

General Issues

- Does EU action, as opposed to national government action, in the areas of education and vocational training generally benefit or disadvantage the UK? Can you point us to any published evidence or analysis in support of your view?

Generally we would regard this as advantageous: there are strong arguments in favour of promoting educational frameworks in terms of both the individual, national economies and the EU more generally. However, this should not come at the expense of Member State flexibility. It is well known that some Member States have very focused vocational programmes. This is not necessarily an advantage e.g. the German model is often held up as model to which the UK should aspire but in fact many HE programmes in the UK combine vocational and academic; students make choices very early in Germany and in several other EU Member States and as a result there is less social mobility.

In the UK one in three people start a university course for the first time when they are over 21 and arguably one of the disadvantages of the UK system is that students specialise too early. A very sharp divide between academic and vocational training promoted at EU level would not therefore be beneficial.

- Are there any specific EU activities in the areas of education and training that you consider particularly beneficial or particularly disadvantageous to the UK?

See above

- Do you think the EU, as opposed to national government, should do more or less in relation to education and training? If so, where and why?

There is a strong argument for the EU to do more to promote education and training. The risk is that the focus is on the supply of education and not on stimulating employer demand for highly skilled jobs.

- What other areas of EU competence or activity have an impact on education and training in your sector and how?

million+ affiliates have engaged strongly with Bologna and Erasmus, both of which are regarded as an advantage as well as in Horizon 2020 and FP7 and their predecessor programmes.

- What challenges or opportunities are there for the UK in further EU action on education?

The UK lacks a coherent and high quality apprenticeship framework although other qualifications which are vocationally focused such as BTECs are highly regarded. Apprenticeships have been expanded in number since 2010 but the quality and levels are variable.

While we do not regard the EU's interest in these areas as outside the legal framework we have reservations about a potential false dichotomy / divide between academic and vocational education. As previously outlined very many university / HE programmes are vocationally focused and the majority of young people who progress to university at 18 have one or more vocational qualifications.

- What international bodies or arrangements other than the EU are important to education and training in the UK? How does your experience of dealing with them compare with the EU's activity in this sphere?

UK Universities trade throughout the world and engage with the national frameworks / institutions in which they have partnerships. The EU is just one of the educational trading areas in which universities engage, albeit an important one in terms of both students, staff and collaborations.