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Recommendations to National Authorities for the Enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA

Prepared by the BFUG Advisory Group 2 on Learning and Teaching

In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Communiqué, Ministers announced the addition of “cooperation in innovative learning and teaching practices as another hallmark of the EHEA”.

To this purpose the present recommendations for action, in order to enhance collaboration and partnership within and between the European higher education systems, are proposed to Ministers and national authorities.

The recommendations fully respect the fundamental values of the EHEA, most recently expressed in the Paris Communiqué of 24-25 May 2018 as follows: “Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of learners and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA.”

The context of the Covid-19 health crisis further underlines the importance of the Group’s recommendations in several regards. Particularly relevant are those on the need for pedagogical innovation and further development of online education and open educational resources, as well as that on strengthening the link between educational research and teaching.

The recommendations summarized below are structured around the need for student-centred learning, the enhancement of teaching, and the overarching importance of national and international dialogue involving all stakeholders. These three themes are interconnected and equally important.

The recommendations also underline the crucial importance of reinforcing the Bologna tools, especially ECTS, to indicate achieved learning outcomes and their associated workload, and the other Bologna key commitments. Public authorities in charge of higher education should commit:

1. To make student-centred learning a reality, by:

supporting higher education institutions in their efforts to start or maintain a structured dialogue on innovation and enhancement of learning and teaching, involving students, teachers and also relevant external stakeholders. The issues addressed should include the development of curricula, learning outcomes, assessment and quality assurance, with due consideration for the skills needed to address current and future challenges of society;

promoting, within disciplinary courses, the development of soft skills, and the skills necessary for the enlightened citizen of the 21st century, in order to understand the challenges of a complex world and respect others and the environment;

exploring ways to stimulate the cross-border exchange of good practices for supporting the enhancement of quality learning and teaching, emphasizing active methods;

creating a supportive environment, both in terms of funding and regulation, that enables higher education institutions to tailor education provision to the needs of different types of learners (lifelong learners, part-time

learners, learners from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups), and to build a culture for equity and inclusion. This includes creating flexible learning pathways (including micro-credentials) on institutional and national levels and across the EHEA, and to explore opportunities offered by digital technologies to do so;

encouraging and supporting the development and implementation of national and institutional strategies and approaches for Open Education and the use of Open Educational Resources;

stimulating students to be mobile beyond predefined university-to-university agreements.

2. To foster continuous enhancement of teaching, by:

promoting the establishment of educational teams including both academics and staff responsible for helping or training them in their missions (institutional and/or inter-institutional teams);

supporting higher education institutions in enhancing the continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers and (cross-border) exchange of good practices. Inter-institutional staff development measures and creation of cooperative national structures may be considered as ways to enhance CPD;

supporting higher education institutions in creating a sustainable and supportive environment at institutional and national levels for the transformation, especially digital, of quality teaching and learning. Such an environment should be created in collaboration with staff responsible for teaching, and include a framework with decent working conditions and a manageable teaching workload as well as attractive tenure opportunities;

assuring, in collaboration with the higher education institutions (which are expected to involve all those responsible for teaching), structural measures to assure the parity of esteem for teaching and research. If needed, academic career schemes should be revised to ensure a better recognition for teaching in academic careers;

exploring, in collaboration with the higher education institutions, ways to foster new and innovative teaching methods, with a focus on inter- and multidisciplinary approaches, research-based learning and teaching, appropriate use of learning analytics and open education, among other innovative approaches.

3. To strengthen higher education institutions' and systems' capacity to enhance learning and teaching, by:

including the enhancement of learning and teaching in national higher education strategies and approaches. The design and implementation of such strategies and approaches should serve as a basis for a structured and continuous dialogue with higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the learning and teaching community;

supporting the strategic development and innovation capacity of learning and teaching at both national and institutional levels, through empirical education research, projects and pilots, and the collection and use of data about education, while respecting data privacy;

exploring ways to stimulate and support cross-border exchange of good practice at national level and throughout the EHEA, for instance with platforms for exchange and cooperation;

allocating appropriate and stable funding and resources, and adopting fit for purpose regulatory frameworks when needed, in order to enable higher education institutions to develop innovative and high-quality teaching and learning environments.

The Bologna Follow-up Group, in its next work plan, is asked to support the implementation of the recommendations on learning and teaching with a view to achieving joint progress in the EHEA, and to report on the results in the framework of the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report.

