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BOLOGNA POLICY FORUM: THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Bologna May 2018 – Bologna Policy Forum round tables draft for discussion

The objective of these short notes is to set the scene of each round table in order to prepare a briefing for the Bologna Policy Forum.

Universities across the world are facing the implications of internationalisation and globalisation, societal changes and new forms of knowledge and the massification of Higher Education. In many countries there is debate about the future role of universities at a time of rapid social and value change. The EHEA is committed to collaborating with international partners on issues of common concern in Higher Education in order to be a positive agent for change. It aims to identify good practice both within and outside the EHEA and will focus on how effective dialogue and policy learning can take place across different social and cultural settings within the constraints facing universities. The Bologna Policy Forum is launching this dialogue through bringing together leading policy makers, international organisations and experts to understand and share experience and identify future goals. [Between 2018 and 2020 it proposes to the Ministers to support the continuing role that the EHEA can play in a globalised world by the establishment of a new Global Working Group and the organisation of two peer learning global seminars on Inclusive Higher Education and the Social and Civic Role of Universities.

Round table 1: Widening access and ensuring success for all in higher education.

Access and success in higher education are important components of most countries' social and economic agendas. Universities around the world have come under increasing pressure to reflect the diversity of the societies within which they operate and to improve graduate outcomes and to enrich the student experience. Higher Education Institutions have to tackle the issue of how to successfully recruit students from different backgrounds, including under-represented groups, life-long learners, migrants and international students. Increasingly there is a focus not just on 'fair access' but also on retention, progression, successful completion and good labour market and social outcomes for different groups of students. There have been a number of innovations in inclusivity across the world and including within Europe the recent Gothenburg Communication that emphasised the importance of inclusive education. The European Commission's new strategy on Higher Education (COM/2017/247) outlines direct ERASMUS+ support for HEIs to develop and implement integrated institutional strategies for inclusion, gender equality and study success from admission to graduation.

Learning from good practice in this area requires an understanding of the domestic social and political contexts of higher education, a grasp of the wider geopolitics of higher education and a discussion of trends and barriers. The integration of different groups, including underrepresented groups, older students, refugees and migrants, into higher education institutions can be highly politicised and challenging against a background of domestic cuts in university funding. Barriers can include funding, entrenched societal values, economic geography and the need to change university practice and even countries with a long commitment to increasing diversity have found it an area that is difficult to reform.

Recent changes in higher education across the globe in the transformation of pedagogy with increasing digitalisation, the development of open resources and changes in patterns of learning could open up new possibilities for widening access and it will be useful to share and compare experience in this area. Successfully widening access requires 'mainstreaming' and taking a critical look at how all existing policies affect access. It is also important to consider the international dimension to access. For example,

it is now becoming recognised within the EHEA that mobility programmes -which provide valuable opportunities for internationalisation, increasing diversity and human development- tend to favour already advantaged students.

The aim of this round table is to see what policies work in different educational systems and what the challenges are. Sharing different perspectives on how to support diversity will help to drive progressive change in widening access where the European Higher Education Area can provide a useful over-arching framework for global policy dialogue and learning on issues of common concern.

Examples of questions to the potential speaker (s):

- What is the most important priority for access in your country and what can we learn from your experience?
- What are the particular issues for migrants in accessing higher education in your country?
- How can mobility schemes prioritise inclusivity?
- Are there any international initiatives that could positively benefit inclusivity?
- What kind of policies have you found useful in addressing issues of fair access, retention and success?

Round Table 2: Higher Education Social responsibility: The civic role of higher education institutions

Some argue that the civic role and social value of higher education institutions has diminished in the last few decades, and criticisms of the “ivory tower” and academic insularity remain prevalent. Calls for greater public accountability have brought higher education’s contribution to the public good back into focus. While the responsibility of higher education to society is not new, there is growing recognition that contemporary social challenges demand collective solutions that require both local and global engagement. Thus, many countries are recognising wider social, cultural and civic role that higher education institutions can or should play in their communities.

There are a number of organisations such as the Council of Europe, the Talloires Network and the Magna Carta Observatory that support the role of universities in strengthening values and enhancing civic life. There is also a key role for the EHEA to share good practice internationally on values and the civic and social role of universities.

At a time when inequality, xenophobia, political extremism and populism are on the rise, the civic role of higher education institutions is seen by many EHEA countries as a way of building social cohesion by providing students with values, skills and aptitudes that promote civic participation, social inclusion, sustainability and global citizenship. By engaging with communities, being open to participation in public debates and helping to explain and address current issues for a broader audience, Higher Education staff can become thought leaders and help to counter extremism and populism.

Higher education institutions are a rich source of knowledge and resources that can contribute to the economic and social development of their surrounding communities. In addition to helping build human capital, create knowledge and drive innovation, higher education institutions can provide a wide range of services that address local needs – for example, input into health and welfare services or providing centres for culture and arts. Academic staff and students engage in volunteering and outreach activities and many higher education institutions provide opportunities for continuing education and lifelong learning.

Active engagement with society can entail the establishment of partnerships between universities and local, regional and national government and industries to tackle problems and to meet the needs of the community. Academic staff can work with these partners to develop curricula that develop the skills needed now and in the future. Engagement with the community can also be embedded in the curriculum through pedagogical approaches such as experiential and service learning and curricular and extracurricular activities ranging from volunteering and public service to internships. This can help students better understand how a particular community works and the problems it faces.

Engagement with society can also be an integral part of research. By working closely with the community, researchers can create new knowledge in consultation with specialist groups or the wider public. They can work with local citizens on ‘citizen science’ projects to jointly investigate and solve problems. Medical researchers can work with patients to ‘co-produce solutions’ to medical problems.

In this context, the sharing of good practice and seeing what works across different educational systems can be invaluable as a way of realising higher education's social responsibility and the civic role of Universities. This round table will consider differing interpretations, challenges and opportunities related to the civic role of higher education institutions both within and outside the EHEA.

Examples of questions to the potential speaker (s):

- To what extent is the idea of a civic or social role embodied in the mission or constitution of your higher education system?
- What does the civic role of higher education mean in your country/jurisdiction?
- What incentives are provided to higher education institutions in your country/jurisdiction for public or civic engagement?
- What are the barriers to enhancing the civic role of higher education?