeniably important to students, researchers, and other stakeholders and some Russell Group universities have participated in the piloting of U-Multirank. However, ranking universities is fraught with difficulties and we have many concerns about the accuracy of any ranking. It is very difficult to capture fully in numerical terms the performance of universities and their contribution to knowledge, to the world economy and to society. Making meaningful comparisons of universities both within, and across, national borders is a tough and complex challenge, not least because of issues relating to the robustness and comparability of data. The fact that an individual institution can fare quite differently in the various league tables illustrates these problems very clearly. League tables which rely on data provided by individual universities also generate additional burden and costs for institutions wishing to participate. For these reasons, it is questionable whether investing in another ranking system is the best use of the EC’s resources.

8. **Mobility**

8.1 The mobility of students and researchers, for part or all of a programme of study or research, is highly valuable to the individual and the institutions and countries that participate. The Commission’s proposal to increase EU resources through Education Europe and Horizon 2020 to support the costs of mobility for students and funding for early career researchers is welcome. European mobility and Marie Curie funding in particular provide very valuable support to our universities’ efforts to continue to increase their global engagement and to provide students and young researchers with an excellent, truly international education, which prepares them best to contribute to the economic and cultural prosperity of the EU and beyond.

8.2 The combination of teaching and research excellence in Russell Group universities creates an ideal learning environment, and attracts many EU students, both for full

---

89 A European University Association report (Global University Rankings and their Impact, 2011) and a European Commission report (Assessing Europe’s University-based research, 2010) express serious doubts about the feasibility of comparing universities, and an earlier report by HEFCE (Counting what is measured or measuring what counts? 2008) found that constraints on available data mean that league tables tend to simply ‘count what can be measured rather than measuring what counts’.
programmes, and on exchange schemes. With the recent changes in the fees and funding arrangements for undergraduate students in the UK, it will be important that appropriate policies are put in place for incoming Erasmus students to ensure that our institutions are able to continue to welcome such students in the future.90

8.3 Postgraduate education is a great opportunity and a good investment for many students. Postgraduates will be increasingly important for the EU to create a more skilled and highly qualified workforce and drive growth in the economy. Taught postgraduate study empowers people of all ages to gain additional skills and knowledge to give them an edge in an increasingly competitive jobs market but also to provide the innovation and knowledge which is vital in a 21st century economy. It can also lead the way to postgraduate research which develops highly valued skills, is usually required for a research career, and often involves being a vital member of a team producing ground-breaking research. Attracting the brightest postgraduates from around the world is a critical priority for Russell Group universities, because these students bring a huge range of benefits to our universities, and also to the wider UK and EU economy.

8.4 The Commission is exploring the possibility of a European-wide Masters loan guarantee scheme. We have not yet seen the details of how such a scheme might operate, and therefore at this stage it is difficult to form a clear view as to the potential benefits. Whether the guarantee could significantly increase mobility would depend on the terms and level of loans available and how they complement member states’ provision domestically. In principle, however, increasing financial support for postgraduate students is something we do see as a priority. In the UK, borrowing to fund postgraduate study is not as easy as accessing student loans for undergraduate study. We have raised concerns that financial considerations could increasingly deter talented home and EU students from pursuing postgraduate study.91

8.5 We support the EU’s call in the Principles on Innovative Doctoral Training, for research excellence and “an attractive institutional environment with critical mass”. We have recently welcomed HEFCE’s recognition that support for home and EU postgraduate research should be prioritised and funding better targeted towards excellent provision.

9. International dimension

9.1 Higher education is one of the UK’s most successful export industries and this should be celebrated and supported. The Commission recommends urgently addressing problems in obtaining visas to study and work to enhance Europe’s attractiveness. This reflects our advice to the UK Government, that if we are to maintain our place as a global leader in higher education, immigration policies must not prevent universities from attracting the best staff and students from outside the EU.

9.2 Research and higher education are increasingly international activities. Russell Group universities benefit from numerous partnerships in research and teaching with institutions around the world. The scale and diversity of these links is huge, ranging from links between individual academics to overseas campuses and large-scale research and education partnerships. Such collaborations support staff and student

90 Currently, the funding councils provide universities with Erasmus fee compensation for incoming Erasmus students who do not pay fees in the UK. This funding is currently under review.

The Council and Commission propose designing a strategy for the internationalisation of higher education, working with member states, and including both EU and national level dimensions. It is not yet clear what such a strategy might entail, or how it might be developed. The EU already provides welcome support for cooperation with non-EU higher education systems, notably through programmes such as TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus. International collaborations add most value when the partners themselves select the institutions, researchers and organisations with which they wish to cooperate. We would be very concerned to ensure that any common EU strategy for the internationalisation of higher education adds benefit to, and certainly does not impede, the international activities and partnerships of institutions such as ours which are already highly internationalised.

23 November 2011
Q92  The Chairman: Good morning, and welcome to you all. We are pleased to have you here together at the meeting. This is our penultimate witness session and so far we have heard quite a lot of interesting evidence, which will feed into our deliberations. Before I ask you to introduce yourselves, I have a few housekeeping points to make. Members’ interests are recorded in the Register of Lords’ Interests and a list of declared interests is on the witness table. The session is on the record. It is being webcast live and subsequently will be accessible via the parliamentary website. You will receive a copy of the transcript of
the session to check and correct, and this will be put on the Parliamentary record on the website. Please begin by stating for the record your name, official titles and affiliations. If you wish to do so, you can make a brief opening statement.

**Dr Jennifer Barnes:** Thank you. I am Jennifer Barnes. I am Pro-Vice-Chancellor of International Strategy at the University of Cambridge and President of Murray Edwards College, an all-women college. I am here representing the Russell Group of universities.

**Professor Tony Downes:** I am Professor Tony Downes. I am Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Reading, but when you issued the invitation I was the Acting Vice-Chancellor. To my great pleasure we have succeeded in finding a successor. I am here representing the 1994 Group, of which I am a board member.

**Professor Les Ebdon:** I am Les Ebdon, the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Bedfordshire and Chair of the university think tank, million+. Many members of million+ are strongly international in their outlook. We recognise the value of the Bologna Process in promoting student and graduate mobility. Most of us regret the decline in student mobility, which has been accelerated recently with the advent of fees. We certainly see the way in which we have particularly benefited from European Union framework programme research funding because of its emphasis on applicable research, which fits the mission of many of our universities. We welcome the fact that recent European Union policy has emphasised the catalytic role that universities can play in local economies.

**Professor Graham Galbraith:** Last but not least, I am Professor Graham Galbraith, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Hertfordshire. Today I am representing the University Alliance, which comprises 23 business-facing universities and which makes up over 25% of the student body in the UK.

**Q93 The Chairman:** Thank you. I will open the questions with something that has already been referred to, the Bologna Process. How beneficial do you feel that that process has been for UK higher education institutions and should they be more engaged with the process? How much emphasis is placed on the European Credit Transfer System and the Diploma Supplement among your members?

**Dr Jennifer Barnes:** I am happy to start. We are fully supportive of the Bologna Process. We would like to see it reflected as continuing on an autonomous and voluntary basis because it has come from the sector. That puts considerable emphasis on it in terms of its respectability throughout Europe. Many of the Russell Group universities already employ the European Credit Transfer System, and Diploma Supplements, when wished for, are provided.

**Professor Tony Downes:** I would echo a large part of that. I believe that the Bologna Process is something that no UK university can afford to ignore. Many of them have absorbed it fairly easily and readily into the way they do things already, but if you did not have it, it would be an important mark that something was missing. I believe that all 1994 Group members use ECTS, and our view on Diploma Supplements is to make them available if they are asked for. But they are really employer driven rather than university driven.

**The Chairman:** That is interesting because in the past the Government have said, and as indeed the Minister said last week, that they do not feel that the ECTS is really fit for purpose. Would the two remaining speakers like to comment on that?
Professor Les Ebdon: I want just to emphasise that our members are very supportive of the Bologna Process. It has come up from the universities, and not just European Union universities. We must not confuse it with the attempts perhaps to take it over which are being made by some parts of the European Union. Perhaps we should emphasise too that the value of the Bologna Process has been felt internationally. When I go to China, I am often asked to speak about the Bologna Process, because graduate mobility is not just a European issue; it is a global one. We have benefited significantly from the first cycle process in Bologna because people have moved towards British systems, and that has been beneficial, although it is becoming slightly more challenging as we move through the process.

I am sure that all the million+ subscribing universities also subscribe to the European Credit Transfer System and find it valuable, along with the Diploma Supplement. It is interesting that the Government should say that they do not find the ECTS particularly helpful. I think that what is not helpful to employers is the current classification system, which averages so many different abilities in a single classification: a First, a 2:1, a 2:2 and so on. Of course, these days we are paying a lot of attention to the Higher Education Achievement Record, known as HEAR, which gives even more information to employers if they want it. The suspicion about that is that it gives too much information to employers, but its greatest value is to graduates themselves so that they know where their own strengths lie.

Professor Graham Galbraith: Again, we are all sounding like we agree with each other, which is unusual for universities. From the point of view of University Alliance members, the ECTS has worked well. There are some more detailed issues around—for example, while it is good for credit transfer, when it comes to the grades of a credit when people are taking joint programmes between different universities across Europe, it becomes more complicated. I know that there is a plan of some kind to look at the concept of a Quality Assurance Agency existing in each Member State. Negotiations between universities in joint programmes would be made much easier if there was an overarching accrediting body in each member state, because that is usually where the difficulties arise. Individual universities have to negotiate joint programmes with each other, so it would be beneficial.

On the Diploma Supplement, I agree with what Professor Ebdon has said. The honours classification system, if I can be even bolder, gets in the way of the power that the diploma supplement could have in terms of giving a fuller picture of the performance of a student. I think that employers and parents in the UK are kind of blind because they always look to the honours classification, whereas actually the Diploma Supplement would give much more detailed information on the capability and performance of each individual student.

Q94 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Can we talk a little more about the point that Professor Ebdon made about the intergovernmental Bologna Process, which goes right across Europe as opposed to the EU? Can you say a little bit about where you think the lines should be drawn on who should be doing what and about how clear you think the sector and European decision-makers are about where the value gets added?

Professor Les Ebdon: It is very important that universities as autonomous organisations stay in control of this process. One has to recognise, of course, that governments have a key part to play and that university systems are different. In the whole of the EU, it is probably true that this country has the most independent universities and that some countries have much more state control over their universities. Research has shown that autonomous and independent universities are better able to maintain quality and produce a better system. If you look at a good deal of research, it shows that they are among the most successful universities, and we should be very proud of our university system in this country.
Dr Jennifer Barnes: An area that the United Kingdom will want to look very carefully at in the next stage in the Bologna Process is our one-year Masters. It will have tremendous implications in terms of our ability to be consistent with Bologna. At the moment, for Masters, Bologna measures workload and numbers of hours. That is antithetical to the UK Masters, which is based on the quality of the outcome and the experience. It will be important to question where you draw certain lines. This country’s strong advocacy of its Masters programme—for many reasons, which we may get on to—will be important.

Professor Tony Downes: I endorse that and would like to follow up on what Professor Ebdon has said. Most universities in the United Kingdom are increasingly internationalised and global, and the EU becomes quite a narrow perspective in terms of what many universities are doing. If the creation of a European higher education area became a significant regulatory framework for higher education that we had to operate within, that would be extremely constraining. If you read the EU document, more than anything, it feels like a document aimed at the rest of the EU, trying to get it up to where the UK is now. The thing that is missing is what Professor Ebdon has already mentioned: there is no greater guarantee of success than autonomy.

Q95 Lord Cotter: We have just talked about the importance of internationalism. We all know the times in which we live. We shall be coming on to how European universities can retain their competitive edge regarding the US and China and many other nations coming forward. Do you think that a greater proportion of the EU budget should be allocated to research, education and innovation? I come to this where we are today with a business perspective, which is what I concentrated on in Parliament. What I think is the key question is how we feel we are competing and will compete in the future on R&D.

Professor Graham Galbraith: I welcome the emphasis on knowledge and innovation that is a key part of Horizon 2020. University Alliance published its report, 21st Century Universities: Engines of an Innovation-Driven Economy. A lot of evidence in that clearly pointed to the importance of investment in higher education and in research in higher education establishments. I think that there is a lot of press coverage at the moment about having too many graduates. In fact, the evidence suggests that it will be very important for us in the future to have a highly skilled workforce. That is recognised and is a theme that we very much welcome in Horizon 2020. However, a key issue is not just European funding within Europe; a key aspect of it is how we engage with countries outside Europe. We have to ensure that research and other funding allows that kind of collaboration. Another aspect that I welcome is the emphasis on SMEs, because future growth is going to be dependent on SME development. Alliance universities are strong in their business engagement with SMEs, and the UK could do very well out of the funds focused on SMEs.

Lord Cotter: A greater proportion?

Professor Graham Galbraith: I think that the proposals that show an increase in budget are to be welcomed. Again, the UK has traditionally done very well out of the euro region—money through Europe for research and innovation—and it is something that I would welcome. The percentage of GDP that we spend on research in comparison with our competitors is low, so I think that this increase in budget is very welcome.

Professor Les Ebdon: I do not think that you would expect a group of university academics to give anything other than strong endorsement to your question, Lord Cotter, but it would be a serious mistake to think that EU funding is the answer to the issues that we face in terms of education, innovation and research in this country. We have to face the situation
where public funding for higher education in this country is about to reach an historic low—it is substantially less than that allocated in other Member States and in other competitor countries. While an increase in the EU budget in this area would be very strongly welcomed, it would not replace the cuts that we are seeing elsewhere.

A particular feature of EU funding that has been helpful has been the way in which it has encouraged collaboration between academia and business. I refer to my opening remarks. The emphasis on applicable research has been very helpful, particularly to those universities that concentrate on that form of research. It has demonstrated the ways in which greater collaboration between business, industry and universities can substantially lift local economies and contribute to the competitiveness of the European Union.

I have just one final point, which is that there is another reason why the UK Government should be keen on promoting this direction of funding in the European Union. UK universities outperform all other universities in the European Union in achieving this funding by substantial margins. Whereas we do not do quite so well on agriculture, we do extremely well on research funding.

Q96 The Chairman: Could you give us some examples of what you think constitutes good practice in that area?

Professor Les Ebdon: Yes, I can. One of the things that has been really helpful in framework funding—having been an assessor for framework funding, I know how the system works—is that, for a start, the decisions are completely blind as to who are the partners in the project. So, as opposed to when you serve on a UK Research Council committee—where one of the first questions that people ask is, “Does anyone know this research group? Have people heard about it?” and we have all the dangers of cronyism—in the European Union you do not know who the partners are when you make your scoring. There are two streams of scoring going on. One is on the merits of the proposal—in my case, as a scientist, on the scientific merits of the proposal—and the other is scoring on the merits of the applicability of the research; that is, the benefits that it would bring either to society or to business and industry. There are some very clear themes that the European Union wishes to advance for the benefit of European citizens and the European economy, and one judges research against those themes. We have seen some very good collaborations.

One of the things that framework funding really has built is a European community of researchers. The collaborations that go on within Europe are now very strong, and they need to be. The other big research bloc has been the United States, where there has been much larger volume. It is therefore very sensible for European researchers to collaborate. The challenge that we face in the future is the new mega-economies in China and India, and perhaps even Brazil, which we will have to compete against as Europeans.

Q97 The Chairman: Are there any other quick responses to Lord Cotter’s remarks?

Professor Tony Downes: I want to make a quick comment to follow up on what Professor Ebdon has said. It is true that no university is going to say, “No, we don’t want more money”, but with Europe you always have to ask, “What is the price?” Quite a lot of European research funding can be inordinately complex in terms of the teams that you are required to put together. I think that you have had written evidence about that. It is something that one would need to watch.

Dr Jennifer Barnes: To build on that, the bureaucracy question is a real one. The Russell Group will collaborate and contribute to grand challenges where the right amount of money
The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group, million+ and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)

and the right teams are; if it is in Europe, they will be in Europe. Some 77% of European Research Council money goes to the Russell Group, so the sector in the UK is already heavily involved in this. It looks to that money because of the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review. We would like to have more here but, given the nature of the universities, if the challenges are big and if the money is right, the Russell Group is absolutely ready to engage. The difficulty then arises that if the bureaucracy is such that other parts of the world are able to deliver the same kinds of challenges with more autonomy for the sector, and with industry partnerships, then that is where we will be looking.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I am aware of the time and I see that we are just about to go into question 3. We will need to speed up a little bit, but should we not get to the end of the questions, we would ask you to submit some written evidence further to what you have already submitted.

Q98 Lord Whitty: I am interested in what you see as the role of the EU. You do not want a regulated framework and you would be keen on a bit more money as long as there was not a lot of bureaucracy attached to it, but what about the EU as a facilitator? In the innovation area, for example, the EU is setting out a strategy and setting up various bodies—innovation partnerships, innovation communities and so on. How far do you see a role for the EU in that? Are you saying, “It would be better if you left it to us to set up bilateral arrangements with other universities and with business, and really the EU bureaucracy should duck out of it”, or do you see a positive potential role for the EU in this respect?

Dr Jennifer Barnes: In terms of the Russell Group, to answer briefly and give others a chance, the question has been put almost backwards. If the European Social Fund and other entities and the EU are premised on the development of skills and economic growth, we say that we are the sector that is the engine to provide that growth. But we have also shown, particularly in this country, that our autonomy gives us a considerable basis for saying, “Please let us help you structure policies and moneys”. We are tremendously excited about the Horizon 2020 challenges. We are not saying, “We do not want anything to do with you”. We are saying that we actively wish to engage, but we need to be recognised for the excellence that we already bring in the UK.

Professor Les Ebdon: I would just add, Lord Whitty, that the way it actually works is probably the other way round to the way that you phrased the question. Groups of academics interested in similar areas of activity will often get together with people from industry and business, and then they will seek funding. That is what we seek from the European Union, and that is the key role. These partnerships are worth forming if there is a funding stream that can be approached. The initiative comes not from a bureaucrat in Brussels who says, “You should get together for this”; it comes because academics naturally get together when they have a common interest and start writing research proposals.

Professor Graham Galbraith: The issue of red tape and bureaucracy is one well made, and within the Horizon 2020 programme there is an attempt to address it, but of course we have to wait to see what the reality is on the ground. The UK Government have things to do as well. The Social Funds and the European Regional Development Funds, are actually managed by the Member States. ERDF bureaucracy is as great, if not greater, than the central European bureaucracy. In the UK we ourselves could be less bureaucratic about the elements that we have control over, and I would encourage that to be considered.
Q99  Lord Whitty: Can you see whether enough is being initiated by the universities bilaterally, multilaterally or within a programme? Is there more that the UK universities could do on the European dimension? Earlier, you seemed to be slightly more favourably inclined to joint relationships outside the traditional ones with North America and the English-speaking world in terms of joint courses, joint campuses and so on. Do you see more scope for that with European universities?

Dr Jennifer Barnes: Within the sector there is the stimulus of the Knowledge and Innovation Communities, and we would like to become more involved with those. There are already members of the Russell Group—and indeed universities across the table—who are involved on a regional and national basis but, on the earlier part of your question, there is also a recognition that, given our track record, we would feel that we should play a greater part in those. They are acting as a stimulus for closer alliances and partnerships.

Professor Tony Downes: If you look at the way in which universities in the UK behave, you see that they have been pretty opportunistic in identifying emerging markets. Europe’s higher education is a pretty established market. The reason why UK universities are looking to the Far East in particular is that it is an emerging market—the centre of gravity of the world economy, whether we like it or not, is moving east. The universities which are most active and most alert to the opportunities arising are seeking to operate in that part of the world. I do not think that we are turning our back on Europe and, where there are opportunities, we will take them, but I do not see Europe being the driving force in global higher education over the next, probably, 50 years.

The Chairman: Can we move now to talk a bit about the mobility of students?

Q100  Earl of Courtown: The Committee has noted that, in 2010-11, the number of UK students participating in the Erasmus programme was the highest that we have ever had, but we are still lagging far behind Germany and France. This is seen as originating from problems with language among our students. How do you think greater language skills can be developed and encouraged in UK universities beyond just language students? How significant do you think are the social as well as the economic benefits of placements abroad and how could these opportunities be more actively encouraged by institutions and Governments? Anecdotal evidence that I have of Erasmus students from the UK is that they tend to go to their universities of choice in Europe and live and socialise with other English-speaking students. Some of the benefits of living and learning abroad for a period are negated by this.

Professor Les Ebdon: I can counter your anecdote. Both my sons did an Erasmus year out. I now have a French daughter-in-law and an Italian daughter-in-law, so I am a very strong supporter of the Erasmus system and I am delighted to have some bilingual grandchildren. There are real advantages to students in placements overseas. Placements generally benefit students. They help them to mature; they give them a wider set of experiences; they make them much more employable by a wide range of employers; and they are definitely to be encouraged. The decline in the number of students engaging in such exchanges is to my mind a matter of great regret. Some of it is associated with the fees system—we may get on to questions about that later—but we should not build in a strong disincentive to people to take part in these placements. The other barrier that many UK students see to doing placements in the European Union is language. We need to face the fact that we have a very significant challenge both in our schools and in our universities in the teaching of languages. Modern universities tend to teach modular programmes, so it is relatively easy to introduce language components to those programmes, but in recent years the popularity of those language modules has declined significantly. I think that that is because people feel less well
prepared and equipped at school. We might say, “Well, put on more *ab initio* programmes and maybe that would help”, but it does not seem to. I just wonder, as we get increasing diversity in this country because of the mobility of labour in the European Union, whether we should not look at Polish programmes in our universities, perhaps building on students that we have from that culture and benefiting from the very strong links that this country has with Baltic states.

**Professor Tony Downes:** Just to go one up on anecdotal evidence, I should say that the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 2009 published a report based on a survey of students studying abroad in around 2003-04 and shows, statistically, that those who study abroad perform better overall both in degree results and in salaries earned in first employment. So I think that you can abandon the anecdotal evidence and say that there is now good, hard evidence to that effect. My own university offers quite a lot of *ab initio* language. There is a terrible problem of being able to take the horse to water but not being able to make it drink. The greatest take-up of *ab initio* language in my university is from foreign students studying a fourth or fifth language. There is a real problem in the UK about a willingness to study languages. Removing languages from the compulsory curriculum after the age of 14, which I know is being reconsidered, was a peculiar decision at a time when we were being told that it was a pity that UK students were not more adept at languages and more willing to study abroad.

**Dr Jennifer Barnes:** Finally, from the perspective that we have, the students who come to us are exceptional. They are with colleagues in the UK who recognise that they are increasingly studying alongside students who have two if not five languages. However, we could do far better in our university system, provided that the secondary system is considerably remedied, by allowing students—not simply language students—to understand that the opportunities for them in other countries in their specialist discipline, particularly with some of the programmes that Europe has been putting on, will increase. For example, professional musicians will want to go to Hungary to study piano or to Germany to study technology and music. They will need the language. When they see that their own professional discipline requires a language for them to be able to study in a part of the world that is doing innovative and creative things, we in universities should be better at conveying that message.

**Professor Graham Galbraith:** It is a difficult problem. Desire to take up a language at university is an issue. However, there are some small glimmers of hope. In my university, some 20% of our business students now take up a language voluntarily. I think that that is driven by getting the message across to students about the advantages of studying abroad. We have a communication barrier, which is explaining the advantages. Away from the anecdotal to the more anecdotal, if you meet students who have gone out to do a work placement or study abroad before and after their trip, you see that they are transformed individuals. They are completely different. They exhibit exactly the kind of skills that employers continually tell us that they want to see among students. I know that we are going to talk later on about diversity, but there is an issue around which groups of students take up the opportunities of studying abroad. There is certainly a potential social divide developing.

**Q101 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** I had not thought of the Erasmus programme as a dating agency until now; we will have to include that in our report. Professor Ebdon, you say in your submission that the new fees and funding regime in England may impact on the participation of students at English universities from 2012-13 onwards. Have you started
The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group, million+ and the University Alliance - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)

seeing this? Presumably, the students are applying already. Is there a variation between those universities that have high fees and those that have lower fees, and between England and Scotland and so on?

Professor Les Ebdon: Of course it is very early days—15 January was the date for most universities to give equal consideration to UCAS applications, so by next week or the week after we will see the digest of applications from UCAS. However, the initial indications are that we are not seeing much variation in the behaviour of students with regard to the level of fees, but significant variation by subject. There has been quite a swing to science and to those subjects that are seen to lead more directly to employment, and a swing away from subjects that are considered to be less strongly related to the world of work, so one might hope to could get the message out that an Erasmus exchange or placement abroad really helps someone’s employment prospects. But the real challenge is that, if students think that they have to take a fee loan for four years as opposed to one for three years, that additional debt burden is not worth taking on. It is very important to sustain a fee waiver for that year.

Let us not forget too that we have a student number cap, so the number of places at our universities will reduce by 8% to 10% depending on the mix that universities have this coming year. Therefore we will see very strong competition for places unless more are made available. If the Government really wanted to do something about this, and they often say that they do, they could at no cost encourage people into exchange programmes by taking them outside the student number cap. We have to ask whether this is just a question of rhetoric or whether there is a true belief that these are valuable programmes.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: As you gather information over the next few weeks and months, could you let us have it and any comments that you have to make on patterns and so forth? That would be helpful.

Professor Graham Galbraith: There is no doubt that the cost to students makes them look closely at the length of their programme. There is even some pressure now to consider things like two-year degrees. To my mind, once you start trying to cram a course into two years, you remove any opportunity for studying abroad or placement, yet precisely what employers want is the full experience of a university education and that includes these opportunities. So there is some concern that fee levels may drive participation down not just in study abroad but also in UK work placements and sandwich programmes. Some 10% of students in University Alliance institutions are doing four-year degrees with a one-year sandwich placement. Employers absolutely love that, but in the future it will be very expensive for students.

Q102 Viscount Bridgeman: This is a very brief supplementary on the Erasmus programme and it is a subject that has been of great concern to this Committee. The perception, I believe supported by research, including by the NUS, is that the Erasmus programme is drawn from a fairly narrow social demographic. I understand that the British Council has been attempting to address the problem with a fee waiver system for students studying abroad. What can universities and bodies at the UK and EC level do to encourage a broader base, and would you prefer to see a system of fee waivers continue after the current review?

Professor Les Ebdon: Most certainly we would want to see the fee waiver continue, otherwise we will see a dramatic decline in the number of students. You have asked how we could extend the programme. At the moment, the fee waiver applies if you study abroad for a year. If you study for a period of less than a year, you do not get the fee waiver. It is really
important, if we want to encourage more people to study abroad, that we address that problem. The obvious way of encouraging more study abroad is to say, “Okay, why not a six-month placement or a three-month placement?” The answer to those questions is, “That would cost me fees that would add to my loan debt”. It would be a serious disincentive.

**Professor Graham Galbraith:** We made a decision at the University of Hertfordshire to waive the £9,000 fee for placements abroad and work placements, but I have to say that it is debatable whether that will be sustainable for us. Government fee waiver funding needs to be in place. I also think—I am sure that this will come out in Sir Tim Wilson’s report—that we need to consider how we can incentivise students to take placement opportunities, whether work placements in the UK or studying abroad.

**Professor Tony Downes:** The only thing that I would add to what has been said about the concern about debt that a fourth year adds is that there is also the worry about the cost of living. One of the things that we might consider is some help with costs of living while studying abroad. It tends to be more expensive just because of the costs of establishing oneself somewhere, travel and everything else. Help with those costs would ease the concern that students have. The fee waiver only does half the job.

**Q103 Viscount Bridgeman:** I think that your answers address the socio-demographic problem, but do you have any more specific comments on that side of things?

**Professor Les Ebdon:** Professor Downes has hit on one of the important components of this, which is that those with advantaged parents are able to seek support for that period, and I have experience of how much it costs. Over 60% of the students at the University of Bedfordshire are on full grants—that is, the parental income is less than £24,000 a year. In fact, we have 1,000 students a year whose residual family income is zero—that is, they come from a benefit situation, and the thought of finding an extra year’s living expenses is a real challenge. Those students also depend very heavily on the jobs that they do while they are students. We know that the employment situation in many other European Union countries is such that it is very difficult to get part-time employment while you are studying.

**Dr Jennifer Barnes:** I agree with all that, but I want to emphasise that the research that has been done thus far suggests, going back to the earlier point about language students, that the pipeline now runs predominantly from the independent schools, because many state schools have dropped their languages. Therefore we are creating a system early on that disadvantages individuals. The other comment to make is that Erasmus is but a small part of the overall number of EU students studying in this country. A vast number come here under different schemes and we would want to look carefully at them in any data collection.

**Professor Tony Downes:** I probably ought to say that this is not a 1994 Group point, but purely a personal observation by someone who is married to a language teacher. There is also a cultural issue. Those who have the social advantage of travelling widely before they go to university know that “abroad” is not a frightening place.

**The Chairman:** You have touched on what I was going to ask about. It is not just about fees, although obviously that is a substantial component.

**Professor Graham Galbraith:** Could I add a brief comment? We need also to think about students in the UK who wish to spend time studying in areas beyond Europe. There is a big issue about getting our students engaged in exchanges with the United States, Brazil, China and so on. There is now an opportunity to give some thought as to how we might incentivise that group of students.
Q104 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Let me turn to postgraduates for a minute and come back to this question of the European Masters. Dr Barnes has already expressed some concerns, but could we hear a little more about how you feel about the proposal and particularly the loan guarantee facility?

Dr Jennifer Barnes: The position of the Russell Group at the moment is that we have not seen enough information about what it would look like to be able to express a view at all, although at the point that we do I am very happy to provide a submission. There are real issues in terms of the sense in this country of student loan complexities—once you talk about the current fiscal situation in Europe and cross-border lending and so on, that is a whole area to be tackled. There is also the issue that, if we suggest over time that we should be following Bologna to the extent that a two-year Masters is going to be recognised more than a one-year Masters, we also place a considerable additional burden fiscally on people who wish to do a Masters. If we could pedagogically show that the two years had such a vast advantage to the development of the human being, we would want to go there, but there are very fine studies that can display the pre-eminence in Europe of a UK Masters.

Professor Graham Galbraith: My concern when the details come out is that this may end up being a loan facility for one year spent abroad, which if we only have a one-year Masters will be slightly problematic for us. I think that there is an opportunity for that scheme to cover three, four and six-month project placements as part of a one-year Masters programme, which might be advantageous to UK students, but the two years against one year is where the problem might occur.

Q105 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: We have been talking about the mobility of students, but what about researchers and academics? What could the Government do to encourage more of our researchers to go to European countries and vice versa?

Dr Jennifer Barnes: Lord Foulkes, we need no encouragement to have our researchers go internationally. In Cambridge, I have had heads of school say to me, “What is going to happen when none of our top researchers are here because they are all wanting to engage in significant international collaborations that will place them overseas, including in Europe?” Marie Curie Actions is a stunning programme, which we welcome. It is useful to talk to it right after Erasmus, because the implications for who would feel a similar degree of confidence and ability to work abroad and in other parts of the European Union will have to do with a number of factors as well as where the best research is. Primarily, the UK as a destination of outstanding research excellence has to be cherished and recognised. Going back to Lord Whitty’s earlier point, this is not just about Europe. If the projects are right, we are absolutely fully in Europe and in other parts of the world. The mobility of the top talent to be in Europe—and we are all part of Europe—is one of the most pressing things that we currently face.

Professor Graham Galbraith: There are some practical issues such as leaving family and retaining pension schemes and so on and I know that some work is going on to think about how we can get that kind of mobility of researchers in the labour market. Like others, I fully support the Marie Curie-type initiatives, which work very well, but there are a lot of small initiatives in terms of mobility of researchers that frankly are not very financially viable for an institution. I would rather that the funds were much more focused on the Marie Curie fellowship-type schemes and that we abandoned some of the more peripheral schemes, which I do not think are really delivering for the UK.
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Your move from Glasgow to Hertfordshire was not too traumatic, was it?

Professor Graham Galbraith: It was traumatic, because buying a house down here is an expensive business, I have to say, so there was trauma.

Dr Jennifer Barnes: The other thing about Marie Curie Actions, which for our entire sector is very positive, is its integration with industry and its expectation that that is natural. To go back to the point about how we can get these two sectors to work better together, in many cases there are long-standing good relations. Of course we could be doing better, but it builds that into the structure, which is very welcome.

Professor Les Ebdon: I notice that Lord Foulkes asked what Government should do rather than what you and I should do. In some ways, I think that that is quite an important point, which goes back to what we have all been saying about the position of UK universities as global enterprises rather than simply EU-focused enterprises. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor’s remit at my university is entirely about making the budgets work. Almost every answer that I could have given would have been, “Well, money would help”.

Professor Graham Galbraith: Following on from that, it is just as important to have international researchers coming into the UK as it is to have our researchers going out. Also, if we look at the broader perspective, while this is slightly off-beam, the UKBA visa restrictions mean that bringing in researchers from non-European countries is problematic and is beginning to damage that kind of movement of academics.

Q106 Lord Lexden: Can you tell us what you think about the U-Multirank system being proposed by the European Commission? If you like it, how do you think it should be formulated to make it as useful as possible? That is the first part of the question. The second part is this. How could the quality of data and the existing ranking systems be improved to provide more accurate comparative indicators across European higher education institutions?

Professor Les Ebdon: To be quite blunt, I do not think that there are any merits whatever in this proposal. Everyone knows that the current league tables published by the newspapers are not transparent. They are retrospective and they reflect historic funding streams and historic prejudices. The weightings change from year to year to achieve the outcomes that people want and they are now being applied on a so-called worldwide basis, sometimes with ludicrous results. The European U-Multirank tool will have the same problems. As well as their having no credibility, one needs to look at these ranking systems and say that there are two other problems. They distort the behaviour of universities so that people chase league table placements. Is that the way we want our universities to be run? Should they follow some ranking identified either by bureaucrats in Brussels or by newspaper barons? We have to ask ourselves that question. There is clear evidence from a number of research projects that that is so. We also have to say that no sooner do you generate a ranking than you create a hierarchy. That is one of the reasons why research is so much more highly valued in universities than teaching because research impacts on the league tables more. We do a disservice to our students with league tables.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Does the Russell Group agree with that?

Dr Jennifer Barnes: The Russell Group agrees entirely.

Professor Tony Downes: As does the 1994 Group.
Professor Graham Galbraith: We agree, and one of the issues to consider is that, when U-Multirank was developed, it was thought of as a kind of internal self-assessment tool. The problem with all these things is that, as has been said, they immediately become a form of league table and take on a role that they were never designed to fulfil. The other important issue to consider is how accurate the data are and what data are being used. We are fortunate in the UK in that we have the Higher Education Statistics Agency, which at least gathers a lot of audited and accurate data, but that is not the case in every other European country. The first thing that is needed is the accurate gathering of data and an understanding of that, then let people choose by selecting what data they wish in order to work out the value of different universities. However, I agree absolutely that using newspaper and other rankings in this way is really counterproductive.

Professor Tony Downes: The other thing that we should note is that the baseline year is going to be five years out of date before the first rankings come out. It is really hard to see the value of this.

The Chairman: There is a last question that I want to fit in, although it has been partially addressed.

Q107 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: In headline terms—maybe you can flesh it out in writing afterwards if there is anything that you wish to add—what more do you think our Government could do to provide guidance, support or information to make sure that British universities are getting everything that they can out of the EU in terms of funding, or do you think that you are already pretty good?

Dr Jennifer Barnes: Quickly, because I am sure that colleagues will have things that they would like to add, the most important thing that the current Government can do is to support us to get a robust proportion of the innovation research funds when the discussions come, on the basis that that funding should be used for the excellence that we have given evidence of over hundreds of years.

Professor Tony Downes: I endorse that. We need the Government to push to make sure that any allocation is based on excellence rather than anything else. We would probably quite like somebody to point out that the Government’s rules on full economic costing are somewhat better than Europe’s. Therefore those of us engaged in European-funded research cannot be sure that we are actually covering our full costs.

Professor Les Ebdon: The Government clearly have a responsibility to properly fund the UK university system. If they do that, I think that you will find that we have a very entrepreneurial and active sector that will actively seek European funds—it has a very good track record of doing so. One has to have a concern that cuts will diminish the strength of that sector and our abilities to compete with other countries that are presently investing in their university sectors.

Professor Graham Galbraith: The principles behind Horizon 2020 are very positive for the UK sector. We have been very successful in the past, and the Government supporting these new proposals in the first instance is a good starting point, as is working closely with the sector as the details start to emerge, because there is good experience in how effectively to access these funds in the sector. We want to continue to do that.

Professor Les Ebdon: Let me add one issue for Government, which is to do with the abolition of the regional development agencies. The ERDF funding has no obvious home. The European Union is strongly committed to funding through the regions. We no longer
have regions in England and it would be a great pity if money just reverted to the Treasury. Universities benefited significantly from participation in ERDF funding through the RDAs and no mechanism is presently proposed for how that funding can continue. I hope that we are not going to send it back to Brussels and that we will find some way of utilising it for the purposes that we have been so far.

**The Chairman:** Thank you. We will have to bring the session to an end. Thank you all very much. There has been a remarkable degree of consensus. It was informative for us, especially for me. It was very interesting to hear you situate the EU's position in a more global context. That gives us something to think about for our report. Thank you.
The Scottish Government – Written evidence

1. The purpose of the Scottish Government is to create a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increasing sustainable economic growth. This is underpinned by five Strategic Objectives:

   - Wealthier & Fairer
   - Smarter
   - Healthier
   - Safer & Stronger
   - Greener.

3. Under the Smarter Objective we are committed to expanding opportunities for Scots to succeed from nurture through to life long learning ensuring higher and more widely shared achievements.

4. More specifically the Government’s Action Plan on European Engagement identifies Research and Creativity as a key area. It advocates Scotland playing a leading role in Europe and raising our profile through a “Team Scotland” approach. One example highlighted is the collaborative approach with stakeholders to our engagement with the Bologna Process, which enabled Scotland to perform extremely well in the Stocktaking Report for the 2009 Ministerial Conference.

Communication on modernisation of higher education

5. The Commission’s communication “Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems” is particularly welcome in Scotland as it fits closely with the agenda we are promoting through our recently published paper “Putting learners at the centre: delivering our ambitions for post-16 education”\(^{92}\). Both documents share a particular focus on promoting jobs and growth, on progression and the relevance of higher education and on the links between higher education and research.

6. We are therefore pleased but not surprised that the communication reflects what is happening in Scotland as we continue to engage, in particular within the Bologna Process, to ensure that the alignment of higher education across Europe can best benefit Scottish students, academics and institutions.

7. Our responses to the specific questions are set out below.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

8. We believe there are a number of ways in which EU intervention can be most effective – a large number of which are already being pursued by the Commission. We are committed to increasing the outward mobility of Scottish students in order to promote personal development and ultimately their contribution to the economy. In this respect

the mobility options offered through the current Lifelong Learning programme are a welcome contribution and we would support the strengthening of them through “Youth on the Move” to increase their effectiveness further.

9. We are also strongly supportive of the research funding that has been provided through the current Framework Programme. In our response to the Commission consultation on research and innovation funding in May 2011, we pointed out that Scotland is successful in securing Framework Programme funding. Since 2007, we have received €276 million of such funding, the majority of this going to our universities and research institutes. Scotland is therefore in a strong position to bring this expertise and strength in collaboration to bear in linking with other regions and member states to address Europe’s Grand Challenges.

10. We also suggested that Scotland’s research excellence could help focus the priorities for future R&D policy, including Horizon 2020. We therefore think that this EU intervention is effective and that the integration of the next Framework Programme with other programmes can make it more so, as long as genuine integration is actually achieved. We encourage a reduction in the number of funding schemes and instruments and believe there are numerous steps that can be taken to make Horizon 2020 more attractive and easier to access.

11. These interventions have been helpful and should be maintained and built upon by the Commission in future. Whilst we would not advocate any greater competence for the Commission in the field of education, we would welcome consideration of how education interacts with other areas of competence as suggested by the focus on jobs and growth, and in particular on the use of Structural Funds.

**The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area**

12. The Commission has made important contributions to the Process, to the development of the EHEA and in particular has provided funding for some key initiatives. Given that mobility has been identified as the hallmark of the EHEA, the funding provided through the Lifelong Learning Programme is critical in supporting the process. In addition to this, we believe that funding for Bologna Experts has been important in expanding knowledge of the benefits of mobility and other elements of the process more widely within participating countries.

13. We believe that the Commission continues to be a valuable contributor through its funding, involvement of Eurostat and Eurydice and contributions to the Bologna Follow Up Group. However we are concerned that its interventions within the Process increasingly appear to focus on convergence of existing Bologna initiatives with Commission activities in identical areas being developed in parallel. We are of the view that this often entails duplication of effort by Member States and as a point of principle would contend that decisions made together by 47 countries should not be reconsidered in discussions by a subset of 27 countries in a different forum – as happened with parallel discussions on a benchmark for student mobility in higher education.

166
Mobility

14. As discussed above we are committed to increasing the mobility of Scottish students and indeed have recently committed funding to a sector-wide project designed to do so. Part of this is about greater promotion of the benefits of mobility through a “Year of Mobility” in Scotland in academic year 2012-13. We believe that greater awareness – particularly of the benefits for future employment – will encourage greater participation. We are also conscious that language ability can be an issue and we are taking action to promote more widespread learning of languages in Scottish schools. Together with our commitment to develop our young people as global citizens, we believe this will provide them with the grounding and background knowledge to equip them better to undertake studies or research outwith Scotland.

15. However we recognise that for many students funding is at least perceived as a barrier to mobility and our commitment to no tuition fees for Scottish (and therefore other EU) students must help in this respect. In addition to this we are exploring options to provide additional funding for Scottish students studying overseas as part of our Saltire Scholarships Programme. Of course funding from the Lifelong Learning Programme is invaluable in respect of boosting mobility.

16. With all of this funding we must provide opportunities for a wider range of students and in this respect we believe that funding for shorter mobility periods should be routinely available. We have suggested to the Commission that the three month minimum duration for Erasmus mobility is too long – in particular disadvantaging student parents, those with caring responsibilities and others on lower incomes. It is not so much the length of the experience that is significant but rather the quality of it and the learning outcomes that result. Gaining credit towards the course of study in the home institution is important to ensure the student sees their period abroad as direct progress towards their qualification. For those who are less confident to be mobile a short taster of studying abroad may well be the catalyst to further mobility in the future.

Masters level mobility and researchers

17. Our instinct would be to support additional mobility within the European Research Area and funding for mobility at Masters level. We are though unclear exactly how a student loan guarantee system might work and would be keen to see further detail from the Commission as this develops.

Targets

18. The Scottish Government has a National Performance Framework through which we assess our performance by way a set of national outcomes – one of these is that we are better educated, more skilled and more successful. We favour this approach over the setting of targets as it means we can more easily link all of our work to our purpose of growing the economy, whilst avoiding the potential negative impacts that can be caused by chasing a numerical goal. Our national indicator is therefore simply to increase the number of graduates in positive destinations.
League table: U-Multirank

19. We welcome efforts to promote greater transparency and in particular wider provision of information on higher education across Europe. In Scotland and more widely across the UK there are already a large number of such information sources and whilst we believe in making this information more readily accessible across Europe, we do not believe any new sources are required in respect of Scottish institutions.

20. We are concerned that U-Multirank, whilst being designed to provide comparative information, could be used to compile a ranking – as indicated by its title. We are also concerned about the lack of buy in from institutions - we have no evidence of any particular appetite from institutions to provide data for U-Multirank. Clearly if any such tool is to provide a holistic picture it requires input from Higher Education Institutions all over Europe.

21. We are therefore of the view that, in supporting the jobs and growth agenda, the Commission would be advised to allocate future funding elsewhere in order to achieve greatest impact.

Funding instruments

22. We would support increased Commission funding for higher education from 2014 onwards, with the caveat that consideration must be given to how this could impact on other areas of the budget.

International Dimension

23. We believe the current programmes such as Tempus are important in creating and enhancing links beyond the European Union. Further developments might usefully include provision for developing wider links across the globe. We would particularly support additional funding for mobility and partnership schemes featuring China and India which are key partner countries for the Scottish Government and important areas of activity for the Scottish higher education sector. Scottish universities in particular are very successful in recruiting students from these countries and we would be interested in Commission funding for outward mobility which would supplement that already provided by the Scottish Government.

28 November 2011
The following is Phil Baty, Editor, Times Higher Education World University Rankings’ submission to the House of Lords Inquiry into the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: The EU Contribution.

The submission relates exclusively to the inquiry’s request for views on the proposed new “U-Multirank” tool.

1. Times Higher Education magazine has published an annual world university ranking since 2004, but after extensive review and wide consultation with the academic community, the magazine launched a new and improved version of the global ranking in 2010 with a new data supplier, Thomson Reuters, a different methodology and a much wider range of performance indicators (up from 6 to 13).

2. This new system meets a wide range of user needs and is available on a website and iPhone application which allows users to rank up to 400 institutions overall (178 European institutions), and also against five separate criteria: teaching (the learning environment); International outlook (staff, students and research); industry income (innovation); research (volume income and reputation); and citations (research influence).

3. After six years of publishing a ranking, in November 2009, Times Higher Education set up a new partnership with Thomson Reuters, one of the world’s leading data companies. Thomson Reuters was engaged to build a new database of global, research-driven universities, and to work with Times Higher Education to develop a new, more sophisticated way to rank universities. Times Higher Education would take full responsibility for the rankings methodology, and undertook to rank the institutions, while Thomson Reuters would collect, analyse and supply the data, but would not itself publish a ranking.

4. The first thing the two new partners did was to conduct a global opinion survey to find out what higher education professionals thought of the existing ranking systems, what indicators they valued and what concerns they had. The results, published by Thomson Reuters in the report New Outlooks on Institutional Profiles (http://thomsonreuters.com/content/press_room/science/Higher-Education-Rankings) were illuminating.

5. In general, there was significant support for the value of university rankings from the self-selecting sample. About 40 per cent globally said that rankings were “extremely/very useful” and a further 45 per cent said that they were “somewhat useful”.

6. But in the Thomson Reuters global opinion survey, many said they viewed the existing world ranking methodologies unfavourably, and there was widespread concern about data quality. Some 74 percent of respondents, for example, said they believe that institutions manipulated their data to move up in rankings.
7. *Times Higher Education* made a clear decision to take the view that, despite the inherent problems with reducing all the complex and often intangible activities of a university into a single ranked table, the limitations of global ranking systems are outweighed by their usefulness.

8. University rankings are relatively crude. They cannot capture many of the things that matter most in higher education: how a great lecturer can transform the lives of her students, for example, or how free enquiry enhances our society. They can never be objective, because their indicators and methodologies are based on the subjective judgement of the compilers.

9. But *Times Higher Education* believes that as long as rankers are responsible and transparent; as long as they invest properly in serious research and sound data; as long as they are frank about the limitations of the proxies they employ; and as long as they help to educate their users and engage in open debates, rankings can be a positive force in higher education.

10. They can play a crucial role in helping us to understand the dramatic changes the sector is facing, and there is no doubt that dramatic change is upon us.

11. There are now 3.7 million students studying outside their home countries; there are at least 162 satellite campuses set up outside their parent universities’ home countries. Almost half of all UK research papers are now written with co-authors from overseas. We live in a world of global education hubs, of joint degrees, faculty and student-mobility schemes, of franchised programmes, global research networks and bi-national universities.

12. We are entering a world of mass higher education and the traditional world order is shifting. And rankings, when carried out responsibly and openly, can help to fill a crucial information gap.

13. The Thomson Reuters survey report, *New Outlooks on Institutional Profiles*, also presented information on the particular indicators of performance valued by respondents. Some 92 per cent said that faculty output (as measured by research publications) was a “must have” or a “nice to have” indicator. There was also strong support (91 per cent) for a measure of faculty impact (research paper citations). Some 86 per cent said they wanted faculty/student ratios as a proxy measure of the teaching environment, and 84 per cent said they supported the use of income from research grants.

14. Some 79 per cent of respondents supported the use of peer “reputation” measures – the controversial opinion polls that have provoked strong criticism.

15. As well as carrying out the poll, *Times Higher Education* held a meeting of its expert editorial advisory board, and opened up web forums for public debate on ranking metrics.

16. Three strong concerns were raised about the original methodology of the world university rankings published between 2004 and 2009.

17. There was concern about the heavy weight, at 20 per cent, that had been assigned to a staff-student ratio as the only proxy for teaching quality in the old ranking system. It was not seen as a particularly helpful or valid indicator of teaching quality, and it was believed that data was easily manipulated.
18. There was concern about the quality and value of reputational surveys of academics and employers, and concerns about the size and quality of the samples. There were further concerns that excessive weight was given to results of such subjective reputational surveys, which made up 50 per cent of the overall rankings indicators in the old ranking system.

19. The final major concern, raised by the Times Higher Education editorial board, was with the use of citations data to indicate research excellent. Given the wide variety of publication habits, and therefore given the wide variety of citation volumes between different disciplines, we were advised that it was essential to normalise the citations data by subject. No normalisation was carried out under the previous (2004-2009) ranking system, meaning that institutions with strengths in areas with typically lower citation volumes, such as engineering and the social sciences, were at a serious disadvantage compared to those with strengths in the life sciences, where citation levels tend to be much higher.

20. In developing a new rankings system with Thomson Reuters, Times Higher Education sought to directly address these concerns, but it also had to go back to basics to consider how to capture as many characteristics as possible of the global research-led university, across all of its core missions.

21. It should be made clear that the THE world university rankings look only at a particular type of university. In ranking no more than 400 institutions, we are focusing on about 1-2 per cent of the world’s higher education institutions. Our world top 200 list may have institutions with different cultures, histories, sizes, shapes, funding and governing structures, but they all share core characteristics: they publish world-class research, carried out across national borders; they work with global industry; they teach from undergraduate to doctoral level; and they compete in a global market for the top student and academic talent.

22. So our rankings look only at the global research-driven university. There are many other different models of university, all of which can achieve excellence in the context of their own aims and missions. Many different models could be deemed absolutely successful in their own terms, but they would be unlikely to find places at the top of the world university rankings.

23. We have data on many hundreds of institutions, but we stop our official rankings list at 200th place specifically to prevent any sense that everyone should aspire to the same model. It is wrong to suggest that everyone must be judged on the same scale against the model set by the likes of Harvard and Stanford universities and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Not everyone can be a Harvard, not everyone should aspire to be, and not everyone would want to be.

24. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings were finalised only after 10 months of open consultation, and the methodology was devised with expert input from more than 50 leading figures from 15 countries, representing every continent.

25. The new Times Higher Education World University Rankings, first published on 16 September 2010, and again on 6 October 2011, recognise a wider range of what global universities do. While the Academic Ranking of World Universities compiled by Shanghai
Jiao Tong University really focus only on research performance, and the QS world university rankings focus on reputation, the THE world university rankings seek to capture the full range of a global university’s activities – research, teaching, knowledge transfer and internationalisation.

26. The THE rankings use 13 separate indicators – more than any other global system – to take a holistic view.

27. The THE World University Rankings place the most weight on a range of research indicators. We think this is the correct approach in a world in which governments are investing heavily in developing the knowledge economy and seeking answers to global challenges such as climate change and food security.

28. We look at research in a number of different ways, examining reputation through an improved professional academic reputation survey (see below), income and volume (through publication in leading academic journals indexed by Thomson Reuters).

29. But we give the highest weighting to an indicator of “research influence”, measured by the number of times published research is cited by academics across the globe.

30. Citations simply tell us whose research has stood out, has been picked up and built on by other scholars, and most importantly, has been shared around the global scholarly community to push further the boundaries of our collective understanding – surely one of the most fundamental roles of any research university.

31. For the 2011-12 world university rankings, we looked at more than 50 million citations accumulated over a six-year period (2005-2009) from more than 6 million research publications. In response to strong criticism of our 2004-2009 methodology, the data are fully normalised to reflect variations in citation volume between different subject areas, so universities with strong research in fields with lower global citation rates were not penalised. We look at citations per paper produced by each university, measured against world average citations levels in each field.

32. We also sought to acknowledge excellence in research from institutions in developing nations, where there are less-established research networks and lower innate citation rates, by normalising the data to reflect variations in citation volume between regions. This is an important innovation, which goes a large way to meeting criticism that the rankings, based so heavily on bibliometrics, favour the English-speaking world too much.

33. We judge knowledge transfer with just one indicator – research income earned from industry – but we plan to enhance this category with other indicators in future years. One proposal being considered, at the time of going to press, is to look at the number of research papers a university publishes in partnership with an industrial partner.

34. Internationalisation is recognised via data on the proportion of international staff and students attracted to each institution — a sign of how global an institution is in its outlook.

35. The ability of a university to attract the very best staff from across the world is key to global success. The market for academic and administrative jobs is international in scope,
and this indicator suggests global competitiveness. Similarly, the ability to attract students in a competitive global marketplace is a sign of an institution’s global competitiveness and its commitment to globalisation.

36. For the first time this year, we have added an indicator that rewards a high proportion of internationally co-authored research papers.

37. But perhaps the most dramatic innovation for the world university rankings for 2010 and beyond is the set of five indicators designed to give proper credit to the role of teaching in universities, with a collective weighting of 30 per cent.

38. I should make one thing very clear: the indicators do not measure teaching “quality”. There is currently no recognised, globally comparative data on teaching outputs. What the THE rankings do is look at the teaching “environment” to give a sense of the kind of learning milieu in which students are likely to find themselves.

39. The key indicator for this category draws on the results of an annual academic reputational survey carried out for the world university rankings by Thomson Reuters. To meet criticisms of the reputation survey carried out for the rankings between 2004 and 2009, Thomson Reuters brought in a third-party professional polling company to conduct the survey.

40. The Academic Reputation Survey is distributed worldwide each spring. It is a worldwide, invitation-only poll of experienced scholars, statistically representative of global subject mix and geography. It examines the perceived prestige of institutions in both research and teaching.

41. Respondents are asked only to pass judgement based on direct, personal experience within their specific area of expertise. They are asked “action-based” questions (such as: “Where would you send your best graduates for the most stimulating postgraduate learning environment?”) to elicit more meaningful responses.

42. In 2010, the survey attracted 13,388 responses, attracting a good balance of responses around the regions and the disciplines. In 2011, despite the fact that no one who completed the survey in 2010 was invited to take part again, the survey attracted 17,500 responses, with an excellent balance of responses.

43. Some 19 per cent of the 2011 respondents were from the social sciences, with 20 per cent from engineering and technology, and the same proportion from physical sciences. Seventeen per cent came from the “clinical, pre-clinical and health”, while 16 per cent came from the life sciences. The smallest number of responses came from the arts and humanities – just 7 per cent – and while this is a little disappointing, it still gives us a statistically sound basis for comparisons.

44. There was also an excellent spread of responses from around the world, facilitated by the fact that the survey was distributed in nine languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Brazilian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese.
45. The vast majority of respondents, some 36 per cent, came from North America, while 17 per cent came from Western Europe, 10 per cent from Eastern Asia, 8 per cent from Eastern Europe and 7 per cent from Oceania.

46. In addition to the reputation survey’s results on teaching, four further indicators are used to provide information on a university’s teaching and learning environment.

47. The rankings also measure staff-to-student ratios. This, as noted by Times Higher Education’s editorial board, is admittedly a relatively crude proxy for teaching quality. But the indicator hints at the level of personal attention students may receive from faculty, and there was strong demand for it among our stakeholders, so it remains in the rankings, but receives a relatively low weighting of just 4.5 per cent.

48. We also look at the ratio of PhD to bachelor’s degrees awarded, to give a sense of how knowledge-intensive the environment is, as well as considering the number of doctorates awarded, scaled for size, to indicate how committed institutions are to nurturing the next generation of academics and providing strong supervision.

49. The last of our teaching indicators is a simple measure of institutional income scaled against academic staff numbers. This figure, adjusted for purchasing-price parity so that all nations compete on a level playing field, gives a broad sense of the general infrastructure and facilities available. This is another major innovation in world rankings.

50. The full methodology and the explanation of each of the 13 separate performance indicators used is here: http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2011-2012/analysis-rankings-methodology.html

51. Sector responses to our new tables have been excellent. I will not pretend that there has not been criticism – and it has come notably from the heads of institutions that have taken the biggest hits from our new methodology – but many other comments have been positive.

52. David Willetts, the UK government minister for universities and science, congratulated Times Higher Education for revising its rankings methodology. Sir Steve Smith, vice-chancellor of the University of Exeter and the former president of Universities UK, which represents all UK vice-chancellors, said that the new methodology – and particularly its reduced dependence on subjective opinion and increased reliance on more objective measures – “bolstered confidence in the evaluation method” (Smith, 2010, 43).

53. David Naylor, president of the University of Toronto, summed things up well. He recognised that Times Higher Education “consulted widely to pinpoint weaknesses in other ranking systems and in [our] previous approach”. He said: “They brought in a new partner with recognised expertise in data gathering and analysis. And they also sought peer opinions on the education and learning environment at scores of universities. These are welcome developments.” (Beck and Morrow, 2010, 1).
54. We are proud of our new and improved rankings, but we will continue to engage with the global university community and take expert advice on further methodological modifications and innovations. We are always listening.

February 2012
1.0 Introduction
The Committee of UK Bologna Experts welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Lords’ Enquiry concerning the role of the Commission in enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education, especially in the context of the continuing expansion of the sector across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and the need to secure European competitiveness and a more educated, innovative, and adequately skilled workforce for the global economy.

2.0 Pursuit of knowledge
We emphasise however that even during times of financial austerity the focus of attention on the economic contribution of higher education should not override the fundamental requirement that European universities continue their traditional pursuit of intellectual enquiry, and that ‘universities (should be) primarily institutions devoted to extending and deepening human understanding’.

3.0 Economic and social aims
Higher Education must be at the centre of innovation and job creation, meeting economic needs, enhancing graduate employability, supporting lifelong learning, widening participation, and adding real value to the European social and political environment. Europe requires a well educated and appropriately qualified workforce and population. It is however essential that the mission of European Higher Education must also uphold civic values, and develop knowledge. The Commission must promote these aims and secure the centrality of Higher Education to their accomplishment.

4.0 Student-centredness, marketisation
4.1 As Bologna Experts we are concerned by the risk of appropriating student-centredness as an instrument in the marketisation of Higher Education. We reject the trend towards regarding students as consumers analogous with customers in a shopping mall. In contrast to the manifesto for change produced by the UK government in 2009 and the subsequent Browne Report into University funding, adopted almost in its entirety by the current ruling Coalition, we call on the Commission to promote, in so far as it can given that HE remains an area of national competence, genuine student-centred teaching and learning through better resourcing, improved facilities, better staff-student ratios, and investment in information technology to support improved teaching and learning. It is essential that quality assurance focuses on improving the student experience.

4.2 The granting of Degree Awarding Powers and university title should be properly safeguarded. Lessons from the for profit sector in the USA should be heeded. Experience demonstrates market failure, student failure, and loss of financial resources through loan defaults.

94 A recent UK university Masters graduate named Juliane Göke recently complained to her university that her name was misspelt on her degree certificate. She asked for a replacement but did not even get a reply.
5.0 Funding

5.1 While we accept the need for diverse income streams into higher education, including from the private sector, we believe that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should continue to be substantially publicly funded, and that this is more likely to secure student-centred teaching and learning than the revolution in university funding that is taking place in the United Kingdom.\(^{95}\) The Commission can and should play a role in ensuring the long term impact and durability of research funding in order to develop innovation and global competitiveness. We welcome the Commission initiative Horizon 2020 Framework Programme and look forward to seeing the Commission’s forthcoming proposals.\(^{96}\)

5.2 We call upon the Commission, even in times of austerity, to lobby member states to adequately fund Higher Education. Furthermore we urge the Commission itself to allocate more resources to promoting the European Higher Education Area. Quality higher education is essential to maintaining civic and cultural values as well as building sustainable economic growth, competitiveness and employment in future years. We believe that recovery from the current economic and financial malaise will in large measure depend upon public investment in higher education and in research.

6.0 Masters Level programmes

We applaud the institutional partnering and staff and student mobility inherent in the Commission-supported Erasmus Mundus initiative which involves HEI consortia offering Masters level courses with in-built mobility and credit transfer. We urge the Commission to extend support in order to encourage new consortia to develop. We similarly applaud the introduction of the European Masters and urge the Commission to develop transferable loan guarantee facilities to make such programmes more accessible.

7.0 Bologna Reforms

7.1 HEIs must ensure the full implementation and consolidation of the Bologna Reforms in compliance with the aspirations of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Achieving these goals requires all HEIs to embrace the Bologna Action Lines and the priorities highlighted by subsequent Ministerial meetings, which can be summarised as follows\(^{97}\):

- Implementation of the three cycle framework
- Compatible and transparent qualification frameworks
- Credit-based systems based on learning outcomes and notional study hours
- Staff and student mobility in all three cycles
- Co-operation in quality assurance
- Promotion of the European dimension
- Lifelong learning
- Promotion of the European Higher Education Area

---


• Doctoral studies and building appropriate levels of synergy between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area

7.2 The Leuven Ministerial Meeting in 2009 further indicated priorities that consolidate and develop the Bologna Action Lines, notably:

• Quality enhancement in student centred teaching, research and innovation, and social and cultural development
• The social dimension of higher education, including key skills and personal development, lifelong learning, and widening participation
• Employability, including availability of work placements, and the engagement of employers as stakeholders
• Implementation of the 20/2020 target, to ensure that students across all three cycles benefit from mobility opportunities, study abroad and opportunities to develop their foreign language competence in languages other than English

7.3 The Bologna Reforms established the European Higher Education Area, launched by the Budapest-Vienna Declaration in March 2010. This endorsed the aims and objectives summarised in 7.1 and 7.2 above.

8.0 University expansion
8.1 The Commission should continue to promote the implementation and consolidation of Bologna principles and develop and consolidate the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), assisting its ability to compete globally in attracting the best students and researchers, thus contributing to employability, research excellence, and economic competitiveness. The Commission has targeted a figure of 40 per cent of the European Union population of working age to have university level education. Several member states have not yet achieved this figure. This figure should be regarded as a minimum for international competitiveness. The Commission estimates that by 2020 35% of all jobs will require high level qualifications, but now only 26 per cent have a university degree.

8.2 We call upon the Commission to actively support the principle that faculty teaching be combined with scholarship and research activities. We caution against expansion that requires staff to teach a larger number of modules to larger cohorts while having less time for research and scholarship. It is a paradox that these trends have been accompanied by reduced contact time for students, often less than ten hours per week in class. We stress that a distinguishing feature of the university is that teaching should be underpinned by research and scholarship.

9.0 Mobility
9.1 The Leuven Ministerial meeting in 2009 set a target of 20 percent of all university students across the EHEA to have a mobility experience by 2020 (Leuven 20/2020). This should be regarded as a minimum target for all institutions, and all member states, not

---

simply for the EHEA as a whole. The target should explicitly refer to credit mobility through the Erasmus Lifelong Learning Programme Student Exchange and Erasmus-supported work placements. We urge the Lords’ Enquiry to stress the need for the Commission to increase funding to support the 20/2020 mobility target.

9.2 It is iniquitous that those countries that are most successful in sending students abroad have as a result a feeble amount of grant support for mobile students. This is a consequence of the block grant to national agencies being divided according to the number of students involved in a mobility activity (exchange or placement). We suggest that the funding be substantially increased to improve participation in the Erasmus Programme, and also that the available funds should be more equitably distributed.

10.0 Stakeholders
10.1 We urge the European Commission to undertake research into stakeholder expectations in terms of Higher Education provision, employability, key skills, and the impact of mobility and work placement experience on graduates’ preparation for employment. Such research, including efforts to understand better employer perspectives, should broaden the scope for expert input on the curriculum and on the teaching and learning undertaken at university. It is vital that policy makers and education providers have access to adequate data in order to enhance the quality and appropriateness of provision, and the matching of output to the needs of employers, and the wider society.

10.2 We offer a cautious welcome to the U-Multirank initiative, which we regard as highly dependent on the extent of institutional engagement, coverage, and accuracy of data used to compile the rankings. It is vital that the instrument recognise the diverse character of European HEIs in so far as direct comparisons can be iniquitous and misleading. A further caution is that there is already a surfeit of ranking instruments available with much argument about their accuracy and usefulness. If U-Multirank can be developed as an effective transparency instrument that reflects both student and graduate experience, then it could be beneficial.

11.0 Conclusion
While Higher Education remains primarily an issue of member state competence, we urge that the Commission to offer clear guidance to member states through its support for the European Higher Education Area, in order to assist in the achievement of the aims and objectives outlined in this submission. We urge the Commission to maintain and develop its commitment to promoting the ethos and goals of the Bologna Process. We recommend that the Commission should prioritise:

1 Maintaining the traditional ethos of the European university as a domain of intellectual enquiry for teaching, learning and research in the pursuit of knowledge
2 Promoting and funding International Student Mobility (ISM) including international work placements, and foreign language learning other than English.

---

101 King, R., Findlay, A., and Ahrens, J. (2010) International Student Mobility Literature Review. Report to Hefce and co-funded by the British Council UK National Agency for Erasmus. The report indicates a lack of hard evidence concerning the impact of mobility on employability but anecdotal evidence, also from employers, that graduates benefit from having had a mobility experience during their studies.

102 While the use of English as a lingua franca throughout the EHEA has increased, competence in a third modern foreign language appears to have diminished. In the UK foreign language learning, already at a critical low, has further deteriorated...
3 The provision of research funding, including arts, humanities and social sciences, and to strengthen HEIs’ contribution to the European Research Area (ERA)\(^{103}\)

4 Measures to enhance lifelong learning

5 Measures to boost widening participation and social mobility

6 Efforts to boost employability including developing key skills inside academic programmes, and opportunities for retraining and upskilling

7 Research into employability, specifically the needs and expectations of employers and other stakeholders in terms of what higher education should provide and produce, including the development of civic responsibility and an understanding of the importance of economic sustainability.

8 Engaging a full range of stakeholders, including employers, and the utilisation of employers as a resource in HE planning and provision, as well as university faculty staff as core providers.

9 Effective development and enhancement of student-centred learning and transparent systems of quality assurance

**Note:** this submission is made on behalf of the UK Bologna Experts. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Erasmus National Agency.

21 November 2011

---


Evidence Session No. 1.  Heard in Public.  Questions 1 - 26

THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2011

Members present

Baroness Young of Hornsey (Chairman)
Viscount Bridgeman
Lord Eames
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Baroness Henig
Lord Lexden
Baroness Prosser
Baroness Scott of Needham Market

Examination of Witnesses

Professor Colin Riordan, Chair of International Unit, Universities UK, and Vice-Chancellor, University of Essex, and Dr Christian Yeomans, Policy Officer (Europe), UK Higher Education International Unit.

Q1 The Chairman: Good morning. While you are settling down, I shall give you our housekeeping notes. Members’ interests are recorded in the Register of Lords’ Interests and the list of declared interests is on the witness's table. The session is on the record and is being webcast live and will subsequently be accessible on the parliamentary website. You will receive a transcript of the session to check and correct. This will be put on the record, again on the parliamentary website. Will you please begin by stating for the record your names and official titles? If you wish to, you can make an opening statement, or if you want to go straight into the questions, please let us know. We particularly welcome you as our first witnesses for this inquiry. We look forward very much to what you have to tell us.

Professor Riordan: Thanks very much. My name is Colin Riordan. I am the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex and I am here in my capacity as the Chair of the International Policy Network for Universities UK, which is the umbrella organisation for universities in this country and higher education institutions.

Dr Yeomans: My name is Chris Yeomans. I am a policy adviser at the UK Higher Education International Unit based at Universities UK.

Professor Riordan: Of which I am also the chairman.

The Chairman: Sorry.
Professor Riordan: I am also the chairman of the international unit.

The Chairman: Oh, you forgot about that bit. Thank you very much. Did you wish to make any statement at all or do you want to go straight into questions?

Professor Riordan: I think I will go straight into questions.

Q2 The Chairman: I will kick off then. The first question is around the added value of EU engagement, because essentially that is what we are concerned with. What will it give us that we might not have otherwise? Could you tell us in your experience where the added value of EU involvement has been for UK higher education institutes so far? Looking into the future, how much value might be added? Let us start with that question first.

Professor Riordan: I think the overall question of added value is quite simply stated; it is extra public funding into the system, which is always very welcome for universities and students. That matter has clearly become a bit more acute and it has been noticeable in the last year or two—as the money in this country has receded like the tide but has remained more available in Europe—that universities in this country have become rather more interested in this issue in certain ways. But if I break that down a bit, I would say that there are three main areas where there is very clear added value. One is collaboration, another is student mobility and the third is research funding. On the collaboration agenda, the work of the European Union in that area has been fundamental. The Erasmus programme, other kinds of exchange programmes, Marie Curie and the various different options available to fund research have motivated universities across Europe to work together. There are other mechanisms for that such as the European University Association, but that takes advantage of these opportunities. That is something that improves the quality and the reach of higher education. Research and learning are by their nature collaborative. There are areas where critical mass matters—the numbers of researchers—and where international cross-fertilisation is crucial. You can clearly argue that collaboration increases quality, output and other things.

Student mobility is one of the big successes of the European Union. I was an Erasmus coordinator for 12 years as a young lecturer from the 1980s and right through the 1990s when I was at what was then University College Swansea. I think that to date 2.2 million students have taken part in Erasmus. However, the number of UK students who have done so is rather smaller. I think that this year there are almost 13,000 students. The benefits of student mobility are clear. There is some very good evidence on this. A 10-year longitudinal study was undertaken in America which covered 40,000 students, half of whom had some international experience. It is not specifically concerned with Erasmus students but it looked at students who are getting out into the world into a foreign country. The study showed that they gained an average two to three point increase in their grade point average, so they achieved more. The experience also affects their employability very positively. In more anecdotal terms, anyone who has ever dealt with students who have been on years abroad or who have had some sort of experience abroad will know that they become more rounded and more mature. It improves their education and opens their minds. Therefore, there are lots of reasons why that experience is important. It has worked well.

As regards research funding, this issue has been crucial for the UK. The European Research Council has been a great success and we are one of the most successful countries in the European Union in terms of accessing that. About 15% of the budget goes to the UK out of the 27 countries, and funding is allocated on a competitive basis founded on excellence and peer review, so that is a real achievement. As far as UK research is concerned, over the
seven-year period that we will come to the end of in 2014, that will amount to about €7 billion, so it is very significant for us. If you were to ask researchers across the UK what the most important effect of the European Union has been, they would probably say the European Research Council.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much. We will come back to some of those points.

**Q3 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Welcome, Professor. You were talking about when you were young. Vice-chancellors are getting younger every day as far as I am concerned. I am very impressed by what you said about collaboration, student mobility and research funding. However, I was just a wee bit disturbed by your first answer when you said that you saw more students coming from overseas as making up the deficit, given the Government’s cuts to higher education funding in the United Kingdom. Is that not likely to distort the position within universities if students from overseas are being brought in specifically to make up deficits in funding? You will get them coming in from the richer countries rather than the poorer countries and you will get them coming in for particular specialisms. That could distort the whole balance within universities. Are you not worried about that?

**Professor Riordan:** That is not what I meant at all; sorry, I must have put that badly. What I meant was that in terms particularly of research funding universities have been looking more to Europe recently, even though research funding has not been cut—it has been capped in cash terms.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** That is a cut in real terms.

**Professor Riordan:** It is a cut of about 10% in real terms over the four years. The situation has perhaps jolted some universities into thinking that they need to look at alternatives. I certainly would not put it as starkly as you did. On that point, although it is not exactly about the EU, if students want to come and study at a university and there is funding for them, you can generally find the capacity to do that. If there are very large numbers, you might have to have new buildings and it will take longer but it is not usually the case that international students come in and supplant the places of home students, as it were. In my experience, what prevents home students studying is not the presence of international students.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** So no home students are going to be denied places as a result of additional students coming in from overseas.

**Professor Riordan:** I could not guarantee that none would, but it is extremely unlikely; it is not as though there are 30 places in a lecture room and, once they have gone, there are no more. It depends on the subject. There are limits on things like medicine anyway, where you can only have a certain number of overseas students. But, on the whole, universities are there to teach students and we do not discriminate as to where they come from. You have to have funding to teach them with, so it is the availability of funding that creates limits. I am going slightly off the point here, but nevertheless you can only recruit to a certain limit of home students, and we would be fined if we took any more. That is what stops us, not the presence of overseas students.

**Q4 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** Are you beginning to see that EU students are becoming a more attractive proposition, if you like, because of the visa problems with non-EU students?
**Professor Riordan:** Not really. There is not much of a relationship. At my university, the University of Essex, we talk about HEU students, who are home students and EU students, because they are treated the same. They come in under the same fee arrangements, so we put them together, while overseas students come in under a different fee arrangement.

**Q5 Lord Lexden:** On the general point of European funding, you referred to what is still the comparative generosity of other European countries in terms of fees. Would you expect that to change for the obvious reason that, generally in the rest of the European Union, funds are not going to be as plentiful as they were?

**Professor Riordan:** Yes, there is a difference between what each individual country provides for its higher education system and what the European Union does. I referred to European Union funding. Because the last tranche was set in 2007 until 2014, there has been no change. It remains steady, and it looks as if in the next round for Horizon 2020 there will be an increase. Individual countries are clearly doing different things. If your country has a sovereign debt crisis, I would have thought that that is going to affect things.

**Q6 Baroness Prosser:** Good morning. You just mentioned 2020, which I wanted to ask you about. The target is quite a significant one. Do you think that it is realistic? Can we hope to reach it and do you think it is desirable?

**Professor Riordan:** Are you talking about the Bologna target of 20% of students being internationally mobile by 2020?

**Baroness Prosser:** I am talking about 40% for 30 to 34 year-olds. That is the Europe 2020 target.

**Professor Riordan:** In the UK we have already reached that. We have 40.7% of male and 42.3% of females. In the EU overall it is just over 30%, but there are big differences. Places like Finland are well into the 40s, but Turkey and Croatia have percentages in the teens. If we want all of the EU to have an average percentage in the 40s, we would probably be looking at specific countries for that.

**Baroness Prosser:** To average out like that might not be terribly helpful if we are talking about using these funds to ensure that our students and young people move on. The role of education and training in achieving the overall strategy must be key. There is a link between that and young people moving into employment. How do you see that panning out?

**Professor Riordan:** There is very good evidence for a correlation between economic prosperity and the proportion of people who have tertiary education. That can be shown in the OECD statistics. Make of it what you will, but that is what the correlation is. Moreover, the correlation does not seem to be between specific subjects. It does not have to be the STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths. It is just that tertiary education itself appears to do that; hence these types of targets. Going on the evidence, the sensible thing to do is have a target for tertiary education.

**Baroness Prosser:** You talk about the economic advantage that comes. Are you talking about that in the context of the individual or the economic advantage that comes to the country’s aims on sustainable growth, for example?

**Professor Riordan:** It is certainly both. Personally, I think that it is very much to the individual’s benefit because their employment and life chances are improved. Clearly you do not have to have a university education to do well in life, but there does seem to be enough
evidence to show that people do better on an individual basis. There is also the intangible
effect of education which improves people's experience in lots of ways. But there is also a
clear correlation between the prosperity of a country and the proportion of people who
have been through higher education.

Q7 Baroness Henig: You were saying that participation in higher education in the UK is
about 40% and it therefore looks as though the effort of the EU over the next few years will
be focused on boosting other countries in Europe, but if you look around the world, I
would have thought that our competitors—America, China and Asia—have higher
participation rates. Is that not going to pose a problem for the UK, because Europe is going
to put all its resources into bringing countries in Europe up to 40% while the real action is in
other parts of the world where higher education is developing much more fully? Is that a
problem?

Professor Riordan: I suppose it depends on what the Commission intends to do. I think it is
highly unlikely that it would be in a position to say that it would put most of the funding into
areas where there is low participation because of the horse trading that goes on, to be quite
frank. The notion of having a higher proportion of young people, or just people, in higher
education has gone out of fashion a bit over the past couple of years. We have had for
around 10 years a target of 50%. We have reached the low 40s, where we are now, but we
seem to have found it difficult to push beyond that. Politically it clearly is not as fashionable
as it was, but the evidence remains the same. If you have a high level of education, you will
do better as a country.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: There is a part of the country where participation is at 50%.
It is called Scotland.

Q8 Baroness Henig: Perhaps I can bring you back to Erasmus, which you briefly
mentioned. Each document in the EU's agenda for the modernisation of higher education
puts a lot of weight on expanding the Erasmus programme. I could not agree with you more
about how good Erasmus is for students but all the evidence from UK universities over the
last few years is that far more people come to the UK under the Erasmus programme than
go out. In my experience it is not easy to persuade British students to go abroad. In
particular, part-time students, mature students and those who are perhaps not mainstream
are not always very willing to go abroad. In the UK context how would you remove some
of the obstacles that clearly must be there at the moment which prevent UK students taking
up opportunities under Erasmus?

Professor Riordan: Yes, that is an important question. Any of us who have worked in
universities are aware of this. I was a professor of German for many years so it was quite
easy to get students of German to go abroad but to get students of other subjects to go
abroad was much more difficult. I should say that I am chairing a group on student mobility
for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills that is looking not just at Erasmus
and the Erasmus fee waiver issue but at how we can get more outward mobility for UK
students more generally. We have wonderful internationalisation, as it were, and highly
international universities. In my own university about 40% of students come from beyond
these shores, but the UK students on the whole tend to stay in Colchester. What are the
reasons for that? Language is one of them, but it is quite a big one. There is a real reluctance
to learn other languages here. The converse of that is that in other countries you do not
have to explain to any young person, or anybody else for that matter, why it might be
helpful for them to learn English, and because of that they tend to be open to other
languages too, so you will get much more cross-border flow.
I think that this issue also has something to do with the history of Europe, which seems to promote cross-border flows on mainland Europe. It is partly due to the Channel, which is ridiculous these days, but I think it probably is due to something historical. But languages are an issue. Language learning is declining in this country. I have seen my own subject dwindle inexorably over 20 years. A good proportion of the problem seems to relate to economic and financial questions. It is much easier if you can get either a job or extra funding because the Erasmus funding does not cover everything; you need to come up with other money. There will be the question of fees and the fee waiver to deal with as well in the future.

Q9  The Chairman: Excuse me for interrupting you, Professor Riordan. Could you please say what the fee waiver scheme is? You have mentioned it a couple of times.

Professor Riordan: Under the system as it is now, we have been able to charge 50% of whatever the standard fee is—it is now around £3,300. From the Higher Education Funding Council for England you got a chunk of money that would offset that so that the students did not incur a fee for going on the Erasmus programme, so that was something specifically for Erasmus.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I have Lady Scott and then Lord Foulkes.

Baroness Scott of Needham Market: I wanted to ask about languages and you have just covered that, so that is fine.

The Chairman: Fine, okay. Lord Foulkes.

Q10  Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Quite separately from the Erasmus programme—forget about that for a minute—as regards the ordinary mobility of students, there have been a number of reports that universities on the continent, in the Netherlands, Germany, I think, and perhaps some other countries, are deliberately targeting students from England to go there at reduced fees because of the huge increase in fees in the United Kingdom. Have you seen that happening? Do you have any evidence of that? Is that affecting intake into UK universities?

Professor Riordan: It is much too early to tell as regards the intake under the new system, as we have been having applications only for a few weeks, so we have no evidence of that. However, it is certainly happening. Maastricht University is a great example of it. It has made a big fuss about it, and that is fine. My own view is: why shouldn’t they? We are sitting here saying that our students should go abroad. If that is what happens and they go and study abroad, that will be a good thing.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I am not implying that there is anything wrong with it; I am just asking for information to see whether it will affect intake into English universities. Presumably, you also have students seeking ways of getting into Scottish universities without having to pay the full fees that students resident in England have to pay. I was told by a Conservative Peer that some people are actually seeking residence in Scotland for the purpose of attending Scottish universities. Have you detected that at all?

Professor Riordan: I have not. I do not know what the rules are. I happen to know the rules in Wales, which is that you need to be domiciled there for six years, so you would have to think about it six years in advance. I would be surprised if there was not something—
The Chairman: I am sorry to interrupt but this is slightly outside our remit because this is an ongoing domestic issue within the UK. We want to try to keep to the—

Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Good try, though.

The Chairman: It was a good try, but it is outwith our remit at the moment.

Q11 Baroness Henig: Can I ask a quick question about Erasmus? If it is going to be expanded in the future, which is what the EU wants to happen, and large numbers of Erasmus students come to UK universities, might that not cause problems for staff/student ratios in UK universities? I remember, as dean of a faculty, that you were not that enamoured of Erasmus students coming because they did not bring any money, whereas you got bonus points every time international students came because they brought money with them. Therefore, if you get large numbers of Erasmus students, is that not simply going to worsen staff/student ratios?

Professor Riordan: You have control over it in that you say, “We will send a certain number of students and you send a certain number to us.” In a particular department it might be five students. The only trouble is that they will always send five students and we will generally send nought, one or two unless it involves languages. If it involves a languages programme, you will fill the quota, but what inevitably happens is that across the institution you tend to end up with more coming than going. This is not really a major problem because the numbers are relatively small.

Baroness Henig: At the moment.

Professor Riordan: You can always control them. If you had more students able to go out, you could then take more coming in because it is a straight swap. That is why there is no fee involved because you assume that there is a fee there. But you have to distinguish between that and European Union students just simply studying in this country, of whom there have been very large numbers. We saw something like a 68% increase in applications, funnily enough from the last time that fees were tripled, as it happens, when they went from £1,000 to £3,000. The reason for that was that there was funding to go with it, you did not have to pay it upfront and suddenly it became doable again. But now there are very large numbers of EU students who come here and do their full degree in the UK. They are treated as home students. Frequently, they are very good students from right across the European Union. In my experience, incoming Erasmus students do not tend to cause problems. There are niggles around it because you have to put on exams at funny times and you wonder who these students are who suddenly appear, because they are occasional students. They might be there only for two terms or for a semester, so they are slightly outwith the others, but that tends to be the sort of thing that happens.

Q12 Lord Eames: Professor, so far I have found what you have said to us fascinating. You have touched on mobility of students and the increase in the aspects of mobility. I represent a generation where a lot of the mobility for researchers was based on your personal initiative. Now the picture is very different. How do you feel that we can boost the opportunities for researchers as opposed to students in mobility terms? What do you feel about the various suggestions already put forward about this, because I think there is a distinction between the two?

Professor Riordan: There are existing schemes such as the Marie Curie scheme for young researchers, which works pretty well. The simple answer for researchers is, I am afraid, that
on the whole it is always about money. It does not have to be large amounts of money. It is not a case of applying for a multimillion pound grant, provided that it is collaborative, although that certainly exists. What does work well is seed-corn money. We have a link with the University of Konstanz in Germany and Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi—it is a three-way thing. We make relatively small amounts of money available. We put in £25,000, they put in the equivalent in euros and staff can apply for a relatively small amount of money just to get together. It is like a party: you get people together, give them food, drink and music and leave them to it and they will get on with it. They will have a good time. With researchers and academics it is much the same thing. If you put them in the same place with whatever facilities they need and just leave them to it, they will do what needs to be done. It comes down to funding for mobility and that kind of inducement for people to work collaboratively on projects. These days with modern technology, once you have had one or two meetings you do not have to rely on constantly seeing each other, although the occasional physical visit is good. Once you get that human relationship established and the common interests worked out, that really functions well.

Lord Eames: In your experience, is there any way that has not yet been tried to emphasise the importance of this? I accept the point about finances, but the air is full of suggestions.

Professor Riordan: I do not think so. Researchers just do this anyway. It is quite difficult to keep track. I have a relatively small university but even in that case it is very difficult to keep track of all the research relationships that develop, not just in the European Union but around the world, because that is what researchers do—they meet each other at international conferences. I am not clear about whether there are big gaps there that we have not thought of filling up to now.

Q13  The Chairman: Do you think it is a question of more funding being required? Would that be one way in which more progress could be made in that area?

Professor Riordan: I would have thought that certainly directed and focused funding and saying that we want to bring researchers together would be useful. To be fair, there are schemes like that and there are lots of sources of money. Awareness is one of the issues. That is something that I perhaps did not mention with regard to student mobility—making students aware of the advantages, opportunities and funding streams. To go back to that briefly, the student mobility group that I chair will look at all that.

I am sorry, but I will come back to the subject that we are discussing in a moment. I was just remembering what I should have said earlier. We do not in this country have something like the German Academic Exchange Service or the IIE in the United States, which is a similar student mobility service. We lack that in this country. The British Council has certain programmes but we do not have a go-to place for students. We do not really have a one-stop shop for researchers that everybody is aware of and everybody uses and which brings together all the different possibilities. I think that information as well as focused funding on mobility would definitely help.

Q14  Viscount Bridgeman: Will you flesh out the IIE system for my information?

Professor Riordan: The United States has this system, as do other countries. The one with which I am most familiar, given my background, is the German Academic Exchange Service—the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst—which is funded by the German Foreign Office and promotes staff and student mobility. It provides grants to enable students and staff to go to Germany and for German students and staff to go abroad.
Q15 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: I want to ask about Multirank, but before I do I have a further question on the previous point. Obviously, when you need resources, you do not much mind where they come from and you go wherever they happen to be, but which is the most effective source? Should resources come from national Member States, the EU, or should it be an intergovernmental thing? How much sense does it make for the EU to be in that arena?

Professor Riordan: That is an important underlying question to all this. It is clear that higher education lies within the remit of the individual Member States. One thing you have absolutely take into account is that there is very good evidence to show that the more autonomy a university has, the more successful it is likely to be. That does not mean to say that if a university is autonomous, it is therefore going to become world class overnight. However, it is much more difficult for a university to be a leading world university if it is trammelled. It needs to be untrammelled essentially. What role do governments and the European Union have? The absolute key thing is that we have to allow universities to flourish. They will not all flourish but enough of them will. That is the first point. There are areas across Europe—international co-operation and collaboration is one of them—where the European Union can have an effect on things. In the end it comes down to the fact that that is where the money is. The Bologna process itself, which is a ministerial, intergovernmental effort, and goes beyond the European Union—I think there are now 49 states involved in that, which is many more than the European Union ones—can promote greater alignment on a voluntary basis. That is a very good way of doing it. What the European Union can do is focus funding on ways of encouraging things to happen, such as enabling students to go abroad and staff to collaborate.

Q16 Baroness Scott of Needham Market: I wanted to ask about Multirank. Obviously, the collection, analysis and comparison of data are important, but do you think that Multirank is the right way to go about it? What are your general views on this?

Professor Riordan: No, I do not. Our Government and many other governments are very wary about setting up their own league tables because that can quite quickly become a way of channelling funding. League tables are an extraordinarily unreliable way of doing that. It happens anyway. Overseas governments frequently refer to the Times league table in particular and allow students to go only to universities that are in the top 50 or so of that, so you cannot really stop that happening. As a sector in the UK, we feel that it might increase transparency. However, there is no lack of transparency in this country. We have very good data sets through the Higher Education Statistics Agency. If we are going to be asked to provide more data, there is a real cost and burden to doing that. I do not think that that would be acceptable, if that is what the Multirank tool is going to ask for. You clearly cannot stop anybody—a newspaper or whoever—taking the data that are there, setting them out in a particular way, weighting particular bits and saying, “This gives us a ranking.” We as a sector believe that that is not something that funding authorities ought to be doing.

Baroness Scott of Needham Market: I am sure we accept your remark that the UK’s house is in relatively good order, but presumably that is not necessarily the case elsewhere in the EU, so how would students, researchers or anybody else from the UK make judgments about universities elsewhere that they may want to link up with?

Professor Riordan: That is a valid point. If there are areas in the EU where basic data are not available, that is fine. What we are concerned about is that there should be no increased burden on UK institutions, as we have enough of those already. The other thing is that
there needs to be a very clear guarantee that this is not going to become a funding mechanism.

**Q17 Baroness Henig:** Is there not already a ranking in the sense that the research exercise produced a ranking and the Government funded on the basis of the research exercise? Is that still the case? I have lost track of whether that still applies.

**Professor Riordan:** That is true, but that is a—

**Baroness Henig:** That is still there. Could the European Union build on something like that, because there is already that ranking?

**Professor Riordan:** It could do, but the cost of that exercise is absolutely enormous and the reason for that is that it comprises peer review. This is not the Government coming in and saying—well, I suppose it is—that we need it and the funding council should administer it. It is peer review, so we assess each other, with external assistance, and say, “This is what we think, qualitatively. We have read the relevant documents.” There is a lot of debate about this. Do people read all the relevant articles? I am absolutely sure that they do. But it is a peer assessment of work and that is a different thing.

**Baroness Henig:** That might be an angle. If it was to be peer assessment in some shape or form across Europe, would you feel differently?

**Professor Riordan:** No, because the cost and the burden of that would be horrendous. It is impractical.

**Q18 The Chairman:** There is still the same administrative burden. It would appear to be duplicating, so in a sense it would be even worse. Do you have any intelligence on this European tertiary education register, because it is not really fleshed out in the communication? Do you know anything about the intention of that? Have you heard about that at all?

**Professor Riordan:** No, I have not, but I have just been passed a note. There is no explanation of what it involves or how it will be used, so it is not surprising that I have not looked at it.

**The Chairman:** We have both come to the same conclusion on that. We just wondered whether you had any extra information on it.

**Professor Riordan:** You could ask the Commission about it, but there does not appear to be a single register of the higher education institutions in Europe. That could potentially be a useful thing to have.

**The Chairman:** Possibly, yes. Thank you.

**Q19 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Can we move on to internationalisation of higher education beyond the European Union? As you know, a number of British universities have campuses overseas, outwith the European Union, and are developing that. The Commission is now getting involved in this issue and suggesting that there should be a European strategy for the internationalisation of higher education. Do you think that is a good thing for the EU to get involved in? What do you think it could be constructed of?

**Professor Riordan:** That is really the question. It is one of those things where, in principle, you say, “Yes, of course”. We are in favour of internationalisation. We all do it. As to
whether you could do anything useful in those terms, if you count every higher education institution, there could be as many as 4,000 in Europe. There are certainly about 800 in the European University Association. How do you do anything sensible with that number of institutions to promote internationalisation beyond what they are doing already, I do not know. For most universities that have any strategic perspective, it is very high up the agenda in each case. I would want to know what can be done on a practical level. That is not immediately clear to me unless it involves specific programmes.

We have things such as Erasmus Mundus. That is more than an institution-to-institution programme; it is rather a university-association-to-university-association programme between European universities and African universities—that sort of thing—to promote that level of co-operation, which is very high-level co-operation. There are also a lot of institution-to-institution programmes, such as Atlantis between the European Union and the US. That kind of focused programme is good but, as regards a strategy to make that happen, I think that you would need to give that some thought. First, is it practical? Further, is it needed, because universities are doing this anyway? It is like saying that we need to get them to teach students, in a sense. I am exaggerating a bit, but it is what universities do.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** So they would do this by their own initiative, without having to have a European Union strategy. I was trying to think of what this might involve and I thought of the Sorbonne and the LSE working in francophone and English-speaking west Africa. Something could be done there, but such a programme is more likely to come from individual institutions than from Brussels, is it not?

**Professor Riordan:** Yes, I agree with you. A programme such as that, which would be a development of an Erasmus Mundus-type programme, could focus on institutions or subjects, or perhaps be a combination of research and teaching. There would be ways of doing that. You could think of programmes that would promote internationalisation, but would a whole strategy for European higher education add anything? I suppose that it would depend on what it said. If it said that it was trying to promote co-operation internationally, that is fine.

**Lord Foulkes of Cumnock:** Are you worried that it could involve increased bureaucracy, costing money, and not produce anything particularly valuable?

**Professor Riordan:** Yes, on that, the Bologna process has not had a major resonance in the UK. I think that if you came along and said, “There is now this other new process we are having”—an internationalisation process or whatever it might be—“and you are all meant to respond to it,” you would get a rolling of the eyes. That is the danger with that, whereas if you said, “Here’s a project. It is funded. You can apply to it,” that would work.

Q20 **The Chairman:** Is there a specific meaning attached to “internationalisation” or is it one of those catch-all terms that encompasses anything to do with going across different borders?

**Professor Riordan:** A large number of hours and sheets of paper have been devoted to that matter.

**The Chairman:** We do not need the hours’ worth; we just need a concise definition.

**Professor Riordan:** I suppose that it is a catch-all phrase, but it generally involves internationalisation of the curriculum. That is one of the things that people usually mention. It could include things such as making lectures less culturally specific and not referring to
TOWIE\textsuperscript{104} in your lectures, as somebody who has just come from China might not know what that is, even if you do, and international student mobility outward and recruiting students inward. I will come back to that. The definition is a bit catch-all but it is becoming more focused. I think the key breakthrough was the recognition that all students need to be international students. Just the fact that you have a lot of international staff, which many of us do, and a lot of international students from more than 130 countries, which quite a number of universities have, does not in itself necessarily make you international. You need to look at the assumptions that you make, the way that you do things and what the UK students do as well. That has come into the whole mix.

Q21 Viscount Bridgeman: This is a general, overarching question on the financing. I very much take your point that the money lies in the EU. We understand that the Commission has proposed that for the next period, 2014-20, under the Multiannual Financial Framework there should be three funding instruments: Education Europe, which I understand includes Erasmus Mundus and Tempus; Horizon 2020; and cohesion policy. You might be able to help us a little on those three schemes. What is your general view on that three-way proposal?

Professor Riordan: It clearly makes sense in terms of the higher education policy—essentially, the teaching part of it and the student part of it—to review all the programmes. A multiplicity of programmes presently exists. I gather that the intention is to put a lot more money into that. A 72% increase is proposed, which is very welcome. The cohesion policy part is a uniquely European question to do with the accession of new Member States and the rather large differences between the development of higher education in some of the western European States and in some of the new accession States. How do you redress that balance? We accept that you need to build research capacity. There are probably also development needs for staff. All kinds of things need to be done and a specific approach will need to be taken. Dividing the matter into three in that way certainly makes sense. The additional funds are no doubt welcome.

Q22 The Chairman: You mention the ESF and you may be aware that a little while ago we produced a report, Making It Work: The European Social Fund. New communications are coming out about what it is likely to be over the coming years. Do you think that there is likely to be more of a squeeze on the input into higher education?

Professor Riordan: I hope not. Horizon 2020, which is the follow-up to Framework programme 7, also envisages a rise, perhaps from about €54 billion in 2007-14 to perhaps €65 billion or €70 billion in the next seven-year period from 2014, more or less. The Commission is proposing €80 billion. Doubtless, a compromise will be arrived at. That is very good news. The mood music that you get from Brussels—we have been there two or three times this year to talk to the Parliament, the Commission and other agencies—is that there is a very clear recognition that investment in research and education will make a difference and will create growth. I have heard that even from MEPs who represent rural constituencies. You would expect them to say, “Oh no, we have to protect the CAP.” The CAP serves an absolute purpose but there is recognition of the need to invest in research. That is something that has been a slight surprise but it is very welcome.

The Chairman: Do you think that there is a possibility that that will lead to a narrowing of the subjects that are valorised if focus is directed on a particular notion of growth and

\textsuperscript{104} The Only Way is Essex
certain kinds of employment? We have seen that happening here in relation to the arts and humanities. I declare an interest as I used to teach in that subject area.

Professor Riordan: I declare an interest as being on that side of the campus, too. That whole question of whether arts and humanities are being cut here is an interesting one. It will depend on whether students continue to want to study them. If they do, they will not be cut. If you get the same number of students taking the programmes, more funding will have to go in. Because I am also involved in the humanities, I notice that there is an open letter going round at the moment which is to be sent to the Commission. The letter asks for a dedicated £5 billion programme for social sciences and humanities as part of Horizon 2020, so there is clearly concern about this. There is always a balance to be drawn with regard to directed funding. We have our global challenges, which often tend to be focused on practical issues such as water or climate change, and you can completely understand why that is the case. Certainly, as a sector, we would argue that there needs to be a large amount of discretionary funding which you can apply for, and that we should not be looking at this in an instrumental way. My sense, certainly as regards the European Union, is that that is the case. I do not think that there is a very instrumental way of looking at this, or at least I do not think there is a philosophy that this needs to be about certain subjects in the STEM area that will give us prosperity. There is no evidence to say that that is true. It would be helpful if the UK Government were clear that we should not attempt to direct research into particular areas because it does not necessarily work.

Q23 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Stimulated by what you said about your number of visits to Brussels, do you get the impression that there is a desire among officials in the Commission and MEPs for a sort of creeping increase in competence within the European Union on higher education? I am not saying that that is a good thing or a bad thing.

Professor Riordan: An increasing competence?

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Yes, do you think that they want to take over more responsibility from the national governments?

Professor Riordan: I see. I think that that is something that we need to be aware of and to keep an eye on. There is perhaps a sense that the European Commission ought to be more closely involved. As I understand it, there is some scepticism in the Commission about the Bologna process. It has been going for 10 years and the Commission feels that it has not made fast enough progress and has not achieved as much, and that is possibly one of the reasons why we have this renewed communication on modernisation in higher education. The danger that we have to watch out for includes two things. One is that Bologna actually is working pretty well and the reason is that it is done by consent. It is getting people to work together, coaxing them and saying, “Look”. It is not forcing anything. There has been quite a lot of push in this country, partly because people felt that they were going to be told, “You have to have two-year MAs,” when we have only one-year MAs. There are lots of myths about it all. However, the reason that it is working is that the approach is relatively softly, softly, even though there have been major student protests about it, certainly in Germany, Austria and other places.

Nevertheless, if the European Commission gets involved, there are two dangers. One is that if you try and direct alignment, it will work very much against university autonomy, and we have to defend against that. Secondly, it could quite easily duplicate what is already happening with Bologna, so that you get two sets of targets: one mobility target for Bologna and one for the Commission. It is the same for other areas. We need to be quite wary of
this, particularly because at the moment, quite rightly, national governments have competence, whereas in Scotland, Wales and this country it is devolved to the home nations—and there are good reasons for that.

**Q24 Baroness Prosser:** You were talking a minute ago about the importance of the STEM subjects. A couple of weeks ago, I chaired a conference of the UKRC, which was looking at the whole question of the involvement of women in such subjects and the gender imbalance. Do you find that that still exists? Is there anything that you think you can do at your level to try to improve that? There is a terrible waste of possible talent by those subjects seeming to be closed off.

**Professor Riordan:** I suppose the question would be whether the European Union or the European Commission could do more to promote diversity. There is genuine not just acceptance but acknowledgement and understanding of the fact that there is a lot of talent out there that is not getting through. However, we do work very hard; it is part of the whole widening participation and diversity agenda. It is not just, as it were, origin or class-based but gender and disability, and all sorts of things. We go out into schools, and have programmes for that. We go to communities and workplaces. I think that we are actually working very hard on that in this country. As to what the European Union could do, again it is usually focused programmes with money attached to them that work in these areas. So that is an area that could be looked at. I think something about that is also in the communication.

**Baroness Prosser:** Do you think that the focus ought to come a little earlier, perhaps at school level, because it is the choice of subjects at that level that often creates a great divide?

**Professor Riordan:** Yes. If it is a question of when you intervene, that could be done at the age of eight or nine. That would be the best time, and you have to intervene with families. You need parents and children and you need to get them on to university campuses, because there is a lot of misunderstanding. They perhaps just do not know what they are and it is quite intimidating. You need to take that away and make people feel part of something at an early stage.

**Q25 Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** When I was involved in EU programmes at local government level some years ago, we used to have to produce reams of statistical data that were sent in—I guess you still have to do that. I am interested in your sense of how good the analysis is of the data that you are sending in. Do you get a sense that the Commission just ends up with a vast amount of data, or is it really good at processing it and therefore coming to judgments about how effective its spending programmes have been in terms of meeting the objectives that it set out to meet? Or does it all just get lost somehow in the data?

**Professor Riordan:** I think that it is probably closer to the latter than to the former. The thing is that the European Union is such a huge beast. We have 500 million citizens. There is a major strand of work at the moment for the Horizon 2020 research funding programme to improve transparency and make things less complicated, less bureaucratic and less data heavy. It can often be very data heavy and information poor, so you do not get very much out of it. It is a real problem, but there is a genuine will in the Commission to address that.
Baroness Scott of Needham Market: How good is the Commission at listening to you as a sector? What are your general impressions about how much it actually takes on board, say, on the point you just made?

Professor Riordan: Certainly in the last year or so, in the run-up to the next iteration, it has been very good—it really has. Robert-Jan Smits has been over here—he might even be here this week. He has been over two or three times. He talks and he listens. He takes things back. You can get to see him. He heads the Commission on research. It has been very good.

Q26 The Chairman: One last quick question: why do you think that the Bologna process has not had more resonance in the UK? What do you think the problem is?

Professor Riordan: The way in which people have seen it here is to ask, “What is the problem to which this would be the solution?” Quite a few of the proposed reforms, which have caused such upset in Germany and Austria, involve the introduction of things such as bachelor-level degrees, which we already have—setting things on a basis that is closer to what you might call the Anglo-Saxon idea, which involves the US, New Zealand, Australia and us. Although quite a lot of the process requires some reaction from us, it has not had much resonance for that reason. People feel that it does not apply to them.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. That is most helpful. You have been very clear and fulsome with your answers and have got us off to a really good start.
UK Higher Education International Unit – Supplementary written evidence

Introduction

1. This document sets out the response of the UK Higher Education International Unit (IU) to the House of Lords Inquiry into the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe.

2. The response has been developed in consultation with stakeholders from across the UK higher education sector, and builds on the oral evidence provided by Professor Colin Riordan, Chair of the IU, at the meeting of the EU Social Policies and Consumer Protection Sub-Committee of the House of Lords on Thursday 10 November 2011.

3. The response is divided into two parts:
   - Added value for the UK of EU engagement in higher education
   - Responses to consultation questions

Added value of EU engagement in higher education

4. Education is a Member State competence, and therefore ability of the EU itself to achieve the stated goals in the Communication is relatively limited. As such, the agenda needs to endorsed and implemented at the member state and institutional levels.

5. However, the European Union makes an important contribution to UK higher education by facilitating exchanges of ideas and good practice, sharing of policy development, and, crucially, funding programmes such as Erasmus to encourage mobility.

6. Key examples of the European Union adding value to UK higher education include:
   - **Lifelong Learning Programme (LLL)** - The main programme for Higher Education in LLL is the Erasmus Programme. Erasmus is the European exchange programme for higher education students, teachers, staff, and institutions. It enables student and staff mobility for work and study, and promotes transnational cooperation projects. It is notable that:
     - Nine out of every ten European higher education institutions (HEIs) participate in Erasmus.
     - More than 2.2 million students across Europe have participated since it started in 1987, as well as 250,000 higher education teachers and other staff since 1997.
     - The 2010/11 figures for the Erasmus programme are yet to be fully validated, however the early indications are that student numbers in the Erasmus programme represent the largest number of outgoing UK Erasmus students in the programme’s history, and that there have now been more than 200,000 UK students who have benefited from the programme since its inception. In 2010/11 there were 12,830 outgoing UK students on Erasmus, an
increase of 9.5%, and 2,059 an increase of 15.8% on the year before (figures to be confirmed).

- **Framework Programme:**
  - R&D is one of the areas where the UK benefits most substantially from membership of the EU - the more the EU invests in R&D, the more the UK benefits from EU membership.
  - Nearly 15% of the budget allocated for the current Framework Programme (FP7), the EU’s main instrument for funding research, has gone to UK researchers, with the total contribution of FP7 to UK research expected to reach Euro 7 billion.

7. There are a number of areas where the UK could be doing substantially better in terms of making the most of what the EU has to offer. While UK participation in the Framework Programme is already extremely strong, UK is far less successful in the 20 smaller funding programmes outside of FP7 to which researchers can apply for support – eg. Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Atlantis, and Lifelong Learning. UK is currently lagging behind Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain in securing funding from these programmes.

**Responses to consultation questions**

**How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?**

8. European HEIs are at the heart of the EU’s 2020 strategy. By identifying human capital development as fundamental to smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy places education and research at the centre of Europe’s future economic well-being. Consequently, it opens up a wealth of opportunities for higher education institutions.

9. Higher education institutions have a key role in providing teaching, undertaking research and innovation, producing employable graduates, and developing new ideas for a changing world.

**How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?**

10. The EU is one among the many participants, countries and organisations, involved in taking forward the Bologna Process.

11. The EU sees the Bologna Process as part of a broader effort in the drive for a Europe of knowledge. As such there are a number of areas of overlap between the interests of the EU and the action lines of the Bologna Process. These include:
  - lifelong learning and development; and
  - education and training and co-operation in Vocational Education and Training
12. The European Commission view of the Bologna Process is that it has not gone far enough, or achieved enough for higher education in its first ten years. To some extent, this can explain the EU’s revitalised focus on higher education, and the measures included in the Modernisation Communication.

13. Many of the areas highlighted by the European Commission closely mirror those, or duplicate those of the Bologna Process. These include the duplication of mobility targets and qualifications frameworks.

14. An important point to note is how far the Bologna Process has come from its inception in 1999 (when there were 29 participating European countries and three areas of policy focus), to 2011 with 47 participating countries and 10 policy ‘action’ lines.

15. It is crucial that the EU does not overstep its remit, and that the Bologna Follow-Up Group retains control of Bologna Process Policy. The EU can support the Bologna Process by not duplicating the processes developed as part of the European Higher Education Area, thereby creating competitor initiatives.

16. Student mobility in the UK is marked by a striking imbalance: the UK is performing extraordinarily well as a ‘receiving’ country (second only to the US), but performs rather poorly as a ‘sending’ country, ranking only 22nd behind countries such as Greece, Turkey and Morocco in 2005. This signals the risk of UK graduates increasingly missing out on the international dimension and therefore putting their competitiveness in the European and global market at risk.

17. The most commonly mentioned barriers to mobility are financial barriers, with 82% of responding UK HEIs citing ‘economic and financial reasons’ as being a hindrance to mobility. Although the existing Erasmus grant is welcomed across the sector, it evidently does not cover all costs and is not adjusted for locations where the cost of living is relatively high. Consequently, many students – especially less privileged ones and those who undertake part-time employment alongside their studies – do not see going abroad as practical possibility.
18. Linguistic barriers are the second most commonly mentioned, being referenced by 60% of responding UK HEIs as a key reason for restricting participation in the Erasmus programme, either because students are not eligible for certain destinations/institutions, or because they are afraid of studying/working in a non-native language. This factor means that the highest enrolment is among language students, and many HEIs are reluctant to send students abroad unless a partner can offer a range of courses in English.

19. Academic barriers are the third most cited barriers to mobility, ranging from student concerns about full recognition of credits (especially for the best students) to institutions failing to find sufficiently compatible courses at partner universities or align term dates. Although most responding UK institutions say that qualifications recognition is no longer a major concern given the development of ECTS, some HEIs do mention that their students continue to experience some problems in this regard, especially in relation to grading, and suggest that there be greater efforts to increase inter-institutional understanding and to provide country-specific guidelines. Many HEIs also highlight that academic barriers are most considerable for students on professionally-accredited and vocationally-orientated courses.

20. It appears that cultural and motivational barriers also persist, and so the reluctance of individuals to move out of their comfort zone continues to be a problem.

21. There also appears to be a lack of information on international student mobility opportunities and funding in the UK at the national level. While there are many examples of best practice at the institutional level in the UK, there is no central coordination point that provides information, advice and assistance in relation to ISM outside of the British Council, which is the national contact point for the Erasmus programme.

22. A further barrier can be found internally in the university system: as many degree programmes entail compulsory core classes for benchmark purposes and as necessary prerequisites for proceeding to the next year – this is especially the case in science subjects. These core classes may not be available at the partnering universities.

Proposals to overcome barriers to mobility through the Erasmus programme

23. Shorter periods of mobility should be offered. This would enable many more students, and especially those currently underrepresented, to take part in the Erasmus programme, since shorter mobility periods would present less of a financial burden and would appear less daunting to individuals. This might also encourage longer periods of mobility at a later point, by helping to increase interest in work and study abroad and to build confidence in students.
24. The UK HE sector expresses support for the Erasmus grant to be increased. Other suggestions relating to financing include proposals for the grant to take into account the different living costs between countries and whether work placement students are earning a salary; for there to be some kind of bursary for students from low-income backgrounds; and for HEIs to offer a ‘rent rebate’ for students living overseas for only one semester whilst having to pay for accommodation in the UK on a yearly basis.

25. Given the prevalence of linguistic barriers, there is considerable recognition that more language support is needed (and also that this is primarily a UK problem, because of the lack of language-training both at the school- and university-level compared to the rest of Europe). Although responsibility for this lies primarily at the institutional and national levels, UK HEIs call on the European Commission to specifically allocate funding for the provision of language training both before and during placements.

26. In order to increase participation in the programme in general, it is suggested that the European Commission encourage HEIs to organise promotional Erasmus days and workshops; to increase understanding of the programme among academic staff; and to develop ‘student ambassador’ programmes, whereby returning Erasmus students provide advice and counselling to those considering mobility. It is suggested that grants be made available for such initiatives.

27. Another practical proposal is that the European Commission provide more information on social security/insurance requirements across the EU, so as to help institutions overcome legal barriers to work placement mobility.

Future development of the Erasmus Programme

Staff mobility

28. There is widespread support throughout the UK HE sector for a greater emphasis on staff mobility within the future Erasmus programme. Over and above the personal and professional benefits gained by the individual participants, the sector believes that staff mobility has considerable positive spill-effects for the institutions involved and their students. Benefits of academic and staff mobility include:

- opportunity for staff to learn about other educational systems, to acquire new skills and develop new curricula, and to exchange good practices
- potential for staff mobility to encourage student mobility and strengthen student exchange programmes
- possibility for staff participants to network and develop closer research links with other academics
- role of staff mobility in helping to develop and strengthen institutional partnerships and cooperation, and in raising the international profile of HEIs

29. Incoming foreign academic staff can help to ‘internationalise’ UK institutions and provide a means through which students who themselves are unable to take part in mobility can gain an insight into other countries’ values and practices.
Work placement mobility

30. The inclusion of work placements in the Erasmus scheme has been welcomed throughout the UK HE sector and its success is evidenced by the significant take-up rate among UK students since its introduction in 2007. Between 2007/08 and 2008/09, there was a 25% increase in participation in Erasmus work placements according to the British Council. This compares with an overall increase in Erasmus mobility of 6%.

31. The sector expresses considerable support for their continuation and enhancement. In today’s economic climate and given the increasing rhetoric about employability, an emphasis on work placements is axiomatically important.

32. Despite the success of Erasmus work placements, some practical problems nonetheless exist in relation to finding suitable placements, dealing with regulatory differences across countries, and finding time in the curricula for work placements. Some suggestions for developing the future Erasmus programme include:
   • development of a network of approved work placements across Europe with a corresponding centralised method to contact companies abroad
   • more opportunities for short-term placements

33. Concerning credit mobility under the Erasmus programme, the UK had the lowest rate of outward mobility in the EU with only 7,000 participants in 2005/6. While this downward trend has been reversed with the latest numbers, this is mainly ascribed to the introduction of the work placement scheme whose significance should not be overrated as a number of mobility programmes that were already taken place before are now subsumed under the work placement scheme. Moreover, the ‘conventional’ Erasmus study-abroad mobility seems to remain low.

Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme

34. The details set out in the Communication on the proposal for an ‘Erasmus Masters Degree mobility Scheme’ and the ‘European level student loan guarantee facility’ are unclear. Whilst the UK is supportive of any scheme to increase outgoing student mobility, in the further development of the proposal the UK would want to ensure that any future scheme would not affect member state autonomy and add value to existing programmes.

Extension beyond EU countries

35. It is currently being considered whether to further extend the Erasmus programme beyond EU countries. There is thus an international agenda beyond Europe for Erasmus. This would be supported by the UK sector.

Erasmus Fee Waiver and Steering Group on Outward Student Mobility

36. In response to rising sector concern, over the past few months the International Unit (IU) has been working closely with sector stakeholders in relation to the uncertainty of the Erasmus tuition fee waiver post 2012. Following representation to David Willetts MP, Colin Riordan has been charged with Chairing a joint Government and Sector Steering Group on UK outward Student Mobility. The remit is to review current incentives, financial support and obstacles to outward student mobility and to make recommendations to ensure its continuation and increase in the future.
37. The work is being supported by four expert working groups: Erasmus fee waiver; Business involvement and benefits to employability; UK institutional best practice; and International best practice.

38. The secretariat support for this work is being shared by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the UK Higher Education International Unit. The Group will submit recommendations to David Willetts regarding the future of the Erasmus fee-waiver before Christmas 2011 and to put forward concrete recommendations for increasing UK outward mobility by early March 2012.

**How can the mobility of researchers be boosted? What are your reactions to the various ideas put forward by the Commission?**

39. The UK is generally supportive of the EU’s efforts to support the mobility of researchers, and gains particular value in a number of areas including the Marie Curie Actions programme, which is highly valued by the HE research community in the UK. The UK sector strongly supports the continuation of Marie Curie into the successor to the Framework Programme.

40. However, the UK needs to be vigilant in ensuring any future/proposed changes that the EU is looking at in terms of social security, employment rights (particularly the classification of a doctoral candidate as an employee) and portable loans and pensions, are workable in the UK context.

**European Framework for Research Careers**

41. The information provided by the Commission in the Communication is extremely limited – more information would be required for a definitive statement.

42. However, the IU has seen an early draft of the European Framework for Researcher Careers, and has reservations in a number of areas. These included:

   - The Framework directly links researcher careers to the competencies of researchers – it is critical to acknowledge that opportunities for progression are dependent on a whole range of external factors, not necessarily within the power of the individual.
   - A number of member states already have researcher development frameworks which address a number of the objectives of the European Framework for Researcher Careers. In the UK this has been produced by Vitae (The Vitae Researcher Development Framework).

**European Research Area Framework**

43. The International Unit and Universities UK are in the process of consulting the UK HE sector on its perspectives on the European Research Area Framework, and would be happy to provide the Committee with a copy of the results, once the consultation has been completed.
44. The UK needs to be vigilant in ensuring any future/proposed changes that the EU is looking at in terms of social security, employment rights (particularly the classification of a doctoral candidate as an employee) and portable loans and pensions, are workable in the UK context.

Amendments to the students and researchers directive
45. The UK HE sector is cautious on the statement, in the Communication, “Considering proposing amendments to the students and researchers Directive”. Further information on this is required as the statement refers to “accompanying rights should be facilitated and/or strengthened”. This is where the UK needs to be vigilant in ensuring any future/proposed changes that the EU is looking at in terms of social security, employment rights (particularly the classification of a doctoral candidate as an employee) and portable loans and pensions, are workable in the UK context.

How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

46. It is important that the EU does not set binding targets which it expects member states to meet – it is the responsibility of member states individually to set mobility targets of this nature. The UK in any case more than meets this target.

47. However, as an aspirational target for the EU as a whole to pursue, the sector is broadly supportive of this target.

What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

48. The sector does not support the Commission’s plan of proceeding to launch U-Multirank tool. This is for a number of reasons:
   • it is not yet clear whether this is primarily a tool to increase transparency, or another means of ranking universities when there are already several established international ranking systems;
   • there is also the issue of increased administrative burden to UK HEIs of another ranking tool, which will require HEIs to devote increased resources to data collection and analysis;
   • an EU endorsed ranking system, such as U-Multirank could potentially be one step closer to the EU using the instrument to guide its funding decisions;
   • the Commission seems to be moving on this ahead of debate and agreement by Member States: at the last Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in 2009 Higher Education Ministers agreed only that the Bologna Follow-Up Group should monitor the development of transparency initiatives and report back at the next Ministerial Conference in April 2012. Therefore the IU has a watching brief on this development.

What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?
49. The Communication refers to the Commission's proposal for the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-20 (MFF) including 'a significant increase in the budget devoted to investment in education, research and innovation'.

50. The proposal for education and training is a 72% increase, from €8.8 billion (currently £7.6 billion) for the current period (2007-13) to €15.2 billion (currently £13.2 billion) for the next (2014-20).

51. The UK sector is generally supportive of any increase in EU budgets devoted to investment in education and research.

52. However, there is an issue to raise regarding EU budgetary priorities. The inclusion of education and research objectives in the five priorities for Europe 2020 means the EU has put education and research right at the heart of its agenda. The question is will this strategic commitment be reflected in the MFF: will the EU put its money where its mouth is and shift its budgetary priorities to reflect its focus on education and research (by, for example, transferring funds from the Common Agricultural Policy)?

53. The Commission’s suggestion that ‘over €40 billion’ (currently £35 billion) of the proposed allocation for the European Social Fund in the MFF could be made available for education and training is unclear and details are not expected until later in the year.

54. Likewise the proposal for an ‘Erasmus Masters Degree Mobility Scheme through a European level student loan guarantee facility’ is currently unclear; whilst it could potentially be helpful to mobility, it could also potentially cut across Member State autonomy.

55. The UK HE sector is generally supportive of efforts to help Europe’s universities by adding value to the existing HE sector.

56. However, the UK sector would question the usefulness and effectiveness of having an international strategy at the EU level. Focus and finance might best be spent on assisting EU institutions in developing internationalisation as a concept, and embedding it in their institutional profile, something on which the UK could share experience and best practice.

57. The sector is not convinced that initiatives to promote European HEIs generically in order to attract top talent to Europe as a whole (as set out in the Communication) are necessary or desirable. They could be counterproductive, and could divert resources from existing areas, such as Erasmus.
58. The discussion in the Communication for an EU internationalisation strategy is unclear, even though this has been on the agenda for some time. There needs to be more detail on this before the sector is in a position to develop a definitive response.

**The UK Higher Education International Unit**
The UK Higher Education International Unit (IU) is a central observatory and intelligence unit on HE internationalisation and European policy developments for UK higher education institutions. The IU works to support the development and sustainability of the UK HE sector’s influence and competitiveness in a global environment and to represent the sector’s distinctive strengths within Europe and internationally. It provides analysis on all aspects of HE internationalisation from international research collaboration to student recruitment to the various forms of ‘transnational education’ by which UK education is delivered overseas. The IU supports and promotes the UK HE sector’s engagement in European Union and Bologna Process policy debates. The IU is funded by Universities UK, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the higher education funding councils for England, Wales and Scotland, GuildHE and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland.

21 November 2011
1. Introduction
1.1 The University of Kent welcomes the Committee’s interest in this subject
1.2 This submission addresses in particular the following questions from the Committee’s brief:

- *The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area*
  How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

- *Mobility*
  How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and the role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

- *Targets and league table*
  What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

- *International dimension*
  The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

2. Background
2.1 The University of Kent positions itself to be the UK’s European University. This is based in part on the pioneering role the University took in the early stages of the development of European student mobility; our early adoption of the European diploma supplement; and the award of the E-quality label for outstanding quality in our Erasmus activities. The University is the only UK university with its own campuses in continental Europe. A campus in Brussels which houses the Brussels School of International Studies was established in 1998 and a smaller venture in Paris which specialises in the Humanities started in 2009. These are purely for postgraduate students.

2.2 In addition to some 248 incoming Erasmus exchange students, mainly on undergraduate programmes (balanced against 238 outgoing), and 806 full-time undergraduate students from the rest of the EU, there are in the current year 288 non UK EU students on postgraduate taught programmes (350 in 2010-11) and 135 on postgraduate research programmes out of a total student population of nearly 18000. The Brussels campus had 56 non-UK EU students in 2010-11 out of a student population of 180. The University also has seven Masters programmes (in addition to those at its Brussels and Paris campuses) which involve either a semester abroad in a partner institution or a double award with a partner institution (typically requiring one-year in each). In total the University has around 100 partner institutions in continental Europe covering student mobility, double award programmes and research cooperation. The University is participating in Erasmus Mundus programmes with one already in operation (the first involving a PhD programme) and several more at various stages of planning.

2.3 This places the University of Kent in a unique position to comment on issues relating to student mobility and the reality of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
3 The ECTS system and Student Mobility

3.1 The University of Kent was an early adopter of the European Credit Transfer System enabling Kent students to obtain credit for studying at a partner university and incoming students to receive credit for their studies in Kent. The University uses the standard UK credit system of awarding one credit for the learning outcomes associated with a nominal 10 hours of study implying that one ECTS is associated with 20 hours of study. The creation of the ECTS system enabled an escape from the need to compare contact hours and facilitated the development of credit bearing exchanges. However, the fact that many EU countries embed notional hours of study for credits in legislation and translate this into ECTS does remain a difficult issue since many countries require between 25-30 hours per ECTS credit (see Annex 5 of the ECTS Users’ Guide http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf).

3.2 Although there is broad agreement that one year of study amounts to 60 ECTS and a three-year undergraduate degree equates to 180 ECTS there are problems relating to Masters degrees. The norm in the Bologna conventions is that a typical Masters degree will be a two academic year programme worth 120 ECTS. Most UK Masters degrees are of 12 months duration (around 45 weeks against the standard academic year of 30 weeks) and have thus been credited with 90 ECTS – this has been accepted as the minimum credit value of a Masters programme. A number of UK universities have faced problems in securing recognition of the Masters degrees of their graduates from other EU countries in those students’ home countries. This arises because the notional hours are below that expected or that a student completing a Masters programme is expected to have accumulated 300 ECTS (180 from a Bachelor’s degree + 120 from a Masters degree).

3.3 In seeking local accreditation of the programmes at its Brussels Campus from the accreditation agency for the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), the University of Kent faced the problem that programmes correctly validated under the British system (and identical to programmes offered at its Canterbury Campus) which carried 90 ECTS could only be credited with 60-72 credits in Belgium because Flemish legislation requires 25-28 hours per ‘studiepunt’ (the legislation defines a studiepunt, but this is interpreted as an ECTS). This implies that the same programme carries two different ECTS values making a nonsense of the claim that the ECTS is a way to achieve transparency in qualifications obtained in different EU member states.

4 Mutual Recognition of Qualifications and Student Mobility

4.1 The degrees awarded by accredited universities within the EHEA which meet the requirements of the Bologna and Lisbon accords and satisfy the standards of the Dublin descriptors according to the level of the award should be recognised by the authorities of all member states in the EHEA. Unfortunately many of these do not allow for programmes of study offered by universities in countries other than their home country. Legislation typically refers to the need for programmes to be recognised within the country where they are offered, rather than where the institution is based. For example, The University of Kent’s Brussels Campus offers Masters degrees equivalent to those at its Canterbury Campus, taught by full-time staff employed by the University. These are full degrees of the University and are not collaborative awards. However, the authorities in several countries (e.g. Greece, Bulgaria, …..) have refused to recognise these programmes both for scholarship awards and as legitimate qualifications for employment or further study because they were not, until recently, officially recognised in the country where the study took place.
4.2 As the EHEA is based on an intergovernmental agreement, European law cannot be used to assert the University’s rights. There is an argument that failure to provide immediate recognition under the mutual recognition provision by the Belgian authorities is an interference with the University’s rights to operate its legitimate business under Single Market legislation, and that students are having their rights to study wherever they wish within the Single Market denied, but the fact that higher education is a national competence and the recognition of qualifications is laid down in national legislation has proved to be a barrier.

4.3 The European Commission has found itself powerless to act and the UK government has been reluctant to intervene as it does not wish to lose national competence over education policy. This could raise interesting issues if universities from other EU countries sought to establish in the UK and sought mutual recognition of their right to award degrees on their own national basis (e.g. through QAA), short of seeking full degree awarding powers within the UK.

5 Funding for Student Mobility

5.1 The Commission’s proposals for a loan guarantee facility at Masters level is an attractive one. Currently too few students have the opportunity to integrate a period of study abroad into a Masters programme and this is particularly true of the UK where one-year programmes are typical. The prospects for double-award programmes with a year spent in each of two institutions would be attractive to many potential students, but finance remains a constraint. The removal of HEFCE funding for many postgraduate programmes could make institutions more reluctant to accept Masters students on the mutual waiving of fees basis implied by most mobility programmes.

5.2 The University’s Pro-Vice Chancellor (External) sits on the Working Group set up to advise the Minister with responsibility of Higher Education on future funding for the Erasmus programme.

6 League Tables

6.1 The University of Kent is opposed to the proposal for the introduction of a league table of European institutions based on U-multirank. There are already many alternative league tables in existence: each of these has its own methodology, which is clearly published, and each places emphasis on different aspects of a university’s performance. U-multirank is a further example of this and may have its own merits. However, any league table published by the Commission would acquire an official status which would be unwise when the Commission has no competence over policy towards or the operation of universities.

7 Internationalisation

7.1 The University of Kent is fully committed to internationalisation (http://www.kent.ac.uk/about/plan/int/index.html). This embraces the internationalisation of the education of all students as well as internationalising the student body (students from over 120 different countries), strategic partnerships with universities worldwide and joint research. The University has been engaged in a number of Erasmus Mundus projects and joint projects funded by the European Commission, such as LiSUM which aims to foster mutual enrichment and understanding between Higher Education Institutions in the EU and China and LOTUS which aims to promote partnership and co-operation between European and south-east Asian universities.

7.2 It is important that any policy towards promoting intra-EU mobility does not ignore the importance of embracing countries outside the EU.
8 Summary
8.1 The University of Kent is committed to enhancing mobility at the postgraduate level within Europe, but the lack of a common system of mutual recognition and the failure to agree on a standard definition of credits in the ECTS militates against this for complete programmes.
8.2 Mutual recognition of qualifications remains a national competence and this clearly reduces mobility between different levels, e.g. a student taking a Masters degree in a member state other than their own and wishing to return home to follow a doctoral research programme.
8.3 Funding for students at the Masters level remains problematic and a system which encouraged mobility through loan guarantees or similar mechanisms would be beneficial.
8.4 There is no need for any additional ranking system of universities at a European level and given the lack of competence of the European Commission for higher education it seems inappropriate for the Commission to endorse such a system.
8.5 As well as improving internal mobility within the EU, it is vitally important that mobility between EU countries and those outside the EU is treated in a non-discriminatory way.

15 November 2011
University of Salford, Manchester – Written evidence

1. **How can Europe most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation:**

- Funding instruments for HE institutions across Europe should be focused on supporting two key aims of the sector – i) producing excellent graduates who have skills relevant for the job market, and ii) generating excellent research. Developing both the academic expertise as well as skills for employment should form core part of all curriculum development at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary)

- From a UK perspective and with reference to the EACEA Lifelong Learning Policy Context & Priorities document 2012 – support the improvement of skills levels throughout the educational process

- In particular maintain research and funding to address need for reduction in early school leaving and need for Lifelong Learning/workplace skills development as addressed in EACEA LLP Policy Context & Priorities document - 2012. Look at best practice between states more rigorously and increase measures to share and replicate examples from other countries, particularly ones that have an holistic approach to learning from school through to FE/HE and vocational and workplace learning

- Continue to fund and encourage links between industry/employers and education establishments for a variety of reasons including opportunities for work experience and state of the art industry training to input into curricular design that is relevant and appropriate leading to enhanced chances of employment

- Provide accessible and accurate data on the ‘demand side’ for the EU employment market – in terms of sector needs and skills/qualifications by country as the basis for the development of better targeted education and training programmes through institutional (academic and commercial) partnerships

- From an EU/UK perspective, more promotion and encouragement needed regarding opportunities for education and work at European level as mobility is not as developed as some other EU countries and UK remains more ‘insular.’ More promotion through educational establishments – schools, colleges, FE and other sectors. Funding could be utilised for specific programmes/ posts to demonstrate the opportunities to a wider range of people and co-ordinate access and take-up mechanisms

- In connection with above, enhanced development of European languages at UK level in order to encourage greater movement and participation within Europe
2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

- The implementation of the Bologna process has been only partially successful as there are too many variants across the EU member states in terms of the scope of degree programmes, the number of credits awarded to students for modules attended whilst on ERASMUS placements for example, and their subsequent acceptance in home institutions; as well as the cultural/industrial acceptance of newly introduced BSc/BA degrees in countries where they had not been previously offered.

- Seeing through the full implementation of Bologna, so that there is a genuine consistency across the EU 27 member states would be a great achievement for the European Commission. We need to understand better the major ‘blocks’ on implementation of Bologna in order to develop initiatives that are relevant to specific country/regional contexts. Useful and current information on progress towards the implementation of Bologna by country is not easily accessible. There needs to be better co-ordination of this at country level as it is not efficient for individual institutions to do it themselves. There will also need to be a greater effort to coordinate country level outputs at a European level to encourage effective use of the data – this may require targeted (and funded) initiatives at country level to address the main ‘blocks’ on progress.

- Measures like EUROPASS and DS (Diploma Supplements) are helpful in trying to make educational progress transparent at European level – this could be developed further as the process is still in early stages in some organisations, but fully utilised in others. Efforts need to be made in ensuring employers have a better understanding of the equivalence of academic qualifications/experience – particularly while EU member countries are working towards greater harmonisation.

- The mechanisms for the accreditation of new European degrees and similar qualifications has been problematic between many institutions involved in the Lifelong Learning Programme. Although it is appreciated this is due to variances between accreditation rules in respective countries, more guidance, i.e. online information toolkits, information seminars and workshops, would be helpful in continuing this process to a successful conclusion across a wider area of Europe.

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged on to the Erasmus programme? What are your views on the suggestions made by the Commission to boost mobility, including the proposed student loan guarantee facility for Masters students and role of the European Research Area to boost mobility of researchers specifically?

- In the UK – building European trips and placements into curriculum design as a standard feature, would be a great opportunity to broaden young people’s
minds. Often, by the time they go to University, they are reluctant to go on placement or student exchanges due to lack of experience, or linguistic inabilities.

- As previously: boost promotion of the LLP programme and opportunities within institutions and different sectors of the UK

- We need more flexibility in the organisation and management of student mobility to develop better access for a wider group of students whose circumstances prevent them from benefiting from semester or year-long periods of study. This may require the introduction of shorter but more frequent study visit opportunities. The increase in cost/administrative complexity would be off-set by wider participation and the longer term benefits of international study experience

- More access to European language courses. Confidence-building in use of languages – perhaps more language support inbuilt into certain types of trips abroad as a preliminary measure and included as a teaching ‘booster’ whilst on the trip

- Mobility measures inbuilt into staff development programmes for new researchers, teachers and other key staff within organisations. Effective implementation with necessary preparation, planning and consultation with staff member to ensure a relevant and successful trip

- The European Masters loan could be a good opportunity for students in a country such as UK where a fee structure is in place for Masters level courses (as opposed to some other EU countries where government funding is in place for students to access these courses free of charge.) However this would depend on the financial detail, conditions and support

- We need a more convincing demonstration of the value of mobility (for students and researchers) in terms of employment and business outcomes. Much of the current body of evidence is anecdotal and is based on an assumption that mobility/international experience is inherently ‘a good thing’ and worth the additional investment of ‘effort’, time and money

4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

- The focus in Europe should be on able, skilled & therefore employable workforce; not on a percentile number of students that go through the higher education system. The danger of this target is that is it quantitative, not necessarily qualitative; furthermore, given the current economic challenges in Europe, this target is also financially unsustainable for the majority of EU governments. One training solution does not fit all. instead we should focus on delivering training in fields / sectors/ disciplines where skills force is needed and where there are genuine gaps
• Our concern is ensuring the consistency in assessment, as the nature of HE institutions across Europe is different. For example, the dual system for teaching and research in EU member states, which were members of the former Soviet Bloc means that traditionally, Universities focused on teaching whilst Academies of Sciences delivered research.

• Only desirable if the link with jobs is reinforced and as previously, more partnerships between employers and the education sector to address future skills needs (and also lead to other collaboration, ie. R & D activities.) The Agenda for New Skills and Jobs is the perfect opportunity to address this more effectively at national level if it is implemented effectively incorporating more synergy between Universities, colleges, employers, social partners etc. This is the most important issue – not the ‘number of young people with HE or equivalent qualifications’

5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European Universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ Tool?

• With reference to the MultiRank Final Report - as the tool would be ‘multi-dimensional’ covering various elements of a University such as education, research, innovation, internationalisation and community outreach, this would be more beneficial for an organisation such as this one that performs well in a number of diverse areas, but does not always fare as well in the UK research rankings.

• This could potentially lead to more transparency and informed choices by students leading to greater success. The added benefits cannot be overlooked re. the use of the information for promotion to markets, industry, governments and internationally to leverage further partnerships, funding and knowledge exchange.

• The U-Multi-rank Tool will not add value if it simply becomes another ‘league table’ that aggregates and ‘reduces’ data to ‘average scores’. If it provides insights into specific areas of strength/expertise then it has the potential to add value and encourage useful longer term partnerships across the EU for programme development and research.

6. What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases, for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education, Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?

• Agree with need for further similar investment of finances in these areas, including more funds for students to study at Masters level in another state.

• On an operational/administrative level, it is very interesting to note in the document ‘A Budget for Europe 2020’ that there has been ‘some overlap between actions – this has lead to increased management costs and has confused potential applicants’ and that the Commission proposes ‘to
rationalise and simplify the current structure by proposing a single, integrated programme on education, training and youth’

The above action is strongly recommended by this organisation and has been apparent in a number of programmes and through partnerships with other organisations in both the UK and other member states. It is anticipated that such a measure would be more cost effective and lead to greater participation. Any changes in the name of ‘rationalisation’ should be tested to overcome the perception that many of the existing administrative/financial processes are overly bureaucratic and act as a disincentive to mobility and greater harmonisation.

7. The EU currently engages in the internationalisation of European higher education through programmes such as Tempus. How can this agenda be developed further?

- Open up all EU programmes to global institutions, where they can provide added value to the European partnership. This is currently not the case with the exception of the Framework 7 programme. Opening up schemes to wider participation would allow a rationalisation of the current suite of programmes – and as such provide concrete evidence of streamlining/simplification which would be welcomed

- The internationalisation agenda was also partially instigated through the Erasmus Mundus programme which operates at international level and through revised LLP criteria from 2010 which meant that for some strands, countries outside of Europe could be included as a ‘third country’ partner at a reduced rate and with reduced responsibility. One of the benefits of this interaction was that a bid could stand alone if the third country element was rejected, but if the third country did become involved, the project could be used to utilise expertise outside of Europe and build links for potential future developments. This was a good interim measure and a way of ‘testing the water.’ This organisation would be interested in finding out the results of this initial ‘internationalisation’ measure implemented through the Lifelong Learning Programme in 2010 and how this may be developed further from 2014 onwards

21 November 2011
University Alliance – Written evidence

1. This response is intended to inform thinking in relation to the role the EU can play to support higher education in order to maximise the impact on jobs, growth and innovation.

2. The role of universities in driving growth and innovation is a significant issue for University Alliance, a group of 23 major, business-engaged universities committed to delivering world-class research and a high quality student experience. Our aim is to deliver evidence-based policy and research and foster close links with Government and business in order to improve higher education policy for the benefit of the economy and society.

3. We note that education is a Member State competency and that, as the Call for Evidence highlights, this means the EU’s role in this area is to encourage cooperation and to support and supplement the actions of Member States if necessary. While others will undoubtedly consider this aspect in more detail in their submissions we will focus primarily on the role of universities towards growth, jobs and innovation. In this submission we highlight the evidence to support investment in this area, the continued and growing need for graduate level skills and the role of business engagement towards these goals.

Strategic backdrop: Europe 2020

1. How can EU intervention most effectively help higher education to contribute to the EU’s Europe 2020 ambition to boost EU jobs, growth and innovation?

4. Europe 2020 set out some important and ambitious goals for Europe against a backdrop of financial crisis back in 2010. Europe 2020’s recognition of the central role of knowledge and innovation towards “smart growth” is critical, particularly for the UK where our universities are a great strength of our economy.

5. This is not just about seeking further investment in universities. In many cases realising potential is about recognising existing investment in a significant area of strength for the UK economy, then mapping it across government priorities beyond the education and skills system.

6. In our publication, 21st Century universities: engines of an innovation-driven economy, we drew together a wide range of evidence to form six key findings with relevance for this inquiry:

   I. Innovation is a key driver of growth and productivity.
      a. Recent research has confirmed that innovation and high-tech approaches are the most likely to be successful in driving economic recovery and economic growth in the UK economy.

---

b. Innovation was responsible for two-thirds of productivity growth between 2000-2007 and was the common defining feature of the fastest growing 6% of businesses between 2002-2008. These businesses generated half of all new jobs created during this time.

2. Human capital (particularly graduate-level skills) is now the primary indicator of future economic growth.
   a. The proportion of our working population with graduate-level skills, along with our science and research base, will determine the pattern of our future economic growth and our ability to achieve the innovation-based economy that we are striving for.
   b. A graduate contributes between 20 and 48 per cent greater productivity to the labour market than employees holding lesser qualifications.

3. There is an increasing shortage of graduates, not saturation, and there is still a significant ‘graduate premium’ attached to obtaining a degree.
   a. The UK economy is not presenting any of the labour market signals that would suggest there are too many graduates in the economy. Graduate vacancies continue to grow, there is an increasing proportion of skilled jobs in the total workforce and there is still a significant graduate premium.

4. If we stand still we will fall behind – our global competitors are continuing to invest heavily in universities despite their own budget deficits.
   a. In 2000, the UK was 3rd amongst top industrialised nations in terms of the proportion of young people graduating. In 2008 we had fallen to 15th position because our competitor countries have been investing at a faster rate than us.
   b. We have to consider carefully the consequences of continuing to move down this ranking in terms of our international competitiveness.

5. Universities have a vital role to play in re-balancing the future economy, both in terms of sectors and regions.

6. Those universities with high levels of business engagement are well placed to build on established partnerships with business and new industries.

7. In this sense the EU is providing a strong evidence-based steer which should be supported. In particular, the strategy’s recognition of intensifying global challenges is important background:

   “Europe will continue to benefit from being one of the most open economies in the world but competition from developed and emerging economies is intensifying. Countries such as China or India are investing heavily in research and technology in order to move their industries up the value chain and ‘leapfrog’ into the global economy.”

8. The strategy clearly recognises that achieving an innovation-based economy will require increased investment in higher education, science and research – a fact widely recognised by our international competitors. Without this investment in the building blocks of innovation, we face a downward spiral of economic competitiveness.

---

9. Following the publication of the Government’s White Paper, *Higher Education, Students at the heart of the system*¹⁰⁷, the UK higher education sector is undergoing significant change. The EU communication and 2020 Strategy draws us back to the core of the issue. Whilst the scale of our fiscal deficit means that sources of public investment will be constrained for the foreseeable future, it is critical that we seek to secure the total investment to higher education (both public and private) in order to ensure that any reduction in public investment does not harm the future growth of our economy.

2. How can the EU add value to the development and success of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

10. It is important to recognise that the Bologna Process incorporates countries and organisations beyond the EU. Bologna is a process that aims to move forward through collaborative consensus, with acknowledgement of the value of university autonomy as a central feature. This can mean that progress appears slow but the advantages are that developments are firmly rooted and owned by participants.

11. It is perhaps inevitable that there is some overlap between the goals of the Bologna and the ambitions of Europe 2020. It will be important for the Commission to be aware of these and to seek ways in which joint efforts may be harnessed to greater effect whilst not overstepping its competence.

Mobility

3. How can the mobility of students and researchers be boosted, and how specifically can a more diverse body of students be encouraged onto the Erasmus?

12. The UK performs well as a ‘receiving country’ but does not perform well as a ‘sending country’ in terms of the mobility of students and researchers. As has been well documented, this would seem to be largely due to financial and language barriers exist together with a lack of knowledge on the benefits of studying abroad.

13. The inclusion of work placements in the Erasmus scheme is something that is welcomed by the UK HE sector and evidence shows that it has had increased sign up since its introduction in 2007. Between 2007/08 and 2008/09 there was a 25% increase in participation in Erasmus work placements according to the British Council. This compares with an overall increase in Erasmus mobility of 6%.

14. The value of work placements as part of a degree programme is of particular interest for Alliance universities, with 10% of students at these universities undertaking ‘sandwich courses’ compared to a sector average of 6%. Experience of work during not only facilitates graduate employment but can also build valuable skills that support employability more generally.

15. A HEFCE commissioned report found that, “a benefit of structured work experience is improved employment outcomes after graduation.”¹⁰⁸ The report went on to say that,

¹⁰⁷ BIS, Higher education, Students at the heart of the system, June 2011 [http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/hereform/white-paper/]
¹⁰⁸ Increasing opportunities for high quality higher education work experience, Report to HEFCE by Oakleigh Consulting Ltd and CRAC (2011) [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2011/rd07_11/]
“the priority for activity/interventions by the HE sector should therefore be to support work experience placements for students during their period of HE study so that they develop the employability skills employers require and begin to build a body of work experience in advance of entering the employment market proper”.

16. We know that employers value this experience but much more could be done to get this message across to students. The opportunity to study abroad needs to be publicised more widely especially to prospective students through UCAS and information and guidance received. Erasmus could support this by encouraging the use of student ambassadors and employers to speak about their experiences and highlight the value of this scheme.

17. A further way in which work placement opportunities might be expanded would be by developing a network of approved work placements across Europe with a central support for universities / students to identify these opportunities and make contact.

Targets and league tables

4. How desirable is the EU’s target that, by 2020, 40% of young people should successfully complete higher education or equivalent studies?

18. A highly educated and skilled workforce are essential components of growth potential. They enable people to find employment, create high value goods and services within a knowledge based economy and to deliver high quality public services. They also contribute to social mobility and fairness.

19. Over recent years we have seen an increase in press coverage and commentary describing an oversupply of graduates, especially following the 50% participation target introduced by Labour in the UK. However, a look at the evidence tells a different story, there is actually likely to be an increasing shortage of graduates, not saturation.

20. A recent report out today by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) showed a significant fall in graduate unemployment. The annual report, What do Graduates Do?, showed that six months after finishing their courses, 69.7 per cent were in employment – a 7.9 per cent increase on last year. The report also says that 63.4 per cent of respondents had graduate-level jobs, an improvement of almost 10 per cent on the previous year.109

21. Despite coverage to the contrary, this recent data only adds to significant evidence that far from there being a saturation of graduates, there is an increasing shortage of graduate-level skills:

- The UK economy is not presenting any of the labour market signals that would suggest there are too many graduates in the economy. Graduate vacancies continue to grow, there is an increasing proportion of skilled jobs in the total workforce and there is still a significant graduate premium.

- IFS projections of earning profiles for graduates compared to non-graduates demonstrate the ‘graduate premium’ graduates receive in higher average salaries.

109 [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/assets/assets/documents/wdgd_2010.pdf]
The pattern of normal distribution of salaries is similar but there is a significant difference in average earnings between graduates and non-graduates.

- When the most recent economic crisis hit. The youngest were hit hardest, and the lower educated were substantially more vulnerable than the more highly educated.
- The net present value (NPV)\textsuperscript{110} for graduates in the UK is not only one of the highest across the OECD but it is still increasing in terms of the increased earnings advantage and employment advantage over non-graduates. This indicator shows no sign of the over-supply of graduates.
- In terms of the proportion of graduates in non-graduate jobs, OECD have demonstrated that “under-employment” in the UK is under the natural level of around 25% of graduates. With more than three-quarters of all graduates in high-skill employment, it is difficult to conclude that we have yet reached a saturation of graduates to the labour market.

22. The reason why we are yet to reach saturation of graduates is because of the central importance of these high-level skills to the success of our economy. This is because in knowledge based economies, human capital is the primary indicator of future economic growth. In the UK, we know that of the 13.5m jobs to be filled to 2017, over half (56%) will require people to hold graduate level qualifications, indicating a significant shift towards greater demand for higher level skills.

23. A graduate contributes between 20 and 48 per cent greater productivity to the labour market than employees holding lesser qualifications. UKCES predict a continuation of this trend in ‘Working futures 2007-2017’ stating that the most significant increases in employment up until 2017 are likely to be in higher level occupations such as:

- managers & senior officials (+872,000, 1.7% pa)
- professional occupations (+643,000, 1.5% pa)
- associate professional & technical occupations (+654,000, 1.4% pa)

24. Conversely, declining employment levels are projected for:

- skilled trades occupations (-226,000, -0.7% pa);
- machine & transport operatives (some -117,000, -0.5% pa)

25. As this Figure 1, this is the case across Europe with an increasing proportion of skilled occupations in the OECD.

\textsuperscript{110} The net present value (NPV) of a graduate is calculated by comparing the costs (fee, loss of earning during study – much higher than fees -, additional tax over a lifetime and additional social contributions) to the benefits (additional earnings over a lifetime and employment advantage (lower risk of unemployment)) of going to university. The NPV of going to university in the UK is one of the highest in the OECD and is increasing.
26. While we fully understand why the UK government has moved away from using targets for the proportion of graduates, we believe that the inclusion of a 40% target with the Europe 2020 Strategy provides an important signal about the importance of investment in this area to support economic recovery and growth. In that vein, we would suggest that more work needs to done to argue the value that a ‘highly-skilled’ workforce will bring.

5. What is your view of the proposed introduction of a European universities league table – the ‘U-Multirank’ tool?

27. University league tables have increased in prominence and influence in the UK over recent years and much work has been done in this area to consider their value but also some more negative consequences.

28. A report commissioned by HEFCE in 2008, *Counting what is measured or measuring what counts?*[^111], investigated league tables and their impact on higher education institutions (HEIs) in England and found that:

- League tables did not provide a complete picture of the sector
- Some of the measures included were poor proxies for the qualities identified: the measures used by the compilers were largely determined by the data available rather than by clear and coherent concepts of, for example, ‘excellence’ or ‘a world class university’.
- The resulting rankings largely reflected reputational factors and not necessarily the quality or performance of institutions.

29. The report looked into the extent to which higher education institutions would welcome an official ranking from the sector bodies and found that only 5% of survey respondents would accept such a ranking.

[^111]: HEFCE, *Counting what is measured or measuring what counts?* April 2008
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_14/
respondents indicated support for one. When the report was published, HEFCE confirmed that it did not intend to introduce an official published ranking, but instead would continue to support the Unistats web-site, which enables users to compare subjects and institutions in a way that recognises the diversity of user needs.

30. Providing adequate information for students has continued to be a focus since this report was published. Most recently this was outlined in the Higher Education White Paper, which proposed that higher education institutions should provide a standard set of information about their courses\(^{112}\), and that Government would make it easier for prospective students to find and compare this information.

31. We do not believe that a U-Multirank tool would be a helpful development. As the HEFCE study found league tables or ranking tools of this kind are often a blunt instrument which do not allow different strengths across diverse institutions to be recognised and utilised. As such we would be particularly concerned if such a tool was used as the basis for funding decisions in the future.

**Funding instruments**

6. **What are your views on the effectiveness of the proposed EU financing arrangements, including funding increases for higher education under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (Education Europe, Horizon 2020 and Cohesion Policy)?**

32. The focus of Europe 2020 on investment in R&D as an important pillar of plans for “smart growth” is to be welcomed as is the corresponding increase in the budget devoted to investment in education, research and innovation as part of the Multi-annual Financial Framework. Again this is backed up by strong evidence.

33. Innovation is widely recognised as a key driver of growth and productivity; it was responsible for two-thirds of productivity growth between 2000-2007 and was the common defining feature of the fastest growing 6% of businesses between 2002 -2008. These businesses generated half of all jobs created by existing businesses during this time.\(^{113}\)

34. Figure 2 shows the consistent increase of knowledge-intensive services and high-tech manufacturing as a percentage of gross value added (GVA) in the UK, US, Germany and France. This demonstrates the extent to which these countries have become innovation-based economies.

\(^{112}\) Known as the Key information set, see [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/infohe/kis.htm](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/infohe/kis.htm)

35. In their report, *What was / what next?*, Universities Scotland highlights four main factors that influence productivity: innovation, skills, investment in capital and competition. They find that:

“The creation of new ideas, technologies and process can have a significant effect on productivity performance. Innovations often have ‘spill over’ effects that can create wider benefits to the overall economy than simply to the person or firm who created the innovation. These spill overs can be contagious and increase the productivity of all firms as new processes and ideas are copied.”114

36. In addition, we would highlight the following point made in the Europe 2020 strategy:

“R&D spending in Europe is below 2% compared to 2.6% in the US and 3.4% in Japan, mainly as a result of lower levels of private investment. It is not only the absolute amounts spent on R&D that count – Europe needs to focus on the impact and composition of research spending and to improve the conditions for private sector R&D in the EU. Our smaller share of high-tech firms explains half of our gap with the EU.”115

---


The report was produced under guidance from a panel of 11 leading Scottish economist – no key argument or assertion was included unless it was supported by every members of the advisory panel and supported by multiple pieces of verifiable evidence.

37. The extent of existing business engagement with universities towards innovation and commercial impact is often underplayed and yet there is more that could be done to support it. Alliance universities have much expertise in this area as business-focussed institutions that embed these partnerships across their activities. To name a few examples, this has included Siemens co-investing with the University of Lincoln to create a greenfield engineering school, Hewlett Packard signing a strategic agreement to support graduate employability engage in research projects and engage in curriculum design, or the University of Bradford investing more than £4 million to develop Research and Knowledge Transfer Centres focussing on working with business to find solutions in areas such as Micro and Nano Technologies, Advanced Materials Engineering and Pharmaceutical Engineering.

38. To that end we also support the proposals set out within the Innovation Union Initiative aiming to enhance cooperation between the worlds of science and business, remove barriers for entrepreneurs to bring ideas to market and to launch European Innovation Partnerships.\footnote{Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union, SEC (2010) 1161}

21 November 2011
In your experience, where has the added value of EU involvement been for UK higher education institutions to date? And looking to the future, how might further value be added?

How can the EU add value to the development and success of the intergovernmental Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area?

A number of developments at a European level have added value in terms of transparency and recognition, which have enhanced mobility in higher education and helped promote an understanding of HE qualifications within a single European labour market.

The Erasmus programme is pivotal, whilst the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) assists mobility in terms of credit transfer and recognition between institutions. The diploma supplement puts HE qualifications into their national contexts and as such facilitates labour market mobility.

The introduction of the Bologna ‘two cycles’ of bachelors and masters degrees (doctoral level third cycle) has in theory helped both horizontal and vertical mobility, that is, movement between institutions during a cycle and movement between institutions after the first cycle, that is taking a masters degree at a different institution. However, in a number of countries, bachelors degrees are not fully accepted as exit qualifications (by academics and employers) and students are expected to progress to masters level. Also, institutions often complain that the reduction in time (by splitting higher education into two cycles) limits the opportunity to include student mobility.

In a number of countries, the second cycle masters degree is two years in length and in some circumstances the acceptability of the UK 12-month masters degree has been questioned, even though within the Bologna framework a 180 UK (90 ECTS) degree is allowed.

The EU has supported other higher education programmes, such as Tempus and the EU cooperation programmes with industrialised countries, Atlantis (with USA), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Korea, which have funded mobility as well as joint and dual degree partnership projects.

What are the obstacles to undergraduate and postgraduate student mobility and how can their mobility be boosted? How do you see the Erasmus programme developing in future – in the UK and EU contexts? Do you welcome the Commission’s proposal for a European Masters level student loan guarantee facility?

Two main obstacles to mobility are funding and language. Language is less of an obstacle than previously because more partners now offer teaching in English. However, programmes in English are still limited in southern Europe. Proficiency in a language is a significant boost to employability.
In terms of funding, the Erasmus programme supports study periods and work placements in Europe. It is vital to keep this funding in a future (replacement) Erasmus programme. However, other European countries offer additional funding, for example Spain where both national and provincial governments fund mobility, and numbers have grown.

The Erasmus tuition fee waiver (no UK tuition fees if on an Erasmus exchange for a whole year, which the UK government reviews annually) is most likely an incentive to student mobility, and Hertfordshire offers zero tuition fees in the Placement Year of 4-year degrees, which again (anecdotally) is an incentive to mobility, and at Hertfordshire student mobility has grown significantly. In the new funding regime, it is important to protect 4-year degrees, which allow an intercalated year for study and work placements abroad, or a combination of study and work. Study abroad is a key contributor to employability.

‘Erasmus students achieve better degrees and earn higher salaries.’ (HEFCE, 2009)

The 12-month masters degree in the UK offers limited opportunity for mobility in time terms compared to its 2-year counterparts in other European countries. Similarly, 2-year accelerated bachelors degrees limit opportunity for mobility in terms of time and synchronisation.

Erasmus Mundus projects offers limited funding for students at postgraduate level. The European masters level student loan guarantee facility is therefore a welcome development.

What are your views on the proposed EU financing arrangements in light of current and past experiences? What do you think their future priorities should be? How significant will this source of funding be for the universities that you represent?

There is no funding similar to Erasmus for student mobility outside of Europe at undergraduate level, and perhaps a revised Erasmus programme (or UK government funding) could support mobility outside of Europe. The integration of EU higher education programmes (Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, EU cooperation programmes with industrialised countries) is perhaps a prudent move in the context of expanding mobility opportunities and potential funding support.

The Erasmus budget is a significant source of funding to Hertfordshire, and last year was €353,000 and this year is expected to approach €400,000.

The Erasmus programme also includes staff mobility, for both academic and professional staff, which is both valuable in terms of staff development, but also in terms of a catalyst to student mobility.

30 November 2011
University Alliance, The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group, and million+ - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)

**University Alliance, The Russell Group of Universities, 1994 Group, and million+ - Oral evidence (QQ 92-107)**

Transcript to be found under Russell Group