



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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Education has always been a high priority for us: it empowers people and improves their opportunities. It can also enrich cultures and drive forward economic growth. In Scotland, we believe that education is a public responsibility, bringing benefits to society as well as to individuals. That is why we are committed to the Bologna Process and support its goals to make the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) attractive, dynamic and competitive on a global stage – built on the principles of quality, openness and transparency.

I am privileged to have taken part in this fourth Ministerial summit, which marks the half way point in our goal to create the EHEA by 2010. We must continue to work together across borders and across boundaries to strengthen the ties between our universities and to review the structures that facilitate the mobility that is at the heart of the Bologna Process. In Scotland, we recognise that flows of people, particularly creative and talented people, are important factors in any nation's international competitiveness. By bringing diversity to our cultures, we help to renew those cultures and sharpen economic competitiveness at both a national and European level.

In a world of increasing internationalisation, it is important that qualifications are widely recognised by higher and vocational education institutions and by employers – to allow students and graduates to move easily from one programme of learning to another. I am therefore particularly pleased that we adopted the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA and that all participating countries have committed to elaborating by 2010 more detailed national qualifications frameworks which will link to that overarching Framework. I am proud that Scottish expert advisers took part in the Bologna Working Group that developed the overarching Framework and we look forward to engaging in future discussions about ECTS and how it articulates with national systems of credit accumulation. With our well developed and integrated Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework in place, covering school, vocational and academic qualifications, we understand the benefits qualifications



frameworks bring for learners, for employers, for institutions and for lifelong learning. We stand ready to share our experience, as other countries work towards this.

This conference has reinforced my view that the strength of the Bologna Process is that it is not driven by any one partner, but that all stakeholders – Ministers, the higher education sector, the European Commission and student and staff representative bodies work collaboratively towards common goals. The need for everyone to work together is even more critical as we move into the implementation stage, embedding at institutional level agreed principles and actions.

The stocktaking report shows that substantial progress has been made in the three priority areas we agreed at the Ministerial conference in Berlin in 2003: quality assurance; the two cycle degree system; and recognition of degrees and periods of study.

In Scotland, we have the advantage of having in place already the fundamental principles set out in the Bologna Declaration. We have a widely recognised system of Bachelors and Masters Degrees – valued by students and employers alike. This is demonstrated by the high percentage of Bachelor graduates who go straight into employment (65%) after completion of the first cycle. We also have a robust quality assurance mechanism in place, comprising internal reviews and our innovative Enhancement-led Institutional Review, with its emphasis on quality enhancement and student participation. Indeed, with our diverse approaches to higher education, Scotland and the other parts of the UK operate as a microcosm of the EHEA, with students and staff moving easily from one part of the UK to another.

Against this background, I support the view expressed at this conference that countries with Bologna reforms largely in place have a duty to support and advise those who do not. Scotland looks forward to sharing its good practice as well as learning from the experiences of others, as we too have challenges to overcome.

We need to widen and deepen the engagement of staff and students in individual higher education institutions with Bologna and the issues it raises. We need to make sure the arrangements put in place to produce Diploma Supplements work effectively across all Scottish higher education institutions and that they are recognised and understood by employers. We need to engage constructively in debates about how best to maintain diversity and flexibility in the 3rd cycle (doctoral level qualifications). While our quality enhancement framework is more ambitious, we nonetheless need to ensure that in the relevant areas it is aligned with the ENQA standards and guidelines we adopted at this conference. We need to ensure that the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework meets the criteria for self certification of alignment with the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. And, we also need to work to improve capacity in areas such as the accreditation of prior learning.

We look forward to engaging with our Bologna partners on these issues over the next two years and beyond. We relish the opportunity to maintain and develop links with other European universities, with their rich heritage and cultural diversity. It is by continuing to nurture and respect that diverse heritage within a coherent framework that we will develop greater opportunities for students and researchers to study and work with the best minds in Europe.



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