

The Bologna Process looks towards its third decade: Enhancing achievements and responding to a changing context

The Bologna Process and the proclamation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010 have been a success, as they have:

- enabled consolidated reform processes across European higher education systems and institutions, and produced commonly shared policies, frameworks and instruments that respond to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.
- facilitated higher education exchange and collaboration among participating countries and organisations at policy and institutional levels, strengthened the role of European higher education sector representative organisations, and enabled the building of alliances which have become an important hallmark of the EHEA. No other region in the world has built such active links and relations in higher education.
- confirmed the merits and the importance of cooperation among Bologna signatory countries through the development of the EHEA while also engaging internationally.
- underlined the important role of the European Union, which participates actively in the Process, but also shares resources and provides support. This has had a positive impact on the Bologna Process, and also brought benefits for the EU and its members.
- demonstrated the critical importance of both active collaboration and partnership between ministries and the higher education sector, that include institutional leadership, academic and administrative staff, and students, as well as growing alliances with external stakeholders.
- revealed that successful higher education reforms require an interplay between bottom-up and top-down approaches, with ministries and higher education institutions acting together, thus serving the common interest.
- contributed more generally to enhancing the international visibility and understanding of European higher education, while promoting internationalisation through mobility and cooperation with other parts of the world.

Therefore, the European University Association:

1) values the achievements of the EHEA.

It has enabled participating countries and pan-European organisations to establish shared goals, and to work together to coordinate reforms at the national level – in particular in the areas of quality assurance, recognition, the introduction of the three-cycle system, support to mobility, and greater collaboration. Systems and institutions benefit from the European frameworks and instruments that have been developed. A joint, stakeholder-led organisation, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), has been created. The Bologna Implementation Report provides a reliable assessment of progress - including on where it is lacking.

2) calls for a more systematic implementation of reforms, and thus supports the new “peer support approach”.

On behalf of the European higher education community and in close collaboration with EURASHE, EUA has committed to join the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) that will manage a new “peer support approach”. This approach will focus on the implementation of recognition, quality assurance, and qualification frameworks – with the possibility of extension to other policy areas if peer support is regarded as successful.

3) calls on countries and higher education institutions to address social inclusion and equity.

According to the Bologna Implementation Report, little if any progress has been made over the past 10 years in this important area. In Yerevan in 2015, ministers committed to develop, implement and monitor “a coherent set of policy measures” under the EHEA Social Dimension Strategy Widening Participation for Equity and Growth - for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning.

4) calls on the Bologna Process to address university values, such as autonomy, academic freedom, student and staff participation, as well as fostering civic values.

Higher education institutions are educating greater numbers of people to be able to take their place in society and to become enlightened global citizens. Without attention given to both university and civic values in our education systems, neither Europe’s higher education nor its societies will be successful in the future.

5) welcomes the Bologna Process’s commitment to putting a stronger emphasis on the transformation of learning and teaching, including digital provision.

Progress on these topics will require joint strategic efforts from both institutions and their members, and policy makers. EUA calls for a systematic consultation of the higher education sector and relevant organisations, in order to explore whether action could be provided at the European level and what added value it could bring, e.g. with regard to supporting institutional strategies, and to promoting and recognising teaching as part of academic careers. EUA has pointed to this and other issues in a [position paper on learning and teaching](#) (2018) and a [discussion paper on digitalisation](#) (2016).

6) invites a systematic consideration of the role of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of the Bologna Process.

The SDGs are a shared responsibility for all countries and institutions and address many of the Bologna commitments. They tackle access to quality education, inclusion and gender equality, but also more generally the contribution that universities can bring through education and research to society, in addressing sustainability in its social, economic and environmental dimensions. Moreover, as part of the EHEA’s Global Dimension, the SDGs provide a framework for international exchange and collaboration.

7) encourages the Bologna Process to take up new issues of common interest to European higher education institutions.

In order to maintain its relevance, the Bologna Process must keep pace with the present rapid changes that are impacting higher education. For example, recognition and quality assurance processes should not become an obstacle to new ways of learning and teaching. Thus, we need to think of Bologna as developing into a place for debate on higher education development and innovation, able to share information and to raise awareness among policy makers and the higher education community, and, if appropriate, then to agree on new common goals.

8) underlines the urgent need for the Bologna Process to explore new ways of working.

The 2015 Yerevan Communiqué called for “shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and academic communities and stronger involvement of stakeholders” as the “condition for reform success”. The Bologna Process must establish ways of working that tap into the innovation potential of higher education institutions and networks, and take stock of the results of the many projects and pilots that are conducted throughout Europe.

9) invites the Bologna Process members and partners to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to reach its long-term goals.

As the goals of the Process become more complex and demanding, and more challenges are identified, it will be important for the Bologna Process, as such, to consider its governance arrangements to ensure enhanced capacity for the management and follow-up of its growing activities. EUA therefore calls for the establishment of a professional secretariat by 2020.

10) supports the continuation of the Bologna Process up to 2020 and beyond, and invites members and partners to join forces and work together to ensure its success.

While the Bologna Process is an intergovernmental process, the challenges it addresses require the active participation of the European higher education community and its stakeholders. Therefore, EUA will seek to work with its national and institutional members and partners to engage with the ongoing reform process so as to ensure that the Process addresses important issues for universities in a way that makes sense for Europe’s academic community.

With more than 800 members, the **European University Association (EUA)** is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors’ conferences in 47 European countries.

info@eua.eu

www.eua.eu

