Modernisation of higher education in a European context in 2021

The Dutch Team of Bologna Experts[1]

Summary
This memorandum outlines how recent developments in the modernisation of higher education in Europe have arisen from the shared values that formed the basis for the start of the Bologna Process in 1998. The memorandum therefore suggests that it would be good if everyone working in higher education used the Bologna tools and principles as a guide when developing and implementing new initiatives.

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged us to take a fresh, critical look at how higher education institutions organise their education and deal with internationalisation. Out of necessity, normal in-person education was largely shifted to online platforms in March 2020 with varying degrees of success. This made those involved aware of the possibilities offered by online learning, but also laid bare its limitations.

During the most recent conference of the Ministers of Education of the countries participating in the Bologna Process, held in Rome in November 2020, it was requested that explicit attention be paid to the effects of a number of key social developments, such as the effects of the digitalisation of society and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) drafted by the United Nations.

The new Erasmus+ Framework Programme was launched in March 2021. As part of this programme the European Commission has developed the European Universities Initiative to strengthen collaboration between European universities. There is also a call for renewed attention to be given to the importance of lifelong learning through the introduction of micro-credentials.

All of these topics have given rise to debate and questions within and between higher education institutions, at both the national and the international level. The Dutch Team of Bologna Experts therefore decided this would be a good opportunity to review these subjects. The emphasis in the review was on the current situation, but the way in which certain aspects

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have developed over the past two decades was also considered. We hope this memorandum will help the reader to better assess the various developments and place them in context.

Reforming higher education

The incentive for the drafting and signing of the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 by the Ministers of Education of the four largest EU member states was twofold: significant concern for the competitive position of European higher education in a global context and the quality and relevance of that education for the economies and societies of the countries involved. The declaration corresponded with a concern that had been expressed in recent years by the European Commission, that the education provided in Europe was not adequately responding to the transition from an industrial to a knowledge economy.

The Sorbonne Declaration led to the signing of the Bologna Declaration one year later, by 29 EU member states and potential member states, and the start of the Bologna Process, which had the explicit goal of creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in response to the challenges that had been identified.

The core of the Bologna Process is three obligations to which 49 European countries have now committed themselves:

1. The introduction of a three-cycle system (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate/PhD). This model is a template for other countries around the world and has facilitated collaboration outside of Europe. The Associate degree has now earned a place within this system, although it is not the same in all countries;
2. Mutual recognition of student performance and qualifications by higher education institutions; and
3. The use of adequate quality assurance tools.

In the first decade, the Bologna Process gathered momentum; the process received a great deal of media attention, it was high on the political agenda and it was a priority for higher education institutions. After more than 20 years of the Bologna Process, however, we must acknowledge that the initial interest in the process has waned significantly. One of the main reasons for this is that a number of the achievements of the Bologna Process have become commonplace (in the Netherlands, for example, the use of ECTS credits in higher education, the introduction of the three-cycle structure and the mandatory issuing of a Diploma Supplement have been included in the Higher Education and Research Act). This has given rise to a widespread impression that the Bologna Process has been completed. The plans in the Bologna Process that are yet to be achieved appear to have faded into the background.

New initiatives have since captured our attention, such as the initiative launched by the French president Emmanuel Macron, which has been embraced by the European Commission, to set up 'European Universities'. In addition, great importance is being attached to an apparently new phenomenon, micro-credentials. These are a form of certification for completed units of study, in response to the growing flexibility of education and the need for lifelong development in an increasingly dynamic labour market and society. We use the term 'apparently', because in fact the European Commission already introduced the concept of lifelong learning at the end of the twentieth century.

2021: A fresh start

It is not an exaggeration to say that in 2021 a fresh start has been made with the Bologna Process and with the modernisation of higher education, which is directly connected to it. The key reasons for this fresh start are the refining of the Bologna objectives in the Rome Ministerial Communiqué (2020) and the launch of the new seven-year Erasmus+ framework programme (2021–2027). The Rome Ministerial Communiqué focuses on a higher education area that is inclusive and innovative and exhibits interconnectedness with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Higher education is expected to make a significant contribution to the digitalisation agenda, to greening the economy and to strengthening the social dimension by giving explicit attention to inclusion. Innovation in higher education is being shaped by research into and the introduction of micro-credentials, and the updating of educational visions aimed at a student-centred approach and an active learning and working environment. International connectedness is strengthened with the help of physical and virtual mobility, but also through ongoing attention for the international dimension of education, e.g. through Internationalisation at Home.

Implementation of these structural reforms and improvements is also the goal of the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme. There is significant overlap between the objectives of the Bologna Process (the development of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA)) and those of the EC (the development of a European Education Area (EEA) by 2025). The latter area is partly based on the philosophy of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, which covers and connects all levels of education and is thus much broader and more ambitious than the EHEA. The annex contains a table which sets out the correlations between the various policies.

Renewed attention

The recent developments call for renewed attention from a broad group of staff working in higher education, not only in the Netherlands, but also in the other 'Bologna countries'. Certain topics that are closely connected with international collaboration and the reform of higher education are listed below. It is evident from the list that there are still a significant number of challenges and points requiring attention.

Knowledge of and experience with the developments in the context of the Bologna Process are important to be able to interpret the recent developments and adequately respond to them. The documents underpinning the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)*, the *Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)* and the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)* belong on the desk of every policy adviser and board member in higher education and should be regularly referred to. Members of examinations boards should be familiar with the contents of the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* and the role and contents of the Diploma Supplement (DS).

Furthermore, use should be made of an informed group of experienced colleagues, such as the Dutch Team of Bologna Experts. The team recently developed the 'Bologna Module',

which offers interested parties an opportunity to learn about various aspects of the Bologna Process.

Below, we examine a number of key topics in detail. We hope this will clarify the correlations between different political and social themes and highlight the points that deserve attention from policy advisers within the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the associations representing the universities and universities of applied sciences (VSNU and VH), and higher education institutions, i.e. management at all levels, policy staff, lecturers and students.

1. The role of the Erasmus+ programme and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) was introduced at the start of the previous Erasmus+ programme (2014-2021). Holding an ECHE was a prerequisite for higher education institutions to be able to participate in the Erasmus+ Programme. When the new Erasmus+ programme (2021–2027) was launched, all higher education institutions once again had to apply for an ECHE.

The ECHE should be seen as a kind of quality label, since it gives the EC certainty that a higher education institution in a so-called programme country can be deemed capable of successfully performing international collaboration activities as part of the Erasmus+ programme. The ECHE lists a set of principles with which an educational institution that wishes to receive an Erasmus+ grant must comply.

By including a number of agreements in the ECHE (e.g. agreements regarding the use of Bologna tools) the implementation of the Bologna Process within higher education institutions is fostered. The latest version of the ECHE contains a number of new elements, such as digitalisation, inclusion and sustainability.

Relevant documents:
- *Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 Guidelines:*
  https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-charter-higher-education-2021-2027-guidelines_en

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Within higher education institutions there is still insufficient awareness of the commitments that are made when an ECHE is signed.
- If a higher education institution does not comply with the requirements set out in the ECHE, the National Agency Erasmus+ does not have the power to take away the ECHE from the higher education institution, which would make further participation in the Erasmus+ programme impossible.
- The implementation of the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)* is still not complete. In the Netherlands, although the use of ECTS credits is embedded in the Higher Education and Research Act, other components of ECTS, such as the ECTS Course Catalogue and use of ECTS Grading Tables, have not yet been implemented and/or correctly implemented.

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2. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

ECTS was first developed as a transfer system (from 1989 onwards), but since 2005 it has become a fully-fledged transfer and accumulation system that forms one of the core components of the European higher education reform process. Developed by the European Commission in collaboration with higher education experts, it has been a formal tool in the Bologna Process and the EHEA since 2015.

ECTS is based on the average student workload in relation to the intended and achieved learning outcomes. The system has a number of key features that also form the basis for the system used in the Netherlands.

- *ECTS credits*

In ECTS a full-time academic year comprises 1,500–1,800 hours, or 25 to 30 hours for every ECTS credit. The Dutch Higher Education and Research Act states that an academic year represents 1,680 hours and that 1 ECTS credit is equivalent to a workload of 28 hours.

- In the Netherlands, the terms EC or European Credit are often used to refer to ECTS credits. This term is incorrect and may lead to confusion in an international context.*ECTS Course Catalogue*

The ECTS Course Catalogue describes the full range of education offered by a higher education institution, with three levels of information: a) Information about the institution; b) Information about the study programmes offered by the institution; and c) Information on the individual learning units that make up the study programmes.

ECTS Course Catalogues are published on institutions' websites and are therefore accessible to everyone. The information in ECTS Course Catalogues is provided in a widely-spoken language (usually English) in addition to the national language.

- *ECTS Grading Tables*

ECTS Grading Tables provide an overview of the statistical distribution of study results awarded to students in a specific discipline over a specific period. The purpose of ECTS Grading Tables is to provide insight into the grading culture of an institution or programme. ECTS Grading Tables can also be used for the conversion of grades.

Relevant document:

- *ECTS Users' Guide*
  https://op.europa.eu/nl/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Correct formulation of learning outcomes at the programme level and the learning unit level (see also 4. Qualification Frameworks).
- Inclusion of all programme learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement.
- Different workloads/lengths of Bachelor and Master programmes (first and second cycle).
- Flexibility of study programmes (see also 9. Micro-credentials).
- Design of the ECTS Course Catalogue and the language to be used

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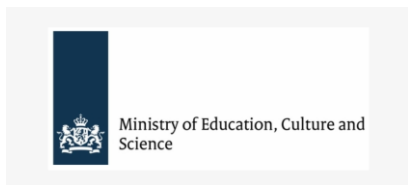
- Comparable and balanced workloads
- Use of ECTS for grade conversion

3. Mobility: Physical and Virtual

Physical mobility of students and staff has since 1987 been supported by the original Erasmus programme and its successors. Although the Erasmus programme has been an overwhelming success in terms of its societal impact as a result of the significant numbers of students who completed part of their degree in another country (by studying at a partner institution abroad or by doing a work placement or traineeship abroad), the mobility numbers originally envisaged have never been reached. This is not surprising, since the percentage of students expected to incorporate international experience into their degree was extremely ambitious.

Although mobility has become an integral part of higher education in Europe, there is also interest in the idea of gaining 'international experience' while remaining at the 'home' institution. This is known as 'Internationalisation at Home'. Internationalisation is closely linked to the development of knowledge and understanding of and respect for other cultures. This applies to other countries, but also to the unifying European ideas and ideals: that we live alongside each other in a multicultural society.

Concerns about sustainability and the development of a green economy, as well as the recent Covid-19 experiences, have given 'Internationalisation at Home' new momentum. This applies both to physical international classrooms and to their digital counterparts. Interesting initiatives have been and are continuing to be developed.

Relevant documents:
- Nuffic's Internationalisation at Home pages: Internationalisation at home in het hoger onderwijs | Nuffic: https://www.nuffic.nl/onderwerpen/internationalisation-home/internationalisation-home-in-het-hoger-onderwijs)
- KA3 Erasmus+ Forward-Looking Cooperation Project EVOLVE – Evidence-Based Online Learning through Virtual Exchange: https://evolve-erasmus.eu)

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- The sharing of knowledge with regard to new initiatives in the area of 'Internationalisation at Home', international classrooms and blended and virtual exchanges deserves ongoing attention.
- Professionalisation of staff with regard to the above topics.

4. Qualifications Frameworks

The qualifications frameworks form the basis for the European Higher Education Area and for related reforms. There are overarching European frameworks, national frameworks, sectoral frameworks and discipline-specific frameworks.

There are two overarching frameworks in Europe: the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, which was the result of the Bologna Process and which is based on the Dublin Descriptors, and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning created by the European Commission, which covers all levels of education. Each framework is underpinned by a different philosophy. The first is based on stand-alone descriptors with a focus on the educational process, comprising five dimensions that apply to Associate, Bachelor and Master degrees. These dimensions are: (1) Knowledge and understanding; (2) Applying knowledge and understanding; (3) Gathering and assessing information; (4) Communication; and (5) Lifelong learning skills.

In the second framework, the descriptors build on those for earlier levels and focus on the outcomes of the learning process. The framework makes a distinction between three types of descriptors: knowledge, skills, and responsibility and autonomy, the latter being the highest level of competence. Qualifications frameworks are important because they form the basis for formulating and monitoring programme learning outcomes and the outcomes of individual learning units, including micro-credentials. In that respect the sectoral frameworks, but more particularly the discipline-specific frameworks, are especially important. These frameworks are an essential tool for formulating programme learning outcomes. They were drafted by international groups of subject specialists. The Erasmus+ project CALOHEE contains examples of qualifications frameworks as well as templates.

Relevant documents:
- *Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area:* *http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Qualifications_of_the_European_Higher_Education_Area*
- *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning:*
- *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe:* https://www.calohee.eu.

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- In higher education institutions, knowledge about qualifications frameworks, both the overarching European frameworks and the national frameworks, is mostly limited to a small group of staff.
- How can the usefulness and necessity of the qualifications frameworks become more widely known among a broad group of lecturers and course developers?
- The role of qualifications frameworks at a discipline/programme level is still not sufficiently recognised. This relates in particular to the benchmark statements produced by the Quality Assurance Agency in the United Kingdom

(https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statements.pdf?sfvrsn=1656ff81_41) and the Tuning / CALOHEE reference documents.

5. Internal and External Quality Assurance

The development of trust between higher education institutions is considered critical for international collaboration. To build a solid foundation for that trust, tools have been developed to ensure that education – programmes and learning units – meets minimum standards. The key document in this respect is the Bologna tool *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)*. It draws a distinction between internal and external quality assurance. Quality assurance bodies and higher education institutions are expected to implement the ESG as part of the Bologna Process.

The Netherlands uses a complex external quality assurance system that combines institutional accreditation with programme accreditation. This puts it in a unique position in an international context.

Relevant document:
- *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance: https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf*

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Clear description of how quality assurance is organised within an institution and at a programme level. Transparency with regard to quality assurance tools and outcomes deserves ongoing attention.
- Although for the Netherlands it can be assumed that the ESG are being implemented, the same cannot be said for many other European countries, at least not comprehensively. This puts pressure on the recognition of programme components completed elsewhere.
- Preventing quality assurance from leading to a bureaucratic process. This means that there should always be a healthy balance between costs and benefits.
- Making sure quality assurance is not a paper exercise, but instead clearly adds value to the tasks of maintaining and potentially improving educational quality.
- Ensuring students can contribute to developing and improving programmes.
- Adequate quality assurance with regard to work-based learning. See 11. Work-Based Learning.

6. Automatic Recognition of Student Performance

On 26 November 2018, the EU member states accepted an EU Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning abroad.
Recognition of study programmes (or components of programmes, such as modules or units) successfully completed elsewhere is a key area for attention in the context of the internationalisation of education. This is to prevent inappropriate barriers from being raised or the creation of unnecessary delays in study completion.

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The EC's policy documents talk about automatic recognition, which can give the impression that the higher education institutions concerned have little or no control over this process. This is not correct. In the context of the Bologna Process, it has been agreed that, in principle, Bachelor programmes give access to Master programmes, and Master programmes give access to Doctoral programmes. However, this does not alter the fact that additional requirements may be imposed, such as substantive requirements, and/or that selection processes may be put in place. This applies to both national and international exchanges.

In relation to international exchanges for certain periods of study, the term 'automatic' refers to honouring past agreements regarding education completed elsewhere. To that end, learning agreements (see ECTS) are drafted and signed by the parties concerned. A learning agreement forms the basis for a Transcript of Records, which is issued at the end of the mobility period.

Relevant documents:
- *Lisbon Recognition Convention* (1997): https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention
- *The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions. Practical guidelines for credential evaluators and admissions officers to provide fair and flexible recognition of foreign degrees and studies abroad.* Second edition 2016: https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/8220_European%20Recognition%20Manual%20Second%20Edition%20FIN.pdf)
- *The Triangle of Automatic Recognition* (NUFFIC, February 2020): https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/triangle-automatic-recognition

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Within the Erasmus programme, automatic recognition is a pressure point in relation to student exchanges. The situation in the Netherlands compares favourably with that in many other countries, but that does not change the fact that this is an area of concern at the European level, and an issue that Dutch institutions may face.
- International recognition of professional qualifications is not uniformly carried out in accordance with the agreements made in the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
- Inclusion in the Diploma Supplement of courses completed at other institutions, along with the grades obtained.
- Positioning of the one-year Master programme (60 ECTS credits) in the international higher education context. Practice shows that in many countries, one-year Master programmes do not give access to a Doctoral/PhD programme.

7. Doctorate/PhD in the European context

Within the Bologna Process / the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Doctorate/PhD is defined as the third cycle. Internationally, as well as within Europe, there are major differences in interpretation which 22 years of the Bologna Process have been unable to resolve. The biggest difference has to do with status. In 2005, it was decided that it would be best to define 'Doctoral candidates' as 'early-stage researchers', who should be recognised as "professionals – with commensurate rights – who make a key contribution to the creation of new knowledge".

The formal length of a Doctoral programme differs from country to country, but is usually three to four years; the average time taken to complete a Doctoral programme/thesis in Europe is 4.5 years. The position and status of the Doctorate is also different in different countries. The above definition allows both the status of PhD candidates as students and as employees.

Both 'recognition' and 'mobility' are important elements of Doctoral programmes, which always include a teaching and research component. The vast majority of programmes offered by Doctoral schools include a mobility component.

Within the higher professional education sector, there have been experiments with a 'University of Applied Sciences Professional Doctorate'. In the Netherlands, this process has started with a number of pilots. It goes without saying that these pilots will make an effort to ensure rigorous implementation of the Bologna agreements.

Setting up and implementing Doctoral programmes is an important element of the European Higher Education Area. This was the reason behind the tenth action point of the Bologna Process, which calls for good coordination between the European Higher Education Area and the European Higher Research Area.

Relevant documents:
- Conclusions of the Bologna Seminar on Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society: https://eua.eu/resources/publications/626:salzburg-2005-–-conclusions-and-recommendations.html.
- Study by the European University Association, published in 2019 on the basis of a survey conducted among educational institutions in 2018: https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/online%20eua%20cde%20survey%2016.01.2019.pdf
- *The European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers*. The council is an official partner of the Bologna Process: http://eurodoc.net
- *EUA Council for Doctoral Education* The council has provided a platform for consultation and coordination since 2008: https://eua-cde.org

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Areas identified as requiring attention:

- Difference in the length and nature of the programmes at a national and international level
- Use of ECTS credits
- Implementation of Professional Doctorate programmes that comply with the European directives
- Structure of the programmes, incl. the scope of the teaching component (delivering lectures)
- Conditions for admission
- Quality assurance systems for Doctoral research
- Organisation and awarding of international joint Doctoral degrees

8. Joint study programmes and national and international joint degrees

Joint programmes are an important component of intensive collaboration between higher education institutions. There are many forms of joint programmes between two or more higher education institutions, which can include jointly-awarded diplomas, as is the case for Joint Degree Programmes, Double Degree Programmes and Dual Degree Programmes.

Joint degree programmes are the most intensive forms of collaboration between higher education institutions. Joint degree programmes can be offered at both a national and an international level. They result in one single diploma, signed by the awarding institutions. A joint Diploma Supplement is also issued. An accreditation and quality assurance programme has been developed for these programmes, which has been validated by the 49 countries involved in the Bologna Process. It is called the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. This model may be developed further into a European Recognition and Quality Assurance System. The feasibility of such a development will be investigated over the next few years. A key catalyst for international Joint Degree Programmes is the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs).

Relevant document:
- European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes:
  https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Clarity around terminology and consistent use of terminology. The terms Joint Programme, Joint Degree Programme, Double Degree Programme, and Dual Degree Programme are used interchangeably. There is insufficient clarity about the differences.
- A lack of knowledge, and insufficient sharing of knowledge, with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of choosing a specific form of collaboration.
- Although European agreements have been made about promoting the organising of joint programmes and the awarding of joint degrees, in many countries the relevant laws and regulations have not yet been amended to accommodate this kind of programme. Many

EU member states still impose restrictions on the issuing of joint degrees and the associated diplomas issued on behalf of the awarding institutions.

- The additional costs involved in joint degree programmes are not reimbursed at a national level. This restricts the further development of such programmes.
- Within higher education institutions, knowledge about and experience with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes is still absent or limited.

9. Micro-credentials

The higher education sector is currently giving a great deal of attention to the phenomenon of micro-credentials and their certification via 'batches'. Micro-credentials should be viewed in the context of a renewed interest in lifelong learning.

The Flemish government initiated the MICROBOL project to try to understand the significance of micro-credentials for the Bologna Process as well as the associated challenges. MICROBOL stands for 'Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna key commitments', and the project has identified "whether and how the existing Bologna tools can be used and/or need to be adapted to be applicable to micro-credentials". This has resulted in a set of recommendations.

With the support of an ad hoc working group, the EC has developed a European Approach to Micro-Credentials. According to the EC, this approach will help "to open up learning opportunities to citizens and strengthen the role of higher education and vocational education and training institutions in lifelong learning."

Relevant documents:
- MICROBOL project: https://microcredentials.eu
- MICROBOL recommendations: https://microcredentials.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/07/MICROBOL-Recommendations-1.pdf
- *A European approach to micro-credentials. Output of the Micro-credentials higher education consultation group: final report* (2021): https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7a939850-6c18-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1. The report is currently serving as the basis for a consultation process: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/a-european-approach-to-micro-credentials_en

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Institutions are looking into offering micro-credentials, particularly for people already in the workforce, but are primarily looking at the issue from a regional perspective; so far, the international perspective and the international research on this topic has not been widely acknowledged.

10. European Universities Initiative

The idea of creating a small number of European universities was initiated in 2017 by French president Emmanuel Macron. The initiative has since been embraced by the European Commission, which sees it as an opportunity to further its own agenda of greater collaboration

between higher education institutions within the EU. This should not only improve the competitive position of the European higher education sector compared with other continents, but should also contribute to innovation.

In the words of the European Commission: *"European Universities are transnational alliances that will become the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education."*

The European Universities initiative is part of the Erasmus+ programme and is seen as a flagship initiative that should contribute to the creation of a European Education Area (EEA). According to the EC, the primary goal "of this initiative is to bring together a new generation of creative Europeans able to cooperate across languages, borders and disciplines to address societal challenges and skills shortages faced in Europe."

To date, in particular research universities within the EU have used this initiative to give their alliances/consortia a distinct profile.

Relevant document:
- https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Participation in this initiative by research universities in particular; underrepresentation of the higher professional education sector (both nationally and internationally). Either the universities of applied sciences must be given a chance to catch up, or a two-tier system of the haves and the have-nots will emerge. As an example, the consortia of European Universities are offered more opportunities to apply for European grants.
- Structural funding of European Universities and the consequences when funding is not available.

Confusion with regard to the contribution to the development of higher education in general. How will institutions that do not participate in a European University benefit from or be hindered by these developments?

11. Work-Based Learning (WBL) in Higher Education

The purpose of work-based learning is to optimise the preparation of students to play an active role in the labour market. The immediate trigger for the initiative was the 'skills gap' that emerged from (and is still being explored in) research by multiple parties, including the EC itself, consultancy firms, the OECD and the World Economic Forum. All of this research showed that most students were not adequately prepared for the labour market.

Work-based learning can be distinguished from other forms of active preparation for the labour market, such as a work placement to gain experience of professional practice (as part of the study programme), a traineeship (a supplementary, structured course) – intended as explicit preparation for a specific professional sector after completion of a higher education study programme – and entrepreneurship.

For universities of applied sciences in the Netherlands, active preparation for the labour market is a structural part of all degree programmes. This is usually also the case for degree programmes offered by universities of applied sciences in other European countries.

It applies to a lesser extent to many programmes at research universities. The added value of work-based learning in this sector is not always sufficiently recognised as part of an academic learning process. This is entirely due to insufficient knowledge and experience within research universities with regard to the contribution work-based learning can make. There is also a lack of familiarity with models for work-based learning that have been developed within various Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliance projects, such as the WEXHE project – *Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience in Higher Education.* This project has produced summaries of generic learning outcomes connected to work-based learning. This material and material from similar projects, with which research universities are usually not familiar, could help strengthen not only the role of work-based learning within degree programmes, but also the potential labour market position of graduates. These projects also illustrate the roles and responsibilities of the organisations/companies that offer work placements and traineeships. Quality assurance for work-based learning has been identified internationally as an area requiring attention.

Relevant documents:
- *UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Work-Based Learning:*
  https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/work-based-learning
- WEXHE: Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience in Higher Education:
  https://wexhe.eu

Areas identified as requiring attention:
- Knowledge about work-based learning within research universities is still limited. The benefits for students, higher education institutions and employers of this form of education are not well known within research universities.
- Insufficient familiarity with the literature on the benefits of work-based learning, in research universities in particular.
- Insights and tools that have emerged from European projects, such as those developed by the Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience in Higher Education project (WEXHE – https://wexhe.eu) are not being used, or are not being used enough.
- A reliable set of quality assurance tools, based on clearly-formulated learning outcomes, and formalised agreements based on a contract signed by all parties involved with regard to supervision and assessment.

List of European Terms

Dutch term	English term	What is it/what are its aims?	Who does it cover?
Europa	Europe	One of the seven continents; a geographical region	51 countries in Europe
Europese Unie (EU)	European Union (EU)	Collaborative partnership in Europe	27 countries are members of the EU
Europese Economische Ruimte (EER)	European Economic Area (EEA)	European internal market	EU plus Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein
Europese Vrijhandelsassociatie (EVA)	European Free Trade Area (EFTA)	Partnership to promote trade between EEA and non-EU European countries	EU plus Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Switzerland
Europese Commissie (EC)	European Commission (EC)	Helps shape the EU's strategy, proposes EU laws and policies, monitors their implementation and manages the budget. Also plays a role in supporting international development and aid. In the case of education, it makes recommendations.	27 commissioners led by a president, runs directorates and agencies with a substantive focus.
Europese Raad (ER)	European Council	Defines the EU's overarching political direction and priorities.	Heads of state or government of the 27 EU member states, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission
Europees Parlement (EP)	European Parliament	Together with the European Council, responsible for adopting and amending legislative proposals, and making decisions about the EU budget.	Members chosen by voters in the EU member states
Europese hoger onderwijsruimte	European Higher Education Area (EHEA)	Bologna countries (countries affiliated with the Bologna Process)	49 countries, plus the European Commission (Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and Vatican City).
Europese onderwijsruimte	European Education Area (EEA)		
Erasmus+ (E+)	Erasmus+	EU-designed and financed programme for education, training, youth and sport (2014–2020)	Potentially, any country in the world. The countries involved must be recognised by the EU as partner countries. There are 14 distinct regions.

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Programmalanden Erasmus+	Programme countries	Participation in many actions is limited to member states and associated countries.	EU countries (27) and a number (7) of countries outside the EU (such as Turkey and the United Kingdom (until 31 Dec. 2020)
Partnerlanden Erasmus+	Partner countries		Partner countries (e.g. Western Balkan countries) and other countries throughout the world.

Correlations between various European policies

	Bologna Communiqué	**European Education Area**	**Erasmus (2021-2028) - ECHE**	**Relevant link to this memorandum**
Social / Civic dimension	**An inclusive EHEA.** Equitable access to higher education. Full support to complete studies and training.	**Inclusion and gender equality** ● Pathways to School Success ● 50 centres of excellence for VET ● European Approach to micro-credentials ● Gender-sensitive teaching	Encouraging the participation of individuals with fewer opportunities in the programme. Promoting civic engagement and encouraging students and staff to get involved as active citizens before, during and after their participation in a mobility or project. Respect in full the principles of non-discrimination, transparency and inclusion set out in the programme.	(§1) Erasmus programme/ECHE
Innovation dimension	**An innovative EHEA.** HEIs are supported in intensifying their search for solutions to societal challenges. Meeting SDG goals by 2030. Swift up-dating of knowledge, skills and competences.	**Green and digital transitions** ● Education for Climate Coalition ● Greening of education infrastructure ● Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability ● Digital Education Action Plan	Promoting environmentally friendly practices in all activities related to the Programme. Green Erasmus.	(§1) Erasmus programme/ECHE (§3) Mobility: Physical and Virtual (§9) Micro-credentials (§11) Work-Based Learning
Collaboration dimension	**An interconnected EHEA.** Shared frameworks and tools that facilitate and enhance international cooperation and reform, exchange of knowledge and mobility of staff and students.	**Geopolitical dimension** ● Team Europe approach ● Strengthen cooperation with strategic global partners ● Expand international dimension of Erasmus+	New opportunities to collaborate with excellent non-EU partners as well.	(§1) Erasmus programme/ECHE
Academic dimension	**Making student-centred learning a reality.** The student is an active participant in determining their studies. Mechanisms for flexible learning pathways are implemented.	**Quality in education and training** ● Boost basic and transversal skills ● More mobility and cooperation opportunities ● Support lifelong acquisition of language competences ● Develop a European perspective in education	Ensure the quality of the mobility activities and of the cooperation projects throughout the application and implementation phases. Erasmus (2021-2027) is a programme for all levels of education.	(§2) ECTS (§1) Erasmus programme/ECHE (§5) Internal and External Quality Assurance (§9) Micro-credentials (§11) Work-Based Learning

Academic dimension	**Fostering future teaching.** Teaching and research should be equally important. Teachers should be supported in the professional development.	**Teachers and trainers** ● 25 Erasmus Teacher Academies ● European guidance for national career frameworks ● European Innovative Teaching Award	Staff mobility: "It is recommended that staff training mobility should be part of the human resource / professional development policy of the HEI."	
Academic dimension	**Strengthening HEI's capacity to support learning and teaching.** Effective strategies for operating in a digital world. Foster collaboration initiatives and platforms for exchange.	**Higher education** ● European Universities full roll-out ● Development of a European Degree ● Legal statute for alliances of universities ● Erasmus+ Mobile App	Undertaking the necessary steps to implement digital mobility management in line with the technical standards of the European Student Card Initiative. EU programmes as a mean to increase quality in teaching and learning; more virtual and blended mobility + IT platforms;	(§4) Qualifications Frameworks (§5) Internal and External Quality Assurance (§10) European Universities Initiative