



PREAMBLE

EURASHE - The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education was founded in 1990 as an international association that promotes and emphasizes Professional Higher Education (PHE). Its members are Colleges, Polytechnics, University Colleges, Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities with their professional trainings.

Three purposes were at the origin of EURASHE: to promote the interests of professional HE at a national and European level; to cooperate internationally on the development of PHE; and to promote internationalization within the PHE institutions. In 2007 the Statutes of EURASHE were amended in order to welcome any other higher education institution that offers professional training, and to accept other relevant stakeholders in higher education as associate members.

Since 2001 EURASHE has been the acknowledged representative of PHE in the Bologna process, taking in the broad range of professional trainings in a growing number of signatory countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Through our active involvement in the working agenda of the Bologna Process, EURASHE has been substantially contributing to the creation and development of the EHEA, not least, in the area of quality assurance, as a member of the E4 group together with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the European University Association and the European Students Union. Subsequent to this, EURASHE has contributed to the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Our focus on professional higher education explains EURASHE's concern for the employability of graduates at each cycle of the European higher education structure, and for the individual's access to engage in a continuum of lifelong learning.

For EURASHE the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda are intertwined. Sustainable development and economic growth across societies requires the contribution of higher education; and likewise higher education institutions must acknowledge their obligations to the societies of which they are an integrated part. We acknowledge the benefits of institutional autonomy, but consider responsibilities to society at large to be far reaching.

The objectives of the Bologna Process - as most recently formulated in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of April 2009 - are also EURASHE's. We value a close and binding European cooperation between HEIs, rather than the preservation of national characteristics and traditions, though these will have their specific roles to play.

In the following ***"EURASHE 'S 10 Commitments for the European Higher Education Area in 2020"*** we try to clarify our views on some important aspects of the Bologna process and our own responsibilities towards the continued creation of the EHEA. We wish to communicate an optimistic look at a potential progress in the different areas covered in the Communiqué, realizing that progress in each domain very much depends on our willingness to change things. Rather than to see this as wishful thinking, we proclaim such progress

in terms of objectives which can be met wholly, substantially or even partially. They, however, remain the overall target of the Bologna Reform process, irrespective of the degree of their implementation in the different countries and institutions. And they remain the overall priorities of EURASHE.

Abbreviations:

EHEA: European Higher Education Area / ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education / EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education / EQF: European Qualifications Framework / ESU: European Students Union / EUA: European University Association / HE: Higher Education / HEI: Higher Education Institution / LLL: LifeLong Learning / NQF: National Qualifications Framework / PHE: Professional Higher Education / QF: Qualifications Framework / QA: Quality Assurance / RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning

EURASHE's 10 Commitments for the EHEA in 2020 – Visions & Strategies

I. *The social dimension* as referred to in the Bologna Process is part of a multidimensional, political and socio-economic matrix that cannot be solved by means of education alone. Widening the access to higher education, however, will be an important step towards a more sustainable and democratic society, to which a growing number of individuals with different backgrounds can make equally valuable contributions.

On the individual level the social dimension can be summarized in terms of equitable access for all. And so our vision for 2020 is an EHEA where the individual learner can attain the highest level of education that is in line with her or his capacities, skills and desires, and regardless of the socio-economic, cultural or national background.

During the next decade, nations and governments must cooperate to remove all social, economic and cultural barriers to higher education where they may still exist. This includes legal frameworks and organizational structures for paths to and through higher education for learners who are unfamiliar with traditional academic terminology and/or reticent towards long study programs.

EURASHE commits itself and its members to contributing to this vision. We encourage institutions to implement all measures to meet the Bologna goals.

II. *National qualifications frameworks (NQFs)* are designed to facilitate recognition, mobility and employability through transparency, comparability and transferability, not only between different countries but also between different sectors within a national higher education system. To fulfil this purpose, NQFs must be elaborated with a strong emphasis on learning outcomes, fully integrated into the Quality Assurance systems, and allowing a variety of learning paths to a given qualification, including informal and non-formal learning; they must be linked to recognition of prior learning; and they must be certified against widely-recognized, overarching QFs for all types and levels of higher education.

NQFs which meet these requirements will contribute to making higher education programs more relevant to the needs of society, and at the same time will contribute to the coherence and continuity of the individual learner's development. Our vision for 2020 is an EHEA where NQFs are implemented in all Bologna countries, higher education institutions, and where a single, universal European Qualifications

Framework has been developed, certified against the Overarching Qualifications Framework for the EHEA and aligned to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

EURASHE commits itself to cooperate with international bodies, national authorities, higher education institutions and external stakeholders in defining the learning outcomes that will constitute a universal EQF. We will initiate discussions and projects to explore the possibilities for sector- and/or profession-specific approaches in this context. And we will assist our members to ensure that the principles of QFs are understood, reflected in the institutional policy and fully implemented into curricula.

III. The employability of graduates has from the outset of the Bologna Reform process been considered as a cornerstone in developing the three-cycle structure of Higher Education, and the curricula are being adapted accordingly. The underlying concern is to make higher education more responsive to rapidly developing societies, with equally rapidly changing demands from the world of employment.

This calls for flexibility and innovation in the contents as well as in the structuring of higher education programs. The vision for 2020 is a Europe where governments, employers and HE institutions have increased their partnerships in order to create jobs for the graduates and graduates for the jobs. HEIs must make it possible for students to maintain relations with the labour market through program structures based on linked and flexible cycles; employers must allow and encourage their employees to go back to HEIs for relevant supplementary study periods; and governments must ensure that the proper support mechanisms are in place.

When dealing with employability, however, employers and HEIs should also take into account the long-term horizon of graduates' careers. Furthermore a number of graduates may wish to become entrepreneurs rather than employees. And, not least, the strict market orientation must be balanced with citizenship and general human and humane qualities.

EURASHE commits itself and its members to create and further develop provisions for students, which directly affect their job prospects, e.g. careers services and skills-oriented education. We will increase partnerships with the public and private world of employment and establish cooperation for research and innovation. We will encourage quality-assured work placements as integrated elements in HE. And we will pro-actively look for and assist in the development of employment prospects that reflect positive tendencies in society, such as emerging 'green-collar' jobs, and provide appropriate training and certification for them.

IV. Lifelong learning (LLL) as a leading principle for the creation and development of the EHEA is strongly supported and advocated by EURASHE and its members, and we believe that the predominant qualities of LLL are widely found in PHE institutions and programs. For societies, LLL contributes to extending knowledge and skills and to creating new skills and transversal competences. For individuals, LLL is a major source to be flexible towards societal and professional changes or to pursue personal desires for the mere reasons of personal development and growth.

The rapidly changing labour market and the increasing impact of information and communication technologies requires a more flexible and mobile population. In view of the global ageing of the world population, technical, professional and academic knowledge will continually have to be updated. LLL will then be the organic and essential part of the learning process at every level and in every sector of HE.

Our vision for 2020 is that in the entire EHEA, a system of linked and progressive cycles, which permits any qualified person to enter and exit HE irrespective of age and educational profile is implemented. We urge

governments to ensure the provision of adequate investment and legal support for LLL as one of the most liberating tools to realise a more equitable society as one of the strongest movers towards prosperity and economic growth.

EURASHE commits itself to assisting its member institutions, other HE associations and international and national authorities to develop flexible and innovative HE programs in all academic and professional fields, with appropriate methodologies, including distance-learning provisions. And we will take initiatives to establish reliable indicators and data-collection, which will help measure and increase the effectiveness of lifelong learning policies and practices in the different Bologna countries and the EHEA as a whole.

V. *Student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education institutions* are, both as concepts and as realities, closely intertwined with all the previous themes, i.e. the social dimension, the qualifications frameworks, employability and lifelong learning. Since the beginning of the Bologna process the role of students, teachers and their learning environment has already undergone significant change in accordance with the relatively new concept of student-centred learning.

The learning society in a globalised world requires a number of competencies that are universally accepted, such as interpersonal and intercultural competencies, multilingualism, international awareness, ICT-skills, and – perhaps most important – the ability to learn how to learn in different formal and informal settings, including autonomous learning processes with adequate support and guidance structures.

The vision for 2020 is an EHEA where the transition to student-centred learning has been completed in all Bologna countries and where HEIs have redefined and implemented curricula in line with their mission and profile, but entirely based on students' learning outcomes. This requires not only the dedication of all institutional staff and management, but also the full involvement of students in program design, institutional governance and quality assurance. We advise governments to establish the legal frameworks for this purpose.

EURASHE commits itself to encouraging and assisting all its members to develop an overall approach to teaching, learning and assessment, where the student-centred approach is the rule, rather than the exception, and where the will to seek feedback from students and to learn from it, is a prevailing force.

VI. *Education, research and innovation* are elements in all types and levels of HE, but different HEIs focus on different aspects of education according to their mission statements. We do see, however, a continuum between academic, professional and vocational teaching and training; and similarly we see a continuum between fundamental research, innovation and applied research.

Continually evolving societies require us to invest more in the triangle education-research-innovation, and we are convinced that higher education is a major driver not only for economic and social development, but also for innovation in an increasingly knowledge-driven world. And so we urge governments to focus on the structural development of applied research in the EHEA, to ensure that research results are translated into all levels and cycles of higher education and to recognize the contribution applied research makes to regional innovation.

Our vision for 2020 is that a greater balance has been established among the different sectors of HE between teaching and research through the instruments of innovation; that academic and professional sectors have developed the means to make use of their complementary assets; and that all higher education institutions have adopted this double mission, each in accordance with their specific mission and profile.

EURASHE commits itself to contributing actively to the transfer of research results in society through innovation and an applied-research based HE with a special focus on regional development, without neglecting the global perspective. We will cooperate closely with the world of employment, acknowledging that in a regional context, public institutions (schools & kindergartens, polyclinics, social service centres, etc.) and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are natural partners for professional HE.

VII. *International openness* in HE is first of all a means to stimulate global awareness and a true sense of global citizenship and global responsibility among graduates and within the HE sector as a whole.

Present-day problems are worldwide and cannot be solved in a definite geographical area like the EHEA, but require a global platform for global solutions. Moreover, the creation of the knowledge society requires global awareness and responsibility, and HEIs can play an important role here in consciousness raising and in finding solutions through internationalisation of programmes and study environment.

Our vision for 2020 is an EHEA where the international dimension is perceived as an integrated part of the mission and role of HEI; where all study programs will offer students the possibility to carry out at least one semester abroad; and where the positive significance of international openness also comprises immigrant students as important contributors to the internationalisation of HE. We urge governments to abolish all legal obstacles relevant to this vision.

EURASHE commits itself to the enhancement of international openness in the EHEA as well as within its member institutions. We will stimulate the development of joint degrees across national borders. We urge potential research and innovation players and stakeholders to participate in international projects. We will initiate international cooperation to develop and implement comparable QA and accreditation systems. And we will facilitate our members' active participation in international HE organizations and networks.

VIII. *Mobility* of students and staff remains an important goal of the Bologna Process. Mobility is important for sharing and dissemination of knowledge and skills among students and professionals; it contributes to the personal development and responsible citizenship of the individual; and it underpins the European identity and the multilingual tradition in a global context.

The set target of 20 % mobile students in the EHEA by 2020 is ambitious and may not be reached, mainly due to obstacles that are beyond the remit of higher education authorities, such as the (lack of) portability of loans and grants; problems with visas and permits to stay, etc.. But also, HEIs can create obstacles, e.g., when study periods abroad or qualifications achieved are not recognized; or when a student is refused re-entry to her or his original HEI.

In our vision for 2020, all HEIs will provide an international experience for the individual student, either abroad, at her or his home institution, or virtually. A growing number of European students in HE will be European multilingual citizens with universally utilizable skills and knowledge. Mobility, in all cycles of HE, will be an organic part of higher education and shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area.

EURASHE commits itself to strive to achieve the 20 % goal for students and also to increase mobility of staff. We will inform our students about the specific advantages of studies or practical training abroad, and we will stimulate the interest of employers who accept foreign students for practical training as a part of their HE studies. We will stimulate multilingualism and multi-cultural competencies, and promote mobility in a harmonious way, avoiding the brain drain phenomenon. And we will enter into a discussion with those

of our member institutions who might still believe that a mono-lingual and mono-cultural approach is to be preferred.

IX. Multidimensional transparency tools. Various ministerial communiqués have highlighted the diversity of European HE as an asset. A transparent, multidimensional classification system of instruments which are designed to benchmark HEIs on research and innovation, teaching and learning outcomes, services to society, level of internationalisation and mobility, governance, study fees and study environment, student and stakeholder involvement, etc., may help identify and make visible such diversity.

The development of such transparency instruments, is however, inextricably linked to a well-functioning QA system across the EHEA and to well-described QFs that are closely related to the mission of the specific HEI. Ranking, especially ranking expressed as an average of the different individual dimensions, must be avoided; such an average figure will be statistically questionable and therefore provide the reader with limited, or feasibly, misleading information.

Our vision for 2020 shows an EHEA that has built up a comprehensive information system offering all the necessary data for those demanding detailed information about the individual HEIs and HE programs across country boundaries.

EURASHE commits itself to cooperating with international authorities and HE associations to identify and develop such qualitative and quantitative descriptors and indicators that will ensure the practical usefulness of the multidimensional instruments to the prospective learner.

X. Funding. Increased government funding is essential to maintain the current level of studies, but may not be enough to increase substantially the proportion of the youth that will complete a HE program. The accrued benefit for society from the education system in the form of skilled employees, entrepreneurs and independent researchers, vastly outweighs the current investment. This makes it both realistic and desirable to invest efforts and resources into education, research and innovation, not least in the light of the upcoming demographic evolution in Europe.

The vision for 2020 is an EHEA that is funded in accordance with the overall needs of society and consistent with the expressed objectives of the social dimension of the EHEA. Study fees have not risen, but general study support resources have been partly diverted to underrepresented groups. Funding sources and methods have been diversified, containing a mixture of public and private funding sources. Where applicable, public and private employers have been successful in establishing salaried in-service training periods as integrated part of HE programs.

EURASHE commits itself to cooperating with authorities and institutions to develop cost-effective education methods and structures.

Brussels, February 2010.