

# RELEASING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION TO SERVE OUR SOCIETIES



EURASHE POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE  
EHEA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN PARIS  
IN 2018

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MAY 2018



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# EURASHE IN BOLOGNA

EURASHE as the representative body of professional higher education in Europe recognises and welcomes the achievements of the Bologna process and the current emphasis placed on fundamental values as the essential basis for further development of European higher education.

We welcome the focus on the reinforcement of the key commitments and principles of mutual respect, collegiality, trust and stakeholder engagement.

EURASHE supports the proposal to 'rethink' and innovate teaching and learning, strengthening its links to research and the plans for the further internationalisation of European education.

EURASHE has contributed as a consultative member to joint work within the Bologna process during recent decades. Bologna-driven reforms have often highlighted various aspects and initiatives embedded within the DNA of professional higher education including the focus on learning and teaching, quality assurance, clear structure of qualifications, learning outcomes, recognition agenda and stakeholder engagement.

EURASHE is ready to further support the key Bologna process commitments and instruments, as well as to address other challenges such as access, personal and professional development, regional development and user-oriented research within Bologna structures, in partnership with other stakeholders, national governments and higher education institutions. Taking account of the results of the last period activities and joint discussions EURASHE would wish to emphasise the following areas for future development.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS TO MINISTERS

EURASHE urges the ministers within a joint European Higher Education Area (EHEA) agenda, as well as their national environment to:

## SUPPORT REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

support the regional and community engagement agenda of (professional) higher education, through relevant policy and financial instruments promoting recognition, support and appropriate evaluation of this wide spectrum of learning, applied research and innovation activities;

## SUPPORT INNOVATION IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

take action and support further the opening up (professional) higher education, embracing innovation in teaching and learning through digital transformation of learning as well as integration of future skills concepts into next decade curricula;

## PROMOTE LIFE-LONG LEARNING

adopt policies and measures promoting further systemic implementation of the life-long learning agenda, including flexible pathways through formal and informal learning and recognition of learner achievements particularly in the workplace;

## RECOGNISE THE ROLE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

promote greater understanding and respect for the teaching and learning agenda through policy, financial incentives and shared international experience. Demonstrating its relevant links to research, student engagement and the innovation that will be required as methods and practice evolve to meet new challenges, technological advancement and the changing requirements and expectations of a diverse learners' population;

## RECOGNISE SHORT-CYCLE HE

recognise fully short cycle higher education qualification as a bridge to further enhancement of access to higher education, upskilling and reskilling within this life-long learning concept;

## RESPECT AND PROMOTE DIVERSITY WITHIN HE

respect and promote a diversity of roles, missions, objectives and types of provisions of higher education based on jointly agreed values, principles and instruments as the most effective response to emerging challenges and further development while recognising the achievements which have been made in raising employability and development through strengthening professional higher education.



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# EURASHE COMMITMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

EURASHE invites the other stakeholders to engage into constructive dialogue and joint action in order to build a joint vision which enables Europe to progress on transforming higher education institutions into meeting 21st Century challenges and stakeholder expectations. Within this context EURASHE commits to the mapping and promotion of policy developments, identification of relevant instruments, as well as sharing experience and good practices at systemic and institutional levels. We believe that this will directly impact on relevant areas of a future EHEA.

## STRONGER REGIONAL INTEGRATION

stronger engagement of universities of applied sciences and other professional higher education institutions within their regional and local communities, utilising and developing their existing academic capacity, as well as connecting with external partners. We seek tools which enable better understanding, respect and promotion of the role of professional higher education, the diversity of its activities and their positive impact on society and further regional development;

## INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

innovation, better recognition and appreciation of relevant and effective teaching and learning including joint initiatives with the world of work and other stakeholders supported by the identification of suitable methods of learning and student assessment corresponding to the profile of professionally oriented programmes especially work-based learning;

## LIFELONG LEARNING

enhancing flexibility within the life-long learning concept including the recognition of prior learning and better understanding and recognition of professional higher education qualifications at all qualification levels within EHEA. Our vision includes incorporation of various life-long learning initiatives into the core agenda and mission of professional higher education institutions as a response to the constantly changing environment and challenges within society;

## USER-ORIENTED RESEARCH

exploiting the existing capacity and potential of professional higher education in user-oriented research which is set and conducted together with partners from the world of work in order to serve their needs and innovation. Linking teaching, learning and research agendas to the benefit of students, their development and acquisition of competences for their further success;

## SHORT CYCLE HIGHER EDUCATION

further advocacy for short-cycle higher education programmes while paying a careful attention to further development and relevance of the first cycle programmes, as well as enhanced capacity for advanced professionally-oriented programmes;

## QUALITY CULTURE

the systemic adoption of quality assurance standards, practices and the development which embed an overall quality culture.

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# FOCUS ON KEY VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

In order to enable institutions to meet the demand for relevant and innovative, internationally competitive higher education which helps to shape societies towards meeting 21st century challenges,

EURASHE calls for a clear but careful and validated rethinking of curricula, teaching and learning, research agenda and societal role of higher education. We believe that a success of such substantial development requires appropriate autonomy, principles and values, yet needs also to respect agreed key commitments within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), at national systemic level, within institutions and at programme level. This will directly benefit students and academic staff and indirectly the societies which we serve. Thorough implementation should be achieved by peer learning, clear policy commitments and formal measures by governments, as well as by the support of institutions in their development.

EURASHE is ready to continue to support the implementation within joint Bologna structures, as well as supporting our members and the wider professional higher education community in their mutual learning based on good practice. We contend that supporting and monitoring implementation and its progress is a long-term, yet urgent, task to ensure the success of the Bologna process. This should be reflected in the next steps agreed at the Ministerial conference.

EURASHE calls for a closer and more integral engagement of stakeholders, in particular those from the world of work which provides additional opportunities for professional higher education providers.

EURASHE asserts that institutional autonomy and academic freedom are central to effective education, supported by the effective and active participation of students and staff. As universities of applied sciences and other institutions of professional higher education are often closely embedded within their communities, they are well placed to respond flexibly and integrally to the challenge and needs of local professions, industries, businesses and community groups. The detailed balance requires to be weighted to respect the professional sphere within the academic community. Effective structures are key to effective development in this regard.

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# FLEXIBLE LEARNING PROVISION

The first step to creating an effective project plan is to set a baseline. The baseline is the foundation on which the other project elements will be built on. Like other European partners EURASHE is aware of recent societal developments and the global challenges to the development and coherence of our societies. EURASHE seeks to support the importance of civic and democratic values throughout European higher education. At the same time the EURASHE community acknowledges the societal impact of rapid technological change both in the workplace and in civic society. It is anticipated that an even greater change will result as a consequence of digitalisation of industry, business and all other aspects of human life, including the public sector. Higher education will be required to reflect this new environment in order to prepare students for their place in the world.

not only by making greater use of digitalisation, but by reviewing the overall patterns and approaches to learning and teaching. While some competences are likely to remain the same, the changing character of many qualified professions, their disappearance and emergence of new ones, the need for continuous acquirement of new competences together with more flexible patterns of working, will place new requirements on higher education and learning in general. The importance of life-long learning will be crucial for personal and professional development of all generations. It is likely that everyone will need to acquire new qualifications, competencies and skills throughout their lives. This will require greater flexibility of learning pathways including professional higher education. Taking account of these factors and the need to enhance access of non-traditional target groups, EURASHE calls for specific attention to:

- reflecting life-long learning as an integral part of the mission of higher education institutions including legal and regulatory arrangements regarding funding, governance, performance assessment;
- recognising prior learning, further exploration of harmonisation of various national approaches in order not to undermine trust, transparency and coherence throughout EHEA;
- recognising learner qualifications, in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which has to be seen as a fundamental right of the individual learner. This approach should relate to different 'contents' such as study periods, work placement and apprenticeship irrespective of the learning methodology and the mode of delivery, subject to robust quality assurance mechanisms;
- recognising the role, dynamics and emergence of short-cycle higher education qualifications as a stand-alone qualification within EHEA qualification framework, while respecting other potential forms of education and training at the EQF level 5 within various national environments. This qualification is another bridge for enhanced access to higher education for various target groups, as well as an opportunity for upskilling and reskilling of those already in employment; and
- identifying relevant, robust and flexible arrangements for permeability between higher education and vocational education and training.

We believe that such systemic and mutually beneficial discussions have to be held with a range of key stakeholders, including enhanced engagement with the world of work, students, higher education institutions, but also those from the vocational, continuing and adult learning fields, with full respect to the key role of the European Commission and national governments.



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# REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES



Referring to the changing environment there is a growing need for sharing the knowledge and capacity accumulated within higher education, as well as responding to the call for more accountability to society. EURASHE contends that regional and local community engagement of higher education institutions will become a more important part of their mission and activities. This concept embraces a wide spectrum of learning, research and innovation activities engaging both students and staff.

EURASHE believes in smart specialisation reflecting regional needs, capacity of partners, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises and civic society organisations where (professional) higher education institutions act as a hub connecting various actors and facilitating mutual discussion and activities.

EURASHE and its members wish to discuss further the key role of universities of applied sciences and other institutions in professional higher education in regional development, in order to enhance the capacity of development activities and their impact on society.

At the same time, we expect these activities to be recognised formally as an integral part of relevant higher education institutions mission and to be reflected in legal and regulatory frameworks including appropriate financial and infrastructural provisions. Such recognition should be reflected in various European and national schemes including the applied research provisions and considered in the welcomed intention for redesign of schemes for linking learning and research. Universities of applied sciences, as they are found in various countries with a binary higher education system or as integrated institutions within the university system, with their clear profile in terms of curricula and programmes, student population and civic role, are well positioned to be seen as examples of European University networks, cooperating across country borders with excellence in learning, regional engagement and innovation and user-oriented research applications.

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# LEARNING & TEACHING AGENDA

EURASHE supports, in line with prevailing agreement within the Bologna structures, the focus on the innovative redesign of existing teaching and learning arrangements to reflect more appropriately transformation through new digital technologies and developing innovative and relevant learning and teaching solutions to accommodate future diverse needs of non-traditional target groups. Considering the nature of professional higher education, we call for further enhancement of various work-based learning approaches, while recognising the need to ensure quality and the achievement of relevant competences. This would include rethinking the way educational institutions teach and assess student work. It must be recognised that students learn increasingly through (open accessible) digital resources. It is vital that the “learn and repeat” assessment systems need rethinking towards deep learning and competence-oriented structures. Identification of appropriate ways of recognition, appreciation and support of teaching and learning activities within the national legal and regulatory frameworks, but especially within the academic career progression, is of crucial importance.

Support for peer learning and exchange of experience is another “soft measure” to be promoted at the national, but even more importantly at international levels.

EURASHE welcomes the emphasis on linking learning and teaching with research. Universities of applied sciences and other providers of professional higher education have been striving for the greater engagement of students in research activities including those carried outside academic institutions in collaboration with the world of work. The evaluation of this agenda must respect the mission of the institution or programme, the character and objectives of learning at various levels and various fields.

EURASHE would also welcome recognition of a wider spectrum of relevant activities including pedagogical innovation as part of the applied research agenda.

Overall, EURASHE would wish to highlight the need of further recognition and support throughout EHEA of diversified roles, missions, objectives and types of provisions within the differentiated landscape of higher education and various instruments for its governance. The key role played by professional higher education with full respect to each element is an important principle in addressing the various challenges and tasks in a flexible and relevant way to serve the diverse needs of our societies.

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# EURASHE AND PROFESSIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

EURASHE is the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education that offer professionally orientated programmes and are engaged in applied research within the Bologna cycles. EURASHE represents universities of applied sciences (UAS) and university colleges; other members of EURASHE are national and sectorial associations of higher education institutions, and other individual institutions, such as universities.

EURASHE is highly committed to the Bologna Process and takes part in the advisory groups on dealing with non-implementation' and the 'revision of Diploma Supplement', as well as in the working groups on 'implementation' and on 'new goals'.

EURASHE has defined professional higher education as "a form of higher education that offers a particularly intense integration with the world of work in all its aspects, including teaching, learning, research and governance, and at all levels of the overarching qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area. Its function is to diversify learning opportunities, enhance the employability of graduates, offer qualifications and stimulate innovation for the benefit of learners and society. The world of work includes all enterprises, civil society organisations and the public sector. The intensity of integration with the world of work is manifested by a strong focus on the application of learning achievements. This approach involves combining phases of work and study, a concern for employability, cooperation with employers, the use of practice-relevant knowledge and use-inspired research. There have been identified 12 further specific characteristics for governance, teaching/learning and research agenda for professional higher education all of them reflecting the interaction with the world of work and joint setting of the agenda and activities.



