

# **Modernisation of higher education in a European context in 2023**

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The Dutch Team of Bologna Experts\*

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## Table of Content

<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Reforming higher education</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2021: a fresh start</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Renewed attention</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>1. The role of the Erasmus+ programme and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education</b> .	<b>6</b>
<b>2. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Diploma supplement (DS)</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Mobility: physical and virtual</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Inclusive education</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Qualifications Frameworks</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>7. Associate degree</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>8. Internal and external quality assurance</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>9. Automatic recognition of educational qualifications</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>10. Doctorate/PhD in the European context</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>11. Joint study programmes and national and international joint degrees</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>12. Micro-credentials</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>13. Digitisation and digitalisation in higher education</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>14. European Universities Initiative</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>15. Work-based learning (WBL) in higher education</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>16. Flexible learning paths</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Annex</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<i>List of European Terms</i> .....	<i>24</i>
<i>Correlations between various European policies</i> .....	<i>26</i>

## Summary

Since 1999, when 29 European Ministers of Education signed the Bologna Declaration, systematic efforts have been made to modernise higher education (HE) in Europe. Numerous initiatives have been introduced and tools developed to that end. In the intervening period – nearly 25 years – great progress has been made toward establishing a European Higher Education Area. Steps taken by the European Commission (EC), such as the further development of the Erasmus+ programme, have played a vital role in that progress. This memorandum aims to offer insight into the current state of affairs by providing a picture of recent and ongoing developments, as well as an overview of the latest tools. It will also identify the challenges that still lie ahead of us. This memorandum is intended for policy officers and other employees at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the umbrella organisations and the higher education institutes themselves: i.e. all levels of management, policy staff, lecturers and students.

## Introduction

Experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns regarding the climate, European values and safety have given us compelling reasons to take a fresh, critical look at how higher education institutions organise their education and deal with internationalisation. Out of necessity, normal face-to-face 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. It has become clear that, while online learning is a welcome addition to classroom teaching, especially in the form of blended learning, it is not a true alternative. Students need a social environment in order to perform at their best.

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, the undermining of European values such as democracy and ethics and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) drafted by the United Nations.

The new Erasmus+ programme was launched in 2021. As part of this programme, the European Commission developed the European Universities Initiative to strengthen collaboration between European universities. There was also a call for renewed attention to be given to the importance of lifelong learning through the introduction of micro-credentials. Policy elaborating the nature of these credentials has since been published.

This policy is reflected in the *European Strategies for Universities*, introduced by the European Commission in January 2022. This policy paper from the Commission sets out a vital role for higher education, formulated in four key objectives: (1) to strengthen the European aspect of education and research; (2) to position higher education institutions as beacons of the European way of life; (3) to strengthen their role as actors in efforts toward the twin green and digital transition; and (4) reinforcing their leading role within the EU as a world player.

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 is on the current situation, but the way in which certain aspects

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

## Reforming higher education

In 1998, the Ministers of Education of the four largest EU Member States signed the *Joint declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system*, known as the Sorbonne Declaration. The reason for the Declaration 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 was the result of 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 (and has) 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 3 obligations to which 49 European countries<sup>†</sup> have committed themselves to date:

1. the introduction of a 3-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 3-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 is complete. 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 from 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 keeping with the growing flexibility of education and responding to the need for lifelong development in an increasingly dynamic labour market and society. Micro-credentials

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<sup>†</sup> Two of these countries were suspended at the start of 2022 due to the war in Ukraine: Belarus and Russia. Since that time, Russia has announced plans to launch its own overhaul of the higher education system.

appear to be a response to the European Commission's introduction of the concept of lifelong learning in the late twentieth century.

## 2021: a fresh start

It is not an exaggeration to say that, in 2021, a fresh start was 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 7-year Erasmus+ framework programme (2021-2027). The *Rome Ministerial Communiqué* focuses on a higher education area that is inclusive and innovative and exhibits interconnectedness for the purpose of achieving 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. Among other factors, innovation in higher education is being shaped by research into and the introduction of micro-credentials and by 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 to 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 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 sticking points and issues 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 Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ of the 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 examination boards can be expected to be familiar with the contents of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the role and contents of the diploma supplement (DS).

In light of the challenges identified, it would be only reasonable for stakeholders, higher education institutions and decision-making bodies to make optimum use of a well-informed group of experienced colleagues such as the Dutch Team of Bologna Experts, which was

established in 2004. The Team developed the 'Bologna Module', (see Erasmusplus website NL) which offers interested parties an opportunity to learn about various aspects of the Bologna Process.

Below, a number of topics of interest are addressed in greater detail, with particular attention for what are known as the Bologna tools. 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 umbrella organisations 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. Now that the new Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) has taken effect, all higher education institutions must once again be awarded 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 EU Member States and third-party countries affiliated with the programme can be deemed capable of successfully performing international collaboration activities as part of the Erasmus+ programme. When collaborating within the Erasmus+ programme involves third-party countries *not* affiliated with the programme, quality is assured by means of the Inter-Institutional Agreements (IIA). The ECHE contains a set of principles with which an educational institution that wishes to receive Erasmus+ funding must comply.

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

Relevant document:

- [\*Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 Guidelines\*](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- Within higher education institutions, there is still insufficient awareness of the commitments that have been made when an ECHE has been signed;
- If a higher education institution does not comply with the requirements set out in the ECHE, the National Erasmus+ Agency does not have the power to revoke the ECHE of the higher education institution, which would make further participation in the Erasmus+ programme impossible.

## 2. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

ECTS was first developed as a transfer system from 1989 onwards, and 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 conjunction 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 study load in relation to the intended and achieved learning outcomes. The system has a number of central 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 study load of 28 hours. In the countries that have incorporated the ECTS system into their legislation and regulations, the average length of an academic year is between 1,500 and 1,600 hours.

The incorrect term ECs or European Credits is often used in the Netherlands. This term is incorrect and is confusing in the international context.

- *ECTS Course Catalogue*

The ECTS Course Catalogue describes the full range of courses 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 Dutch.

- *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 marks.

Relevant document:

- [2015 ECTS Users' Guide](#)

For more on the background and importance of the ECTS' development, see:

- [Robert Wagenaar, \*A History of ECTS, 1989-2019: Developing a World Standard for Credit Transfer and Accumulation in Higher Education\*](#). Groningen, International Tuning Academy, 2019:

For more on how marks are converted between different countries and institutions, refer to the

- [EGRACONS Grade Conversion Tool](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- The implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which 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, are not yet and/or not correctly implemented. This is not in the best interest of students and their national- and international positioning during their studies and after graduation;
- Correct formulation of learning outcomes at the programme level and the learning unit level (see also 4. Qualification Frameworks);
- Different workloads/lengths of bachelor and master programmes (first and second cycle);
- Flexibility of curricula (see also 12. Micro-credentials);
- Design of the course catalogue and the language to be used;
- Comparable and balanced study loads;
- Use of the ECTS grade conversion model.

### 3. Diploma supplement (DS)

The diploma supplement (DS) is an important tool for documenting the learning outcomes of a curriculum. The format of the supplement has been adopted at the European level and was developed by the EC, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The DS is intended to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes.

The Dutch Higher Education and Research Act stipulates that all higher education institutions must issue a DS (in keeping with the European model) along with every diploma. This DS must provide information on (1) the holder of the qualification; (2) the type of qualification and the institution that issued the diploma; (3) the level of the qualification; (4) the content and learning outcomes of the successfully completed curriculum and the marks attained; (5) the function of the qualification; (6) a certification of the DS; (7) a description of the relevant national education system; and (8) any other relevant information. The content is expressed by means of the profile on the one hand and the achieved learning outcomes of the programme on the other. To ensure correct interpretation of the marks obtained, the DS should also offer insight into the grading system and the percentage distribution of the assigned marks. This percentage distribution is based on all marks issued within a programme during a period of two consecutive years or within a group of similar programmes.

If the certification in question is a joint diploma, the DS must contain all relevant information pertaining to both institutions that awarded the diploma.

The Dutch Team of Bologna Experts has drafted a guidance to help the Dutch educational institutions complete the diploma supplement.

Relevant documents:

- [DS and Guidance for Completion of the Diploma Supplement](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- Not all institutions of higher education are correctly implementing the DS;



- The Ministers of Education adopted an updated model in connection with the Bologna Process in Rome in 2018. Higher education institutions are expected to make use of this 'new' model;
- All higher education institutions should publish information on the DS on their central websites, including an example that is in keeping with the official model;
- The Europass example currently featured on the EC website is incomplete because it does not include the required introductory text;
- Integral inclusion of all programme learning outcomes in the diploma supplement;
- The percentage distribution of marks should be updated annually.

#### 4. Mobility: physical and virtual

Physical mobility has been facilitated by the Erasmus programme and its successors since 1987. Although the Erasmus programme has developed into an overwhelming success in terms of its importance to society and the numbers of students completing part of their degree in another country (whether by attending normal lectures or by doing a traineeship/internship), the 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 always extremely ambitious.

While physical mobility has become an integral part of higher education in Europe, as an alternative there is also interest in the idea of gaining 'international experience' while remaining at your 'home' institution. This is known as 'Internationalisation at Home'. Internationalisation is closely linked to the development of knowledge, understanding and valuing of other cultures. This applies to other countries, but also to the unifying European concept. The idea is 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 in the most recent framework.

Relevant documents:

- Nuffic: [Internationalisation at home in higher education](#);
- [KA3 Erasmus+ Forward Looking Cooperation Project EVOLVE - Evidence-Based Online Learning through Virtual Exchange](#)

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, which deserves ongoing attention;
- Professionalisation of staff with regard to the above topics.

#### 5. Inclusive education

Particularly in the last few years, there has been growing attention for the theme of 'inclusive education' in the context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The theme is part of what is known as the Social Dimension, one of the 10 action points of the Bologna Process. The *Rome Ministerial Communiqué* (2020) includes an annex devoted to this theme: *Principles*

*and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA*. To that end, 10 principles have been formulated. These are aimed at drawing specific attention to 'underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students', as well as at promoting 'diversity, equality and inclusion'. While the principles distinguish between the responsibilities of public authorities and those of higher education institutions, they also assume cooperation between the two.

In practical terms, the point is to improve access to higher education for potential students who fall into the aforementioned groups. The underlying idea is that higher education should accurately reflect the diversity found in society. Attention must also be paid to the academic success of these students. International mobility programmes must be aligned to the previously stated objectives. Moreover, higher education institutions are now expected to demonstrate social engagement.

For the institutions, this means they must guarantee a culture of inclusive learning. Such a culture places demands not only on university management, but on study advisers and lecturers as well. Lecturers must possess the skills needed to work with and promote academic success among a diverse student population that includes individuals from entirely different backgrounds.

Relevant documents:

- [Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#)
- [European Commission – Inclusive and connected higher education](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- Creating and safeguarding an inclusive learning environment;
- Training teaching and support staff to effectively respond to a diverse group of students while maintaining attention for each individual.

## 6. Qualifications Frameworks

The qualifications frameworks form the basis for the European Higher Education Area and for related reforms. We distinguish between the overarching European frameworks, national frameworks, sector frameworks and discipline-specific frameworks.

There are two overarching frameworks in Europe: the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*, which was the result of the Bologna Process and 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. Very briefly, these dimensions are: (1) knowledge and understanding; (2) applying knowledge and understanding; (3) gathering and assessing information (making judgements); (4) communication; and (5) lifelong learning skills. Doctoral degrees include an additional sixth dimension, 'research'.

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. The EQF encompasses eight levels. The Dutch Qualifications Framework

for Lifelong Learning is based on the same number of levels. One area for attention is level 4, which yields issues in connection with the international context and comparison. Senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university education (VWO) and vocational education and training (MBO 4) are all classified as level 4 by the Framework, despite the substantial differences in learning outcomes between these programmes.

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 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 Forward Looking Project 'Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe' (CALOHEE), contains examples of qualifications reference frameworks as well as templates.

Within the context of the same Erasmus+ Forward Looking Project project 'new (supplemental) frameworks that combine the existing overarching frameworks have been developed for the associate, bachelor, master and doctoral degrees. These are expected to be ready for publication in the first half of 2023.

Relevant documents:

- [European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning](#)
- [Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area](#)
- [Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- In higher education institutions, knowledge about qualification 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 qualification frameworks become more widely known among a broad group of lecturers and course developers?;
- EQF level 4 is not always uniform in nature, as it includes senior general secondary education (HAVO), pre-university education (VWO) and vocational education and training (MBO 4), which have different learning outcomes – a discrepancy that can lead to confusion, particularly in an international context.
- There are two overarching European frameworks; these compete with one another, and national frameworks have been drafted based on each of them. An additional problem is that the frameworks are now 15 to 20 years old and, in light of developments in higher education and society, are no longer up to date. It is therefore recommended to acknowledge the CALOHEE frameworks, which are intended to remedy the aforementioned shortcomings;
- The role of qualification reference frameworks at a discipline/programme level is still not sufficiently recognised. Particularly useful tools in this area are the benchmark statements produced by the [Quality Assurance Agency in the United Kingdom](#) (and the Tuning/CALOHEE reference documents).

## 7. Associate degree

The associate degree deserves particular attention because it exists in multiple distinct forms, which differ from one another in nature and structure and have distinctly different learning outcomes as well. The initial intent (in the context of revising the Bologna Process) was to have the associate degree function as an intermediate degree. Because associate degrees already existed in a number of European countries, the Netherlands decided to introduce associate degrees on an experimental basis. Effective 1 January 2018, a statutory basis for the associate degree as a standalone form of degree programme was laid down in the Dutch Higher Education and Research Act. In that same year, the Bologna Ministers of Education affirmed the associate degree in the declaration drawn up when they convened in Paris. As a result, the 3-cycle system in the Netherlands has effectively been converted into a 4-cycle system.

One aim of this type of programme is to offer vocational education and training students an option for continuing their studies. Associate degree programmes are offered by institutions of higher professional education, often in cooperation with vocational education and training institutions. In some cases, students with an associate degree must complete a transfer programme in order to be admitted to the second part of a regular bachelor programme. As a result, we now recognise three types of associate degree programmes:

- programmes that are an integral component of a bachelor programme and yield an actual intermediate degree;
- standalone degrees that, if the student wishes to continue their education, grant admission to the second part of a regular bachelor programme;
- standalone degrees that, if the student wishes to continue their education, require a transfer programme in order to gain admission to the second part of a regular bachelor programme.

With regard to the recognition of the associate degree in other countries, problems may arise because the Dutch associate degree can potentially be seen as a vocational education and training (VET) certification rather than a higher education programme. Students and degree programmes need to be aware of this.

Relevant document:

- [Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences website, 'De Associate Degree'](#)

Challenges identified:

- The transparency of the associate degree system as it exists in the Netherlands; the existence of different kinds of associate degrees, which have different programme learning outcomes and may impose differing requirements for admission to subsequent education;
- The information provision to potential students with regard to the nature of the associate degree;
- The recognition of the associate degree in other countries.

## 8. 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 units of study – meets minimum standards. The key document in this regard 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](#)

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;
- A weaker point of the ESG as a reference point for quality is that it focuses mainly on the quality assurance process itself and much less on the quality and relevance of the content of curricula, despite the fact that the latter is crucial in connection with automatic recognition of educational qualifications;
- Although it can be assumed for the Netherlands that the ESG are being implemented, the same cannot be said for many other European countries, at least with regard to comprehensive implementation. This puts pressure on the recognition of course components completed elsewhere;
- Preventing quality assurance from leading to an overly bureaucratic process. This means the costs, and the use and outcomes of the process, must always be kept in balance;
- Making sure quality assurance is not a paper exercise and 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-related learning (e.g. internships). See 15. Work-Based Learning.

## 9. Automatic recognition of educational qualifications

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. Automatic recognition is defined as follows: “Automatic recognition of a degree leads to the automatic right of an applicant holding a qualification of a certain level to be considered for entry to the labour market or a programme of further study in the next level in any other EHEA-country (access).”

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 or the creation of unnecessary study completion delays.

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. 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 and/or that selection procedures may be put in place. That being said, the Lisbon Recognition Convention requires higher education institutions to justify instances when admission is not automatically granted by providing evidence of 'substantial differences'. The specific profile of a programme can be decisive in this regard. This applies both to mobility in the Netherlands and international mobility.

Within the Erasmus+ programme, automatic recognition is sometimes discussed in relation to international exchanges for certain periods of study. In those cases, 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 \(1997\)](#)
- [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
- [The Triangle of Automatic Recognition](#) (NUFFIC, February 2020)
- [Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 Guidelines](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- Within the Erasmus programme, automatic recognition being 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 be faced with;
- 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 marks 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.

## 10. Doctorate/PhD in the European context

Within the Bologna Process/the European Higher Education Area, the Doctorate/PhD (EHEA) is defined as the third cycle. Internationally, as well as within Europe, there are major differences in interpretation, which nearly 25 years of the Bologna Process have been unable to resolve. The biggest difference relates to status. In 2005, it was decided that it would be best to refer to 'doctoral candidates', defined 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 university degree is also different in different countries. This definition affects both the status of students and scholarship students and the position of employees.

Both ‘recognition’ and ‘mobility’ are important elements of doctoral programmes, which always include a teaching component and a research component. The vast majority of programmes offered by doctoral schools include a mobility component as well.

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](#)
- [Study by the European University Association, published in 2019 on the basis of a survey conducted among educational institutions in 2018](#)
- [The European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers](#). The council is an official partner of the Bologna Process
- [EUA Council for Doctoral Education](#). The council has provided a platform for consultation and coordination since 2008
- [Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, University of Applied Sciences Professional Doctorate, March 2021](#)

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 (lectures to be delivered);
- Conditions for admission;
- Quality assurance systems for doctoral research;
- Organisation and awarding of international joint doctoral degrees.

## 11. 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 study programmes offered by two or more institutions of higher education. Joint programmes can result in a joint degree, double degree or multiple degree. In the Netherlands, unlike in some other countries, no statutory basis exists for dual degrees.

Joint programmes are the most intensive forms of collaboration between higher education institutions. Joint programmes can be offered in both a national and an international context. In the Dutch context, such programmes result in a single degree certificate signed by both awarding institutions (a joint degree). A joint diploma supplement is also issued. In the international context, a joint programme can result in a joint degree or a double degree. A double degree is when the student receives a separate diploma certificate and diploma supplement from each of the awarding institutions. An accreditation and quality assurance programme has been developed for international programmes and has been validated by the 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. A key catalyst for international joint programmes is the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs).

In June 2022, the EC launched the Erasmus+ initiative to pilot the development of European degrees as a means of further strengthening the European Higher Education Area by promoting more in-depth cross-border cooperation between higher education institutions. This initiative is part of the *European Strategy for Universities: Supporting and Enabling Higher Education institutions across Europe*. The objective is to determine whether it is possible to issue a joint European degree and, in the process, judge the feasibility of institutionalised EU collaborative tools, including the possibility of a European legal status for alliances. Ten projects have since been selected as a means of implementing this voluntary initiative.

Relevant document:

- [NUFFIC, Joint programmes from A to Z \(2015\)](#)
- [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#)
- European Commission, [Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation \(Text with EEA relevance\) 2022/C 160/01](#)
- [Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities](#)

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 around 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 and/or real-world practice 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 certificates 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;
- The European Approach assumes that no additional requirements will be imposed at the national level. In the Netherlands, however, in addition to the EA, an efficiency assessment (aimed at the Dutch labour market) must be conducted, as well as an initial accreditation assessment if the programme in question is new. When a joint programme is being added as a track within an existing study programme, the efficiency assessment is not necessary. A track of this kind will need to be registered with the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (CROHO).

## 12. Micro-credentials

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

Both higher education institutions and private parties may offer micro-credentials. In order to be valid in higher education, they must be certified. Such certification assumes they are subject to existing quality assurance frameworks. A variety of forms are possible. Micro-credentials that are or could be embedded in the curriculum are available, as are micro-credentials that are independent of any educational programme.

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 series of recommendations. The final report was published in October 2022.

With the support of an ad hoc working group, the EC has also 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.” In June 2022, the European Council published the Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability.

Relevant documents:

- [MICROBOL project](#)
- [MICROBOL recommendations](#)
- MICROBOL framework: European project MICROBOL. [Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments](#). Common Framework for Micro-credentials in the EHEA. March 2022
- [A European approach to micro-credentials. Output of the Micro-credentials higher education consultation group: final report](#) (2021). The report is currently serving as the basis for a consultation process: [A European approach to micro-credentials](#)

- [European Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#)

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. At present, little to no knowledge has been acquired from international perspectives or research on this topic;
- The positioning of micro-credentials, whether as independent learning units and/or as integral component of a programme curriculum;
- Establishing a legal basis for micro-credentials in higher education;
- Determining the level of micro-credentials (EQF levels 5 through 7/associate degree/bachelor/master) and sub-levels therein.

### 13. Digitisation and digitalisation in higher education

With regard to this subject, a distinction should be made between the digitalisation of learning, teaching and assessment on the one hand and the administrative transformation on the other. In recent decades, and most recently as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, both aspects have accelerated greatly, and the end point of these developments is not yet in sight. Regarding the teaching process, the use of online and blended learning has become more common, both locally and as part of the internationalisation of higher education.

The following is a selection of relevant recent initiatives.

- *Virtual international collaborative projects – VIS*

VIS is a financing scheme initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science for the 2021-2024 period and intended for the creation and organisation of virtual international collaborative projects. The goal is to give Dutch students a way to gain international experience without leaving the Netherlands. During a virtual international collaborative project, Dutch students and international students work together online to deliver a final product. This helps the students develop both intercultural competences and language and digital skills.

- *SURF Acceleration Plan*

Through the Acceleration Plan, SURF is supporting educational institutions in taking steps toward digitalisation and, in doing so, is contributing to educational innovation using ICT and technology. The plan is based on 3 joint objectives: (1) to improve the alignment to the labour market; (2) to increase the flexibility of education; (3) to achieve faster and more effective learning through technology.

- *European Student Card Initiative (ESCI)*

By signing the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education of the new Erasmus+ programme, higher education institutions pledged their intent to digitise and digitalise their mobility processes by implementing the European Student Card initiative (ESCI).<sup>4</sup> This initiative consists of 3 parts: the European Student Card (not required), the Erasmus+ app (not required) and Erasmus without Paper (EWP). EWP requires higher education providers to fully digitise their Erasmus+

administration by connecting to the EWP network. This connection links together all mobility systems, making it possible to exchange data at the European level.

- *Digitisation and recognition*

More and more knowledge institutions and employers are awarding digital credentials for qualifications and other learning achievements (diplomas, certificates, open badges, etc.). These digital documents contain a wide range of information that can be helpful when verifying, evaluating and recognising learning achievements. The European Commission is working to establish European standards and infrastructures for digital credentials through the European Digital Credentials for Learning (EDC) initiative. This initiative is in keeping with the new Europass and ESCL.

Within the Erasmus+ projects [DigiRec](#) and [DigiNet](#), Nuffic has created an inventory of the ways in which the increasing digitisation of student data and learning achievements has affected the real-world practice of recognition. The results are set out in a white paper entitled Digital Student Data & Recognition. Nuffic is also working with Studielink to more effectively integrate credential evaluation into the enrolment chain by arranging for evaluation recommendations (both specific and generic) to be provided digitally via the central Studielink application (implementation scheduled to begin in April 2023). Another measure in this area is the Groningen Declaration, which is intended to elaborate the content of an internationally operating Digital Student Data Portability (DSDP) system.

- *National Course Catalogue: SURFeduhub*

SURFeduhub is the initiative aimed at developing a platform for sharing education-related data in order to simplify student mobility and flexibility. The data in question concern information on the programmes or courses offered, information on timetables and study progress and is intended for students and staff of higher education institutions. The hub wishes to become the standard for entering information into the Education Executive Agency's (DUO) Institutions and Programmes Register (RIO).

Relevant documents:

- [VIS](#)
- [Acceleration plan](#)
- [European Student Card Initiative | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\) | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [European Digital Credentials for Learning | Europass](#)
- [Digital Student Data & Recognition \(nuffic.nl\)](#)
- Groningen Declaration
- [SURFeduhub](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- The digitisation and digitalisation goals of the higher education sector mark the start of a drastic shift in how policy officers and staff in internationalisation departments deal with mobility processes. It will yield new internal and external stakeholders, in addition to new terminology. Employees will need new skills, including digital skills, and must receive ongoing education and training.

## 14. 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, it is primarily research universities within the EU that have used this initiative to give their alliances/consortia a distinct profile. The goal is to have 60 European Universities, comprised of some 500 higher education institutions, by mid-2024. This represents over 10% of the total number in Europe.

Relevant document:

- [European Universities Initiative](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- The majority of participation in this initiative coming from research universities; the higher professional education sector is underrepresented (both nationally and internationally). If the number of affiliated higher professional education institutions does not increase, there is reason to fear a divide between the haves and the have-nots. As an example, the consortia of European Universities are offered more opportunities to apply for European grants;
- Structural funding of European Universities Alliances and the consequences when funding is not available;
- Lack of clarity regarding the contribution to the development of higher education in general. What will institutions that do not participate in a European University notice with regard to such development, in a positive and a negative sense?

## 15. Work-based learning (WBL) in higher education

The purpose of work-based learning is to optimise the preparation of students for 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 an internship 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 higher professional education programmes in the Netherlands, active preparation for the labour market is a structural part of the programme. This is usually also the case for education 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 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 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 internships 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](#)
- [WEXHE: Integrating Entrepreneurship and Work Experience in Higher Education](#)

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- There is insufficient familiarity with the scientific and other literature on the benefits of work-based learning, in research universities in particular;
- The benefits for students, higher education institutions and employers of this form of education are not well known within research universities;
- 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](#)) 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.

## 16. Flexible learning paths

Societal developments and information, communication and technology have forced higher education institutions to modernise the range of programmes they offer, as well as the content and design of those programmes. The lecturer-oriented approach of the past has now given way to a student-focused approach and various forms of active learning. Programmes are based on programme and module-specific learning outcomes.

These developments have yielded many new educational programmes, most of which are multidisciplinary and possibly even interdisciplinary in nature. A process of increasing flexibility has been initiated in order to more effectively meet the needs of the labour market

and society on the one hand and those of individual students on the other. A distinction is being made between the main or major programme and the other components, i.e. minors, options, electives and internships. Institutions are working with so-called 'window programmes' as well. These are typically semesters for which students can choose their own content in the form of a study abroad, internship and/or electives. This can also serve as a basis for individual learning paths based on modular programmes – an idea that bears a close relationship to the emerging possibilities offered by digitalisation.

The bachelor/master/doctorate structure has enhanced the possibilities for programme mobility, both nationally and internationally, and has promoted the development of national and international double and joint degrees. This is closely related to the internationalisation of the education system, which is taking place in terms of both credit mobility and the multicultural and international classroom. These developments have led to the rapid development of not only internal and admissions offices but also an infrastructure for documentation in the form of learning agreements, the transcript of records and the diploma supplement that is now required to accompany all diplomas. The recognition of learning achievements is crucial in this context.

Thanks to the internationalisation of education – in both form and content – as well as digitalisation, new forms have emerged such as online and blended learning, as well as smaller learning units (micro-credentials) as a way to respond quickly to societal developments, particularly those in connection with lifelong learning. In light of the extremely rapid societal developments that are now occurring – due in part to the fourth industrial revolution (i.e. Artificial Intelligence, with programmes like ChatGPT and Bard as the most recent products) – higher education is and will likely remain in a state of flux. This calls for continuous and substantial adjustments that place demands on all those involved.

In this context, we are talking about no less than a revolution in higher education. It is no longer about the 20<sup>th</sup>-century trend toward massification and the development of technical and career and labour-market-related programmes at all levels. This is accompanied by a transition in the orientation and mission of the educational institution, which is becoming an entity that oversees the development of human capital and regional/national development in the form of applied and public-policy research and serves as an instrument for addressing and resolving societal issues.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century poses new challenges thanks to a multitude of converging developments. These include the development of the neo-liberal university, new providers (including commercial providers), the online university, the growing number of international students, more flexible appointments for academic staff and an increase in the number of supporting roles, greater duty of accountability, and so on and so forth. As a result of these developments, the nature of traditional universities has changed drastically in a short span of time. This has major implications for those institutions and their future longevity, but also and especially for their employees.

Relevant documents:

- Steven Mintch, [The Revolution in Higher Education Is Already Underway](#), in *HigherEd*, 12 January 2022
- Robert Wagenaar, [The end of the traditional university? Rethinking the higher educational model: research and workplace focused](#). Inaugural lecture, 18 February 2022. University of Groningen, 2023
- Derek Jan Fikkers and Judith Kamalski, [Universiteiten moeten nu de regie nemen, anders staan ze straks buitenspel \[Universities must now take the lead or risk becoming obsolete\]](#), in ScienceGuide 16 July 2020

Areas identified as requiring attention:

- Ongoing education and training for academic and support staff;
- Continued attention to the position and role of higher education institutions within society;
- Competing with new providers of higher education, learning modules and/or courses and responding effectively to the demand for education and training from all groups on society; ensuring inclusiveness and relevance to society.

## Annex

### 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 the 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.
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.
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## Correlations between various European policies

	Bologna Communiqué	European Education Area	Erasmus (2021-2028) – ECHE	Link to this document
Social/Civic dimension	<b>An inclusive EHEA.</b> Equitable access to higher education. Full support to complete studies and training.	<b>Inclusion and gender equality</b> • 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	<b>An innovative EHEA.</b> HEIs are supported in intensifying their search for solutions to societal challenges. Meeting SDG goals by 2030. Swift updating of knowledge, skills and competences.	<b>Green and digital transitions</b> • 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 (§4) Mobility: physical and virtual (§12) Micro-credentials (§15) Work-based learning
Collaboration dimension	<b>An interconnected EHEA.</b> Shared frameworks and tools that facilitate and enhance international cooperation and reform, exchange of knowledge and mobility of staff and students.	<b>Geopolitical dimension</b> • 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	<b>Making student-centred learning a reality.</b> The student is an active participant in determining their studies. Mechanisms for flexible learning pathways are implemented.	<b>Quality in education and training</b> • 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 (§8) Internal and external quality assurance (§12) Micro-credentials (§15) Work-based learning
Academic dimension	<b>Fostering future teaching.</b> Teaching and research should be equally important. Teachers should be supported in the professional development.	<b>Teachers and trainers</b> • 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	<b>Strengthening HEI's capacity to support learning and teaching.</b> Effective strategies for operating in a digital world. Foster collaboration initiatives and platforms for exchange.	<b>Higher education</b> • 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 means to increase quality in teaching and learning; more virtual and blended mobility + IT platforms;	(§6) Qualifications frameworks (§8) Internal and external quality assurance (§14) European Universities initiative

