



UK faces continental threat

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By Hannah Fearn

Report advises British universities to act or lose international students to European rivals. Hannah Fearn reports

UK universities will lose lucrative international students to their European competitors if they do not wise up to increasing competition from their neighbours.

That is the message of a Universities UK report released today, which warns institutions to act now to preserve their place in the European market.

The report, produced by the UK HE International Unit at UUK, examines funding regimes, immigration rules and the amount of teaching offered in English to consider the threat that continental European universities pose to UK higher education.

It singles out Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland as potential direct competitors.

To maintain their position, the UUK report advises UK universities to implement all the Bologna Process reforms, designed to harmonise courses across Europe, as soon as possible and then brand themselves “Bologna-compatible”. This would place them at the forefront of development of the European Higher Education Area.

The report says that universities must do more to provide and encourage second-language training as part of undergraduate degree programmes. They should also build better relationships and work “more systematically” with the UK Foreign Office and the Department for International Development.

And the report calls for universities to adopt a “partnership approach” to deal with internationalisation, developing consortia with other universities to attract international students to the UK together.

Rick Trainor, president of UUK, supported the report’s findings and recommendations. “The UK sector is well aware of the emergence of new competitors for international students. While much of this attention has rightly been directed at Asia, increasingly Europe is seen as a potential competitor,” he said.

“Among the ways that UK universities can cope with the increased international activity of our continental neighbours and their growing tendency to teach in English is by placing more emphasis, as they do, on collaborative, partnership approaches.”