

TRENDS TOWARDS INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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Today diversity, inclusiveness, equality and internationalisation in the higher education sector have become more significant than ever before. Institutions of higher education prepare themselves for the changes driven by the national, European and global context.

Analyzing this transformation, we suggest an overview of the trends towards internationalisation of higher education in Europe. Three developments taking place simultaneously can be clearly observed. Firstly, European higher education faces a more market-oriented approach to education and training. Secondly, the internationalisation of higher education has been boosted by a series of agreements made at the level of the European Commission. Lastly, the quality assessment is slowly being transformed from an institution-centered national process to international accreditation [6].

On 14 November 2017, the European Commission outlined its vision for a European Education Area by 2025, selecting a network of European Universities as one of its flagship initiatives, claiming for ‘... a Europe in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders’ [5]. The European Universities Initiative is the programme of the European Union to build a European Education Area, co-developed by higher education institutions, student organisations, Member States and the European Commission. Transnational university alliances will become the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European Higher Education [2].

The European Universities initiative, aimed at establishing alliances between higher institutions from all across Europe for the benefit of their students, staff and society is implemented primarily through Erasmus+ funding. Alliances are forming European knowledge-creating teams to address real-world challenges using a ‘challenge-based approach’ [4]:

- combine shared education, teaching and learning, research and innovation;
- allow groups to collaborate across disciplines through investigation and invention, while enhancing the quality of education, research, and public involvement;
- use innovative learning and training that cultivates critical and creative thinking, and helps learners to adapt and innovate in the rapidly evolving labour market;
- develop innovative solutions that can be adapted to different regions in Europe.

The initiative sets the ambition to expand to 60 European Universities alliances involving more than 500 higher education institutions by mid-2024. Alliances are formed to create the common educational environment with a goal to explore cooperation possibilities to meet the educational needs of those who are looking for training and education opportunities, those who want to acquire a second education, employers who need professionals to fit their industry requirements and for the society as a whole. The objectives include European strategies to encourage educational development, in particular, bring together educational institutions, researchers, students, stakeholders as well as local authorities to define common interests and discuss obstacles to be overcome. Flagships include:

- equal access to knowledge for everyone,
- joined European degree with the legal status,
- internationalization of curricula in order to promote mobility, innovation, excellence and student-centered approach,
- blended intensive programs and collaborative online international learning,
- micro credentials to support and foster life-long learning, and more.

Making the curricula more flexible and suggesting innovation solutions to allow everyone to internationalize their curriculum are among the goals which will in the future promote mobility for all, boost multilingual approach, facilitate communication and exchange between partner institutions.

41 European University Alliances expressed their call in a joint statement on March 8th, 2022 appealing to the Member States to urgently support the establishment of sustainable long-term funding mechanisms to enhance cross-border collaboration among European University alliances across their various objectives. This funding should (1) integrate all education, research, innovation, transfer to society, (2) combine resources (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Interregional Innovation Investments, member state funding, etc.) and, finally, (3) support should be sustainable, a long-term funding instrument [3].

Based on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and

the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities (SWD (2022) 6 final) [1] fundamental academic and democratic values are under pressure as universities strive to compete on a global stage. We need to facilitate and reinforce transnational cooperation between universities to strengthen their capacities to equip young people, lifelong learners and researchers with the right competences and skills. It will also improve attractiveness and global competitiveness of the universities. The future of education should be based on hybrid solutions with the balance between physical presence and digital tools.

Within Europe, a growing number of people need to update and improve their knowledge, skills and competences to fill the gap between their formal education and training and the needs of a fast-changing society and labour market. The COVID-19 pandemic and military intrusion to Ukraine have also highlighted the need for people to be better equipped to deal with current and future challenges such as increased unemployment and damaged physical, mental and emotional well-being of hundreds of millions of people in Europe.

The Commission offers to support leading universities to develop and implement Master programmes, through Erasmus Mundus Joint Master calls addressing global challenges and support transparent and fair recognition of third country qualifications, including those of refugees, through the network of academic recognition centres and the EU transparency tools (European Qualifications Framework, European Digital Credentials for Learning) [1].

The Commission has presented proposals for Council Recommendations on learning for environmental sustainability and micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. Micro-credentials make it possible to certify the outcomes of small, short-term tailored learning experiences necessary to meet the needs of the labour market. They can complement existing qualifications and help individuals to fill the skill gaps to succeed in a fast-changing environment. Micro-credentials allow to record the learning outcomes assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. They can be shared and are portable, may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials.

Micro-credentials could be designed and issued by a variety of providers (education and training institutions, employers and industry, civil society organisations, public employment services, regional and national authorities, and other types of stakeholders) in different learning settings – formal, non-formal and informal ones (European Qualifications Framework, Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area).

Member States are encouraged to support the quality and transparency of micro-credentials by encouraging providers to publish catalogues of micro-credentials they offer and integrating micro-credentials into national qualifications frameworks and systems [1]. The advantages of microcredentials and strategies for their accumulation by students within the

mobility programs between partner universities of the alliances will help to expand cooperation between universities and ensure both equal access to education within European Area and supporting life-long learning demands. Possible cooperation includes opportunities to study and do research abroad, as well as to find new learning methods – virtual mobility, mixed intensive programs, international summer schools involving students and professionals from different universities.

In this context, it is necessary to clarify the legislative framework of European educational structures, which would allow not only EU citizens, but also immigrants to apply for equal access to higher education, and to structure and popularize opportunities to maintain the professional level of refugees and support their integration into the economy of the European country that accepted them.

All the above-mentioned trends clarify the vision for the future of higher education and European universities. Europe has to invest in education and training of the young generation and offer each European citizen a real chance to upskill and reskill, laying the foundation for sustainable growth, a stronger, more prosperous and resilient Europe.

Literature:

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