

Aligning our Compass with Bologna

TEXT: WOLFGANG THIELMANN

A bachelor's degree in Madrid, internships in Tbilisi and Bergen, a master's degree in Tirana, a doctorate in Aachen – in other words international exchange, and the mutual recognition of all academic achievements within Europe and beyond – this is the main idea behind the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). A lot has been implemented so far, some aspects are still pending. DAAD is responsible for the operational implementation of the Bologna Hub Peer Support, a support programme for higher education institutions aiming to align their structures to the Bologna Key Commitments.

Support for higher education institutions

A new project, Bologna Hub Peer Support, aims to support higher education institutions in their implementation of the Bologna key commitments. Higher education institutions across the European Higher Education Area [<https://www.daad.de/daad-interactive-map/>] could apply for participation in the project until March 2021. DAAD, which is responsible for its operational implementation, is bringing together the participating institutions and Bologna experts.

Existing challenges shall jointly be identified, experiences exchanged and reforms advanced – digitally and also in person, if this becomes possible again after the Corona pandemic subsides. The results are intended to facilitate mobility opportunities for students and researchers in the area between Reykjavík and Vladivostok and to encourage academic exchange. 'Some nations in the EHEA have still potential to deepen the implementation of the key Bologna reforms to a certain extent – this remains a central challenge' says Dr Frank Petrikowski from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). 'Projects such as Bologna Hub Peer Support promote quite substantially the implementation of Bologna reforms in all 49 participating nations.'

The BMBF is responsible for coordinating the project, which is mainly funded by the European Union with Erasmus+ funds, and is also providing a financial contribution. The partners in this two-year project include the Spanish Rectors' Conference, the Science Ministries of Albania, Georgia and Ukraine, and the European Students' Union – the umbrella organisation of 45 national student organisations in 40 countries which is based in Brussels and represents nearly 20 million students.

A common higher education area

The Bologna process is named after the Italian university city where 29 European Ministers of Education initiated a Europe-wide higher education reform in 1999. In addition to the EU Member States, a large number of other countries are involved in the Bologna process. The aim was to create a common higher education area with comparability and mutual recognition of all degrees and quality assurance based on jointly agreed standards, which thereby also contribute to the promotion of student mobility.





Dr Frank Petrikowski is a Senior Desk Officer at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The Bologna Hub Peer Support project is coordinated by the BMBF. Photo ©: privat

These key elements of the Bologna process – the aforementioned key commitments – were stated in a communiqué by the Education Ministers of the Member States in 2018 and must be fully applied in all Member States within the EHEA. The project pursues a structured peer support approach which has been identified as one of the key tools in enabling the EHEA to realise its full potential in the future. Moreover, the project’s international dimension, in particular, also enables participants to learn from each other and to mutually engage in open exchange.

Experience with Counselling Missions

DAAD has considerable experience in helping higher education institutions to develop a greater openness towards Europe. ‘DAAD has been providing German higher education institutions with advice through a team of German and international Bologna experts for several years,’ reports Dr Stephan Geifes, Director of the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation at DAAD. ‘This project sees us transposing our successful model to the European Higher Education Area. The high-quality advice from our participating European Bologna specialists means we offer higher education institutions targeted assistance in this field.’

Twenty-five higher education institutions can take advantage of its consultancy. There are no specific requirements for participation. An attractive offer awaits them: each higher education institution that has successfully applied will be offered two counselling sessions in two phases. All participants can exchange views at the final conference.



Dr Gabriele Abermann from Salzburg has been advising higher education institutions on implementing Bologna reform measures since 2009.

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Very positive feedback at national level

Each partner institution in the project provides its expertise and informs relevant stakeholders via their respective networks. This ensures a broad regional approach. The first applications from the higher education institutions reflect this desired geographical diversity. A first evaluation and an interim conclusion are planned for winter 2021. The overall assessment will be made after a second evaluation following a final conference in 2022.

Dr Gabriele Abermann, emeritus professor at Salzburg University of Applied Sciences and long-standing Bologna expert, has recorded positive experiences in Austria and recommends that universities apply: 'There was very positive feedback on peer support consultancy sessions at national level. Higher education institutions, particularly, appreciated the external perspective amongst equals, shaped by personal experience, which stimulated the internal discussions on Bologna-related topics.' This underlined the importance of the strategic interaction of all higher education staff in improving the Bologna concepts in relation to the quality of studies and teaching. The participants also discovered new options for implementation. 'Higher education institutions should not miss out on this opportunity to reflect on Bologna-related topics through the lens of the Bologna Hub Peer Support project,' says Abermann, who is one of the 27 members of the international team of experts. ■

FURTHER LINKS

- ▷ Bologna Hub Peer Support (<https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/de/>)
- ▷ Team of experts (<https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/our-team-of-experts/de/78051-our-team-of-experts/>)
- ▷ Bologna Hub (<https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/die-na-im-bologna-prozess/de/55835-bologna-hub/>)

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