

BFUG9 8b

SWANSEA BOLOGNA SEMINAR ON ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY – 12/14 JULY 2006

The Welsh Assembly Government hosted the UK's official Bologna Follow-up Group Seminar on the theme of Enhancing European Employability at Swansea University on 12/14 July reflected means of enhancing the employability of European graduates within the EHEA and beyond.

The Bergen communiqué identified a need to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications and to create opportunities for flexible learning paths, including the recognition of prior learning. Themes examined at the seminar included how we ensure that higher education, particularly at the Bachelor level, is relevant to the labour market and how we ensure that employers are aware of the additional skills that graduates exiting at each of the points of the three cycles offer. The seminar explored these and other themes from a wide range of viewpoints, including academics, students, employers and professional bodies.

More than 100 delegates from more than 25 signatory regions/ nations plus other stakeholder organisations attended including representation from Australia where interest in the Bologna Process has been keen.

Plenary Sessions covered

- Employability at the Bachelor level: Presentations exploring what makes the Bachelor education relevant to the labour market ; and how we can educate employers better. The presentations and discussions explored university/business links and highlighted international good practice
- **Employability at Masters and Doctorate levels**: Presentations and discussion explored the notion that higher degrees are a route through to employment, not just academia and what the added value of a higher degree is to the employer. They touched too upon progression routes – highlighting good international practice and methods for responding to employers needs through effective university/business links.
- Stakeholders: Presentations and discussion explored the understanding and expectation of employability – and job relevant skills, from the various stakeholders' points of view – students, employers and academia.

Plenary Sessions were ably chaired by:

Professor Janet Beer, Pro VC and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Law and Social Science, Manchester Metropolitan University.

Dr Michael Groneberg , University of Fribourg

Professor John Annette, Professor of Citizenship and Lifelong Learning, Pro Vice Master and Dean of FCE, Birkbeck College, University of London

Plenary Speakers included:

- Jane Davidson, Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.
- Professor Ulrich Teichler, University of Kassel, Centre of Research on Higher Education and Work
- Dr Christoph Anz, Representative of UNICE and Deputy Director, Education/Vocational Training, BDA Confederation of German Employers' Associations
- Professor Eamonn McQuade, University of Limerick
- Dr Janet Metcalfe, Director UK Grad Programme
- Professor Alistair Pearce EURASHE and Principal of Rose Bruford College
- Graeme Roberts, Vice Principal Learning and Teaching, University of Aberdeen
- Nina Aberg ESIB
- Margaret Dane, Chief Executive AGCAS
- Mark Irwin, People and Organisational Development Manager, Corus Strip Products Division

Interactive workshops took place on the second day exploring the key themes of the Seminar, identified as:

1. Embedding in the curriculum – soft skills/ sector skills
2. Links to Industry – including foundation degrees
3. Internationalisation, including mobility – work placements/ teacher mobility

The **key recommendation** of the Seminar was that employability remains an important part of the Bologna Process and should be addressed in each of the three cycles.

The detailed recommendations drawn up by the workshops clearly identified a number of themes and several areas of overlap. Distilled to 3 key messages, these were:

- Embedding skills in the curriculum is a key element of the Bologna reforms and as such needs to be monitored, with an emphasis on sharing good practice across Europe. Recognising the wide diversity of national systems, regional priorities and circumstances together with institutional missions, the widest range of method and approaches is to be encouraged. The importance of effective links with employers cannot be over-stated, but the methods adopted must be appropriate to the context of the course of study, the institutions, the geographical regions and national policies.
- Higher education institutions should assist students to recognise and articulate the employability skills developed within the curriculum and in other activities at all three cycles – linked to the Dublin Descriptors/national qualification frameworks and to future Continuous Professional Development needs. Higher education institutions should

also ensure that students receive information and advice on all sectors of the labour market, together with career management skills.

- The Bologna reforms are creating a new range of transition and exit points from higher education. The ensuing complexity of options for further study or employment, combined with the encouragement of student mobility requires the provision of high quality professional staff guidance for students and appropriate staff development for academic and other university staff. In this context, higher education institutions and governments should promote a coherent cross-departmental strategic approach, to allow institutions to integrate the international dimension and particularly student mobility in institutional policy and curriculum planning.

The Full list of recommendations are attached as an annex.

Annex – Detailed recommendations from the Swansea Bologna seminar:

Internationalisation, Including Mobility – Work Placements/Teacher

Mobility

- Recognising the need to embed all aspects of the Bologna Process. HEIs and Governments should promote a coherent cross-departmental strategic approach and provide incentives for institutions to integrate the international dimension and particularly student mobility in institutional policy and curriculum planning.
- In line with the principles of the European Mobility Charter and with a view to achieving a cultural shift, seek to ensure that quality assurance at all levels (European, national and institutional) includes every aspect of internationalisation and mobility:
 - Recognition
 - Mobility of academic and administrative staff
 - Language skills
 - Information provision
 - High quality management

Links to Industry

- HEIs to assist students to recognise and articulate the employability skills developed within the curriculum and in other activities at all three cycles and linked to the Dublin Descriptors/national qualification frameworks and to future CPD needs
- HEIs to ensure that students receive information and advice on the labour market (all sectors) and career management skills
- HEIs to develop as many links as possible with industry and other sectors (SME, charity, public sector) e.g. Advisory boards, staff exchanges, work placements/experience in order that students and staff are more aware of the business requirements
- Flexibility must be maintained to ensure the diversity of learners is accommodated (lifelong learning)

Embedding in the Curriculum – Soft/Sector Skills (2 workshops)

- The importance of effective links with employers cannot be over-stated, but the methods adopted must be appropriate to the context of the course of study, the institution, the geographical region and national policies. The right links can be built at many levels using Conferences and Seminars, individual contacts, work placements, alumni schemes and faculty or department boards to name but some. Careers services were seen to play a key role in this and it is recommended that such services should be visible and accessible to students, supported by academic and management staff and centrally located
- “Weaving” in Teaching and Learning and Assessment and the Curriculum, and the need for greater transparency which does not obstruct mobility

- Need for Programme/Degree as well as course/module skill learning outcomes which should involve academic staff and careers service working in teams (QA)
- European mobility scheme for academic staff and employer to develop innovation for embedding employability
- Embedding skills in the curriculum is a key element of the Bologna reforms and as such needs to be monitored, with an emphasis on sharing examples of good practice across Europe. Recognising the wide diversity of national systems, regional priorities and circumstances and institutional missions, the widest range of method and approaches is to be encouraged
- The Bologna reforms are creating a new range of transition and exit points from higher education. The ensuing complexity of options for further study or employment, combined with the encouragement of student mobility requires the provision of high quality professional guidance for students and appropriate staff development for academic and other university staff