



EMPOWERING
EHEA Paris 2018
EUROPE'S YOUTH

Conférence ministérielle européenne
pour l'enseignement supérieur



PARIS COMMUNIQUÉ

Paris, May 25th 2018

Meeting in Paris on 24 and 25 May 2018, twenty years after the Sorbonne Declaration was signed, we, the Ministers responsible for higher education, wish not only to celebrate the progress made in building the European Higher Education Area over the past two decades, but also to make strong and ambitious commitments for its further development.

We are proud of what the Bologna Process has achieved. We have built something unique: a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which goals and policies are agreed upon at European level, and then implemented in national education systems and higher education institutions. This is an area where governments, higher education institutions and stakeholders are shaping the landscape of higher education together; that demonstrates what a joint effort and continuous dialogue among governments and the higher education sector can attain. Through the EHEA, we have paved the way for large-scale student mobility and improved not only the comparability and transparency of our higher education systems, but also increased their quality and attractiveness. The EHEA has promoted mutual understanding and trust, and has enhanced cooperation among our higher education systems.

Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation.

Since the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations, the EHEA higher education systems as well as institutions have undergone major reforms. At a moment when Europe is facing important societal challenges – ranging from unemployment and social inequality to migration-related issues and a rise in political polarisation, radicalisation and violent extremism – higher education can and must play a decisive role in providing solutions to these issues. It must also play a key role in establishing the facts on the basis of which public debates are conducted and decisions made. By providing students and other learners with opportunities for lifelong personal development, higher education enhances their prospects of employment and stimulates them to be active citizens in democratic societies.

We therefore commit to developing policies that encourage and support higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility and contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive society through enhancing intercultural understanding, civic engagement and ethical awareness, as well as ensuring equitable access to higher education.

Progress in implementing agreed reforms

As the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows, progress has been made while implementation remains uneven, both between policy areas and between countries.

Quality assurance is key in developing mutual trust as well as increasing mobility and fair recognition of qualifications and study periods throughout the EHEA. We therefore recognise

the progress made in implementing the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) into national and institutional practice in most countries, and we commit to removing the remaining obstacles to their implementation in national legislations and regulations. In order to encourage the development of more joint programmes and joint degrees, we will also enable and promote the use of the “European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes” in our higher education systems. We welcome and will promote the development of the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR).

In order to further develop mobility and recognition across the EHEA, we will work to ensure that comparable higher education qualifications obtained in one EHEA country are automatically recognised on the same basis in the others, for the purpose of accessing further studies and the labour market. To this end we renew our commitment to ensure full implementation of ECTS, following the guidelines laid down in the 2015 ECTS Users’ guide.

We will work to implement the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Recommendations, in particular on the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. We also urge the adoption of transparent procedures for the recognition of qualifications, prior learning and study periods, supported by interoperable digital solutions.

We approve the proposed revised Diploma Supplement and commit to working for its adoption in identical versions within the respective frameworks of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Europass. To further promote student and graduate mobility, we welcome and support initiatives such as the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement, and commit to support higher education institutions to pursue further student data exchange in a secure, machine-readable and interoperable format, in line with data protection legislation. We also note with interest the current “European student card” EU pilot project, which could potentially be broadened to support and facilitate student mobility throughout the entire EHEA.

In many of our systems, ECTS-based short cycle qualifications play an increasingly important role in preparing students for employment and further studies as well in improving social cohesion by facilitating access for many who would otherwise not have considered higher education. We are therefore including short-cycle qualifications as a stand-alone qualification within the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA). Each country can decide whether and how to integrate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework.

Unlocking the full potential of the EHEA: taking implementation forward

We acknowledge that the reforms driven by the Bologna Process require both successful implementation and full ownership of all of our agreed goals and commitments throughout the EHEA. Fulfilling our commitments depends on the concerted efforts of national policy-makers, public authorities, institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders as well as coordination at EHEA level.

In order to unlock the full potential of the EHEA and ensure the implementation of Bologna key commitments, we are adopting a structured peer support approach based on solidarity, cooperation and mutual learning. In 2018-2020, thematic peer groups will focus on three key commitments crucial to reinforcing and supporting quality and cooperation inside the EHEA:

- a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS
- compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention,
- and quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

We mandate the Bologna follow-up group (BFUG) to implement, coordinate and monitor the adopted peer support approach, and to do so with the aid of the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group established to that end. It will analyse the first round of peer support and through the BFUG suggest the direction that the activity should take in the future, and report back to us at our next EHEA Ministerial conference in 2020.

We encourage the use of the Erasmus+ programme for increasing cooperation, beyond mobility, and achieving progress on the key commitments.

Belarus joined the EHEA in 2015 on the basis of an agreed roadmap. We acknowledge that some first reforms have been initiated, but also that substantial challenges remain. We welcome Belarus' commitment to work with and be supported by partners in the implementation of the proposed strategy for 2018-2020.

Innovation in Learning and Teaching

For the past 20 years, the core mission of the Bologna Process and the main objective of structural reforms have been to ensure and enhance the quality and relevance of learning and teaching. Lifelong learning is increasingly important to our societies and economies as well as to our citizens' wellbeing. Now it is time to add cooperation in innovative learning and teaching practices as another hallmark of the EHEA. We therefore commit to developing new and inclusive approaches for continuous enhancement of learning and teaching across the EHEA, and can succeed only if we do so in close collaboration with the European higher education community, in full respect of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The success of the European Learning and Teaching Forum launched by the European University Association last year demonstrates the value and potential of collaboration in learning and teaching, with tangible benefits for higher education institutions, staff and students. Therefore, in addition to measures at national level, we will develop joint European initiatives to support and stimulate a wide range of innovative learning and teaching practices, building on existing good practice in our countries and beyond.

This will encompass the further development and full implementation of student-centred learning and open education in the context of lifelong learning. Study programmes that provide diverse learning methods and flexible learning can foster social mobility and continuous professional development whilst enabling learners to access and complete higher education at any stage of their lives.

We will support higher education institutions to develop and enhance their strategies for learning and teaching. We also encourage them to provide inter-disciplinary programmes as well as to combine academic and work-based learning. Students should encounter research or activities linked to research and innovation at all levels of higher education to develop the critical and creative mind-sets which will enable them to find novel solutions to emerging challenges. In this regard, we commit to improving synergies between education, research and innovation.

Digitalisation plays a role in all areas of society and we recognise its potential to transform how higher education is delivered and how people learn at different stages of their lives. We call on our higher education institutions to prepare their students and support their teachers to act creatively in a digitalised environment. We will enable our education systems to make better use of digital and blended education, with appropriate quality assurance, in order to enhance lifelong and flexible learning, foster digital skills and competences, improve data analysis, educational research and foresight, and remove regulatory obstacles to the provision of open and digital education. We call on the BFUG to take the issue of digitalisation forward in the next working period.

As high quality teaching is essential in fostering high quality education, academic career progression should be built on successful research and quality teaching. It should also take due account of the broader contribution to society.

We will promote and support institutional, national and European initiatives for pedagogical training, continuous professional development of higher education teachers and explore ways for better recognition of high quality and innovative teaching in their career.

Beyond 2020: a more ambitious EHEA

The EHEA has proved its role as a unique framework for higher education co-operation in Europe. To develop the EHEA further, we will intensify cross-disciplinary and cross-border cooperation as well as develop an inclusive and innovative approach to learning and teaching. We call on the BFUG to submit proposals in time for our 2020 meeting in order to enable higher education to fully play its role in meeting the challenges faced by our societies.

We will foster and extend integrated transnational cooperation in higher education, research and innovation, for increased mobility of staff, students and researchers, and for more joint study programmes throughout the whole EHEA. We take note with interest of the recent EU initiative on 'European Universities' and we will encourage all our higher education institutions to work in such new settings. We call on the BFUG to establish interaction with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) by 2020 in order to develop synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA).

We commit to developing the role of higher education in securing a sustainable future for our planet and our societies and to finding ways in which we, as EHEA Ministers, can contribute to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at global, European and national levels.

As a follow-up to the Bologna Policy Forum, we mandate the BFUG to enter into a global policy dialogue to improve regular cooperation with other regions and international organisations. This dialogue should focus on promoting mutual learning and joint initiatives on issues of common interest, such as social inclusion and the wider role of higher education. We welcome the work on the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

We recognise that further effort is required to strengthen the social dimension of higher education. In order to meet our commitment that the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations, we will improve access and completion by under-represented and vulnerable groups. Therefore, we mandate the BFUG to take this issue forward by the next EHEA Ministerial conference.

Preparing the 2020 EHEA Ministerial conference

For our 2020 conference, we mandate the BFUG to develop a Bologna Process Implementation Report assessing the main developments in the EHEA since the Bologna Process began, including to what extent we have fulfilled the mobility target agreed in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009.

We also ask the BFUG to submit proposals for the main priorities for the next decade, in close cooperation with higher education institutions, staff and students, and for the governance of the EHEA.

We gratefully accept the offer by Italy to host the next Ministerial conference of the EHEA and the Bologna Policy Forum in 2020.

Appendices

Measures adopted:

- Structured peer support approach for the implementation of the three Bologna key commitments
- Belarus strategy for 2018-2020
- Short cycle qualifications as a stand-alone qualification level within the overarching Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)
- Revised Diploma Supplement, with a recommendation for its adoption in identical form in the respective frameworks of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Europass