
SHAPING THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Message from the Salamanca Convention of European higher education institutions

Salamanca, 29-30 March 2001

Over 300 European higher education institutions and their main representative organisations, gathered in Salamanca on 29-30 March 2001 to prepare their input to the Prague meeting of the Ministers in charge of higher education in the countries involved in the Bologna process, have agreed on the following goals, principles and priorities.

Shaping the future

European higher education institutions reaffirm their support to the principles of the Bologna Declaration and their commitment to the creation of the European Higher Education Area by the end of the decade. They see the establishing of the European University Association (EUA) in Salamanca as of symbolic and practical value to convey their voice more effectively to governments and society and thus to support them in shaping their own future in the European Higher Education Area.

I. PRINCIPLES

Autonomy with accountability

Progress requires that European universities be empowered to act in line with the guiding principle of autonomy with accountability. As autonomous and responsible legal, educational and social entities, they confirm their adhesion to the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum of 1988 and, in particular, academic freedom. Thus, universities have to be able to shape their strategy, choose their priorities in teaching and research, allocate their resources, profile their curricula and set their criteria for the acceptance of professors and students. European higher education institutions accept the challenges of operating in a competitive environment at home, in Europe and in the world, but to do so they need the necessary managerial freedom, less rigid regulatory frameworks and fair financing or they will be placed at a disadvantage in co-operation and competition. The dynamics needed for the completion of the European Higher Education Area will remain unfulfilled or will result in unequal competition, if the current over-regulation and minute administrative and financial control of higher education in many countries is upheld.

Competition serves quality in higher education, is not exclusive of co-operation and cannot be reduced to a commercial concept. Universities in some countries in Europe are not yet in a position to compete on equal terms and are in particular faced with unwanted brain drain within Europe.

Education as a public responsibility

The European Higher Education Area must be built on the European traditions of education as a public responsibility; of broad and open access to undergraduate as well as graduate studies; of education for personal development; and of citizenship as well as of short and long-term social relevance.

Research-based higher education

As research is a driving force of higher education, the creation of the European Higher Education Area must go hand in hand with that of the European Research Area.

Organising diversity

European higher education is characterised by its diversity in terms of languages, national systems, institutional types and profiles and curricular orientation. At the same time its future depends on its ability to organise this valuable diversity to effectively produce positive outcomes rather than difficulties and flexibility rather than opacity.

Higher education institutions wish to build on convergence - in particular on common denominators shared across borders in a given subject area - and to deal with diversity as assets, rather than as reasons for non-recognition or exclusion. They are committed to creating sufficient self-regulation to ensure the minimum level of cohesion needed to avoid that their efforts towards compatibility are undermined by too much variance in the definition and implementation of credits, main degree categories and quality criteria.

II. KEY ISSUES

Quality as a fundamental building stone

The European Higher Education Area needs to build on academic core values while meeting stakeholders' expectations, i.e., demonstrating quality. Indeed, quality assessment must take into consideration the goals and mission of institutions and programmes. It requires a balance between innovation and tradition, academic excellence and social/economic relevance, the coherence of curricula and students' freedom of choice. It encompasses teaching and research as well as governance and administration, responsiveness to students' needs and the provision of non-educational services. Inherent quality does not suffice, it needs to be demonstrated and guaranteed in order to be acknowledged and trusted by students, partners and society at home, in Europe and in the world.

Quality is the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the European Higher Education Area.

Trust building

As research evaluation has an international dimension so does quality assurance in higher education. In Europe, quality assurance should not be based on a single agency enforcing a common set of standards. The way into the future will be to design mechanisms at European level for the mutual acceptance of quality assurance outcomes, with "accreditation" as one possible option. Such mechanisms should respect national, linguistic and discipline differences and not overload universities.

Relevance

Relevance to the European labour market needs to be reflected in different ways in curricula, depending on whether the competencies acquired are for employment after the first or the second degree. Employability in a lifelong learning perspective is best served through the inherent value of quality education, the diversity of approaches and course profiles, the flexibility of programmes with multiple entry and exit points and the development of transversal skills and competencies such as communication and languages, ability to mobilise knowledge, problem solving, team work and social processes.

Mobility

The free mobility of students, staff and graduates is an essential dimension of the European Higher Education Area. European universities want to foster more mobility-both of the "horizontal" and the "vertical" type - and do not see virtual mobility as a substitute to physical mobility. They are willing to use existing instruments for recognition and mobility (ECTS, Lisbon Convention, Diploma Supplement, NARIC/ENIC network) in a positive and flexible way. In view of the importance of teaching staff with European experience, universities wish to eliminate nationality requirements and other obstacles and disincentives for academic careers in Europe. However, a common European approach to virtual mobility and transnational education is also needed.

Compatible qualifications at the undergraduate and graduate levels

Higher education institutions endorse the move towards a compatible qualification framework based on a main articulation in undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

There is broad agreement that first degrees should require 180 to 240 ECTS points but need to be diverse leading to employment or mainly preparing for further,

postgraduate studies. Under certain circumstances a university may decide to establish an integrated curriculum leading directly to a Master-level degree. Subject-based networks have an important role to play to inform such decisions. Universities are convinced of the benefits of a credit accumulation and transfer system based on ECTS and on their basic right to decide on the acceptability of credits obtained elsewhere.

Attractiveness

European higher education institutions want to be in a position to attract talent from all over the world. This requires action at the institutional, national and European level.

Specific measures include the adaptation of curricula, degrees readable inside and outside Europe, credible quality assurance measures, programmes taught in major world languages, adequate information and marketing, welcoming services for foreign students and scholars, and strategic networking. Success also depends on the speedy removal of prohibitive immigration and labour market regulations.

European higher education institutions recognise that their students need and demand qualifications which they can effectively use for the purpose of study and career all over Europe. The institutions and their networks and organizations acknowledge their role and responsibility in this regard and confirm their willingness to organise themselves accordingly within the framework of autonomy.

Higher education institutions call on governments, in their national and European contexts, to facilitate and encourage change and to provide a framework for coordination and guidance towards convergence, and affirm their capacity and willingness to initiate and support progress within a joint endeavour

- to redefine higher education and research for the whole of Europe;
- to reform and rejuvenate curricula and higher education as a whole;
- to enhance and build on the research dimension in higher education;
- to adopt mutually acceptable mechanisms for the evaluation, assurance and certification of quality;
- to build on common denominators with a European dimension and ensure compatibility between diverse institutions, curricula and degrees;
- to promote the mobility of students and staff and the employability of graduates in Europe;
- to support the modernisation efforts of universities in countries where the challenges of the European Higher Education Area are greatest;
- to meet the challenges of being readable, attractive and competitive at home, in Europe and in the world; and
- to keep considering higher education as an essential public responsibility.