

POSITION

Taking the European Higher Education Area forward

November 2020

THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA): ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The European University Association (EUA), as the representative of the European university sector and an active member of the Bologna Process, will on 19 November join the European ministers responsible for higher education and other higher education sector representatives and stakeholders at the EHEA Ministerial Conference. The event will be hosted by Italy and will be the first ever to take place online. The 2020 Communiqué, which will be adopted on this occasion, takes stock of the work since the Paris Ministerial Conference in 2018 and sets the course for the next Ministerial Conference in 2024 and beyond, towards 2030.

EUA welcomes the progress made over the past two years: based on national and institutional good practices, recommendations have been developed on how national authorities should support the education mission of higher education institutions. As for the social dimension (access, equity and inclusion), a set of Principles and Guidelines will support and guide national-level initiatives. For the first time, a peer-learning approach has been used to address the uneven implementation of the “key commitments” - quality assurance, recognition, the three-cycle degree system - in different countries.

Regrettably, today, only 9.4% - rather than the envisaged 20% - of graduates in the EHEA have had a mobility experience. But the benchmark set in 2009 has had an effect, as it has led to proper monitoring and follow-up actions, resulting in mobility increases. This is important in view of the renewed commitment to the 20% mobility target and the additional goal of international experience for all graduates, such as through virtual mobility. These indicate determination and readiness to take up new initiatives, to be followed by concrete action.

EUA also welcomes the concrete commitments made to promote and protect fundamental values, through monitoring, and measures to foster enhanced self-reflection, constructive dialogue and peer-learning. Institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance and the public responsibility of and for higher education are of crucial importance for education and research and for our societies. They enable universities to contribute through research and education to transparent, and participatory processes of social change and transformation, and are crucial for democracy, in particular in times of crisis. Continued investment in higher education is an important condition for maintaining these values and for succeeding in “the post-crisis recovery and the transition into green, sustainable and resilient economies and societies”, as stated in the 2020 Communiqué.

AN INNOVATING PROCESS TOWARDS 2030

For the past twenty years, the Bologna Process has provided a robust, productive and adaptable framework for collaboration and coordination of European higher education reforms, which has also demonstrated its resilience during the Covid-19 crisis. Originally considered the ultimate goal, the EHEA has since its launch in 2010 become a foundation for the shared, continuous and dynamic development and enhancement of higher education in a rapidly changing world. The Bologna Process must continue to address challenges and shortcomings and find ways to overcome them. It must also reflect on and set out new goals and concrete actions, for example on lifelong learning, the Sustainable Development Goals and the higher education sector's contribution to carbon-reduction and greening. The more systematic involvement and participation of higher education institutions and their communities in the Process would enhance implementation and build trust. It would also boast collective knowledge and experience, enabling agenda-setting for the next decade and better responses to unforeseeable developments. In all these respects, EUA and its members look forward to further contributing to the Bologna Process going forward towards 2030.

Finally, EUA would like to reiterate its deep concern about the developments in Belarus, as recently expressed in a [joint statement](#) with the European Students' Union. As democratic and human rights, but also university values, are violated, a continuation of the higher education reform process with the Belarussian Ministry appears not only inappropriate, but also impossible at this time.