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and Culture



Future of the EHEA - Thematic discussion on vision and priorities

Concept note for the breakout sessions

This concept note focuses on inspiring a forward-looking discussion on the future of European Higher Education Area during the breakout sessions. As agreed in the roadmap the aim of this thematic discussion is to develop further the vision for the EHEA beyond 2020.

EHEA is unique area where governments, higher education institutions and stakeholders shape the landscape of higher education together. Much attention has been given to comparability and transparency of higher education systems in order to help students, graduates and staff to be able to move smoothly across the EHEA. Working together has greatly increased the quality and attractiveness of our higher education, and we hope for further development of all forms of mobility in the future.

Discussions during the breakout sessions will build on the results of the consultations at the national level and on the work done previously in the BFUG. An online survey on the governance and thematic priorities of the EHEA after 2020 was carried out in October 2018. Five priorities that received most mentions were linking EHEA and ERA, supporting students from non-traditional background, using digital technologies, promoting active and responsible citizens and enhancing teacher support. Results of the questionnaire emphasized among other priorities that "implementation of key commitments" should always be seen as a priority.

The discussion in the Bucharest BFUG meeting focused on what the foreseeable changes in society and in the economy of the EHEA and the wider world will mean for higher education, and how and whether the present structures and tools of the EHEA will be sufficient for the future scenario, or whether – and how – they will need to be adapted. The findings from the Bucharest discussion were grouped under seven general themes:

- The societal role of higher education
- Inclusiveness of higher education
- Innovative, flexible and relevant learning and teaching
- Lifelong learning
- Digitalisation
- Internationalisation and mobility
- Governance and autonomy

Outcomes of the national consultations further elaborated the seven themes mentioned above. The results cover a wide range of proposals from systemic reforms to identification of national targets. There is a need to further examine the outcomes and combine the results to the discussion of the BFUG about the further vision of the EHEA.

What EHEA should become by 2030 and beyond?

Beyond the present commitments and the several priorities for the future higher education, we should find a coherent overall vision of the future for the European Higher Education Area around which to build consent. Another important dimension is to consider how we can make reforms effective in the framework of EHEA and how to link structural reforms and tools with broader political goals. The following paragraphs highlight sustainability, fundamental values and a stronger connection and engagement with the higher education



community as crucial elements in a vision for the future and a clearer image of what the EHEA can and should become by 2030 and beyond.

Climate change, globalisation, and technological development are all transforming the world perhaps faster than ever before. This transformation also creates insecurity and concerns about what lies ahead. Especially young people are actively engaged in the fight against climate change.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. In the Paris Communiqué the Ministers already committed to developing the role of higher education in securing a sustainable future for our planet and our societies and to finding ways in which they, as EHEA Ministers, can contribute to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at global, European and national levels. The vision for the future might highlight how the EHEA can help reach this goal.

Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education have been identified as fundamental values and the backbone of the EHEA in the Paris Communiqué. Should the commitment to promoting and protecting fundamental values be a more prominent element of the EHEA by 2030? When we consider the vision for the future, we should think about how to put the commitment to values into practice and what can be done to intensify political dialogue and cooperation among EHEA countries.

Increasing belonging, sharing, collaboration and participation of universities, students, staff, employers, other stakeholders and society at large are essential to the widespread acceptance and understanding of the EHEA. Higher education institutions must look ahead to prepare the future generations and more generally to give guidance to society, to deal proactively with new challenges, and to contribute to ensuring a more cohesive and inclusive society. Therefore, we need to think how to communicate more broadly and to motivate all stakeholders to participate in common effort. Do we need or would it be helpful to have the new image or a goal of creating a “European Higher Education Community” within the EHEA by 2030?

Main questions for discussion:

1. What should be the role of higher education and the EHEA in securing sustainable future and meeting the United Nations SDGs? How can the EHEA work towards these goals?
2. How should the protection and promotion of the fundamental values be reflected in the future vision of the EHEA?
3. Do you think that the idea (and goal) of European Higher Education Community could be useful for building the future of the EHEA? What should it mean in practice?
4. In addition to the present EHEA commitments and priorities, what other elements would help to shift the emphasis and clarify what the EHEA should become by 2030 and beyond?