

# **Review of the Balance of Competencies – Education: Submission from the University of Warwick**

Submission prepared by:

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## **8 Education and training questions**

### **8.1 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?

EU action in education benefits the University of Warwick as a leading UK university. The main actions concerned are Erasmus+ and the Bologna process, though of course the latter goes beyond the EU. Erasmus funding provides over €1m to support student and staff mobility. The framework of the Erasmus Charter facilitates exchanges by providing standardized agreements for institutions and individual students and staff, as well as standardized reporting mechanisms. In contrast exchange agreements with US and other non-EU universities entail extensive and time-consuming negotiation of individual agreements. As important as this efficiency gain Erasmus funding greatly facilitates collaboration with other higher education institutions in Europe.

Increasingly employers are looking for graduates with the intercultural communication and language skills which can be learned through well-

structured Erasmus exchanges<sup>1</sup>. This has led at Warwick to an increased demand for student mobility, with outgoing Erasmus numbers rising to 369 in 2013/14, and (unusually for a British university) matching the number of incoming Erasmus students.

The Bologna Process offers opportunities to facilitate the transfer of marks and credit from study abroad, and streamlines the assessment of non-British qualifications for admissions purposes. It has also enabled the establishment of a dual Master's degree in Political Science and International Studies with Konstanz University. It also strengthens the recognition of UK degrees outside Europe: for example an undergraduate Warwick degree was not recognized in Russia for postgraduate study until we were able to demonstrate that it was at a level compliant with the Bologna stage 1 requirements. British universities are currently making the case with the Indian authorities that a one-year British Master's degree should be considered equivalent to a eighteen month or two-year Master's degree from elsewhere on the basis of the Bologna equivalence. Erasmus Mundus funding has enabled Warwick to establish with European partners a number of joint Masters and Doctorates.

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

Erasmus mobility for students is particularly important as it enhances graduate employability, which in turn contributes to UK competitiveness in and increasingly connected world. In our view there are no EU activities in the area of higher education which are disadvantageous to the UK. We also welcome increased funding towards educational programmes that involve industrial as well as other non-HEI partners.

The U-Multirank project is one of the less successful of interventions by the

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<sup>1</sup> Changing the Pace – CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey 2013

Commission from our perspective. With three different national league tables, and three main international comparative rankings, it would appear that U-Multirank is entering a crowded market with the purpose of rectifying the perceived disadvantage of non-English medium universities in the existing tables. Many UK universities have chosen not to participate, and there is no evidence yet that U-Multirank will displace the existing rankings as one of the main sources of information for prospective students.

- 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?

The EU should continue to have a role in ensuring that education systems and institutions in member states share best practice to work towards the goal of developing in the highest levels of education of any world region. The Bologna process and the development of the European Higher Education Area should be strengthened to ensure the transferability of qualifications across member states, and to set the gold standard for higher education quality to which other regions and countries in the world aspire. Education institutions should rightly reflect local, regional and national priorities and characteristics, and the EU should not seek to impose itself or take over any further competences from member states in respect of education. However, it can and should continue to encourage and support staff and student mobility, the sharing of best practice, and the negotiation of common standards of excellence.

It is interesting to note that the British Government is now setting up schemes to promote study abroad outside the EU, in recognition of the benefits this brings to British students and their employability, and the fact that study abroad outside the EU is not normally supported by the Erasmus programme. An example, it could be argued, of a national government following where the EU leads.

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

Research and Development. The University, along with the UK Higher Education Sector, has benefited from EU research funding under the Framework, European Research Council and Marie Curie programmes, and it is expected it will continue to do so with the recently launched Horizon 2020 Programme. This funding has supported leading-edge research in many disciplines, and facilitated collaboration with some of the top research institutions in Europe.

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

The main challenge for UK higher education institutions is to make the most of the opportunities provided by the Erasmus + Programme. The process of responding to calls for proposals requires intensive commitment from academic staff to identify and mobilize partners, and from administrative staff to prepare costings and check legal documentation. Where activity is funded at less than full economic cost then institutional-level decisions involving senior management and finance staff are required before commitment can be authorized.

Taking part in these activities requires an assessment of the opportunity costs, and a commitment of time against the competing demands of research, teaching and administrative duties. While at an institutional level there can be a general commitment that it is worth participating, individual departments and staff will need to make their own assessment. In some cases this may result in a decision not to participate, not because the activity is not considered worthwhile, but because the administrative burden in proposing and administering the activity is thought to be too burdensome.

- 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?

There is no other international body which is as important for British higher education as the European Union. The University, or individual staff, are members of a number of professional organizations that promote the internationalization of higher education, including NAFSA (USA), EUA (the European University Association), EAIE (European Association for International Education). These organizations provide services including training, conferences and networking opportunities, research, publications, and take part in advocacy with governments and the EU. While these bodies are important for sharing best practice and networking, they can facilitate bilateral contacts – none of them can possibly provide the legal and structural framework for student mobility that the EU can.

The EUA and the EAIE are particularly important for their training, research and development services which facilitate the sharing of best practice among European universities.

The University also benefits from research and reports published by the OECD and the IAU (International Association of Universities) but does not have any formal relationship with these bodies.

The University's international activities are greatly supported by national bodies such as the British Council, the Higher Education International Unit, BUILA (the British Universities' International Liaison Association) and UKCISA (the UK Council for International Student Affairs).

## The Programmes

- For the specific programmes which are funded and managed via the EU (such as Erasmus or Leonardo), what are the benefits or disadvantages of having EU rather than national responsibility and funding for these activities?

Put simply Erasmus+ would never happen if it were left to member state governments. There are advantages of scale in having a Europe-wide system that ensures reciprocity of access for student mobility, funding incentives that support students from widening participation backgrounds, and standard protocols that allow the efficient movement of students.

- Can you point to evidence which shows that language learning has improved through participation in the programmes?

All the undergraduate modern foreign language degrees at Warwick (French, German, Italian and Spanish) require one year study abroad, which is supported by the Erasmus programme. Warwick is ranked 26<sup>th</sup> in the world for Modern Languages in the QS table, and the year abroad, supported by Erasmus, is a major contribution to this. Increasing numbers of non-language students (mainly in the social sciences) are taking advantage of Erasmus opportunities: in many cases this means they will study the language of the country where they are to study at the University's Language Centre before they go, and then continue while they are abroad.

- How would you describe the costs and benefits to your organisation of participating in the programmes?

The cost to the institution of participating in Erasmus is minimal, as all the direct costs and most of the administrative costs are covered by Erasmus funding. The benefits in terms of opportunities for student and staff mobility, enhanced learning and more employable graduates are immense. For Erasmus + Key Action 2 participation costs (preparing

proposals, negotiating with partners) are varied, and for each proposal a cost/benefit analysis is required to ensure that the academic benefits of participation do not result in unnecessary financial pressure on the department or the University as a whole.

### Policy Coordination

- Have you noticed any change in EU activity or emphasis since the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and the introduction of Europe 2020, and, if so, where has this manifested itself and in what ways? Have these changes been helpful or unhelpful?

There appears to be a step change with the move from Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus and the various regional programmes (Tempus, Edulink etc) to the consolidated Erasmus+ programme. It has been stressed by the Commission that the administration of the projects should be simplified, though it is probably too early to see the benefits as the new programme only started in January 2014. The confirmation of the continuation of the main Erasmus mobility programme (now Erasmus + Key Action 1) for the next seven years has given students the confidence to opt for courses which include an Erasmus option.

It is important to note that participation in EU programmes in education is entirely voluntary: neither the Commission nor our national government require us to participate. It is the decision of the individual institution whether to participate or not.

The same applies to policy: for example, the Leuven Declaration in 2009 proposed that all universities in the European Higher Education Area should aim for 20% student mobility by 2020. This is however an aspiration rather than a directive, and in the case of the UK our national government does not require institutions to commit to this.

- Is it appropriate that Europe 2020 focusses on early school leaving and the completion of tertiary education?

Completion of tertiary education is not generally a major concern at

British universities. Widening participation is however an issue, and we would welcome any European initiatives which sought to support increased participation in higher education by those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Has the adoption of EU education policy frameworks or Council Recommendations had any impact on your sector?

The Leuven Declaration and subsequent policy recommendation of 20% mobility by 2020 has been a stimulus for discussion at our institution about the targets we should be setting for study abroad.

- How does policy cooperation on education in the EU compare with other

organisations, for example the OECD?

Policy cooperation at EU level is incomparable to the OECD which has little meaning for student mobility and institutional collaboration, and which has no implications for resource allocation to support international activity. EU support for international activities between member states (and increasingly also beyond member states) is unique in the world, and should be maintained.

- Can you point to examples of reform in national policy which have resulted from EU co-operation in education and training?

The new UK strategy to support study abroad outside the EU would appear to have been stimulated by the success of the Erasmus programme.

- How would you assess the costs and benefits to policy makers of participation in education policy cooperation at EU level?

As a University we are not directly involved in policy making, and are not therefore in a position to comment on this.

In conclusion, the University of Warwick would like to contribute this article, written by our Vice-Chancellor:

***If Britain Withdraws From the E.U., Higher Education Will Suffer***

*Professor Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick, Chronicle of Higher Education 20 December 2012.*

*The British attitude to Europe often seems sad and unnecessarily destructive.*

*The idea of withdrawing from the European Union is profoundly mistaken, promoted by a ragtag of interests and members of the national press who often seem to confuse Europe with immigrants and run stories with two variants: "They're taking our money" and "it's just a crazy bureaucracy." The result is clear enough: Britain has become more and more marginalized within Europe, a stance that can only make it more and more marginal to the world at large.*

Of course, the European Union is hardly perfect but, as *The Economist* has reported, the consequences of a withdrawal from it would be catastrophic. The magazine argues that Britain would end up as just another “scratchy outsider.”

It's even worse so far as universities are concerned. British universities have become tightly integrated into Europe, often maintaining their own offices in Brussels. A withdrawal would be an utter catastrophe for them for three reasons.

Reason one: the flow of students and scholars. This is the 25th anniversary of the E.U. Erasmus program. In those years, nearly three million students from across Europe have benefited from a study- or work-abroad experience provided by Erasmus. Of these, more than 200,000 were from the U.K. That is before we even include the academic and graduate opportunities provided by Erasmus Mundus.

Reason two: British universities are well-respected in Europe. They are almost a kind of model insofar as their autonomy is concerned and they are important players in organizations like the League of European Research Universities. If Britain exits the political bloc, they run the risk of becoming a competitor to continental universities.

Reason three: Research income. It is a fascinating and little-known fact that over the last few years, British universities have become more dependent on research income from the E.U. The founding of the European Research Council has produced a vast new source of money from which British universities do disproportionately well. Most British research-intensive universities obtain at least 10 percent of their research income from Europe. Some derive much more. One of the country's leading universities is now at 20 percent. Such sources of research funds would be either cut off or would need to be renegotiated in new collaborative agreements.

Many higher-education leaders do what they can to fight for the European cause. For example, I am privileged to have been invited on to the Governing Board of the European Institute of Innovation & Technology, which is producing new ways of linking industry and universities from its headquarters in Budapest and which, after a slightly shaky start, is clearly producing the goods.

But there is a wider issue at stake than just the case of universities. The European Union was founded out of a kind of idealism in the belief that a conglomerate of nations could, over time, become something more. That is still a noble vision, notwithstanding the democratic deficit and the undoubted travails of the euro. But it is a vision that is vulnerable to mean spirits.