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# Rome Ministerial Communiqué

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19 NOVEMBER 2020







We, the Ministers responsible for higher education, meeting online on 19 November 2020, celebrate the achievements of the 21 years since the signing of the Bologna Declaration. We reaffirm our commitment to developing a more inclusive, innovative, interconnected and resilient European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

We thank Italy for its key role in preparing and hosting our conference and for having adapted it to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EHEA is a unique cooperation, built on trust, where public authorities and higher education stakeholders work together to define and achieve shared goals. Thanks to the diversity of our cultures, languages and environments, and to our shared commitment to quality, transparency and mobility, our higher education systems offer unequalled opportunities for learning, teaching, research and innovation.

Our societies are facing unprecedented challenges connected with the worldwide spread of COVID-19 and its consequences. The pandemic has shown how interdependent we are, and how vulnerable we can be. It has made evident that we are all part of one world, where human solidarity is an imperative. We greatly appreciate and recognize the efforts of the higher education community in rising to these challenges and reaffirm our determination to provide inclusive quality higher education fulfilling its full range of purposes also in times of crisis.

We are determined to enable our higher education institutions to engage with our societies to address the multiple threats to global peace, democratic values, freedom of information, health and wellbeing – not least those created or exacerbated by the pandemic. We commit to continue and step up our investment in education, to ensure that higher education institutions have appropriate funding to develop solutions for the current crisis, post crisis recovery, and generally, the transition into green, sustainable and resilient economies and societies.

We are committed to overcoming the social inequities that still limit the achievement of a fully inclusive EHEA. Digitalisation has allowed most of our systems to continue to function during the COVID-19 pandemic, although the intensified use of digital means has brought to light certain limits. With its consolidated experience of transnational and international cooperation and research, higher education must take a leading role in exploring and advising on how to address and overcome these limitations.

We look with determination and optimism towards 2030, confident that we will succeed in fostering more effective cooperation and closer dialogue among our countries, our higher education systems and institutions and with the broader higher education community.

We are pleased to welcome San Marino as a new Member of the EHEA. San Marino will be supported in the implementation of its commitments with an agreed roadmap.

## Our Vision

We envision the EHEA as an area where students, staff and graduates can **move freely** to study, teach and do research. **The EHEA of our vision will fully respect the fundamental values of higher education and democracy and the rule of law.** It will encourage creativity, critical thinking, free circulation of knowledge and will expand the opportunities offered by technological development for research-based learning and teaching. It will ensure that our higher education systems offer all learners equitability of opportunities in accordance with their potential and aspirations. We recognize that accomplishing this will require enacting policies and implementing measures in our national frameworks, some of which will go beyond our higher education systems and will entail alignment of wider national economic, financial and social strategies.

To achieve our vision, we commit to building an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by 2030, able to underpin a sustainable, cohesive and peaceful Europe:

- **Inclusive**, because every learner will have equitable access to higher education and will be fully supported in completing their studies and training;
- **Innovative**, because it will introduce new and better aligned learning, teaching and assessment methods and practices, closely linked to research;
- **Interconnected**, because our shared frameworks and tools will continue to facilitate and enhance international cooperation and reform, exchange of knowledge and mobility of staff and students.

Higher education institutions have the potential to drive major change – improving the knowledge, skills and competences of students and society to contribute to sustainability, environmental protection and other crucial objectives. They must prepare learners to **become active, critical and responsible citizens** and offer lifelong learning opportunities to support them in their societal role.

Higher education will be a key actor in **meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030**. We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in bringing their educational, research and innovation capacities to bear on these fundamental global objectives and to deploying resources to ensure that our higher education systems contribute to the achievement of **the SDGs**. Moving towards climate neutrality is essential for all of us, and learners must be prepared for new “green” jobs and activities. They must be offered up-skilling and reskilling opportunities in a lifelong learning perspective, and enabled to develop and apply new technologies and approaches.

**Quality education** will continue to be the hallmark of the EHEA. A robust culture of **academic and scientific integrity** that blocks all forms of academic fraud and distortion of scientific truth, will be supported by all higher education institutions and all public authorities.

## Fundamental Values

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We reaffirm our commitment to promoting and protecting **our shared fundamental values in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation** as the necessary basis for quality learning, teaching and research as well as for democratic societies. We commit to upholding institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education.

We ask the BFUG to develop a **framework** for the enhancement of the fundamental values of the EHEA that will foster self-reflection, constructive dialogue and peer-learning across national authorities, higher education institutions and organisations, while also making it possible to assess the degree to which these are honoured and implemented in our systems. We adopt the **definition of academic freedom** as freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research, teaching, learning and communication in and with society without interference nor fear of reprisal (**Annex I**).

We reaffirm our commitment to fostering ethics, transparency and integrity in and through education and research and note that the Council of Europe's Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) offers the possibility for all EHEA members, consultative members and partners to cooperate to reach this goal.

## Building the Future

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### An inclusive EHEA

**Socially inclusive higher education** will remain at the core of the EHEA and will require providing opportunities and support for equitable inclusion of individuals from all parts of society. Learners with diverse socio-economic, professional, cultural and educational backgrounds must have the possibility and the tools to seek out and avail themselves, at any time of life, of the educational options most useful for them.

We commit to reinforcing social inclusion and enhancing quality education, using fully the new opportunities provided by digitalisation. While our societies increasingly rely on innovative technologies, including artificial intelligence, we must ensure that these observe ethical standards and human rights and foster inclusion. We recognize that digitalisation does not offer 'one size fits all' solutions, and ask the BFUG to propose ways in which all learners can benefit from the new technologies.

We adopt the **"Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA"** (**Annex II**) based on a broadened understanding of the social dimension, and commit to implementing them in our systems. We will engage in wide-ranging policy dialogue on how to implement the principles and guidelines fully at national level. We will support our higher education institutions in integrating them into their institutional culture and core missions: learning and teaching, research and innovation, knowledge circulation and outreach, institutional governance and management. We ask the BFUG to report back to us in 2024 on the steps taken and the related monitoring measures to assure evidence-based follow-up.

We recognize the importance of safeguarding student rights through legislation; we commit to developing and supporting them in our national systems through dedicated measures and structures, such as student ombudspersons or similar solutions that already exist in many EHEA countries. We commit to enabling such arrangements within our countries and higher education systems and will encourage cooperation within the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE).

## An innovative EHEA

We support our higher education institutions in intensifying their search for **solutions to the challenges our societies face**. The **social, human and creative sciences and arts** must continue to play their vital role, giving depth to our lives and enabling us to understand and act in a changing world. Our higher education institutions must engage with their communities to undertake mutually beneficial and socially responsible joint activities.

**Swift up-dating of knowledge, skills and competences** will be required to respond to the challenges and develop the opportunities that the new decade will bring. Higher education institutions will continue to diversify their learning offer and innovate in contents and modes of delivery in order to respond to growing needs for innovative and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership, teamwork and problem solving abilities, as well as enterprising attitudes.

**Flexible and open learning paths**, part of the original inspiration for the Bologna Process, are important aspects of **student-centred learning** and are in increasing demand in our societies. In addition to full degree programmes, many higher education institutions offer or plan to offer **smaller units of learning**, which enable learners to develop or update their cultural, professional, and transversal skills and competences at various stages in their lives. We ask the BFUG to explore how and to what extent these **smaller, flexible units, including those leading to micro-credentials**, can be defined, developed, implemented and recognised by our institutions using EHEA tools.

We adopt the “**Recommendations to National Authorities for the Enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA**” (Annex III) and commit to follow them, supporting higher education institutions in further implementing student-centred learning and teaching. The recommendations comprise increased support for all learners, and for teaching and non-teaching staff. Academic staff, including junior academics, require stable employment and career opportunities, parity of esteem for teaching and research, attractive working conditions, access to up-to-date staff development, and recognition of their achievements. In all these respects we will foster dialogue and collaboration on learning and teaching in our national systems and at EHEA level.

We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in using digital technologies for learning, teaching and assessment, as well as for academic communication and research, and to investing in the **development of digital skills and competences for all**. We commit to the development of open science and education to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and **openly licensed materials** that can be easily shared among higher education stakeholders, who can adapt and repurpose them for their needs.

## An interconnected EHEA

**Cooperation and mobility** connect our systems and foster the development of intercultural and linguistic competences, broader knowledge and understanding of our world. Direct contacts and synergies among our diverse cultures and higher education systems through mobility of staff and students contribute to the excellence and relevance of higher education in the EHEA, making it attractive and competitive on the global scale. We acknowledge the importance and the benefits of physical mobility for students, doctoral candidates and staff. Notwithstanding the current difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we reaffirm our target that at least **20% of those graduating in the EHEA** should have experienced a study or training period abroad, and **further commit to enabling all learners to acquire international and intercultural competences through internationalisation of the curricula** or participation in **innovative international environments** in their home institutions, and to **experience some form of mobility**, whether in physical, digitally enhanced (virtual) or blended formats.

Digital solutions will facilitate secure, efficient and transparent **exchange of data**. Joint digital approaches to enhance recognition, quality assurance and mobility are needed. We ask the BFUG to map existing and find new solutions to enhance the interoperability of digital systems and the exchange of student and institutional data in full respect of privacy and security, taking into account the experiences of the European Student Card Initiative and other initiatives.

Deeper cooperation between higher education institutions will help to address the above objectives through joint teaching and research. We will strive to eliminate obstacles to cooperation at national levels and to enable all higher education institutions in the EHEA to benefit from it. The alliances formed under the European Universities Initiative constitute one important way of exploring deeper, larger scale systemic cooperation, which can prove helpful for detecting and overcoming the obstacles to closer transnational cooperation by higher education institutions in the future.

## Implementation

We take note of the results described in the **Bologna Process Implementation Report** on the progress made over the past two decades. The achievements are impressive. Nevertheless more work is required to ensure that the EHEA is built on strong foundations, capable of supporting interconnected, innovative and inclusive higher education in the coming decade.

We count on the continuous support of the Erasmus Programme and other mobility and cooperation programmes to support our commitments.

In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing implementation of three “**Key Commitments**” essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

We reconfirm our determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented. We ask the BFUG to continue to employ the **peer support method** to achieve this. We commit to the continued participation in and contribution to this effort.

We commit to completing and further developing the **National Qualifications Frameworks** compatible with the **Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)** and ask the BFUG to update the criteria for self-certification to include a stronger element of peer review of national reports. We mandate the **Network of QF correspondents** to continue its work, contributing to the further development of the QF-EHEA and the self-certification of national qualifications frameworks against it.

We will strengthen the implementation of the **Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention** and apply its principles to qualifications and periods of study outside the EHEA, using common assessment criteria and reports, in collaboration with the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

We will ensure **automatic recognition of academic qualifications and periods of study within the EHEA** so that students, staff and graduates are able to move freely to study, teach and do research. We will make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with the ESG and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established. We also encourage the application of agreed and secure systems of digital certification and communication such as blockchain, as well as the further development of the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) to facilitate automatic recognition.

We commit to reviewing our own legislation, regulations, and practice to ensure fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situations, even when they cannot be fully documented, in accordance with Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We welcome the **European Qualifications Passport for Refugees** and will support further broadening its use in our systems.

We acknowledge the progress made in the development of **quality assurance systems** aligned with the ESG, and we commit to removing the remaining obstacles, including those related to the cross-border operation of EQAR-registered agencies and the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. We commit to ensuring that our external quality assurance arrangements cover transnational higher education in the EHEA with equal standards as for domestic provision. In view of the need for increased flexibility and openness of learning paths, smaller units of learning and greater synergies among higher education institutions, we encourage **an enhancement-oriented use of the ESG to support innovation in higher education and its quality assurance**.

We commit to strengthening cooperation with the **European Research Area**. We call for the BFUG to work closely with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) to enhance synergies and alignment between education and research and innovation policies. Focus will be inter alia on developing research-based learning, guaranteeing academic and scientific freedom, and contributing to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

We commit to **building a more closely connected and sustainable higher education community**, which fosters inclusion, communication, cooperation, and solidarity, essential for the **relevance and excellence of the future EHEA**. To accomplish this, we commit to keeping our national higher education sectors informed about and involved in EHEA developments, and to working closely with student and higher education associations and networks on the development and implementation of national reforms. We recognize the importance of the broad consultations carried out to identify priorities for the future of the EHEA, and ask the BFUG to organize EHEA events such as **transnational seminars, workshops and hearings** involving the wider higher education community (students, academic staff and external stakeholders), to discuss present and future goals and explore collaborative ways to address them.

## The EHEA in a global setting

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While the COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible to hold the Global Policy Forum as intended, we are pleased that our Conference includes a global session. We recommit to international dialogue on higher education values, policies, and reforms, drawing on the experiences of the EHEA as well as those of other areas of the world, and ask the BFUG to further develop and strengthen Global Dialogue in the coming work period.

We welcome the adoption of the **UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education and commit to ratifying it promptly**, in order to facilitate fair recognition of qualifications and periods of study from outside the EHEA, using Lisbon Recognition Convention compliant assessment criteria and reports.

We appreciate the inclusion in the recently updated **Magna Charta Universitatum** of the global values of diversity and social and civic responsibility.

## Conclusion

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We call on the BFUG to address the actions and priorities indicated for the next decade with the overall purpose of creating a **European Higher Education Area that fulfils our vision and achieves our goals by 2030**. For our Conference in 2024 we mandate the BFUG to produce an implementation report assessing progress in our agreed commitments.

We gratefully accept the offer by Albania to host the next Ministerial Conference of the EHEA and the Global Policy Forum in 2024.

## Annexes

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- **Annex I** to the Rome Ministerial Communiqué: Statement on Academic Freedom
- **Annex II** to the Rome Ministerial Communiqué: Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA
- **Annex III** to the Rome Ministerial Communiqué: Recommendations to National Authorities for the Enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA









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# Rome Ministerial Communiqué

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## A N N E X I



EUROPEAN  
Higher Education Area



bologna  
process



ITALIAN **BFUG** SECRETARIAT  
2018-2020

## Statement on Academic Freedom

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This text, developed by the BFUG in consultation with a range of experts and stakeholder organisations, aims to outline a shared understanding of academic freedom for the EHEA, and to provide a first basis for the future development of indicators.

Academic freedom is an indispensable aspect of quality learning, teaching and research in higher education as well as of democracy. It is a necessary condition for higher education institutions to produce and transmit knowledge as a public good for the benefit of society. It guarantees academics and students the freedom of thought and inquiry to advance knowledge through research and to exchange openly, as well as the freedom to communicate the results of research within and outside of the framework of academic institutions and programmes.

Academic freedom is a distinct, fundamental democratic right in part grounded in the right to education, and shares elements with freedom of thought, opinion and expression. Academic freedom must be framed by rigorous scientific and professional standards, respect for the rights of others, ethical conduct and the awareness of the impact of research on humans and their environment. It is crucial in order to advance the standards of academic disciplines and fields of enquiry. As such, academic freedom protects not only individual scholarship and expression but also the free functioning of academic institutions in democratic societies. Institutional autonomy is constitutive for academic freedom.

Academic freedom designates the freedom of the academic community - including academic staff and students - in respect of research, teaching and learning and, more broadly, the dissemination of research and teaching outcomes both within and outside the higher education sector. In essence the concept ensures that the academic community may engage in research, teaching, learning and communication in society without fear of reprisal.

Academic freedom is also an essential element of democracy. Societies cannot be genuinely democratic without honouring academic freedom and institutional autonomy. At the same time, the fundamental values of the EHEA cannot be fully realised except in democratic societies. Academic freedom is similar to freedom of expression and is both informed by the standards of academic disciplines and provides the condition for challenging these standards based on the results of research.

The concept, although seemingly simple, is in reality highly complex, and intricately related to other fundamental values such as institutional autonomy and public responsibility for and of higher education. Academic freedom is a universal value rooted in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Its core tenets cannot be understood and interpreted differently in different national contexts or types of higher education institution. But academic freedom is not an absolute value, and its exercise is shaped by the institutions in which we work and the societies in which we live. Thus the range of conduct and boundaries of enquiry and expression which academic freedom protects are often a source of debate.

Academic freedom can be understood to comprise the freedom to learn, to teach and to research, with each of these freedoms entailing the freedom to think, to question, and to share ideas, both inside and outside the higher education sector. Giving meaning and life to these freedoms in the reality of the academic environment automatically opens up a number of issues. The freedom to teach can only be realised concretely in combination with public and social responsibility and institutional autonomy. Public authorities have the responsibility to ensure that relevant higher education programmes are offered to citizens, while autonomous higher education institutions assume a

large responsibility for research underpinning programmes, and for how programmes are taught. Academic staff also exercise a strong responsibility in setting the curriculum and programme components, and developing the teaching methods employed.

Higher education governance also has an impact on the freedoms to learn, teach and research, and should be organised consciously in ways that respect academic freedom. Different governance models co-exist in Europe with academic staff and students differently represented in governing and decision-making bodies. Participation in governing bodies may favour the teaching and research missions of the institution and may reflect the goal of broader societal engagement. Whatever the particular model, academic staff and students should participate meaningfully in decision-making processes and have the right to express their views on their institution's policies and priorities without fear of reprisals.

Values are inter-connected, and the freedom to teach also raises the question of who is to be taught and is thus intimately linked to the freedom to learn. In turn these values relate to equitable access, with a range of issues on criteria and conditions for access to higher education needing to be addressed through societal dialogue and administrative procedures.

Similarly questions also need to be asked about who is doing the teaching and research, and the kind of decision-making process in place for academic staff recruitment and retention. It is essential to ensure that academic staff benefit from sufficiently secure employment conditions to be able to exercise academic freedom. Academic staff should never suffer threats, dismissal, or other sanctions in relation to the content of their research, teaching or stated professional views.

The freedom to research includes the right, consistent with professional standards of the respective discipline, to determine: what shall (or shall not) be researched; how it shall be researched; who shall research, with whom and for what purpose research shall be pursued; the methods by which, and avenues through which, research findings shall be disseminated.

These questions cannot be addressed in a vacuum. Determining which research programmes or disciplines are offered at any given institution is a complex question involving public authorities and institutions in difficult, strategic choices. Research requires financing – which may come from both public and private sources – and in many cases also requires careful consideration of ethical issues.

Although academic freedom is intrinsic to quality higher education, it is not a value that can be automatically assumed. Rather the interaction of the different elements and conditions that ensure that academic freedom is operationalised need to be constructed, regularly assessed, protected and promoted.





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# Rome Ministerial Communiqué

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A N N E X II







# Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA

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Prepared by the BFUG Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension

## Introduction

The 2018 Paris Communiqué recognized the need to guide member states on how to define and implement policy for improving the social dimension of the EHEA. This document outlines core principles and guidelines, which we believe are fundamental to the further development of the social dimension in higher education. This document takes as its starting point the definition of the social dimension provided in the 2007 London Communiqué, namely that the composition of the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should correspond to the heterogeneous social profile of society at large in the EHEA countries. The Advisory Group for Social Dimension also goes beyond the before mentioned definition and has enlarged the definition by stressing that the social dimension encompasses creation of inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities.

The principles and guidelines within this document complement the EHEA 2020 strategy “Widening Participation for Equity and Growth”, which ministers adopted in Yerevan in 2015 as a means to further strengthen the social dimension while concomitantly contributing to increasing quality in higher education. The social dimension should interconnect the principles of accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion into all laws, policies and practices concerning higher education in such a way that access, participation, progress and completion of higher education depend primarily on students’ abilities, not on their personal characteristics or circumstances beyond their direct influence. With this scope at heart, public authorities should support the implementation of these Principles and Guidelines by offering a legal, financial, administrative and informative framework that can initiate processes of implementation at the local level. This framework will promote inclusive strategies, which provide both specific support for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented students<sup>2</sup> as well as highlight broader measures and policies wherefrom the student population and staff employed at higher education institutions can mutually benefit.

Increased participation of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in higher education produces wider benefits with respect to decreased social welfare provision, improved health outcomes and increased community involvement. Collectively, these wider benefits sustain cohesive, democratic societies where social justice, public good, public responsibility and social mobility prevail. Graduate qualifications delivered to a wider pool of citizens means better employment prospects, higher earnings premiums and the passing on of an appreciation for the benefits of higher education to the next generation and to their local communities. Beyond reaching the commitments made by the EHEA, taking a holistic and proactive approach to improving the social dimension of higher education further serves to accelerate progress in attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

These Principles and Guidelines set the course for the next decade of the EHEA for public authorities and higher education institutions to integrate these principles into the core higher education missions: learning and teaching, research, innovation, knowledge exchange and outreach, institutional governance and management, as well as in the policies for empowering present and future students and higher education staff. Improving the social dimension by moving beyond widening accessibility clauses and instead focusing on the concept of ‘leaving no one behind’ is a crucial step forward when looking to strengthen our societies and democracies. Supporting diverse learning

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible at [http://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/71/5/Widening\\_Participation\\_for\\_Equity\\_and\\_Growth\\_A\\_Strategy\\_for\\_the\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_SD\\_and\\_LLL\\_in\\_the\\_EHEA\\_to\\_2020\\_613715.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/71/5/Widening_Participation_for_Equity_and_Growth_A_Strategy_for_the_Development_of_the_SD_and_LLL_in_the_EHEA_to_2020_613715.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Glossary of Terms and Definitions related to the definitions for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented students is at the end of this document.

environments is a necessity and should be seen as an investment towards societies, and public authorities need to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that the proposed principles and guidelines are consulted, adjusted to national realities and implemented, in order to safeguard a better future for our higher education systems.

Principles in the text below should be understood as high-level statements that serve as a basis for the conceptualization of different policies for social dimension enhancement. Guidelines are recommendations intended to advise policy makers on how the principles should be implemented in practice. Therefore, the entirety of this document is not to be seen as a checklist, but rather as the basis for continuous improvement of policies and their effective implementation at national and institutional level.

## Principles

- 1. The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level.** Strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment.

### Guidelines:

Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education should be aligned with concrete targets that can either be integrated within existing higher education policies or developed in parallel. These targets should aim at widening access, supporting participation in and completion of studies for all current and future students.

In the process of creating strategies there should be a broad-based dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions, student and staff representatives and other key stakeholders, including social partners, non-governmental organisations and people from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. This broad-based dialogue is to ensure the creation of inclusive higher education strategies that foster equity and diversity, and are responsive to the needs of the wider community.

- 2. Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.**

### Guidelines:

Legal regulations and administrative rules should allow sufficient flexibility in the design, organisation and delivery of study programmes to reflect the diversity of students' needs. Higher education institutions should be enabled to organise full-time and part-time studies, flexible study modes, blended and distance learning as well as to recognise prior learning (RPL), in order to accommodate the needs of the diverse student population.

Public authorities should promote recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) in higher education, because it has a positive impact on widening access, transition and completion, equity and inclusion, mobility and employability. RPL enables flexible modes of lifelong learning in the entire education sector, including higher education. Implementing RPL will require effective cooperation amongst the higher education system, employers and the wider community and to enable this national qualifications frameworks should facilitate transparent recognition of learning outcomes and reliable quality assurance procedures.

**3. The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.**

**Guidelines:**

It is important to create synergies with all education levels and related policy areas (such as finance, employment, health and social welfare, housing, migration etc.) in order to develop policy measures that create an inclusive environment throughout the entire education sector that fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion, and is responsive to the needs of the wider community.

The social dimension policies should not only support current students, but also potential students in their preparation and transition into higher education. Participation in higher education has to be a lifelong option, including for adults who decide to return to or enter higher education at later stages in their lives. An inclusive approach needs to involve wider communities, higher education institutions and other stakeholder groups to co-create pathways to higher education.

Equity, diversity and inclusion should play a key role in the training of pre higher education teachers.

**4. Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education.** Higher education systems should define the purpose and goals of collecting certain types of data, taking into account the particularities of the national legal frameworks. Adequate capacities to collect, process and use such data to inform and support the social dimension of higher education should be developed.

**Guidelines:**

In order to develop effective policies, continuous national data collection is necessary. Within the limits of national legal frameworks, such data collection should provide information on the composition of the student body, access and participation, drop-out and completion of higher education, including the transition to the labour market after completion of studies, and allow for the identification of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

In order to make such data collection comparable internationally, work on categories for administrative data collection that are relevant for the social dimension should be developed at the EHEA level through Eurostudent or similar surveys. With the aim to rationalize the process and avoid administrative burden on public administration and higher education institutions, this development should take account of existing national practices and relevant data collection processes.

Such national data collection exercises could, where relevant and necessary, be complemented by higher education institutions undertaking additional surveys, research and analysis to better understand vulnerability, disadvantages, and underrepresentation in education, as well as transitions of students across the education system.

- 5. Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.** These services should be coherent across the entire education system, with special regard to transitions between different educational levels, educational institutions and into the labour market.

**Guidelines:**

Public authorities should create conditions that enable collaboration between different public institutions that provide counselling and guidance services together with higher education institutions in order to create synergies and omit duplication of similar services. These services should uphold the principles of clarity and user-friendliness, because end users must be capable of understanding them easily.

Within a diverse student body, special attention should be directed towards students with physical and psychological health challenges. These students should have access to professional support to secure their success in accessing and completing higher education studies. Special focus should be placed on prevention of psychological challenges caused by the organisation of study and students' living conditions.

Public authorities should also consider setting up ombudsperson-type institutions that will have the capacity and knowledge to mediate any conflicts, particularly related to equity issues that may arise during accessing or participating in higher education, or conflicts that hinder the completion of studies.

- 6. Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.**

**Guidelines:**

Higher education funding systems should facilitate the attainment of strategic objectives related to the social dimension of higher education. Higher education institutions should be supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation in and completion of higher education studies, in particular in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Mechanisms for achieving these targets should not have negative financial consequences for higher education institutions' core funding.

Financial support systems should aim to be universally applicable to all students, however, when this is not possible, the public student financial support systems should be primarily needs-based and should make higher education affordable for all students, foster access to and provide opportunities for success in higher education. They should mainly contribute to cover both the direct costs of study (fees and study materials) and the indirect costs (e.g. accommodation, which is becoming increasingly problematic for students across the EHEA due to the increased housing, living, and transportation costs, etc.).

- 7. Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.**

**Guidelines:**

Public authorities should support and provide adequate means to higher education institutions to improve initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff to enable them to work professionally and equitably with a diverse student body and staff.

Whenever possible, external quality assurance systems should address how the social dimension, diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion are reflected within the institutional missions of higher education institutions, whilst respecting the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions.

- 8. International mobility programs in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.**

**Guidelines:**

International experiences through learning mobility improve the quality of learning outcomes in higher education. Public authorities and higher education institutions should ensure equal access for all to the learning opportunities offered by national and international learning and training mobility programmes and actively address obstacles to mobility for vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff.

Besides further support to physical mobility, including full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, public authorities and higher education institutions should facilitate the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support blended mobility and to foster internationalisation at home by embedding international online cooperation into courses. Blended mobility is the combination of a period of physical mobility and a period of online learning. Such online cooperation can be used to extend the learning outcomes and enhance the impact of physical mobility, for example by bringing together a more diverse group of participants, or to offer a broader range of mobility options.

**9. Higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.**

**Guidelines:**

Community engagement should be considered as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Like social dimension policies, community engagement should be embedded in core missions of higher education. It should engage with teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange, students and staff and management of higher education institutions. Such engagement provides a holistic basis on which universities can address a broad range of societal needs, including those of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, while enriching their teaching, research and other core functions.

Community stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, cultural organisations, non-governmental organisations, businesses, citizens) should be able to meaningfully engage with higher education actors through open dialogue. This will enable genuine university-community partnerships, which can effectively address social and democratic challenges.

**10. Public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented both at national system and institutional level.**

**Guidelines:**

Such policy dialogue should allow to develop fit for purpose policy measures, which should respect institutional autonomy, avoid any unnecessary administrative burden, and thus enable concrete progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

Within the scope of the above principles and guidelines, peer support and exchange of good practices are crucial among EHEA countries in order to facilitate progress towards the inclusiveness of higher education systems.

## Glossary of Terms and Definitions<sup>3</sup>

*This glossary defines the three central terms in this document, namely underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students. The definitions are not to be understood as legal definitions and therefore do not conflict with any existing legal regulations, rather they are intended as explanatory definitions used in relation to the contents of the Principles and Guidelines.*

### **Underrepresented students:**

A group of learners is underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g. gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background, ethnic minorities) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group in the total population. This can be documented at the time of admission, during the course of studies or at graduation. Individuals usually have several underrepresented characteristics, which is why combinations of underrepresented characteristics ("intersectionality") should always be considered. Furthermore, underrepresentation can also impact at different levels of higher education – study programme, faculty or department, higher education institution, higher education system.

This definition is complementary to the London Communiqué, *"that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations"*, but does not fully cover it.

### **Disadvantaged students:**

Disadvantaged students often face specific challenges compared to their peers in higher education. This can take many forms (e.g. disability, low family income, little or no family support, orphan, many school moves, mental health, pregnancy, having less time to study because one has to earn one's living by working or having caring duties). The disadvantage may be permanent, may occur from time to time or only for a limited period.

Disadvantaged students can be part of an underrepresented group, but do not have to be. Therefore, disadvantaged and underrepresented are not synonymous.

### **Vulnerable students:**

Vulnerable students may be at risk of disadvantage (see above) and in addition have special (protection) needs. For example, because they suffer from an illness (including mental health) or have a disability, because they are minors, because their residence permit depends on the success of their studies (and thus also on decisions made by individual teachers), because they are at risk of being discriminated against. These learners are vulnerable in the sense that they may not be able to ensure their personal well-being, or that they may not be able to protect themselves from harm or exploitation and need additional support or attention.

<sup>3</sup>This glossary is intended only for the purpose of these Principles and Guidelines.











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# Rome Ministerial Communiqué

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A N N E X   I I I





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

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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.



