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Action

For information

Results of the 2009 UK HE Europe Unit survey on HEIs engagement in European HE developments – England and Northern Ireland

Introduction

1. This E-note reports on the outcomes for England and Northern Ireland 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 HEIs in England and Northern Ireland have significantly raised their 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, Scotland, 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 England and Northern Ireland was larger than that of 2007. 73 HEIs in England and Northern Ireland responded to the survey giving a 55% response rate (57% in 2007)¹. This is similar to the overall UK response rate (59%), but lower than the response rates in Scotland (64%) and Wales (83%).
4. 52% of respondents from England and Northern Ireland were from HEI Registry departments. The remaining responses came from representatives across other categories/departments.

Diploma Supplement

5. 75% of respondents from England and Northern Ireland currently issue the Diploma Supplement (DS). This is a large increase from the figure of 57% reported in 2007².
6. 76% of respondents who issue the DS do so automatically to students graduating with an undergraduate and postgraduate level qualification and 15% issue it on an ad-hoc basis. Only about 30% of respondents issue the DS automatically to doctoral graduates, the same figure as in 2007. A paper-based format appears to be standard, although eight respondents issue the DS electronically.
7. Of those issuing the DS, 87% use the standard format developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES (81% in 2007). This is higher than the national average (81%), Wales (71%) and Scotland (43%).
8. 60% of those not yet issuing the DS intend to do so in the academic year 2010/11.
9. HEIs that do not issue the DS quote IT difficulties as the main reason, along with waiting for further developments in the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) before committing to produce a DS, and the costs involved in producing it.
10. 47% of respondents have received a DS from HEIs elsewhere in Europe (49% in the UK, 67% in Scotland, 40% in Wales), while 28% have received one from another HEI in the UK. 74% of respondents find that the DS is a useful tool for evaluating students' achievements and supporting admissions procedures.

Credit

11. 50% use the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for the purposes of credit transfer, 24% use it for accumulation, and 19% use it for both.
12. Institutions that do not use ECTS reported that this is predominantly because they already use a credit system that is compatible with ECTS. This suggests a greater confidence among institutions about the compatibility of UK credit systems and qualifications frameworks with

¹ The survey was sent to 132 HEIs in England and Northern Ireland in 2009 compared with 117 in 2007.

² The Higher Education Funding Council for England collected more accurate data on the use of the DS in England and Northern Ireland in its annual monitoring statement in 2008.

overarching European systems³.

Masters programmes

13. The survey results show a growth in the number of one-year calendar Masters programmes being offered (271 in 2009, 236 in 2007). There are fewer two-year Masters degree programmes on offer (54 in 2009, 81 in 2007). There is a growth in the number of research intensive Masters degrees (MRes, MPhil) being offered over one year. This may reflect a growing confidence in the UK one-year Masters programme.
14. Examples of other types of programmes being offered include one, two, and three year MBAs, part-time Masters programmes over a three year period, and programmes lasting between 15 and 18 months.

Integrated Masters programmes

15. 56% of respondents in England and Northern Ireland offer full-time Integrated Masters programmes (60% in 2007), 89% of which offer MEng degrees. The UK national average is 58%, 50% in Wales, and 67% in Scotland.
16. HEIs in England and Northern Ireland are developing and offering new types of Integrated Masters degrees, including MComp (Computer Science), MGeoSci (Geographical Science), and MChiro (Chiropractic).
17. 83% (78% in 2007) of respondents providing Integrated Masters programmes award a Masters qualification only at the end of the Masters stage of the programme as opposed to 10% of HEIs offering a Bachelor qualification after the Bachelor stage and a Masters qualification after the Masters stage, and 12% of HEIs offering both qualifications at the Masters stage⁴.
18. 20% of HEIs offering Integrated Masters degrees have incorporated work placements into the summer vacation. The placements are evenly spread between the UK and locations elsewhere and outside Europe. Four HEIs have incorporated teaching placements, again evenly distributed between the UK and the rest of the world. Both types of placement carry assessed learning outcomes. Only 2 respondents extended the timescale for submission of the dissertation to extend the duration of the Integrated Masters degree programme.
19. Three respondents claimed that they did not allocate a minimum of 60 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 qualifications in England and Northern Ireland

20. Responses indicate a slight decline in acceptance of qualifications in England and Northern Ireland in Europe. 62% of respondents are not aware of any difficulties experienced by graduates of UK Bachelor and Masters programmes, this is down from 69% in 2007. 11 HEIs reported difficulties of Bachelors graduates gaining entry into further study, nine HEIs reported the same difficulty at the Masters level. In terms of gaining employment, graduates are more likely to experience difficulty in the public sector.
21. The countries where there were difficulties reported include (in order of frequency of complaint) Greece, Spain, Germany, China, and Turkey. Five respondents mentioned North America and entry to Masters level study as a particular issue.
22. 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, 97% responded the situation was maintained or had improved. 3% said it made the situation worse.

Staff and student mobility

23. 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. 73% of respondents in England and Northern Ireland have measures in place to promote staff mobility, 90% have measures to promote student mobility, 13% have no measures in place to support mobility. This is similar to the UK average.

Joint degrees

24. The 2009 survey asked HEIs to identify in which regions they had joint degree partners⁶. 43 HEIs in England and Northern Ireland responded to say they award a joint degree or multiple/dual/double degree in conjunction with one or more HEIs. Of these respondents, 49% award degrees in conjunction with another HEI in the UK, 72% do so in conjunction with another HEI in Europe, and 51% with a HEI outside Europe.

Institutional Strategies

25. 92% of respondents in England and Northern Ireland have an international strategy (75% in 2007) and 45% have a European strategy (39% in 2007). Of those HEIs with a European strategy, 70% have it embedded in their international strategy and 30% 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. 13 respondents specifically mention recruitment of European students as a strategic objective.
26. 55% of respondents have assigned a particular staff member/committee/group with responsibility for Bologna Process issues (24% in 2007). This is lower than the national average

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.

of 58%, 70% in Wales, and 71% in Scotland. However, the large percentage growth in the England and Northern Ireland HEIs since 2007 is a clear reflection of the growing importance of the Bologna Process agenda in this region of the UK. Academic Registrars, Heads and Assistant Heads of International Offices, Vice-Provosts, Directors of Quality, Deans, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Vice-Principals, UK Bologna Experts and academics are all involved in dealing with Bologna Process issues in HEIs in England and Northern Ireland.

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