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Results of the 2009 UK HE Europe Unit survey on UK HEIs engagement in European HE developments - Scotland

Introduction

1. This E-note reports on the outcomes for Scotland of the Europe Unit's survey of UK higher education institutions (HEIs) in 2009. This document is best read alongside the survey results for the whole of the UK. Survey responses demonstrate that Scottish HEIs continue to have high levels of engagement with the European higher education agenda. The Europe Unit would like to thank HEIs for their assistance in responding to the survey.
2. The data from the survey was collected over the period from September 2009 to January 2010 using an online survey tool. Separate E-notes for Wales, England and Northern Ireland, and the whole of the UK are available from the Europe Unit website.

www.europeunit.ac.uk

Analysis of respondents

3. The 2009 sample of HEIs in Scotland was smaller than that of 2007. Nine HEIs in Scotland responded to the survey giving a 64% response rate (62% in 2007)¹. The UK national average was 59%, 83% in Wales, and 55% in England and Northern Ireland. 44% of respondents from Scotland were from HEI Registry departments. The remaining responses came from representatives across other categories/departments.

Diploma Supplement

4. Seven HEIs currently issue the Diploma Supplement (DS) in Scotland; eight HEIs did so in 2007. The decline the number of HEIs issuing the DS in Scotland may be due to a lower response rate and smaller sample of Scottish HEIs in the 2009 survey.
5. Roughly half of the HEIs who issue the DS do so automatically to students graduating with an undergraduate and postgraduate level qualification. The other half issues it on an ad-hoc basis. Over half of Scottish HEIs issue the DS to doctoral graduates. A paper-based format appears to be standard, with no institutions issuing the DS electronically².
6. There are more HEIs issuing the DS that do not use the standard format developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES (57%) than those that do (43%). This compares with 63% that used the standard format in 2007. The UK national average is 81%, 87% in England and Northern Ireland and 71% in Wales. Scottish respondents say the documents they are issuing to students fulfil all the requirements of the DS.
7. HEIs that do not issue the DS quote IT difficulties as the main reason. The second reason is that HEIs are awaiting developments in the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) before committing to produce a DS.
8. 67% of respondents have received a DS from HEIs elsewhere in Europe (49% in the UK as a whole), while 33% have received one from another HEI in the UK. 67% find that the DS is a useful tool for evaluating students' achievements and supporting admissions procedures, 33% do not.

Credit

9. 78% use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for the purposes of credit transfer, 45% use it for accumulation, and 45% use it for both. This is a higher usage of ECTS than the national average (56% for transfer, 25% for accumulation).
10. Institutions that do not use ECTS reported that this was because they already use a credit system that is compatible with ECTS. This suggests a greater confidence among institutions

¹ The survey was sent to 14 HEIs in Scotland in 2009 compared to 22 HEIs in 2007.

² Only eight HEIs in the UK issued the DS electronically in 2009, up from three in 2007.

about the compatibility of UK credit systems and qualifications frameworks with overarching European systems³.

Masters programmes

11. All respondents offer Masters programmes (92% of respondents in 2007). The majority of Masters programmes in Scotland are one-year full time equivalent.
12. As in the rest of the UK, Masters programmes that are traditionally of two years duration are increasingly being offered as a one-year course, eg 67% of respondents offer a one-year MPhil.
13. Examples of other types of programmes being offered include one, two, and three year MBAs and other part-time Masters programmes lasting between 15, 18 and 24 months.

Integrated Masters programmes

14. 67% of respondents offer full-time Integrated Masters programmes (70% in 2007). The UK national average is 58%, 56% in England and Northern Ireland, and 50% in Wales. All Scottish HEIs offering Integrated Masters programmes offer MEng degrees. The MSci is next most popular degree, followed by MPhys, MChem and MMath.
15. Scottish respondents do not quote any other types of Integrated Masters degrees being offered.
16. 67% of Scottish HEIs providing Integrated Masters programmes award a Masters qualification only at the end of the Masters stage of the programme as opposed to 17% of HEIs offering a Bachelor qualification after the Bachelor stage and a Masters qualification after the Masters stage, and 17% of HEIs offering both qualifications at the Masters stage⁴.
17. 33% have incorporated work placements (both within the UK and elsewhere in Europe) into the summer vacation. 50% have incorporated teaching placements in the UK, while 17% have incorporated teaching placements within and outside Europe. No respondents extended the timescale for submission of the dissertation to extend the duration of the Integrated Masters degree programme.
18. All institutions responded that they allocate a minimum of 60 ECTS credits at Masters level⁵

³ The UK HE Europe Unit published guidance on the relationship between UK arrangements for academic credit and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/sites/europe_unit2/resources/E-09-06_ECTS_Users'Guide.pdf

⁴ Europe Unit guidance to UK HEIs in 2005 recommended awarding two degrees (Bachelors and Masters) at the end of the Integrated Masters degree to support recognition of the qualification in Europe as a Masters degree. http://www.europeunit.ac.uk/sites/europe_unit2/resources/E-05-12.doc

⁵ The ECTS credit range for a second cycle qualification in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) is between 60-120 ECTS (with 90-120 being the most common range).

Recognition of Scottish qualifications

19. Only one Scottish HEI responded to say it was aware of its graduates experiencing difficulty in getting their qualifications recognised in the Middle East and North America. All other respondents reported no difficulties.
20. When asked if the Bologna Process reforms and EU initiatives (DS, ECTS, development of HE qualifications frameworks etc) have improved the situation regarding the recognition of UK degrees in Europe, all HEIs responded that the situation was maintained or had improved.

Staff and student mobility

21. In order to gauge the UK HE sector's potential to contribute to the goal outlined in the Leuven Communiqué (20% of graduates in the EHEA to have had a mobility experience by 2020), the Europe Unit asked institutions if they had measures in place to promote staff and student mobility. 67% of respondents have measures in place to promote staff mobility, 100% have measures to promote student mobility. This is similar to the UK average.
22. 22% of respondents mentioned the Erasmus programme specifically. The majority of respondents mentioned institutional measures such as the creation of a management group for international education and exchange, promotion of mobility opportunities at student recruitment fairs and open days, and individual institutional collaborations with overseas partners.

Joint degrees

23. The 2009 survey asked HEIs to identify in which regions they had joint degree partners⁶. Six HEIs award a joint degree or multiple/dual/double degree in conjunction with one or more HEIs. Of those respondents that issue joint or multiple/dual/double degrees, five do so in conjunction with another HEI in the UK, five with an HEI within Europe, and two with a HEI outside Europe. Examples of degrees include joint PhDs and an Erasmus Mundus Masters programme.

Institutional Strategies

24. 67% of respondents in Scotland have an International strategy (82% in the UK) and 22% have a European strategy (40% in the UK). Of those HEIs with a European strategy, all have it separate from their international strategies. European strategies appear to cover both teaching and research activities, as well as institutional collaborations on other issues.
25. 71% (15% in 2007) have assigned a particular staff member/committee/group with responsibility for Bologna Process issues. This is higher than the UK national average (58%), England and Northern Ireland (55%) and Wales (70%). This is a clear reflection of the growing importance of the Bologna Process agenda in Scotland and in the wider UK. Each institution has taken a very different approach, with a broad range of academics and administrators involved.

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⁶ In the 2007 Europe Unit survey, HEIs were first asked if they had the power to award joint degrees. The question was not asked in 2009 to try and reduce the number of questions in the survey.