

## UK finds edge in networks

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**BRITISH universities** are ahead of their Australian counterparts in making a crucial shift to international education based on partnerships, according to a senior education adviser.

William Lawton, policy adviser at the UK Higher Education International Unit, said Australia remained a key rival in the competition to attract international students but Britain had an edge in the pursuit of "partnership-based internationalisation".

He was commenting on a report that pronounces internationalisation of higher education in Britain a success but warns of rising competitors and urges a more collaborative approach with continental neighbours.

"UK universities do have a competitive mind-set, but it is also our view that we are ahead of Australia in this shift to more partnership-based internationalisation," Dr Lawton said.

"There is no move away from traditional competitors like Australia and the US.

"The report says that they will continue to be the main competitors for the UK's international students. But we need now to think about increasing competition from new places."

The 62-page report, released last week, examines the policies of seven other European countries (Switzerland, France, Sweden, Poland, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands) in regard to competition for international students and more collaborative partnership approaches to international activities over the next five years.

A number of countries within Europe had significantly increased recruitment efforts, the report said.

"In their ability to attract international students, some countries appear to be a current threat to UK universities, others a likely future threat and others not a threat," the report said.

Germany is labelled "both a current and future competitive threat," especially with regard to technical students, because of its low tuition fees and living costs, and close partnerships between universities and industry.

The Netherlands is a new competitive threat but is seen "as a medium-term rather than immediate threat" because, while the average cost of living is lower than in Britain, overseas students pay full-fees and the ability to work is restricted.

The report urges British universities to implement the Bologna Process reforms - the inter-governmental plan to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and promote the European system of higher education worldwide - and brand themselves Bologna-compatible.

It suggests British universities adopt and implement collaborative partnership models for internationalisation, and establish small consortia to develop and implement those strategies.

A co-author of the report, the University of Kingston's Steve Woodfield, said Australia was a direct competitor to Britain in the recruitment of full-fee paying international students seeking to study full-degrees in English, alongside the US (which dominates the market) and Canada.

"Australia and the UK share strategically important target markets for students in Asia, particularly in China, India and Malaysia, but also in emerging countries such as Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam," he said.

"The UK and Australia have benefited from strong links with Commonwealth countries in which the similarity of higher education systems helps to facilitate mobility, although these advantages are eroding as other countries in Europe restructure their education systems in response to the Bologna process."

Student recruitment in Europe was primarily from other countries within Europe, but Asian countries, such as China and India, were being targeted.