

The Bologna Process: Meeting the Strategic Challenges

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JISC infoNet's Bologna project has evolved over a number of years, and has been highlighted at previous EUNIS conferences in a number of contexts. This paper sees the final launch of the 'infoKit' which is achieving wide acclaim in the UK, and offers a retrospective of its development and a summing up of the UK's Bologna experience to date. As is often the case, although the project started out with technology implications as its driver, the much wider context of change, culture and practice within the sector have been the heaviest influences on the final outcomes.

1.1. Background

'Building on our rich and diverse European cultural heritage, we are developing 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.' Ministers responsible for Higher Education in the countries participating in the Bologna Process, London Communiqué May 2007.

The aspirational milestone for the Bologna Process of 2010 is nearly upon us and member countries are currently in different states of readiness. The primary role of the Bologna Process is to strengthen European higher education as a competitor in a global arena that is becoming increasingly competitive. This paper considers the situation for the UK higher education sector in particular but the strategic imperatives are likely to be familiar and transferable to colleagues in other countries.

Over recent years JISC infoNet has presented a number of contexts for Bologna, including internationalisation as a driver, the use of social software and e-portfolio technologies and tools to support the student journey and the management of change issues that emerge as the result of any such initiative within the sector.

This paper reflects on the development of the 'infoKit' to support the implementation of the Bologna Process and highlights the increasing importance of an ongoing 'strategic conversation' across the sector in order to best address challenges such as the Bologna Process. The paper considers mechanisms within the infrastructure of the Process that can be of use in addressing these challenges, and JISC infoNet's forthcoming work on Strategy further considers the positioning of drivers such as internationalisation as core to a coherent institutional strategy rather than supplementary to it.

2. ABOUT THE PAPER

This session marks the culmination of the 'Building Capacity: Preparing for Bologna' project introduced at EUNIS 2006. JISC infoNet worked with EUNIS and other partners on the project which aimed to assist UK institutions in preparing for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

3. BACKGROUND ON PREVIOUS JISC INFONET EUNIS PAPERS

3.1. EUNIS 2006

The EUNIS 2006 paper, 'Ready for Bologna' covered the project proposal for a resource on the Bologna Process. The main focus was on the UK context and the paper covered the lack of preparedness for 'Bologna' of some UK institutions. At that time it was estimated that UK GDP benefitted by around £0.5 billion per year as a direct result of EU students working in the UK. This meant that the Bologna Process was *'... a highly important strategic issue for the UK HE sector and the lack of awareness and preparation on the part of UK universities is of major concern both in terms of causing operational difficulties in the near future and in allowing UK universities to remain competitive in an environment of increased mobility of the student (and staff) population'*. The 2006 paper stated that *'If the UK is to maintain its position as a key player in the world market it must play a full part in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which aims to increase the competitiveness of European HE in the world'*.

Issues and challenges identified by UK institutions at that time included identity management, storage of additional data, mapping to UK frameworks (e.g. conversion of UK credits to ECTS credits), reported outputs (e.g. transcripts/diploma supplements) and whether these should be in paper or electronic format, achieving the kitemark for the diploma supplement, portability and standards - how the information could be moved around and concerns about data protection regimes in different countries. At that stage much of the focus was on the related management of change involved in the Process.

3.2. EUNIS 2007

The EUNIS 2007 paper, 'Developing a Bologna Process Resource: The Benefits of Social Software for Project Collaboration', focused on a practical demonstration of how social software had been used to progress the project. The paper explored how social software and the establishing of collaborative communities of practice could work well in the development of such a resource, and concentrated on two particularly useful tools - wikis, which enabled those involved in the process to easily share ideas and information to develop the resource; and the 'delicious' social bookmarking technology for capturing, cataloguing and managing the myriad of references and resources relating to the Bologna Process. The technology was used to enhance rather than replace other forms of communication and reporting, forming part of *'a blended face-to-face and online communication approach'*.

3.3. EUNIS 2008

The EUNIS 2008 paper, 'The Bologna Process: Supporting the internationalisation of higher education in the UK', provided encouraging news on the level of awareness of the Bologna Process within the UK sector and the wider adoption of some of its mechanisms, notably the Diploma Supplement. There were still however difficulties with IT systems and data and a desire for more specific guidance and exemplars in this area. Internationalisation within institutional strategies was *'...becoming a growing imperative in the context of an increasingly globalised sector'*. The paper also looked at approaches that can be taken when developing strategy including high-level trend analyses such as PESTLE and Scenario Planning in order to identify drivers.

4. POLICY STEER

The Bologna Process has '*sufficient momentum to become the dominant global model of higher education within two decades*'. Clifford Adelman (2008).

The UK higher education sector has experienced quite considerable development and extension over recent years but things can change rapidly as Tom Sastry warned in 2006, (with a degree of premonition perhaps, based on the current recession), '*It is... possible to predict that political and economic shocks as yet unforeseen will impact upon student numbers - an important point to bear in mind given the benign conditions which have accompanied the recent expansion*'.

As far as a policy steer for the Bologna Process is concerned, in the UK it has not been imposed on the institutions by its Government, there has been however a steer for its adoption and a real endorsement of the values that underpin it. A report by the Education and Skills Committee (2007) highlighted confusion in the UK over what the Bologna Process is about. The UK Government responded by admitting that more work needed to be done to ensure that universities are made aware that the Bologna Process is not about '*standardisation or harmonisation*' of European higher education systems, but rather, '*comparability and compatibility*'.

5. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Both the further and higher education sectors are constantly under pressure to meet new strategic priorities, such as those relating to the implementation of the Bologna Process, and cope with the effects of profound and far-reaching change. Such moves may sometimes be driven by changes in government and funding council policy, or simply just reflect the after-effects of widespread socio-economic, cultural or technologically inspired change, as reflected upon in the 2009 Communiqué, '*European higher education... faces the major challenge and the ensuing opportunities of globalisation and accelerated technological developments with new providers, new learners and new types of learning.*'

Constant 'environment scanning' as part of an institution's strategic planning processes can help to identify current and potential strategic challenges which may impact upon it and influence its future direction, management and operation. In the UK, Advisory Services such as JISC infoNet can help keep institutions abreast of these changes and provide resources designed to help them respond to them. The forthcoming JISC infoNet resource strategy (due for launch November 2009) will include advice regarding environment scanning techniques to better inform institutional decision-making and help prepare for future strategic challenges.

In the meantime, it is worth considering how the Bologna Process weaves threads through a number of strategic challenges for institutions, and indeed how some of the infrastructure and mechanisms of the Process and related initiatives can be of use in assisting institutions with addressing these challenges.

6. WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES?

Some 'Bologna-flavoured' strategic challenges for UK institutions include:

- Internationalisation
- Competing in a Global Market
- Employability and Skills
- Lifelong Learning
- Mobility

6.1. Internationalisation

'Internationalisation is a pacemaker for reform and for the development and modernization of the higher education system. The institutions of higher education must assert themselves in the

international competition for the best brains'. From the website of Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2009).

Internationalisation in the sector is a powerful factor and with the advances made in the mass distribution of technology in the last two decades or so the world feels like a smaller place. Institutions within the UK Higher Education sector have done a great deal to take advantage of this, within the constraints of Government policies, international events and other factors beyond their immediate control. It has become obvious however that due to the competitive nature of the international market no university valuing a diverse student body can afford to become complacent with regard to recruitment.

The importance of integrating internationalisation into institutional strategies has grown as a consequence of an increasingly globalised sector. The raising of the profile of internationalisation as a strategic imperative is supported by strategies, policies and initiatives from a range of UK sector organisations and funding bodies, including the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

6.2. Competing in a Global Market

The adoption of the Bologna Process has shown *'the desire for reform of higher education by the governments of many European countries, the desire to have a pan-European system and the strong belief that, if we didn't, we would probably lose out in the global competition'*, Professor Tessa Blackstone (2008).

In the 2008 Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings, 58 of the top 200 universities were in the US and 83 were in countries signed up to the Bologna Process. Commentary on these rankings suggested that, *'The EHEA's 4,000 institutions and 16 million students make it similar in size and scope to the US system and will give it a major competitive advantage in the fight for foreign students'*. The promise and opportunity provided by the establishment of the EHEA has not gone unnoticed on the global stage, as was reported by Hannah Fearn in the Times Higher Education (2008), *'The Bologna Declaration, for all its convoluted requirements, has one overarching goal - to make Europe the most competitive continent in higher education. In this, it is doing its job. In July 2007, Michael Gaebel of the European Universities Association said educators in Asia, Africa, Australia, the US and Latin America were all looking closely at the Bologna Process as a potential model for their own higher education systems'*.

The market for overseas students is changing and no one institution can afford to relax on the laurels of previous success, the sector body Universities UK recognises this and in 2006 its then president, Professor Drummond Bone, said: *"We must work hard to maintain our status as one of the foremost partners in international higher education..."* He went on to emphasise the importance of higher education as a *"major export industry"* and a sizeable contributor to the UK's economy, *"...worth more than food and drink, tobacco, insurance, ships and aircraft. It could be worth £20bn to the UK economy by 2020"*. For the UK competitive challenges include:

- Delivery of courses overseas in English
- Competitive fees for such courses, lower costs of living in other countries and scholarship opportunities
- Quality and comparability becoming increasingly aligned
- Demographic change (a reduced 'local' audience in the UK)
- Increasing restrictions on entry to the UK
- Maintaining and enhancing the perception of the UK System

6.3. Employability and Skills

“Students today and in the future will be competing for jobs in a global marketplace, and so it is vital that engaging them in the Bologna Process is prioritised.” Wes Streeting, President, UK’s National Union of Students speaking to the BBC (2007).

Employability is a key staple of the Bologna Process and the 2009 Communiqué sets out its aims for, *‘...raising initial qualifications as well as maintaining and renewing a skilled workforce through close cooperation between governments, higher education institutions, social partners and students. This will allow institutions to be more responsive to employers’ needs and employers to better understand the educational perspective’.*

One of the key education challenges for the UK is to develop a skilled workforce which can compete in an increasingly competitive global market. The influential Leitch Review (2006) focused on the global context and the imperative to develop world-class skills, *‘Our nation’s skills are not world class and we run the risk that this will undermine our long-term prosperity.’* Raising basic skills and engaging learners is critical to this development. The 2009 Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education reiterates the importance of employability, *‘Student-centred learning and mobility will help students develop the competences they need in a changing labour market and will empower them to become active and responsible citizens.’*

Business and employer engagement has a key role to play in the success of Higher Education in the 21st Century. JISC has adopted a Business and Community Engagement (BCE) strategic theme as a new agenda which meets an aim of its 2007-09 strategy to develop and implement *‘a programme to support institutions’ engagement with the wider community’.* This engagement offers real opportunities to the sector. The UK’s National Employer Skills Survey in 2005 estimated that employers invest £33.3 billion in training annually and of this, it was reported by Chris Arnot in The Guardian newspaper that only around *‘1% is spent with higher education institutions - and most of that is with business schools, on management education. To catch up and keep up with the pace setters, according to Lord Leitch’s review of skills..., we need 45% of the workforce to be educated to degree level by 2020’.*

An increase in globalisation highlights the requirement for an increase in the level of language skills within the UK. According to Keith Marshall, Department of Modern Languages at the University of Wales Bangor, 60% of UK trade is with non-English speaking countries so it is important that steps are taken to ensure that engagement is undertaken in a language appropriate to the customer. The uptake of languages in schools has been in decline over recent years, less than 50% take language at GCSE level (Dearing Languages Review 2007) but there are moves afoot to reverse this situation including the HEFCE-funded ‘Routes into Languages’ initiative which intends to promote take-up of languages from primary education to university.

6.4. Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is about personal development, with the learner as ‘owner’ of educational achievement. Transportability of the learning is an important feature and facilitator of learner progression and technology can play a key part in underpinning this. It has an important role to play in the widening participation agenda, which has a focus on increasing access to Higher Education through different educational pathways, with a requirement for support for learners from all backgrounds/educational levels.

The Bologna Process demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning in Europe, essential to help meet the challenges of increased global competition and the use of new global technologies to support internationalisation. Institutions have been urged to increase the European dimension of higher education by developing courses and curricula with significant European content. This also entails the promotion of partnership activities and curriculum development between institutions in Europe, through methods such as joint degrees.

Globalisation increases the importance of lifelong learning in that skills and knowledge need to be regularly enhanced and updated in order to adapt to new developments in an increasingly dynamic environment. Flexible delivery and 'bite-sized' learning are important aspects in the supporting of lifelong learning.

The European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning developed by the European University Association was drafted as a result of a seminar on lifelong learning held in the Sorbonne in December 2007. It talks about the need for universities to help citizens in the 21st century to be geared up to be able to meet the challenges that face them - challenges that include the increasing speed of globalisation, the shift in demographics that result in an ageing population in Europe and the ever rapid pace of technological change.

In the UK, JISC has been involved over a number of years in initiatives that have supported lifelong learning, such as the MLEs for Lifelong Learning programme. Other outputs have included: the 'Supporting Learners across the Educational Landscape' briefing paper focusing on preparing for a world in which an online record accompanies a learner throughout their life and 'Susie's journey' presents a vision of lifelong learning, demonstrating the need for this to be supported by the seamless transfer of records between institutions throughout a learner's lifetime. More recently, JISC has funded a number of regional and collaborative projects to implement and evaluate the cross-institutional use of e-learning to support lifelong learning, including the provision of personalised learning experiences and flexible delivery to support progression, widening participation and work-based learning under the two phases of the cross-institutional programme to support lifelong learners.

For the educational organisation, the key is in enabling not inhibiting. Crossing the boundaries between organisations is important to the success of lifelong learning and there are benefits to be had for alumni as well as for current students/learners.

Employer engagement is important to the successful fostering/supporting of lifelong learning in the workplace. The workforce generally has become increasingly mobile and workers have their own individual aspirations. This has strong ties with mobility and employability challenges.

As mentioned, a key ingredient of the successful sustainability of a lifelong learning agenda is the availability of appropriate technology to support the recording, managing and storing of related activity. Technology is a major enabler of lifelong learning and can play a key part in its development, with e-Portfolios being an excellent example of a technological tool that a learner can develop and grow alongside the learning experience. JISC infoNet's e-Portfolios infoKit gives more insight into this area.

Additional national initiatives in the UK are developing to complement established Bologna Process mechanisms such as the Diploma Supplement, including the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), recommended by Burgess (2007). This is envisaged to be a comprehensive electronic record which will be a key vehicle for measuring and recording student achievement and is currently being trialled in 18 universities across the UK.

6.5. Mobility

'...mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area', Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2009.

The delivery of education within the international arena is no longer restricted by geography or place: *'Mobility is important for personal development and employability, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions.'* Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009.

There are different types of mobility; mobility for an entire programme of study (diploma mobility), for part of a programme (credit mobility) or for voluntary personal reasons. The Diploma Supplement and credit transfer schemes help to facilitate these.

Social mobility issues feed into the widening participation agenda, indeed Kevin Whitston, Head of Widening Participation at HEFCE commented that, *'Higher education has always been an important factor in the social mobility of individuals from communities without the economic resources and social connections of their wealthier neighbours, and it still is.'*

'Virtual' student mobility is emerging as a result of learners studying in a more 'place-independent' mode supported by developments in technology - e.g. using web, email and internet phones to get access to staff, resources and peers from a wide range of locations. Two projects on virtual mobility partly funded by the European Commission are the Victorious project (which involved 9 traditional universities and one university network investigating current practice in Europe) and VM-BASE project (Virtual Mobility Before and After Student Exchanges), this project, which ended in September 2008, aimed to improve the quality of student exchanges. The importance of flexibility in the 21st century learning space, be it virtual or physical, is addressed in JISC infoNet's Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments resources. A joint UCISA/JISC infoNet Think Tank on 'Anytime, Anywhere, Computing' recognised that *'Staff and students are geographically spread so it's important to have more creative and practical approaches to working.'*

Employers value international skills which are developed through increased mobility (student exchange programmes, work placements abroad) and international skills e.g. language competencies. Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) research shows that, *'Around 60% of the country's top employers indicate that experience of international study enhances employability'*. However, with regard to geographical mobility, whilst the UK benefits from inward mobility (i.e. students from outside of the UK coming to study in UK), UK home students are not participating in outward mobility to the same extent, this can be to their disadvantage and has the potential risk of leaving UK students behind their non-UK peers. According to the HEFCE funded International Student Mobility study of 2004, in 2002-03 the number of UK students taking advantage of opportunities to study abroad fell to only 7,956 compared to 11,988 in 1994-95. This is contrary to the trend in the majority of the rest of Europe, as can be supported by a comment on the website of Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research, *'Students and researchers are more mobile, more flexible and more international than ever before. Knowledge knows no national frontiers'*.

There are a number of factors that have an effect on the mobility (or lack of mobility) of UK students including:

- lack of 'tradition' of mobility
- social factors
- language barriers
- lack of institutional opportunity/support
- family or work commitments

The aforementioned Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) report talks about the lack of outward mobility of UK students. It spells out the benefits of studying abroad - familiarity with other languages and cultures, an increased personal ability to live and work in other countries with confidence and enhanced employability and attractiveness to employers. The report laments, however, that this message is *'...not getting across to students'*.

In a report on the Future Size and Shape of the HE sector in the UK, Universities UK (2008) report on other factors that can impact on student mobility including; future political developments, including government responses to threats from terrorism and global warming.

The Institute of International Education has developed, with partners - including the British Council, an 'Atlas of Student Mobility'. 'Project Atlas' tracks migration trends of those students who opt to go outside of their home countries to study. The European Commission launched a 'Study in Europe' website in October 2008 that promotes *'the attractiveness of European Higher Education to students from other parts of the world'*.

Again, e-Portfolio development is another factor that has an impact on improving mobility and the infoKit has sections on supporting application and policies, drivers and trends.

7. MEETING THE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

JISC infoNet provides a range of resources (tools, infoKits and other guidance) to help plan, monitor and align strategies to best effect. Taking a more strategic approach and using mechanisms that help the wider impact of, say, internationalisation, could encompass Bologna-compliant processes. JISC infoNet's developing work on strategic activity includes a look at common 'strategic challenges'.

There are various access, identity and records management implications associated with the transfer of learner data not just within but between Bologna-signatory countries. The 'e-Framework for Education and Research' (a joint initiative by JISC, Australia's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and other international partners) may go some way to providing solutions to issues such as this. It aims to facilitate technical interoperability within and across education and research through improved strategic planning and implementation processes. The main aim of the initiative is to evolve an open standards-based, service-orientated technical framework to support the communities involved.

8. CONCLUSION

'Our societies currently face the consequences of a global finance and economic crisis. In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, a dynamic and flexible European higher education will strive for innovation on the basis of the integration between education and research at all levels. We recognise that higher education has a key role to play if we are to successfully meet the challenges we face and if we are to promote the cultural and social development of our societies. Therefore we consider public investment in higher education of utmost priority'. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009.

The Bologna Process has major institutional as well as sector-wide implications and in order for it to be successfully implemented it should 'best fit' with the overarching institutional strategy. It should, it can be argued, be seen, not as an 'add-on' but as something that has a seamless relationship with other strategic aspects. If internationalisation and related Bologna Process strategies are perceived as sitting firmly within the remit of an institution's international office alone then it may be viewed as peripheral rather than integral to an overall institutional strategy. This could seriously impact on the benefits and opportunities offered not only to individual institutions but to the sector as a whole (in the UK and beyond).

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