



EMPOWERING
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EUROPE'S YOUTH

Conférence ministérielle européenne
pour l'enseignement supérieur



STATEMENT OF THE FIFTH BOLOGNA POLICY FORUM

Paris, May 25th 2018

We, the Ministers responsible for Higher Education and heads of delegation, institutions and organizations participating in the 5th Bologna Policy Forum, strongly support the continuing value that higher education brings to societies. In an increasingly interconnected and internationalised world higher education and research are central to our future prosperity, peace and progress. Higher education engaging with society is vital at a time when all our societies face challenges ranging from social exclusion, youth unemployment and gender inequality to rising populism, the displacement of peoples, climate change and the very future of our planet. The Bologna Policy Forum in Paris in May 2018 has provided an important opportunity for a multilateral dialogue and exchange of ideas between members of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Ministers from other countries and a range of stakeholders.

Higher education has a long tradition of forging international links and there are many examples of productive partnerships between our countries. Higher education institutions and stakeholders are among the key drivers of international cooperation through the mobility of staff and students, international research partnerships, transnational education and collaboration on reaching solutions to global challenges. In this way higher education has provided a strong basis for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and good practice that contribute to solving global issues.

The EHEA is an example of the kind of progress that can be made by bringing together a large number of countries acting on a voluntary basis. It has provided a framework and practical tools that have modernised and improved the quality of higher education provision – such as learning outcomes, the diploma supplement, qualifications frameworks, and quality enhancement and assurance. Similar approaches have been adopted by other regions in South East Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean and Latin America which have all been actively engaged in the development of national or regional integrative instruments, such as quality frameworks, credit transfer systems, and qualifications frameworks, to strengthen quality and facilitate intra-regional recognition and mobility. The ASEM process is an example of a successful transnational cooperation initiative between Asia and Europe as is the Africa-EU partnership which highlights excellent collaboration on both continents.

We believe that the Bologna Policy Forum, supported by Ministers and international organisations, can bring about a more systematic and sustainable level of international cooperation. This cooperation needs to take account of the diversity across our regions, including the different domestic social and political contexts of higher education and its wider geopolitical dimension. It should define realistic ambitions and goals that can be achieved in a spirit of exchange and mutual learning. It is important for those with responsibility for higher education to listen, learn and engage on common issues. These include quality, academic freedom, student participation, social inclusion, the status, the autonomy and the wider role of higher education institutions. The Fifth Bologna Policy Forum has initiated a global policy dialogue focussing on two of these common concerns - social inclusion and the wider civic role of higher education.

Although the percentage of the population attending higher education is growing in most countries, social inclusion and widening access to higher education is still a challenge across the world. Disadvantaged groups, including migrants and refugees, face additional challenges not only to access higher education but also to succeed. The debate therefore about social inclusion is not just about fair access, it also about success in higher education – this includes retention, progression, successful completion and good employability for all our students and graduates.

Contemporary social challenges require local, regional and global engagement. Higher education institutions are vitally important in supporting the economies of their locality, region or country. We agree that they can and should play an even stronger social, cultural and leadership role in their communities. In this vital civic role higher education institutions can help to build social cohesion by providing students with values, skills and aptitudes that promote civic participation, social inclusion, sustainability and global citizenship.

We, the Ministers, commit to supporting this ongoing, successful interregional dialogue on issues of common concern amongst policy makers, stakeholder organisations, students, staff and higher education institutions. We propose the establishment of a Global Working Group in the next 2018 -2020 Bologna work programme to take this agenda forward and we invite countries to express their interest to hold high level workshops on a yearly basis to continue the dialogue on social inclusion and the wider role of higher education. We are also committed to continuing to collaborate, to share experience and to identify future goals through joint workshops, conferences and importantly peer learning for innovative answers to our common challenges. In order to further develop international partnerships, we call on higher education institutions to explore all opportunities provided by bilateral actions and multilateral mobility and cooperation programmes, such as the EU-funded Erasmus+ or the Horizon 2020 research programmes, to collaborate on reaching solutions to our common challenges.