

On 30 January 2004 the EAIE embarked on a new venture. Rather than being the provider of a conference, a training course or workshop, the Association was a facilitator and prime mover in developing an idea born in Porto.

On your behalf...

# The Bologna Symposium

by Tim Birtwistle

At the Joint EUA/EAIE Seminar on the Bologna process held prior to the EAIE's Porto conference in 2002 it was painfully obvious to the then-President (Professor Tim Birtwistle) that the UK was under-represented. In fact it was worse than that, because but for the presence of Professor David Gillingham (Coventry University) there would have been no delegate from the UK. Discussions took place about putting on an event specifically for universities in the UK.

The end result was the recent Leeds Met Symposium, 'The strategic implications of the Bologna process for UK higher education'. This was 'co-badged' and supported by the EAIE and both UUK (Universities United Kingdom) and the EUA (European University Association). The organisation for the Symposium was undertaken by the new Leeds Met Lesley Silver International Faculty. The focus for the day was to explore the strategic implications of the Bologna process for universities throughout the UK with a target audience of Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Deans, Heads of International Offices and other senior academics.

The context for the keynote addresses was to accept that globalisation is a fact of life rather than a process and to place the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – commonly referred to as 'the Bologna process' – within that context. A main aim of Bologna is to make higher education more competitive and more attractive for European citizens and for scholars from abroad.

Back in 1999 the Bologna Declaration set in motion a series of reforms to achieve

this aim. In September 2003 33 European Ministers responsible for higher education met in Berlin to review progress and set priorities and concrete objectives. The number of signatories grew to 40, including Russia and the Holy See. This pan-European movement has 2010 as the date for full implementation but there are a number of interim stages along the way. A very concrete imminent requirement is that from 2005 all graduates from the EHEA must be given a Diploma Supplement detailing course content, a description of the national system within which the course operates and the achievement of the student. This will be portable documentary evidence of achievement in a common format. Also by 2005 signatories must evidence progress towards a 'two cycle format' for higher education, the so-called 'Bachelors/Masters system'.

The Leeds Met Symposium was very fortunate to be able to gather a formidable array of speakers to attempt a 'wake-up call' to universities in the UK. Over 85 delegates attended to hear an analysis of the current position, a specific analysis of the ways in which universities in the UK may well be at variance with the goals and targets and the future costs of any failure to keep pace, as well as what is needed for the objectives to be met, from:

- **Dr Sybille Reichert** (Head of Planning, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) on the theme: Strategic implications – a perspective from mainland Europe
- **Professor Wendy Davies** (Pro-Vic Provost of European Affairs, University College London): Setting the agenda – a UK perspective

**Wake up UK universities and academics!**

- **Tish Bourke** (Head of the Europe Unit, Universities UK): Quality issues
- **Stephen Adam** (Lecturer in Political Economy, University of Westminster): Does Bologna make a European qualifications framework necessary?
- **Peter van der Hijden** (Deputy Head, Directorate General Education and Culture): A strategy for wider Europe – the European Commission's perspective

It is not putting the case too strongly to say that there remains a degree of apathy and denial in the UK. How can the strong comparative advantage that the 'brand' of universities in the UK has, possibly be dented? Why is any action required when 'we' already have a two-cycle system? 'Our' adherence to learning outcomes means that the notional hours of study exposed by *Trends III* is meaningless because look at what the graduates are able to do on completion of the first cycle. 'Our' Masters courses are equally effective because of the learning outcomes and level descriptors associated with the programmes of study! Wake up UK universities and academics!



*Tim Birtwistle is Professor of Law, TEMPUS Co-ordinator and ECTS/DS Coordinator at the School of Law in Leeds Business School, Leeds Metropolitan University, and is a former President of the EAIE*