

# *The Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies*

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<p>This is a brief introduction and guide to the origins, structure and content of ES programmes in the UK. This document was originally produced for the QAA Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies group and is also to be found on the LTSN web-site, <a href="http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk">http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk</a></p>
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## **European Studies programmes in the UK**

The introduction of European Studies degree programmes in UK universities dates back to the early 1970s. Since then there has been a more or less uninterrupted growth to the extent that the last publication of the University Association of Contemporary European Studies (UACES) biennial *Register of Courses in European Studies in UK Universities and University Colleges* in 2000 listed around eighty UK universities offering between them over 120 undergraduate degree programmes in this field and forty institutions running some eighty taught Masters degrees. Such a growth, which has run so curiously counter to the apparent ambient 'Euro-scepticism' in British society, has inevitably resulted in considerable diversity of structure and content. Thus, the UACES *Register* offers a confusing richness of nomenclature. At the undergraduate level, alongside degrees named European Studies (or sometimes Contemporary European Studies) there is an equal distribution of programmes of European Studies with one or more named modern languages; European Studies and a subject discipline (typically history, law or politics); European Union (or European Integration) Studies, and European Business Studies. The list is completed by degrees in European Area Studies and East European Studies. At the taught postgraduate level there is a similar diversity, although with a greater concentration of degrees in European Integration (or European Union Studies), European Law, and European Public Policy.

Such promiscuity in naming degree programmes prompts two questions: whether expansion may have been at the expense of coherence and whether there is any broad agreement, in theory or practice, on the core elements which are required for a programme to be regarded as European Studies? These questions are, in fact, almost as old as the emergence of the first European Studies undergraduate degrees and reflect the nature of the origins and subsequent development of these programmes. Three factors were important in this respect in shaping the characteristics of what was to become the field of European Studies. Firstly, there was the push factor of Britain's engagement with the processes of European integration. Many of the pioneer advocates of European Studies had a research interest in the EEC and usually, also, a conviction of the benefits that would follow British accession, including the need for a cadre of trained graduates who would be able to respond to the administrative challenges and consequences of membership. The persistence of these underlying assumptions may be judged by the fact that the surges of growth in the number of European Studies programmes since the 1970s have roughly corresponded to the milestones provided by the significant changes in Europe, among them enlargement of the EEC, the completion of the Single Market and the collapse of Soviet control of Eastern Europe. The

second factor was the re-examination of the role and value of the traditional modern language degree. In many institutions European Studies programmes were a direct response to a dramatic change in student demand (as well as the research and teaching interests of newly appointed staff in the expanding Higher Education sector of the time) away from a concentration on literature and high culture as the bedrock of language study and toward an interest in applied language and comparative cultural studies. These interests were defined by a willingness to emphasise communicative skills in contemporary language and the use and analysis of materials drawn from a number of other disciplines or seen as directly relevant to professional development. Lastly, and closely related to this changing focus of modern language teaching, was the softening of boundaries between disciplines and the accompanying willingness of many universities to facilitate structures in which different subjects were combined in new complete programmes of study, most notably area studies, or were brought together to form individual courses or units that might contribute to a number of degrees. In all three areas the lead was taken predominantly by those universities created as a result of the Robbins Report, the polytechnics and the new 'technological' universities (Bettinson, 1989).

This triple origin, which encouraged some combination of applied languages, multidisciplinary and a focus on Europe, in particular, though not necessarily, its contemporary political and institutional development, is important in understanding the diversity that characterises current degrees in European Studies. But it equally serves as a benchmark by which to define the core elements of those degrees, while still allowing for different organising structures and disciplinary emphases. If, to start by stating the obvious, the object of a European Studies degree is Europe then its pursuit must reasonably require some multi-dimensionality. As Flood has written, this requirement in principle would include any aspect of the understanding of Europe 'as a geographical, social, economic, political, cultural and linguistic space in the past, present or predicted future, as well as the interaction of its peoples with those of other parts of the world' (Flood, 1998, p 4). In practice, and reflecting the circumstances of its origins, European Studies programmes have generally interpreted this brief as dealing with contemporary Europe or its recent past. But the point remains that they do so from an inter- (or certainly multi-) disciplinary perspective.

The requirement that European Studies should contain a multi-faceted, rather than single disciplinary, understanding of Europe emerged as a working definition from the two separate surveys on behalf of the Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies (SCHES) conducted in 1997 and 2002 which sought to identify the nature of European Studies provision and changing trends in the balance of the components in European Studies degrees (Flood, 1998; Smith, 2002). On this definition the extraordinarily high number of institutions listed in the UACES *Register* as offering some form of European Studies was identified by both surveys as in fact reducible to about forty well-established programmes. These, in turn, appeared to fall reasonably clearly into two types:

- i) Interdisciplinary programmes which offer European Studies within the context of two or more disciplinary specialisms, most often History and Politics, and which are structured as a tightly focused series of related units entirely deriving from European themes.
- ii) Programmes based on the study of two or more modern European languages which serve as the gateway to the comparative understanding of contemporary European culture and societies.

Each of these categories would exclude from consideration, therefore, for the purposes of this brief guide, programmes which contain European elements within a single discipline degree or

programmes, such as European Business Studies or European Legal Studies, which are structured around a single focus.

The two mainstream different approaches to what constitutes the object of European Studies tend directly to reflect the structure in which the programmes are managed and delivered, and in particular whether their institutional origins lie within modern languages or other disciplines (a point addressed further below). Nonetheless, a strong overlap of themes and subjects has clearly evolved, suggesting the emergence of a broadly agreed generic model of the disciplines or areas that are regarded as core for a European Studies degree. In the most recent SCHES survey (Smith, 2002) three course elements were present in virtually all programmes analysed: history, politics (in which was included the European Union or European integration) and modern languages. Moreover, all three elements together are compulsory components in about two thirds of the programmes, showing a trend toward a common curriculum which would appear to have accelerated since the 1993 and 1997 surveys (Church, 1993, p 11; Flood, 1998, pp 19-20).

The large measure of agreement about the elements which, regardless of the organisational structure of the programme, are deemed to be central to European Studies has been accompanied by a growing conformity both in the way that these core subjects are approached and in their contribution to the overall programme. This is especially the case in the group of programmes organised on an interdisciplinary principle. In the history components the focus is overwhelmingly on contemporary Europe, generally encompassing the 20th century and often starting only after 1945. Within this chronology two themes are prevalent. Firstly, that of a divided Europe, taught in courses examining ideological, political or economic questions across the whole of Europe such as **Europe at war with itself** or **Integration and Disintegration** and secondly, a more narrow focus on the contemporary history of European unity in courses such as **Evolution of an Integrated Europe** or **History of European Integration**. Both these subject areas are clearly designed less to prepare students to explore other periods of European history (though many programmes offer some options of this type) than to complement and provide the background to a wider understanding of the political and social contours of contemporary Europe. Thus, specialised progression in history, normally in the final year, typically includes options such as **Nazism and Fascism**, **Cold War Europe**, **The Reconstruction of Western Europe**, and **Women in Europe**.

The subject of the core politics teaching generally covers a wide spectrum of Europe's political systems (typically: **Contemporary European Politics**; **European Governance and Politics**), often using as case studies those countries whose languages are offered on the degree programme, and analysing such standard topics as the role of legislatures and executives, constitutions, political parties and voting behaviour. Alongside these courses which introduce what may be termed the basic grammar of political analysis applied to Europe there is now an almost universal provision in all programmes of core politics courses which focus specifically on the European Union. This development is relatively recent. In fact the report on European Studies written by Hantrais in 1992 for the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) found that 'the EC as a political or economic entity is not normally an integral part of such (European Studies) courses' (Hantrais, 1992, p 1). The impetus to develop what now appears accepted as a core identifier of European Studies programmes of all types undoubtedly owes much to the European Commission's **Jean Monnet Project** which, for ten years, has helped finance some of the teaching costs of new courses specifically on European integration, the bulk of which in the UK have been within politics. Most of the courses offered have a similar form and coverage (**Understanding the EU**; **The Politics of the EU**; **Politics and Policies of the EU**) providing a general introductory survey of the institutions, processes and policies of the EU. As with the broad introductory history courses those in politics and the EU provide the prerequisite for more

advanced core or optional courses. Although there is a vast variety of options to be found across the programmes some conformity of pattern is discernible. The further study of the EU is increasingly focused on two specific areas of the current integration process: the economic (**European Economic Integration; The Economics of the EU**), and Eastern Europe and questions of EU enlargement (**The EU and the Wider Europe; Dynamics of European Integration**). Similarly, politics options to be found in a number of programmes include international relations (**Theories of European Integration; Europe in a Global Context**), post-Soviet Europe (**The politics of Eastern Europe**) and a number of courses analysing regional politics such as Southern Europe or Scandinavia. Many programmes also include at least one course in the Law of the EU, designed for non-specialists.

It is clear that the politics and history combination forms a core axis in the overwhelming majority of European Studies degrees, albeit with politics or international relations in general being given the greater overall weight. Many programmes, often managed from a Politics or Social Science Department, are largely, or even exclusively, constructed around these disciplines and provide both a foundation in them and progression to a more detailed, advanced disciplinary study applied to Europe comparatively or through single country analysis. Institutions whose programmes are of this type include Aberystwyth, Keele, Kent, Leicester, Leeds, Queen's Belfast, Stirling and Surrey. Some programmes, including Bradford, Dundee, Essex, Northumbria, and Paisley offer additional opportunities of core courses or distinct pathways in the social sciences more broadly, mainly economics, geography, law and sociology or social studies.

All the interdisciplinary social science programmes outlined above include core modern languages. In common with the second type of programme which is based on the study of at least two languages the normal degree course is also for four years with a full academic year (normally year three) spent in one or more of the countries whose language is studied. Language tuition is compulsory during the first two years and often continued into the final year. However, recent pressure on student finances, together with some decline of interest in modern languages at 'A' level, has led to the introduction alongside the main European Studies programme of some social science-based degrees, **EU Studies** or **European Area Studies**, which have optional modern language. These programmes are completed in three years but otherwise share most of the core disciplinary courses. The declining attraction of modern languages in schools has also affected the number and range of languages offered in European Studies programmes. French, German and Spanish are all available almost universally either as post-'A' Level or *ab initio*. But Italian, which is now taught in only about half of the programmes and Russian, which is found in less than one quarter, have both suffered substantial recent closures. All the other languages of the current European Union are available somewhere in at least one programme. Nonetheless, the reduction of provision effectively to three core languages has had a clear consequence in limiting the countries whose cultures, history and politics are studied in detail within a trans-European framework.

Both these developments, which either remove or limit language as a key instrument in the understanding of European cultures and societies, open the prospect of a widening gap between the two generic types of European Studies programmes, defined earlier, which have always been distinguished by the relative prominence given to languages rather than whether they were, or should be, a core part of the programme. In general the importance and role of language relates closely to the institutional structure within which European Studies is managed. Typically the history-politics-social science programmes, which have a clear disciplinary progression in these areas, are either organised within one 'owner' Department, such as Politics, or by an interdisciplinary team drawn from a number of contributing departments, forming a Centre or

programme directorate. Although a few interdisciplinary programmes, such as Queen's Belfast, are the responsibility of an autonomous Institute or School sufficiently large to be able to teach a number of disciplinary strands over the whole span of the degree, none of these forms of organisation include language teaching capacity. This is generally provided separately by staff of Modern Language Departments or a dedicated Language Teaching Centre. The exceptions, in this category of programme, include the European Studies Departments at Cardiff and Loughborough which are each the product of historic mergers between modern language and social science specialists. For the programmes whose origins, or current location, lie specifically in the development of applied languages these are not simply delivered within the departmental structure but are seen as integral to the concept and content of the degree. Thus, programmes such as those at Hull, Portsmouth, Southampton and the University of the West of England typically combine the study of two modern languages with comparative general courses on European history, politics and the EU and a range of options on the cultures of one or more of the countries whose language is taken. An even greater integration of the language as the shaping rationale of the European Studies programme is found at Aston and Bath. There, the culture, history, politics and social relations of Europe are all approached in the context and, predominantly, through the medium, of the foreign language. However, while all these language-based programmes share with their social science counterparts coverage of history, politics and the processes of European integration they balance this with a greater emphasis on cultural studies as being equally integral to the understanding of contemporary European societies. This typically includes courses on the literature or film of individual countries as well as from a comparative European perspective.

Mirroring the large measure of conformity in core subjects the formal structure of most European Studies programmes also follows a broadly similar pattern regardless of disciplinary focus or of organisation. In order to develop the large range of skills required of students in an interdisciplinary degree both types of programme devote much of the first two years to foundation courses covering modern languages and disciplinary specialisms. Additionally, most programmes provide comparative and interdisciplinary courses that are seen as integral to defining the European Studies pathway. These include surveys that introduce students to the variety of approaches to understanding and defining Europe (**The Idea of Europe** or **What is Europe?**) and those that encourage the use of different analytical tools to determine common European patterns (**Social and Cultural Contours of Europe, Issues in European Identity** or **The Economics and Geography of Europe**). In all programmes the third year is normally spent abroad. The majority of students enrol in a partner continental European university, usually within a formal SOCRATES exchange agreement. Some programmes require a study stay of a full academic year entirely in one country; others allow students to spend one semester in each of the two countries whose languages they have taken. In both cases courses are followed in advanced language and a range of disciplines relating to what has been studied in the first two years, and assessments completed under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) for eventual inclusion in the degree classification at the student's home institution. A minority of programmes send students as teaching assistants in a continental European school; a small number arrange professional or commercial placements. In the final year courses are designed to provide advanced skills in language (sometimes including translating or interpreting), the use and refinement of one or more disciplines and, generally, the deeper knowledge of individual European countries, especially those in which a student may have studied. Many programmes require the submission of a substantial dissertation designed to apply the various skills from the whole programme to the analysis of a specific case study or a comparative European topic.

There are two professional organisations representing the interests of European Studies, each working closely with the other. The Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies (SCHES) has a membership drawn from about fifty institutions. Its role is to lobby and promote the

interests of European Studies as a subject area, and particularly as this applies to the teaching of the subject in universities. The University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES) acts as the association in the UK for academics and postgraduates researching on Europe, especially focused on the EU. It publishes a biennial register of courses in European Studies on its web site.

### **Related Internet Links**

UACES: <http://www.uaces.org> This site also contains the annual report, and other material, from SCHEs.

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