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SPHERE – Support to Higher Education Reform Experts

The University of Barcelona (Coordinator) and the European University Association (EUA) are currently implementing on behalf of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission a contract for ‘Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts’ (SPHERE).

The initiative provides training and networking for Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) and National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) in countries neighbouring the EU (former Tempus partner countries) in the period of January 2015 - December 2017.

# The Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts

The network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) was established in the framework of the Tempus programme and continues to be supported through Erasmus+. It is a diplomatic and development cooperation tool of the European Commission that aims to support higher education reform in neighbouring countries, sharing in particular the European experience in this respect. Note that many countries that are in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), but not in the EU benefit from this initiative.

The partner countries (including only the former Tempus partner countries): Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo.

The experts, appointed by the national authorities in the former Tempus Partner Countries, are intended to be a pool of expertise and ‘change agents’ to promote and enhance the modernisation of higher education. They participate in the development of policies and reforms in their countries and contribute to the training of local stakeholders. Their activities consist, for example, in organising and participating in seminars, writing articles and reports, or providing advice to individual institutions and policy makers.

The current network includes around 250 experts, whose activities are managed at the local level by the National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs), in cooperation with the relevant national authorities. International meetings and training events for the network are coordinated by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, in cooperation with the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission and with the support of the SPHERE team.

# Objectives

* **Capacity building of the nationally selected HERE teams** to actively contribute to higher education reform at national level in their countries and at the level of organisations and higher education institutions.
* **Awareness raising in particular about EU higher education policy** – namely the EU Modernisation Agenda – **and policy developments in the EHEA**, and how these policies could potentially impact partner countries
* **Enhancing networking** between HEREs of different countries through a variety of regional and international activities.
* **Peer learning** to allow HERE teams at different levels of knowledge and experience to learn from each other.

# Activities

The following activities are organised on an annual basis:

* **An international conference**, usually towards the end of the year, linking different themes and topics.
* Two **thematic seminars** in different partner countries and European countries.
* Two **study visits to universities**, organised as a means to provide hands-on experience and peer-learning for the HEREs.
* Around 50-60 **technical assistance missions**, as a means of providing targeted support and consultancy to the HERE and the academic community and government in their respective countries.
* **An** **Higher Education Reform Portal** – comprising information on reform in Europe and partner countries, and also a forum for exchange among the HERE

## Activities undertaken in 2015

* Seminar: **Higher Education & Vocational Education and Training*,***10-11 March, Istanbul, Turkey
* Study Visit: **Institutional structures for the management of internationalisation and mobility**, 15-19 May, Berlin
* Study Visit: **Organising International Credit Mobility**, 10-12 June, Ghent/Brussels
* Seminar: **ICT based learning: opportunities for higher education learning and teaching,** 26-27 October, Petra, Jordan
* Conference: **Innovating Teaching and Learning – the Next Phase of the Bologna Process**, 3-4 December, Tbilisi, Georgia
* Technical Assistance Missions (TAM)
  + 43 scheduled:31 delivered by end 2015**,** 12 pushed to Jan/Feb 2016
  + Themes: *Joint degrees (5), quality assurance (5), NQFs, doctoral studies (5), student-centred learning (5), teacher training/teaching excellence (3), e-learning (3)*
  + TAM contributed to: National seminars, conferences, focus groups, meetings with ministry
  + Results posted on SPHERE Virtual Community (access only to HERE and NEO)

## Activities planned for 2016 (tentative)

* March: Seminar **Joint degrees: strategic planning, management, quality assurance (Serbia)**
* April / May: Study visit **Learning outcomes and student-centred learning**
* June: Study visit: **Capacity Building in doctoral education: quality assurance and building doctoral schools**
* September: Seminar **Qualification frameworks: application and utility from a national and university perspective**
* October: Seminar **ESG in action: revised European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance and their implementation in universities and agencies**
* December: Annual conference (theme to be confirmed)

**Website:** http://supporthere.org/