

The Bologna Process 2020 - The European Higher Education Area in the new decade

We, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 countries of the Bologna Process convened in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, on April 28 and 29, 2009 to take stock of the achievements of the Bologna Process and to establish the priorities for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for the next decade.

Preamble

1. In the decade up to 2020 European higher education has a vital contribution in realising a Europe of knowledge that is highly creative and innovative. Faced with the challenge of an ageing population Europe can only succeed in this endeavour if it maximises the talents and capacities of all its citizens and fully engages in lifelong learning as well as in widening participation.

2. European higher education also faces the major challenge posed by globalisation and accelerated technological developments with new providers, new learners and new types of learning. Student-centred learning will help students develop the competences they need in a changing labour market and will empower them to become active and responsible citizens.

3. Our societies currently face the consequences of a global financial and economic crisis. In order to bring about sustainable economic recovery and development, European higher education will strive for innovation on the basis of the integration between education and research at all levels. We recognise that higher education has a key role to play if we are to successfully meet the challenges we face and realise the European Higher Education Area and therefore consider investment in higher education of priority importance.

4. The European Higher Education Area in 2020 shall be an area where higher education is a public responsibility, and where all higher education institutions are responsive to the wider needs of society through the diversity of their missions. The aim is to ensure that higher education institutions have the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes such as preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society, preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development, creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. Higher education must be dynamic: it must be innovative, flexible and creative. The necessary ongoing reform of higher education systems and policies will continue to be firmly embedded in the European values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and full participation of students and staff as well as social equity.

I. Achievements and consolidation

5. Over the past decade we have developed the European Higher Education Area ensuring that it remains firmly rooted in Europe's intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage and ambitions and characterised by a permanent sense of cooperation between governments, higher education institutions, students, staff, employers and other stakeholders. The reform process has also benefited from the contribution from European institutions and organizations.

6. The Bologna Process is leading to greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education and is making it easier for learners to be mobile and for institutions to attract students and scholars from other continents. Higher education is being modernized with the adoption of a three-cycle structure including the possibility of a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle, with the adoption of quality assurance

guidelines, the creation of a European register for quality assurance agencies and the establishment of national qualifications frameworks linked to the overarching European Higher Education Area framework based on learning outcomes and workload. Moreover, the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition.

7. The objectives set out by the Bologna Declaration and the policies developed in the subsequent years are still valid today. The full and proper implementation of these objectives will require increased momentum and commitment after 2010.

II. Learning for the future: higher education priorities for the decade to come

8. Excellence must be pursued at all levels of higher education in order to properly address the challenges of the new era. Excellence requires constant focus on quality based on and further developed with reference to the European standards and guidelines. Upholding the highly valued diversity of our education systems, public policies will fully recognise the value of various missions of higher education, ranging from teaching and research to community service and engagement in social cohesion and cultural development. All student and staff of higher education institutions should be equipped to respond to the changing demands of the fast evolving society.

- ***Social dimension: equitable access and completion***

9. The student body within higher education should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations. We therefore emphasize the social characteristics of higher education and aim to provide equal opportunities to quality education. To this end we believe that access into higher education should be widened by fostering the potential of students from underrepresented groups and by providing adequate conditions for the completion of their studies. This involves improving the learning environment, removing all barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from the study opportunities at all levels. Each participating country will set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education to be reached by the end of the next decade. Efforts to achieve equity in higher education will be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system. All staff of higher education institutions should be equipped to respond to the changing demands of the fast evolving society.

- ***Lifelong learning***

10. Widening participation shall also be achieved through lifelong learning as integral part of the education systems. Lifelong learning will be subject to the principle of public responsibility and involves obtaining qualifications, extending knowledge and understanding, gaining new skills and competences or enriching personal growth. Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, as well as work based trajectories.

11. The implementation of lifelong learning policies requires strong partnerships between public authorities, higher education institutions, students, employers and employees. The Charter on Lifelong Learning developed by the European University Association provides a useful input for defining such partnerships. Successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning and be supported by adequate organisational structures and funding. The development of national qualification frameworks will be an important step towards the implementation of the lifelong learning. We aim at having them all self-certified against the overarching Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area by 2012. This will require continued coordination at the level of the EHEA and with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Intermediate qualifications within the first cycle deserve further development and implementation. The lifelong learning perspective

encouraged by national policies should inform the institutional practice of each higher education institution.

- ***Employability***

12. With labour markets increasingly relying on higher skill levels and transversal competences, higher education should equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences they need throughout their professional lives. Employability empowers the individual to fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets. Raising initial qualifications as well as maintaining and renewing a skilled workforce will foster employability. A close cooperation between higher education institutions, social partners and students will be promoted. This will allow institutions to be more responsive to employers' needs and employers to better understand the institutional perspective, training responsible, inventive and entrepreneurial graduates for the future. Higher education institutions, together with governments, government agencies and employers, shall improve the provision, accessibility and quality of their careers and employment related guidance services to students and alumni

- ***Student-centred learning***

13. Student-centred learning requires new approaches to teaching and learning and a curriculum focused more clearly on the learner in all three cycles. Curricular reform will thus be an ongoing process leading to high quality, flexible and more individually tailored education paths. Academics, in close cooperation with student representatives and employers, will continue to develop international descriptors, learning outcomes and reference points for a growing number of subject areas.

- ***Education, research and innovation***

14. Higher education should be based at all levels on state of the art research and development thus fostering innovation and creativity in society. Doctoral programmes in particular should provide high quality disciplinary research and increasingly be complemented by inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral programmes. We believe that cooperation among institutions of higher education should be consolidated through e.g. the awarding of joint doctoral degrees. In view of the further development and integration of the European Higher Education Area and the European research Area the number of people with research competences should increase. Moreover, the career development of early stage researchers should be made more attractive.

- ***International openness***

15. European higher education institutions will be further encouraged to embed their activities in an institutional culture of internationalisation and global collaboration. The attractiveness and openness of European higher education will be highlighted by joint European actions. For better information and promotion, a network of national contact points will be set up. Competition on a global scale will be complemented by enhanced policy dialogue and cooperation based on partnership with other regions of the world, in particular through the organization of Bologna Policy Fora, involving a variety of stakeholders.

Transnational education should, be governed by the guidelines and standards for quality assurance as applicable within the European Higher Education Area and as in line with the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education.

- ***Mobility***

16. Mobility of students, early stage researchers and staff, embedded in institutional policies to enhance the quality of programmes and excellence in research, strengthens the academic and cultural internationalization of European higher education. Mobility is important for personal development and employability, and it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area, and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions. Therefore, mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the countries of the European Higher Education Area should

have been mobile during their studies. Moreover, also by 2020, there shall be an increase of 20 % of incoming students from non-EHEA countries as part of the internationalization and exchange strategy of the institutions of higher education.

17. Within each of the three cycles, opportunities for mobility shall be integrated in the structure of all degree programmes, thus creating mobility windows. Joint degrees and programmes shall become more common practice. Moreover, mobility policies shall bring together political initiatives with a range of practical measures pertaining to the funding of mobility, recognition, available infrastructure, visa and work permit regulations. Flexible study paths and active information policies, full recognition of study achievements, study support and the full portability of grants and loans are necessary requirements. These policies should aim at increased mobility of a higher quality and at diversifying its types and scope. It should be conducive to a more balanced flow of incoming and outgoing students across the European Higher Education Area and at an improved participation rate from all diverse student groups.

18. Attractive working conditions and career paths as well as open recruitment are necessary to attract highly qualified teachers and researchers to higher education institutions. Career structures should be adapted to facilitate mobility of staff and early stage researchers; framework conditions will be established to ensure appropriate access to social security and to facilitate the supplementary pension rights for mobile staff, taking the best advantage of existing legal frameworks.

- ***Data collection and multidimensional transparency tools***

19. Improved and enhanced data collection will help monitor progress made in the attainment of the objectives set out in the social dimension, employability and mobility agendas, as well as in other policy areas, and will serve as a basis for both stocktaking and benchmarking.

20.

Alternative 1

In the light of the greater diversification of higher education, and in order to make different ways of achieving excellence visible, the Bologna Process, where appropriate, shall actively engage in the development of and will monitor the implementation of new instruments developed inter alia by international institutions and designed to point out the strengths of higher education institutions with diverse mission statements.

These instruments, based on different indicators and meant as a mapping of higher education provide multidimensional information on the activity profiles of the institutions of higher education. Moreover they should be relevant information tools for students and academic staff alike; they should help higher education institutions to compare and identify their relative position, and to continuously strive for excellence. All such instruments, which should be developed with full stakeholder involvement, need to relate closely to quality assurance and recognition and should be based on development of adequate indicators and sound data collection.

Alternative 2

Policies that take due account of the variety of missions of higher education shall be further developed. The key to this is the development of adequate and reliable transparency tools. To that end, classification of higher education institutions should be multi-dimensional, designed in a way that helps institutions develop profiles that emphasize one or more of the main missions of higher education and that recognize the value of all these.

All such instruments, which should be developed with full stakeholder involvement, need to relate closely to quality assurance and recognition and should be based on development of adequate indicators and sound data collection.

Funding

21. Higher education institutions have gained greater autonomy along with rapidly growing expectations to be responsive to societal needs and to be accountable. Within a framework of public responsibility recognizing that public funding remains a priority, the diversification of funding sources should be sought as an opportunity to guarantee further sustainable development of autonomous higher education institutions.

III. The organisational structure and follow-up

22. The present organisational structure of the Bologna Process, characterised by the cooperation between governments, the academic community with its representative organisations and students is endorsed as being fit for purpose. In the future, the Bologna Process will be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU country.

23. In order to interact with other policy areas, the BFUG will liaise with experts and policy makers from other fields, such as research, immigration, social security and employment.

24. We entrust the Bologna Follow-up Group to prepare a work plan to take forward the priorities identified in this Communiqué, allowing for the future integration of the data collection results and the outcome of the independent assessment of the Bologna Process.

25. The monitoring and stocktaking of the progress of the implementation of the Bologna Process will continue in a coordinated way and based on sound data. Eurostat together with Eurostudent and in cooperation with Eurydice will monitor through relevant data collection; the work will be overseen by the Bologna Follow-up Group. This monitoring will also include reporting on the development of multidimensional transparency tools. The next reporting on the progress made towards the achievement of the objectives for the decade to come will be carried out for the 2012 ministerial meeting.

26. We ask the E4 group to continue its cooperation in further developing the European dimension of quality assurance and in particular to ensure that EQAR is evaluated externally, taking into account the views of the stakeholders.

27. We will meet again at the Bologna anniversary conference jointly hosted by Austria and Hungary in Budapest and Vienna on 11-12 March 2010. The next regular ministerial conference will be hosted by Romania in Bucharest in April 2012. The following ministerial conferences will be held in 2015, 2018 and 2020.