7 United Kingdom (UK)

7.1 Facts and Figures

The United Kingdom is divided into four parts: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. 80% of the population in the UK is located in England and this is also reflected in the context of higher education: in 2007/08 out of about 2.3 million students approximately 80% of the students are studying (figure 11) and out of 166 higher education institutions 80% of the providers are located in England (according to the numbers of HESA 2009/10). Each part of the UK has its own education system, though England and Northern Ireland are more or less the same. Wales is rather similar while Scotland has taken its own direction concerning higher education.

Figure 11: Student Numbers in Higher Education in the UK 1996/07 – 2009/10

![Student Numbers in Higher Education in the UK 1996/07 – 2009/10](image)

Source: Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA), http://www.hesa.ac.uk

UK higher education is delivered through a range of institutions including universities, higher education colleges and a few university colleges. Most signifi-
cant for UK higher education was the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992 when polytechnic institutions received university status and the funding and evaluation procedures became a new structure (Tavenas 2004, p.48). Nonetheless, all higher education providers differ greatly in size, mission and history (Eurydice 2008, p.7). Most higher education institutions have the right to award their own degrees and qualification approved by the Privy Council. These recognised bodies are either universities or other higher education institutions (Eurydice 2007/08, p.211).

Those higher education institutions without the power to award degrees are certified by external bodies. As there is a variety of different qualifications (diplomas, bachelors, masters, certificates etc.), England, Wales and Northern Ireland have developed a five-level framework for a better transparency and consistency of all qualification titles (EUNI) (Eurydice 2008, pp.7f). In contrast to the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) which includes one year Higher National Certificate (HNC), a two year Higher National Diploma (HND), a three year ordinary degree and a four year Honours degree. These qualifications have been acknowledged by the Framework for Qualification of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Eurydice 2009c, p.6).

Concerning tuition fees the Higher Education Act 2004 allows higher education institutions to charge variable fees up to £3,000 per year from 2006/07 (linked to the level of inflation) in England. Northern Ireland and Wales have similar arrangements (Eurydice 2008, p.8). In Scotland only Scottish and EU students (full-time) at undergraduate programmes do not have to pay any fees while part-time students receive state benefits (income based) or have relinquish their fees since 2000 (Eurydice 2009c, p.6).

7.2 Governance and Funding

The UK shifted from a more liberal orientation towards a stronger state regulation which affected funding as well as quality assurance matters. This happened in line with increased accountability, efficiency and a loss of trust towards higher education institutions from the state. Today, universities and colleges are self-governing and legally independent bodies with a high degree of autonomy, some as higher education corporations and entities acknowledged by an Act of Parliament (QAA 2005, p.7). Some steering issues of higher education are organised at the country’s level while others are kept by state departments of the UK government (Leisyte 2007b, p.37; Leisyte et al. 2006, p.22). Nonetheless, Watson (1997, p.131) states that it is a “key characteristic of the UK system of higher education to have relatively autonomous institutions to accept collective respon-