



Higher Education Reform Experts

Activity report 2019



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List of acronyms

CBHE – Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education

DG EAC - Directorate General for Education and Culture

EACEA - Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

EC – European Commission

ECTS - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EHEA - European Higher Education Area

EQF - European Qualifications Framework

EQF-LLL - European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

ESN – Erasmus Student Network

EUA – European University Association

HE – Higher Education

HEA – Higher Education Authority

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HERE – Higher Education Reform Expert

ICM - International Credit Mobility

ICT - Information and Communications Technology

ISCED - International Standard Classification of Education

MOOC - Massive Open Online Course

NARIC - National Academic Recognition Information Centre

NEO – National Erasmus + Office

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

QA – Quality Assurance

QF-EHEA - Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area

Executive Summary

The service contract “Centralised Support to the Network of Higher Education Reform Experts” (SPHERE) was awarded to a consortium of the European University Association (EUA) and the University of Barcelona (UB - coordinator) in 2014, with the ambition to support, train and link national HERE teams. This support entails international events and training activities (conferences, seminars and study visits), Technical Assistance Missions (TAM) as well as networking services and the design and maintenance of a portal (Virtual Community Website).

For 2019, the SPHERE training events addressed a **cross-cutting theme: social inclusion and equity**, to which several events were linked, as well as a study. This theme was agreed given it is of continuous focus of the European Union and the EU programmes for higher education, as well of the Bologna Process, where the ‘social dimension’ has gained speed. It was a theme which the Advisory Group endorsed, which was also first explored in break-out sessions of the 2018 HERE annual conference. This helped to programme the 2019 activities in accordance with HERE needs and interests.

The following related themes were tackled in the 2019 SPHERE activities, which included three study visits, a seminar, an annual conference, two newsletter editions and a study on Inclusion in the European Commission’s International Credit Mobility action (ICM):

- **Social inclusion, access and retention:** How universities have developed their policy and strategies towards social inclusion in their contexts; The process for developing a strategy; How is data and information on social inclusion collected; Approaches to ensuring success/integrating students from diverse groups on campus, etc.; Teaching in a diverse classroom.
- **Recognition and its implications for cross-border access to higher education and mobility:** This included the flexibilisation of learning and recognition of prior-learning (RPL), as this is also part of including diverse learners with diverse backgrounds.
- **Competence-based education (CBE):** Understanding the concept of and developing competence-based learning (both writing learning outcomes as well as teaching and evaluation); Innovative teaching to deliver upon CBE.
- **Internationalisation and inclusion,** including inclusion policies and practices for mobility and internationalisation activities.

The SPHERE Team developed **outcome reports** for all events, which are featured on the SPHERE Website (<http://supporthere.org/>). While all events had active participation and good participant reviews, the HERE tend to appreciate study visits in particular for the hands-on experience/case studies that they provided. This is why three of the above themes were addressed via a study visit.

“Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility: A Study of the Ongoing Mobility of Disadvantaged Students from Partner Countries”, was as additional activity that underpinned the theme of social inclusion. It was based on an assessment of monitoring reports of the ICM in the Partner countries included in the HERE action, online surveys of NEO and some National Agencies in Programme countries and former ICM students, as well as university interviews and focus groups. It explored and mapped definitions of ‘disadvantaged students’ and found that in most Partner countries and in some Programme Countries, this definition is far from being supported by legislation and by a broad consensus of opinion. The findings examined issues related to identifying and supporting disadvantaged students to be mobile, capacity of international relations offices and particularities regarding the ICM programme and the extent to which it enables universities to address obstacles to disadvantaged student mobility. The findings were presented and discussed at one study visit and also in the context of the annual conference.

As per the Technical Assistance Missions (TAM), as in previous years, there was a prevailing interest in **Quality Assurance, ICT/Digitalization, PhDs, and joint programmes**. The SPHERE Team noted that, as with 2018, TAM requests have become more specific, addressing more precise needs at national and institutional level and also following-up upon previous TAM that may have been carried out. There were also several TAM that were directly linked to SPHERE events organised in 2018, showing how events can inspire national HERE teams to

explore certain topics further. There continued to be several **regional TAM** events, jointly arranged by several countries on a topic of thematic relevance to the region.

TAM continue to be used as **a mechanism to deliver upon Bologna Process commitments** in those Partner countries that are part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and to also fulfil European Union policy commitments (such as in regulated professions). Non-EHEA countries wishing to comply with certain EHEA frameworks and tools also use the TAM to this purpose.

To support the TAM, SPHERE maintains and expands an expert pool. The experts contribute from their specific institutional and national experiences and many are connected to regional and international developments. Of note, most experts reported that they found the TAM experience useful for their own professional development. In addition, there have been cases of continued exchange and collaboration between experts and the HERE in Partner countries, beyond the TAM.

Finally, the HERE Virtual Community has continued to be updated in 2019 as a means to provide information to the HERE and also to showcase results of events, TAM and other important country-level developments in the Partner countries. The Newsletter for the HERE community was also released twice, to better showcase HERE activities and feature current policy developments in Partner countries targeted by the HERE action.

1. Introduction

The European Commission finances a network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE), appointed by European Partner countries of the Neighbourhood (Southern Mediterranean, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia and the Russian Federation), who are tasked to contribute to higher education reform in the respective countries. The HERE collaborate in national teams, supported by the National Erasmus+ Office (NEO), on the basis of a work plan that details objectives and actions for higher education policy reform in their respective countries.

Through the service contract “Centralised Support to the Network of Higher Education Reform Experts”, awarded to the SPHERE Team - ‘*Supporting and Promoting Higher Education Reform Experts*’ - a consortium of the European University Association (EUA) and the University of Barcelona (UB - coordinator), the European Commission and its Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture (EACEA) provide centralised services and training for the HERE. This entails the organisation of training events, Technical Assistance Missions (TAM) and the development and maintenance of a portal (Virtual Community Website). The SPHERE Team has been operating since 2015.

The following report provides an overview of the 2019 activities, summarises outcomes and recommendations from events and also informs on the outcomes of a policy study that the SPHERE Team conducted.

2. SPHERE in brief (2018-2020)

In the course of its current three-year contract (2018-2020), the SPHERE Team is tasked to organise the following activities for the HERE:

- Three annual conferences
- Three seminars, one per year
- Nine study visits, three per year
- 165 technical assistance missions (TAM), 55 a year (approximately)
- Further development and maintenance of the Virtual Community Website for the HERE
- Studies/publications, as requested by the European Commission. This has been agreed to include a bi-annual newsletter for the HERE, event outcome reports and a larger study on social inclusion in international credit mobility programmes of the EU.

The SPHERE approach for 2018-2020 renews the following methodological principles that were defined for the first SPHERE contract, and also includes some new facets:

- 1) **Awareness raising about EU higher education policy and policy developments in the EHEA**, and how these policies could impact Partner countries. This approach **considers that HERE have different levels of information and different starting points** with regards to their knowledge, which may be a function of the countries in which they are based and their varying professional profiles.
- 2) **Capacity building of the HERE teams** to actively contribute to higher education reform at national level in their countries and at the level of organisations and higher education institutions: In addition to knowledge and information transfer on HE reforms, the role of HERE in their respective countries is a strong point of focus and **the ability of individual teams to propose and shape policy** is highlighted.
- 3) **Enhancing networking** between HERE of different countries through a variety of regional and international activities, including through **regional TAM**.
- 4) **Peer learning** approaches that allow HERE at different levels of knowledge and experience to learn from each other.
- 5) Strong linkages with the Bologna Process and potential **support for Bologna implementation** in countries in need;
- 6) Strong linkages with EU education, neighbourhood and **foreign relations policy**.

3. SPHERE events

3.1 Types of events

The SPHERE Team continues to organise three different types of events for the HERE:

- **Study visits** present a 'case study' of an institution or country, and feature both national and institutional practices, if relevant. The SPHERE Team plans these events in exchange and collaboration with the host institution, which is encouraged to engage staff and students. Study visits have proven to be the most popular centralised activity for the HERE, who generally favour in-depth, hands-on approaches to training activities. This said, at times it is difficult for HERE to relate to an institution or system that is notably different in terms of structure, autonomy and financing of higher education.
- **Seminars** are theme-focused and engage speakers from different European and Partner countries. They focus on a thematic issue (quality assurance, doctoral education, university-industry linkages, for example), and attempt to provide both theoretical background to the issue as well as examples and cases from different systems – both within the EU and in Partner countries – as to how it is implemented. While the HERE have generally appreciated seminars, feedback has suggested that it is difficult to cater to the different levels of knowledge and experience that HERE may have on the topic.
- **Annual conferences** usually tackle an umbrella topic and serve as 'bridging events', linking themes under a policy framework. They have also been used to probe new themes and ideas. All conferences are reserved exclusively for HERE, though some Bologna Promoters from EU countries have joined as of 2017, and host universities can bring in selected staff members, if relevant. This is the biggest event in the SPHERE programme, and provides a large networking potential for the HERE, as well as the chance to showcase results from the initiative.

3.2 Themes

For 2019, a **meta-theme** was identified to inspire the SPHERE training events: **Social inclusion in higher education**. This topic was of high political interest to the EU and its education programmes and has also gained weight in the Bologna Process.

The 2019 events organised by SPHERE, related to this theme, were the following:

- **Study Visits:**

[Social Inclusion: University policies and practices. Vrije Universiteit VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands, March 25-26, 2019](#)

[Competence Based Education \(CBE\): Basics, Perspectives, Implementation, FH Campus Wien, University of Applied Sciences, Austria, 9-10 September 2019](#)

[Inclusive mobility: from good intentions to measurable outcomes: Flanders regional/VUB, Brussels, 21-22 November 2019](#)

- **Seminar:**

[Recognition: Implications for cross-border access to higher education and mobility](#), Chişinău, Moldova, 10-11 June 2019

- **Annual Conference:**

[From social inclusion to skills: Pressing themes in higher education policy making. Charles University Prague, 12-13 December 2019.](#)

3.3 Study Visit to VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands – Social Inclusion: University Policies and Practices

The HERE study visit (25-26 March, 2019) showcased how the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) in The Netherlands addresses social inclusion and tackles the issues of access and retention. It situated the VU within the Dutch context, and entailed important contributions from the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU).

The learning outcomes of this study visit were:

- Understand the process of defining and implementing university strategies for supporting access and retention and social inclusion;
- Understand better the concept of social inclusion, and the national policy context that shapes it in the higher education sector;
- Devise support for the development of innovative teaching practices that promote inclusive approaches;
- Examine systems for student progression and tracking, and the possible university programmes and services that can support this;
- Share interesting practices on engaging diverse students in international mobility;

Themes

The event was divided into a number of thematic sessions with inputs from the VU leadership, heads of important centres (International Office, Students' Services), initiatives (VU Learn!) and key staff coordinators (VU Diversity Officer). It also had an interactive session with students who had participated in VU mentoring programmes.

Amongst the topics explored were:

- Social inclusion as part of the VU history, mission and strategy
- Widening participation in international activities and student exchange programmes
- Social inclusion in the classroom: The VU Mixed Classroom Approach
- Widening participation in pre-university college & programmes for teacher training
- Inclusion policies for research: Improving (access to) the doctoral track and beyond

The study visit was attended by 31 HERE in addition to staff members from the VU. The HERE participants represented 17 countries and were mostly from universities, including rectors, vice-rectors, professors and PhD students. Two ministry representatives attended as well as one representative of a national quality assurance agency and one student HERE.

Participants highlighted the points below as some of their main take-aways:

- Social inclusion measures are often adopted in legislation and related policies (for example, quotas for including minorities in HE) but rarely followed up systematically enshrined in comprehensive measures. This is also true at the institutional level: Institutions may have some measures to include certain underrepresented groups, but they often lack both strategic approaches and the necessary resource allocation.
- While emphasis is often placed on getting students into higher education, less attention is given to student success, which should be a critical component of inclusion policies.
- Measuring the impact of social inclusion policies is essential, also regarding the correlation of social inclusion and academic quality, which is often questioned (can a university be excellent and inclusive?).

- In this regard, data collection is important, both, at national and institutional levels. Data is not a purpose in itself, but critical to informing strategies and policies and measuring impact. National targets must take into consideration the demographics of different regions and cities and the communities which higher education institutions serve. An urban university may need different targets and approaches than one in a rural setting.
- Data and privacy issues may hinder the institutions' ability to measure target groups. This must be considered when designing policies and indicators.
- Social inclusion and international strategies should be differentiated, though both relate to how universities manage diversity.
- The diverse classroom is a critical component of teacher development; while students cannot be forced to self-identify from which background they come, teaching methodologies should be used to address and encourage diversity.
- Mentorship, particularly provided by student peers, can be an effective means to support and integrate students.
- Access to internationalisation and mobility is also a key component of the inclusion agenda and should be reflected in internationalisation strategies and targets.

The Outcome Report of the study visit can be found at: <http://supporthere.org/page/publications>.

3.4 Seminar in Moldova on Recognition: Implications for cross-border access to Higher Education and Mobility

The focus of the HERE seminar was on **recognition** - in particular, the transnational recognition of qualifications and credit mobility. Hosted by the Technical University of Moldova on 10-11 June 2019, it aimed to offer an overview on the topic to HERE and to colleagues from the National Erasmus+ Offices (NEO), while adopting a twin-track approach, catering for the needs of both those who have been working on the topic for the past years, as well as those who are beginning with the basics. To this effect, a comprehensive pre-survey was conducted, where HERE were asked to identify their pre-existing knowledge and experience.

The learning outcomes of this seminar were:

- Gaining a clear view of current priorities and activities in the field of recognition of qualifications.
- Understanding the place of recognition in the context of national and institutional policies on internationalisation.
- Appreciating and discussing the need for relevant staff development at system and institutional levels.
- Assessing the gap between national provision and international good practice, with a view to identifying possible future TAM and other SPHERE actions.

The event offered plenary and break-out sessions devoted to the following topics:

- International recognition conventions
- The development of automatic recognition under the Bologna Process, and the European Education Area
- Recognition of credit mobility
- Recognition of professional qualifications and the extent to which it is increasingly embedded in international trade agreements
- Other related processes and developments such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the digitalisation of recognition instruments (the Europass and the European Student Card), the emergence of "new credentials" (micro credits, badges, nano degrees, etc.), and the recognition of qualifications and study periods of refugees.

The seminar was attended by 67 participants. This included 42 HERE and 16 NEOs from 23 countries. The HERE had very different profiles, including ministry representatives, vice-rectors, heads of Quality Assurance (QA)

departments and international relations units, etc. Several international experts were present, who not only shared examples and provided theoretical background, but also facilitated break-out group discussions. This included Allan Bruun Pedersen (Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science and Vice-President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee), Jenneke Lokhoff (Nuffic, The Netherlands) and Ana Mateus (NARIC, Portugal), Paul Leys (University of Ghent, Belgium), Rajko Golovic (European Students' Union) and Mary Gobbi (University of Southampton, UK) – on professional qualifications and recognition in the nursing sector.

HERE also made active contributions to the programme, including contributions from the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research in Jordan, Ain Shams University, Egypt, the French University of Armenia and Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan.

The seminar discussions generated a number of recommendations and take-aways:

- **Recognition of qualifications is a complex topic, in terms of principles, procedures and actors involved:** Participants showed a high interest in the principles and procedures around recognition of academic and professional qualifications, as well as credit recognition, following a period of mobility abroad. The seminar discussions delved into the complexity of the topic, among others discussing the role of stakeholders who bear the responsibility of recognition – ministries, higher education institutions, accreditation/recognition agencies or a mix of them.
- **Successful, transparent and systematic recognition of foreign qualifications pre-supposes the involvement of several stakeholders and does not occur in isolation.**
- Implementation of recognition procedures requires engagement at different levels:
 - Institutional (from all the staff involved in recognition and QA);
 - National/regional (e.g. in terms of law, transparency tools, national information centres);
 - International (e.g. recognition conventions, internal umbrella organisations and peer learning).
- **Balancing the concept of “substantial difference”:** Fair and transparent recognition is not only a question of legal principles and procedures or technical comparisons; it is also a culture, policy and mindset. This implies accepting differences in context and, when confronted by substantial difference, assessing it by asking whether learning outcomes are comparable rather than whether course inputs are identical. Balancing between accepting foreign qualifications for their value and respecting the quality of one's own qualifications fosters the potential for mutual trust in quality of qualifications. Trust is essential: conventions, legislative and regulatory measures should reinforce it, rather than merely compensate for its absence.
- **More capacity building events should be organised around the topic of recognition of qualifications and credits:** The recognition landscape within EHEA remains diverse, with still a non-consistent implementation of all the Bologna tools and principles, including the ones around recognition. That is why, additional capacity building events should be further organised on recognition procedures, including recognition of prior learning. New developments in recognition- such as emerging digital European instruments, new credentials and the recognition practices for students with a refugee background should be also constantly mapped and peer learning activities should be organised around them.

As there was considerable interest of participants to follow up this event, SPHERE conducted a follow-up survey to gather more information on: Recognition of academic qualifications in general; Recognition of online provision and of micro-credentials, and Recognition of professional qualifications. The results were presented and discussed at the Annual HERE Conference. The SPHERE Team noted that recognition was also a popular topic in the TAM requests for 2020, which shows the continued interest in this field.

The Outcome report of the seminar can be found at: <http://supporthere.org/page/publications>.

3.5 Study visit to FH Campus Wien – Competence Based Learning

This study visit, conducted on 9-10 September 2019, was a follow-up on the [2016 Study visit to Tallinn](#) on student-centred learning and is also relevant to the [2017 Study Visit on Student Engagement](#) (Edinburgh) and the [2018 Study Visit on Professional Development for Teaching Staff](#) (London). It tackled the theme of Competence Based Learning - CBL, which has gained increasing relevance for higher education institutions and systems, particularly at a time when labour market and societal demands are changing and systems and institutions are under pressure to respond to evolving skills demands. The event focused on the example of the hosting institution - [FH Campus Wien](#), Austria's largest university of applied sciences with a considerable student population with non-traditional background (immigrants, adult learners and part time students as well as student who are first generation in higher education). This was notably the first HERE Study visit to a private, university of applied sciences.

The defined learning outcomes were:

- Understand different definitions for Competency-based learning (CBL) and exploring potentially different approaches for CBL in different professions and disciplines;
- Gain insight on what CBL means for the mission and strategy of an institution;
- Assess the role that different actors/institutional services play when it comes to CBL (leadership, deans, teaching development support services, etc.);
- Explore examples of CBL in teaching practices and understanding better what this means to both teachers and students;
- Discuss the impact of CBL on curriculum and course development, including assessment;
- Assess how an institution may engage with external stakeholders on CBL, such as professional/business sectors, employers, local community, civil society in general, NGOs, etc. (for developing curriculum, working together on parts of curriculum or specific courses/modules, etc.).

The SPHERE Team developed [two background papers](#), which are complementary to the Outcome report. They considered the pre-survey results, which gave insight into the expectations of the participants for the event and their background experience on the topic.

Themes explored

The study visit was marked by the unique example that FHCW provided: Due to its status as a private higher education institution, FHCW has a peculiar governance model which also impacts the organisation of learning and teaching; teaching at FHCW was described as much less autonomous compared to universities. Heads of programmes have a relatively high level of autonomy in how teaching is provided, however, the top leadership can decide to discontinue a programme – considering also student and labour market demand and financial aspects. As mentioned, FHCW was also noteworthy in that it attracts a considerable number of students from non-traditional backgrounds. In total, half of the students are older than 26, and every second student is already in the workforce and formally a “part-time learner”.

FHCW describes its teaching offer as “demand driven” as it has to consider the learning needs of students, and the skills needs of the labour market. It regularly evaluates teaching content of programmes against industry needs and student feedback. But it emphasises that this does not mean “asking employers what they need today”, but rather “predicting labour market and society needs at least three years ahead”. By doing so, it also aims to contribute to social, economic and technical innovation – as the motto of the institution is “shaping the future with education”. New programmes are sometimes proposed by staff members but also by industry. Participants had the benefit of seeing how curricula development is done in practice at FHCW, stemming from university-industry and inter-disciplinary development teams.

The study visit was attended by 43 HERE in addition to staff members from the FH Campus Wien. The HERE participants represented 21 countries and were mostly from universities, including rectors, vice-rectors, professors and one student representative from Armenia. Six ministry representatives attended as well as two representatives of quality assurance agencies and three research and innovation centres.

Some take-aways from the event were:

- The study visit clearly demonstrated that CBL is not necessarily about specific methods, but generally about finding probable answers to the question on how learning can best be organised. It became also clear that student centred learning does not mean letting students work alone, but rather providing the necessary 'scaffolding' to enable their learning, to ensure their motivation and reduce frustration and fear, and to bring them gradually to higher levels of learning autonomy.
- This requires not only engagement of individual teachers, but communication and cooperation among teachers. It also involves students themselves, a process that has to be organised and supported (by leadership and the learning centre), and also evaluated and informed (by the units responsible for QA). FHCW showed how the development of the teaching philosophy and the curriculum manual can contribute to this, but in first instance, it depends on the active engagement of the members of the institution.
- FCHW is an interesting case of institutional and pedagogic change: It has implemented what was resisted against many years ago across Europe. These kinds of example can help to promote and accelerate change, and also to convey know-how on how to achieve it.
- The visit also showed how the mission and the organisational and economic model of the institution can impact learning and teaching, and hence should encourage each institution to reflect on how it can use its assets in the best possible way.

The outcome report can be found at <http://supporthere.org/page/publications>.

3.6 Study visit to Flanders: Inclusion in Mobility

This HERE study visit, hosted by *Vrije Universiteit Brussels* on 21-22 November 2019, was unique in that it took a system approach of a region in Europe, demonstrating how Flanders authorities and universities are strategising and tackling the topic of inclusion in internationalisation and mobility in the higher education sector. It considered different higher education institutions within the Flemish policy framework (Flemish ministry of education, and organisations that have worked extensively on this topic as of recent such as the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education - SIHO). Given that inclusion in mobility is a relatively incipient topic for many systems and universities, the purpose of the event was to look at it from the lens of developing and implementing institutional and national policies and initiatives, as opposed to promoting established good practice.

The study visit was also an occasion to discuss current EU priorities for inclusion and mobility and how they are reflected in the Erasmus+ programme. To this purpose, the results of a SPHERE study on the International Credit Mobility (ICM) programme, commissioned by the European Commission, were presented.

The learning outcomes were:

- Become aware of and understand better social inclusion in higher education, and how it can be related to national and institutional policy in the area of internationalisation and mobility;
- Understand the process of defining and implementing university strategies for supporting inclusiveness in mobility, and the related structures and approaches needed to implement it (data collection, QA, student diversity offices, etc);
- Be able to contribute to the development and implementation of policies and actions for inclusive mobility and internationalisation, considering work at institutional, national and Bologna Process levels;
- Better promote and use the opportunities offered under the current EU and national mobility programmes, particularly regarding their insistence on inclusion and mobility.

Themes

Day 1 of the event examined how Flanders and Flemish universities are strategising and tackling the topic of inclusion in internationalisation and mobility. This considered the influence of the Bologna Process and specifically the commitments to the 'social dimension'. Flanders has been at the forefront with its 'Brains on the Move' Strategy and regional targets for inclusive mobility, accompanied by a coherent approach to data, student tracking and assessment, which was designed and agreed between the Flemish universities and the ministry.

The sessions looked specifically at the structures and instruments that support or hamper inclusion in mobility in Flemish universities, with contributions from University of Ghent and University of Antwerp. The different challenges in identifying students with diverse needs and encouraging and supporting their mobility were discussed, as well as how mobility funding programmes and national/regional support structures and services contribute.

On the second day, the event examined the topic from the EU perspective, presenting the EU objectives regarding social inclusion and mobility, and implications for funding programmes.

In this context, the results of SPHERE Study on inclusion in ICM in Partner countries was presented. Not all participants had dealt directly with the mechanics of the ICM, however many comments and reflections were made during the discussion. In first instance, participants reflected on the obstacles for inclusive mobility, as per their own experience. This included:

- Lack of a sufficient number of partnerships through which higher education institutions could explore inclusive mobility arrangements;
- Absence of adequate infrastructure in partner universities which could accommodate students with certain needs;
- Inappropriate foreign language level of the disadvantaged students; some participants questioned whether certain disadvantaged students would be prepared to go abroad;
- Selection of disadvantaged students for mobility remains an informal and unsystematic process; many higher education institutions do not have the capacity or resources to professionalise this. Many higher education institutions also lack adequate internationalisation strategies;
- Difficulty in identifying students, particularly when there is some stigma in being labelled as 'disadvantaged'. It was commented that beyond physical disability, self-identification is complicated and sensitive. This is particularly true for those from a low socio-economic status.

The HERE brainstormed a number of possible ways forward for their inclusion agendas in their respective countries and institutions, especially when it comes to inclusion in internationalisation and mobility.

Some of the take-aways and conclusions were:

- Many of the existing national policies for disadvantage/social inclusion in Partner countries are not sufficient. They highlight some disadvantaged groups (such as those with physical disability or economically disadvantaged) but need updating, and also often systematic consideration and implementation in the higher education context. While higher education institutions may receive some scholarship support for certain groups, more structural measures (social inclusion strategy development, teaching training, capacity to manage diversity, student services, etc) are not necessarily funded.
- Access to internationalisation and mobility is also a key component of the inclusion agenda and should be reflected in internationalisation strategies and targets. The EU policies and programmes for mobility and capacity building going forward can be important in drawing attention to this. The Flemish case is a clear example of how government, government agencies/organisations and higher education institutions can work together collaboratively to define objectives for both inclusion and mobility, and develop a comprehensive approach to monitoring. The Flemish case has been directly influenced by the Bologna Process (social dimension and mobility targets). Its success can be

attributed to the small size of the system, the trust and collaborative spirit between institutions and ministry, and the proactive usage of international projects and networks to develop tools that support institutions and policy makers to refine and implement their strategies.

- Measuring the impact of social inclusion policies is essential, which is dependent upon defining clear categories for disadvantage and identifying a nationally and contextually appropriate way of generating that data. The Flemish case, whereby the Charter on disadvantaged student categories and data collection upon admission was agreed consensually, is an interesting example.
- Data and privacy issues may hinder the institution's ability to measure target groups. This must be considered when designing policies and indicators. 'Self-identification' of disadvantage is also a concern. Promoting mobility opportunities to certain disadvantaged groups is essential, as is making the self-identification process as clear and private as possible.

The outcome report can be found here: <http://supporthere.org/page/publications>.

3.7 Annual conference: Prague

The Annual HERE conferences have served as an important venue for tackling transversal policy themes that frame the HERE activities. As the largest HERE event of the year, it is also a forum for more extensive networking amongst HERE. The 2019 HERE Annual Conference - ***From social inclusion to skills: Pressing themes in higher education policy making***, hosted by Charles University Prague, had the dual purpose of:

- Addressing the umbrella topic of social inclusion, around which SPHERE events for 2019 were structured, and framing the lessons learned from these different activities;
- Introducing the new umbrella topic for 2020, **"Higher education responding to changing skills needs."** And giving HERE a voice in the programming of activities for 2020.

In addition, it provided opportunity for the HERE to discuss - at the level of regions and also thematically - certain sub-themes which were of specific relevance to countries in which HERE are active. It also served as a platform to present forthcoming plans for the Erasmus+ programme in its next programming period, and how this may impact cooperation opportunities with Partner countries.

The objectives of the conference were:

- Understand the current driving forces regarding social inclusion in higher education and extract lessons from the HERE events that have been held in 2019;
- Create linkages between the topics of social inclusion, internationalisation and mobility and understand better how these topics are approached (or not approached) in EU and Partner countries and also via EU mobility programmes;
- Understand the current policy thinking around the skills agenda and the role of higher education in a changing labour market landscape, as themes that will be further tackled in the 2020 SPHERE programme;
- Draw lessons from different Partner countries on how they tackle specific higher education reform themes, both at institutional and national level.

The event was structured around plenary sessions that examined the following:

- Understanding the current driving forces regarding social inclusion in higher education and examining country case studies for social inclusion policy (Ireland and Austria);
- Creating linkages between the topics of social inclusion, internationalisation and mobility and understanding better how these topics are approached in EU and Partner countries;
- Drawing lessons from different Partner countries on how they tackle specific higher education reform themes (Regional discussion groups on teaching in diverse classrooms, reaching out to underrepresented groups, inclusion in internationalisation and RPL as a vehicle for inclusion of diverse students);

- Forecasting the umbrella theme for 2020: Understanding the current policy thinking around the skills agenda and the role of higher education in a changing labour market landscape (examples from Ireland and the EHEA);
- Examining possible sub-themes for 2020: Micro-credentials, student tracking and employability, lifelong learning and continual professional development, sector skills cooperation and green professions.

The break-out groups on day one allowed participants to revisit and connect themes that had been explored in the 2019 event programme whereas day two was used to prime interest in certain themes for 2020.

The conference drew 95 participants – academics, administrators and policy makers. Of these, 73 came from 24 Partner countries. Seven EU Member States were represented, including 8 speakers who have served as experts in a number of HERE activities, such as Technical Assistance Missions, study visits and seminars. Seven of the HERE who attended were new to the network and had only been appointed in 2019. Five ministries representatives attended, including one member of Parliament. Twenty NEO attended, as well representatives from the Czech National Agency. On the side of the European Commission, both DG EAC and DG Employment attended, as well colleagues from the EACEA who manage the SPHERE action.

The event had a number of conclusions:

- Employability and skills remain a top priority for Partner countries in the HERE initiative. For many, there was little to none experience with the topic of micro-credentials, but an understanding of the transformative role they could play if properly introduced and quality assurance was gained.
- It is also clear that national efforts to systematically track student employment, in conjunction with stakeholders (the Irish model was studied) are often lacking in Partner countries and would be central to higher education reform going forward.
- The format of the 2020 HERE Annual Conference has proven to be an effective means to: 1) link together thematic issues that have already been explored through seminars, study visit and TAM, 2) allow HERE who may not have participated in previous events to debate these themes together, 3) forecast an upcoming theme and generate valuable feedback for programming HERE activities.
- It also demonstrated how countries with very diverse policy context for higher education could enhance dialogue around themes of transversal interest.
- The conference allowed important initiatives to be showcased and promoted (the inclusion and ICM study) and for the European Commission to share important information regarding the future of the Erasmus+ programme, which frames the HERE activities. In this sense, it served both the purpose of debating key higher education reform themes and informing the HERE on important developments in EU policies and programmes.

The event also entailed a consultation with the HERE and NEO on the Impact of Erasmus Plus Capacity Building project (which had been explored in the HERE Annual Conference in 2019), as an input for the new Erasmus+ programme and a study that SPHERE would undertake in 2020.

The outcome report for the annual conference can be found at: <http://supporthere.org/page/publications>.

4. HERE Virtual Community and Website

The HERE Virtual Community and Website (<http://supporthere.org/>) is a means to provide information to the HERE and also showcase results of events, TAM and other important developments in the Partner countries.

It has the following functions:

- Provides comprehensive information on all events and hosts a mini-site for events;
- Advertises current higher education developments in the EU as well as relevant EU and EHEA policies and programme announcements (calls for funding, project results, etc.);
- Provides background information on the HERE initiative and provides links to other relevant topics;

- Has a library search function that allows HERE to search for publications and materials that have been posted on different sections of the website;
- Features 'country pages' for HERE/Partner countries, based on content proposed by the NEOs;
- Serves as a communication tool for the HERE community (Virtual Community):
 - The Virtual Community hosts specific discussion groups on topics, used in particular to prime events;
 - All HERE are enabled for all discussion groups. They can disable the feature if they like.

As part of the Virtual Community and Website, the SPHERE Team creates a new 'mini-site' for each event. This contains:

- Downloadable practical information, including information on visas and local hotels, as well as maps of the city and venue;
- Suggested background reading;
- The programme;
- The registration form and a pre-survey, to probe the HERE's level of knowledge on the topic;
- The evaluation form, to be filled out after the event;
- All presentations from the event;
- The Outcome Report.

The Virtual Community and Website was periodically updated in 2019. Some of the most popular pages were the event pages (as they contained resources and presentations from the events), the Publications page (where event outcome reports and the SPHERE studies are published) and the Newsletter editions (also accessible from the website <http://supporthere.org/page/newsletter>).

5. Technical Assistance Missions -TAM

Throughout the course of 2016-2019, the SPHERE Team is facilitating 165 Technical Assistance Missions (TAM), on average 55 per year. TAM provide targeted assistance to HERE teams in Partner countries. A TAM is the provision of an international expert contracted by SPHERE for the period of 1.5 - 2 working days. Logistically, the event is organised by the NEOs in the form of a national seminar or a meeting. Each NEO is entitled to approximately two to three TAM a year. These missions will continue to be a means of providing targeted, hands-on support and consultancy to the HERE and the academic community and government in their respective countries.

In the call for proposals for 2019, the SPHERE Team agreed with the EACEA to award 55 TAM. In the end, some TAM were postponed or cancelled, due to changing political situations in Partner countries. The SPHERE Team offered flexibility in re-scheduling TAM where feasible, given these developments.

The breakdown of topics for the implemented TAM in 2019 was as follows:

Research-based education	1
Student participation	2
Internationalisation	4
Recognition	5
Joint programmes	4
Quality Assurance	9
ECTS/Diploma supplement/Mobility	1
Autonomy and governance	2
Digitalization/ICT/E-learning	6
Teaching staff development	3
National Qualification Frameworks /Qualifications	2
Learning outcomes	1
Entrepreneurship	1

Social dimension	1
PhDs	5
Employability / Work-based learning	1
Student Centred Learning	2
Ethics	1
Life-long learning - LLL	1
Social outreach	1
University-industry cooperation	1
Alumni networks	1

As in previous years, the **quality assurance systems, joint programmes and the doctoral cycle** have remained in high demand, and there was a persistent interest in ICT and digitalisation, university-industry collaboration, and professional development of teachers.

A number of requests were linked to themes that were explored in 2018, which shows the important spin-off the SPHERE events have on TAM requests. This reflects an interest to go deeper into certain topics at national level.

The SPHERE Team notes that as with 2018, TAM requests have become more specific in certain fields and also more innovative. Some examples of such themes are:

- Institutional development of support units for international students at Egyptian universities;
- Assessment of doctoral programmes (Georgia);
- Why and how to build strong sustainable international alumni networks (Israel);
- Evaluating the current financial aid program and assisting with expanding and diversifying Palestinian Universities' current student financial aid programs;
- Building a national platform for MOOCs: Implementation, accreditation and quality assurance (Tunisia).

The 2019 selection also demonstrated the continued interest of certain Partner countries and regions to work together collaboratively and pool resources around a **regional seminar or a joint event**.

Of the events organised as TAM in 2019, 4 were regional/joint:

Country	Topic	Type of event	Date of implementation	Experts
Palestine (Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt)	Higher education policies in the South- Mediterranean Region	Regional	10-11 April 2019	Ligia Deca and Kevin Guillaume
Armenia (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus)	Promoting the international mobility of staff at universities	Regional	25-26 November 2019	Romina Kniaz and Francesca Valente
Georgia (Armenia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan)	Enhancing QA impact	Cross regional	18-19 September 2019	Andy Gibbs

Kazakhstan (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan)	Developing internal quality assurance system in higher education institutions	Regional	6-7 March 2019	Tia Loukkola and Lucien Bollaert
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Finally, it should be noted that the TAM continues to be used as **a mechanism to deliver upon Bologna Process commitments** in Partner countries that are part of the EHEA, and to also fulfil European Union policy commitments (in the context of the common market, such as in the field of regulated professions). Non-EHEA countries wishing to comply with certain EHEA frameworks and tools also use this TAM to this purpose.

Some TAM that referenced specific laws/reforms that were being undertaken for the Bologna Process (or for the EU) were:

- Legal and institutional framework for mutual recognition of professional qualifications within EU – capacity building for competent authorities within Directive 2005/36/EC and the Directive 2013/55/EU (Bosnia and Herzegovina);
- Quality assurance systems in European higher education: models and practices in EU (Russia);
- Enhancement of the higher education institutions’ engagement to strengthen their social dimension especially towards under-represented and vulnerable groups (Albania).

Examples of TAM in non-EHEA signatory countries, which addressed EHEA tools and frameworks were:

- Governance and university autonomy: Lessons from the EU and the Bologna Process (Jordan)

In 2018, the TAM continued to be an activity that is highly appreciated by both experts and the HERE teams/NEOs. Feedback is collected after each event and evaluated internally to continuously improve the quality of the events. The experts, in addition to evaluating their general experience, provide some

There was a clear sense of enthusiasm for developing activity in the area of student engagement.... Starting points for development might include investigating how Bosnia and Herzegovina might support a programme to develop the capacity of students to engage in discussions around the enhancement of learning and teaching, investigating the structures and opportunities students have to shape and influence decision making and investigating causes and extent of student non-engagement. An important consideration is looking at the collection and analysis of student feedback as well as the ways in which students are informed of actions that are taken as a result. (Eve Lewis, SPARQS, Scotland – From the TAM “Enhancing Effective Student Participation and Interaction in BIH Higher Education”)

An assessment of the Jordanian regulatory framework would be helpful, based on the Autonomy Scorecard (methodology which was introduced at the seminar), for the actors to identify the weaknesses and opportunities in the current system. There should be encouragement to reflect on the profiles and competences needed for board members – the process is in the hands of the public authorities, but universities should demonstrate their capacity to think strategically about these issues. It would be important to follow up on structuring sector-wide cooperation (holding regular meetings to start with)....Considering the focus on “evaluation” and “performance”, it might be useful to dedicate a TAM to funding models for the Jordanian Ministry and universities to take part in. Quality is another important focus to address the trust issue. (Enora Pruvot, European University Association (EUA) – From the TAM “University governance and autonomy” in Jordan)

recommendations, e.g. on how to continue reforms or how the TAM can be followed up. Some examples include:

SPHERE generated an expert pool, mainly based on its EUA network resources, that relies very much on practitioners. They contribute from their specific institutional and national experiences. They are often also internationally renowned experts and involved in European policy making and project activities. Experts usually also report that they found the experience useful for their own professional development. This and the fact that they are recognised by HERE as both experts and peers has been critical to ensuring the success of the TAM. Many of the experts have also been invited to speak at SPHERE seminars and conferences.

6. ICM and Inclusion Study

As referred to previously, SPHERE conducted a study on inclusion in International Credit Mobility (ICM) in Partner countries in the Southern Mediterranean, Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership, at the request of the European Commission (EC). The intention was to guide both national agencies and universities in how to better utilise the EU mobility programmes for promoting inclusion, and to orient the EC on how to improve the ICM in the future to be more inclusive.

In terms of methodology, the SPHERE research team revised the three most recent years of NEO monitoring reports and ran online surveys of NEOs and National Agencies in the Programme Countries, as well as previously and currently mobile students. This was complemented by Skype interviews and interviews with a sample of HERE and staff in International Relations Offices. The legal definitions of disadvantage in Partner countries were also examined, to see how far they matched the specifications in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide.

The study was the first of its kind, preceding a more systematised and comparative study of the topic in EU countries.

In terms of results:

- In general, there was a wide variation in law and practice when it comes to ‘disadvantage’ and it seems that no country is completely aligned with the Erasmus+ definition.
- One general observation is that the selection of students for Erasmus+ mobility pays little regard to disadvantage.
- There is nevertheless widespread awareness that, among other obstacles, many students have difficulty in self-funding the initial cost of visas, travel and insurance, particularly when visas can only be obtained outside their home country.
- The SPHERE Team also addressed the Organisational Support that the Erasmus+ programme allows, which can cover some of these additional costs that higher education institutions have in identifying and selecting disadvantaged students for mobility. It seems that Partner Country higher education institutions are not generally aware of its existence and hence it is not applied. This has led to the conclusion that the Erasmus+ principles and mechanisms which are designed to widen access to mobility for the disadvantaged in the Partner countries are not at present being fully exploited or having an effect.

The results demonstrated some of the limitations of the current EU requirements for including socially disadvantaged students in credit mobility. Most universities in Partner countries a) have difficulty identifying students, given that they may not have comparative categories for disadvantage nor a means of identifying such students, b) worry about stigma associated with self-identification, c) do not have appropriate resources in the international office for identifying and supporting such students, d) do not have adequate international partnerships through which they are comfortable exchanging students with disadvantage, and e) do not use or are not aware of the Support Costs the EU makes available to this effect.

The SPHERE Study is an important basis for improving the EU mobility programmes in the next round of the ICM. It can be found here: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/sphere_icm_report.pdf

7. The HERE Newsletter

As a means to feature and promote different HERE activities, and also to disseminate relevant information, the SPHERE Team has been disseminating a bi-annual newsletter. In 2019, two HERE newsletters have been released, one in May and one in December. The content is concise and covers the following:

- Feature articles on policy reform in select Partner/HERE countries;
- Interviews with either a HERE or an expert, such as a Bologna Promoter, on a topical issue;
- Feature articles on the results of certain TAM, as provided by the NEOs;
- Upcoming SPHERE events and a selection of upcoming TAM;
- Announcements of relevant policy events that may be of interest for HERE;
- Announcement of new relevant publications on higher education.

The first newsletter in 2019 specifically included the following:

- Updates on the Bologna Process and the Bologna-Follow Up Group;
- Interview with Colin Tuck, European Quality Assurance Registrar (EQAR), regarding the launch of the DEQAR Database: A new instrument for promoting transparency and QA;
- Interview with Student HERE - Bushra Akileh, Jordan - on the important role of students in policy reform in Jordan;
- Publications of the TRUNAK project results on autonomy in Kazakhstan;
- Highlights from the Montenegro higher education system review.

The second newsletter included:

- Update and preliminary results of ICM and inclusion study;
- Interview with a HERE: Youhansen Eid, NAQAAE, Egypt, on her role as a HERE and the national quality assurance and accreditation framework;
- Outcomes of a cross-regional joint TAM (Georgia/Armenia) – ‘Enhancing QA impact’;
- An article of the new European Universities initiative and its implications for Partner countries.

The HERE newsletter is disseminated to all HERE, in addition to selected European Commission officials and Bologna Promoters.

8. SPHERE Advisory Group

In order to generate ongoing feedback on the programming of SPHERE activities, the SPHERE Team proposed the establishment of a HERE Advisory Group. The purpose of this group is to:

- generate rolling feedback on the activities and events planned, especially on event themes, structure and event materials;
- receive informal feedback on the dynamics of collaboration between HERE teams, at the national level and in the regions, so as to better enable synergies between TAM, for example, and other HERE related activities;
- provide feedback on outcome reports from events and provide direct input on the reading materials suggested for HERE in the run-up to events;
- contribute occasionally to preparation of content for event materials and sessions, and for the HERE Virtual Community and Website;
- generate greater ownership on the programming of HERE activities among HERE;
- reward and recognize certain more active HERE.

The Advisory Group, selected by EACEA through a Call for nominations for 2018-mid 2019, was:

Central Asia	Uzbekistan: Igor Vikhrov
Eastern Europe	Belarus: Siarhei Piashkun
	Georgia: Ketevan Gurchiani
	Russia: Alla Akulshina
Southern Med	Israel: Ma'ayan Hagage (student)
	Lebanon: Chafik Mokbel
Western Balkans	Bosnia and Herzegovina: Aleksandra Nikolic
	Montenegro: Mira Vukčević

In May 2019, the following newly elected group was installed:

Central Asia	Uzbekistan: Olim Astanukolov
	Kazakhstan: Darkhan Akhmed-Zaki
Eastern Europe	Moldova: Valentina Pritcan
	Armenia: Arayik Navoyan
Southern Med	Jordan – Bushra Akileh, student HERE
	Lebanon: Chafik Mokbel
Western Balkans	Bosnia and Herzegovina: Aleksandra Nikolic
	Montenegro: Mira Vukčević

9. HERE National Reports 2019

9.1 Western Balkans

ALBANIA

Key developments in higher education in Albania in 2019

In 2019, the main commitment was to implement the University Pact. The Pact is a document that analyses the situation, problems, measures taken and deadlines. The document was prepared by the Government of Albania in response to the requests made by HEI students during the strike that took place in December 2018. The same month the Government approved 11 bylaws and 4 orders of the Prime Minister.

The requests made by students during the strike were:

- To increase the budget for education to 5% of the GDP to halve student tuition fees;
- To increase the transparency of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MESY) on how funds were spent;
- To increase the percentage of students taking part in the elections for the authorities in HEIs from 10 to 50%, and to have one student from each faculty in the Academic Senate;
- To review academic titles and to check PhD theses and textbooks for plagiarism;
- To have an equal number of votes from both MESY and HEIs in the Administration Board, and one student representative on this Board;
- To provide a Student Card for all students during the 2018 - 2019 academic year;
- To implement e-libraries in line with European standards, and to make university textbooks available online in Albanian for students;
- To evaluate the performance of the teaching and research staff, their online publications and recorded lectures.

The Pact contains policies and additional measures taken by the Albanian Government to address quality assurance issues in HEIs, in relation to: decision-making transparency; the integrity of the teaching process; improvement of the financial policy to ensure scientific research quality and competitiveness of the national and international HEIs in Albania; better student employment; more efficient student internships; building a university campus in Tirana.

Further steps were taken to elaborate bylaws in application of the higher education law in force, to reform study programs, and to enhance the capacity development at HEI level.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

- Joining the National Group for the Implementation of the Bologna Process. The HERE members drafted the Ordinance for the Diploma Supplement (DS) that is to be approved by the MESY, in line with the Acquis Communautaire, and the Europass and EHEA provisions. Particularly, the HERE team prepared: the content of the Ordinance and the format of the DS, in Albanian and English; changes to previous Ordinance no. 25/10.11.2017 on "The registration of diploma and certificate forms in the Diploma and Certificates State Register for Higher Education and Scientific Research"; the Ordinance on "Integral elements and diploma / certificate forms to be awarded by all Albanian higher education institutions" with the aim to include DS provisions and approximation of the relevant Acquis; the "Explanatory terms used in the Diploma Supplement" guideline.

- Drafting guidelines on how to reorganize PhD programs following legal provisions that provide practical explanations to HEIs. Law no. 80/2015 brought significant changes to the curricula development of the third cycle, especially for the PhD programs. Based on the law provisions and on the needs of the Albanian HEIs, HERE members and the Bologna National Group drafted a guide for PhD students. The guide was sent to the MESY for further procedures.

- HERE members participated in and gave presentations at two national seminars: "Smart Specializations Strategies" (28 February) and "Research-based Learning" (13 May). They also organised, together with the NEO, and participated in a local seminar hosted by the University "Fan S. Noli" of Korça. Two HERE team members presented the main elements of two draft academic standards, in the fields of mechanical engineering and biology. The HERE shared their expertise regarding the reform of study programs, based on

academic standards and the Learning Outcomes approach. Two other members informed the participants on the approach that HEIs should have towards the social dimension and inclusive education issues.

- HERE team members continued their three-year study, started in 2018, about the academic alignment between secondary and postsecondary education. Some of the main study findings were presented at the International Conference “Research application and educational methods” held in Korça (24 May 2019).

In 2019, HERE members were invited to national TV shows - 4 times / 90 minutes on average - to share their expertise concerning Albanian higher education reforms, and to inform about international recommendations followed and commitments made by Albania.

- HERE shared their experience and achievements on social media (Facebook).

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

- Preparation of the Draft Ordinance on “The Format of Diploma Supplement”, with the DS format annexed in two languages (Albanian and English), together with the National Bologna team;
- Ordinance for changes to previous Direction no. 25/10.11.2017 on “The registration of diploma and certificate forms in the Diploma and Certificates State Register for Higher Education and Scientific Research”, together with the National Bologna team;
- Ordinance on “Integral elements and diploma / certificate forms awarded by Albanian HEIs”;
- Drafting the PhD Program guidelines, together with the National Bologna team;
- Case study on “Alignment of core courses between secondary and post-secondary education”;
- Organisation of a local seminar at the Korça University, with three presentations by HERE members;
- Organisation of three TAMs in Albania;
- Participation in and presentations at the International Conference for Education hosted by Korça University;
- Presentations at two national seminars;
- Four appearances on the “Education Auditor” national TV show.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: http://erasmusplus.al/?page_id=593
- List of HERE on NEO website <http://erasmusplus.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Albanian-HERE-Team.pdf>
- HERE publications or articles: <https://youtu.be/D8iypTX3IS8>, <https://youtu.be/EnUmopudNbg>
- HERE event pages: http://erasmusplus.al/?page_id=1034
- HERE Facebook page <http://facebook.com/Albanian-HERE-for-Erasmus--1815269242080077/>



Seminar at Korça University (24 May 2019)



HERE periodic meeting at the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Tirana (17 April 2019)

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Key developments in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019

The implementation of Priorities 2016-2026 for Higher Education Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina continued. The Priorities encompass the following fields: Good Governance and Management; Resources; Connection between Labour Market and Higher Education; Qualification Standards; Student Experience; Internationalization; Statistics.

The implementation of the Strategic Directions for Higher Education Development in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012-2022, as well as of the Education Development Strategy of the Republika Srpska 2016 - 2021, is ongoing and various projects are funded for their implementation.

The Posavina Canton adopted the Law on Adult Education; therewith the field of adult education becomes legally regulated in all the 12 administrative units of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Foundation for Mobility of Students and Teachers in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is operational, and HERE team members assisted with its establishment as well as with the selection of the Steering Committee members and consultancy activities for a smooth start of its activities.

The IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) II Programming Process in the field of Employment, Education and Social Policy took place. The process focused on education for employment in accordance with the so-called Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina and with the priorities defined by relevant stakeholders. The new IPA III cycle is in its initial phase.

In July 2019, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina authorized the Chairman of the Council of Ministers to sign the Declaration on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans.

Several meetings with relevant stakeholders were held on the application of the Roadmap for the Implementation of the EU Regulated Professions - Directives 2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EU.

The Council of Ministers adopted Information on participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Erasmus+ Programme as well as in the Education and Youth actions.

The self-certification report was incorporated in the Referencing report and the state of play of the Referencing report was successfully presented to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group in June 2019.

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance prepared a revision of several legal documents e.g. a Decision on the change and Amendment of the Decision on the Norms for Determining Minimal Standards in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina; a Decision on the change of the Decision on Criteria for Election of Domestic and International Experts, and also made recommendations on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes.

The Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (ENIC/NARIC) elaborated Recommendations on the Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications for the Purpose of Continuation of Education (the document was published in the Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Furthermore, the Centre elaborated the Model of Regulations for Professional Recognition of Foreign Qualifications and the Model of Regulations for Academic Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE Team participated in working groups, round tables, meetings and seminars, Governing Board meetings, as well as in the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training Meeting in Belgrade in 2019.

Several HERE team members were directly involved in the national reform processes and working groups contributing to HE developments in the country: the Head of Department for EU Integration and International Cooperation and the BFUG contact person, Ministry of Civil Affairs; the Professional Advisor for Higher

Education Reform, Federal Ministry of Education and Culture; Assistant to the Minister for HE, Ministry for Scientific and Technological Development, Higher Education and Information Society; the Head of Department for Information and Cooperation, Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education Bosnia and Herzegovina; Higher Education Authority representative. The above mentioned HERE acted as contact points in relation to national authorities, disseminated knowledge and learning outcomes to key stakeholders involved in the reform processes, and promoted the Erasmus+ programme and HERE initiative.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. Participation in different working groups, seminars, conferences and roundtables at national, regional and EU level, contributing to the higher education reform in the country.
2. Contribution to the Bologna Follow-Up Group Implementation Report.
3. Recommendations made concerning different documents, laws and regulations.
4. Four TAMs planned and implemented by the HERE team: 1. Enhancing Effective Student Participation and Interaction in Higher Education (Keynote speaker: Eve Lewis, SPARQS); 2. Legal and institutional framework for mutual recognition of professional qualifications within the EU – capacity building for competent authorities under Directive 2005/36/EC and Directive 2013/55/EC (Keynote speakers: Emta Blagdan, Agency for Science and Higher Education Department for International Cooperation, Croatia; Maja Grasic, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia); 3. Prerequisites for Introducing Joint Degrees at HEIs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Keynote speaker: Frank McMahon, Dublin Institute of Technology Ireland); 4. Current and Future Trends in Higher Education in Europe and Stocktaking of Priorities for 2016 -2026 Higher Education Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the participation of Michael Gebel, European University Association.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <https://www.erasmusbih.com/en/here>
- List of HERE on NEO website: https://www.erasmusbih.com/documents/here/List_of_HEREs.pdf
- HERE event pages: <https://www.erasmusbih.com/en/here-events>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-bosnia-and-herzegovina>



TAM “Enhancing Effective Student Participation and Interaction in Higher Education”, Sarajevo (16 May 2019)

KOSOVO

Key developments in higher education in Kosovo in 2019

The major focus of the higher education sector in Kosovo was on the implementation of the 2017-2021 Education Strategic Plan, which includes many actions and measures related to quality assurance, building mechanisms to link the curricula of HEIs with market needs, and internationalisation. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) managed to produce several legal acts that regulate the sector.

Quality assurance: The status of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) as a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was changed in 2019 due to political interference. KAA reapplied and was subject to external evaluation in 2019, but has not returned to full membership. KAA conducts external evaluation of higher education institutions at institutional level and study programmes. As of December 2019, there are 293 accredited study programmes offered by a total of 31 higher education institutions (9 public and 22 private). However, with the full implementation of the Administrative Instruction for Accreditation (the requirement of one PhD for every 60 ECTS of the respective field of study programme), there has been a significant reduction of accreditation of some HEIs and study programmes, because some (public and private) institutions failed to meet these criteria. In 2019, there were 154 bachelor programmes, 119 master's programmes and 19 doctoral programmes.

Education-labour market: Industrial boards were established and studies were conducted on the interrelation of education and labour market. 16 Industrial Boards were established in public universities: 10 at the University of Prishtina, one at the University of Ferizaj, two at the University of Gjakova, three at the University of Peja. The University of Mitrovica and the University of Gjilan are in the process of approving regulations and establishment.

Internationalisation: The number of staff and student mobilities from Kosovo to the EU and US doubled. Due to a number of courses taught in English, tens of students came to Kosovo for short mobilities. The Erasmus+ Programme counted 905 incoming and 500 outgoing students, whereas Central European Exchange Program for University Studies only registered 125 mobilities. HEIs in Kosovo received grants for ten capacity building projects, out of which three projects as grant holder. There is a tendency for HEIs to introduce courses and study programmes in English.

Review of Higher Education legal acts:

- A concept paper for the KAA was approved and the process of drafting the Law on KAA started.
- Revision of the Administrative instruction for verification of student documents needed to study abroad.
- Two bylaws - review of administrative instructions on scholarships and draft administrative instructions on codes of ethics in higher education.
- The Administrative instruction "Criteria and Procedures for Acquiring the Right to Regulated Exercise" was completed and is presented on the platform for public discussion.
- The Administrative instruction "Rules for the functioning of the State Examination Commission, compensation of its members, as well as the procedures and method of conducting the state examination" was finalised and is undergoing the approval procedure.
- The Administrative instruction "Organization and Functioning of the Professional Body for the Development of Occupational Standards" was established.
- Several workshops were held for drafting the Administrative instruction "Organization and Functioning of the Professional Body for the Development of Professional Standards".

In the field of scientific innovation, two administrative guidelines based on the Law on Scientific Innovation, Knowledge and Technology Transfer were completed: Administrative instruction "The composition and

operation of the Scientific Innovation Council on Knowledge and Technology Transfer”, and “The regulation on the voucher scheme innovation”.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team assisted the National Education Authorities with initiatives aimed at promoting the development of the higher education sector in Kosovo through application of the newest reform and modernization processes at all HEIs.

1. Contribution to identifying internationalisation challenges – Kosovo Erasmus+ Office in collaboration with MEST and HERE organised a workshop on ‘Challenges of Higher Education in Internationalisation’, targeting HEI management. The event resulted in a Joint Declaration of the rectors as a commitment to taking measures aimed at increasing the internationalisation of the HEIs.
2. Kosovo HERE organised a seminar on ‘The role of women in academia’, which resulted in the establishment of the Academic Women Association. The seminar was attended by over 50 professors. The Association was officially registered and is led by HERE expert Dr. Drita Kadriu.
3. Contribution to capacity building of university staff: the training activities organised by the KEO and the HERE team on Policy of Higher Education Institutions and Internationalization. Two trainings, led by HERE, were organised at the University of North Mitrovica.

Main achievements of the HERE team

1. Contribution to identify the challenges of HEIs related to internationalisation.
2. Strengthening women’s role in academia - establishment of the Academic Women Association.
3. Contribution to capacity building of university staff.
4. Organization of promotion and dissemination events related to the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education projects.

Links to further details

- HERE section at KEO website <http://erasmuspluskosovo.org/en/heres/kosovo-heres/>
- List of HEREs at KEO website <http://erasmuspluskosovo.org/en/heres/kosovo-heres/>
- HERE event page: <http://erasmuspluskosovo.org/en/heres/activities/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-kosovo>



Seminar “The role of women in science and higher education and their impact on social transformation”, University of Prishtina (18 June 2019)

MONTENEGRO

Key developments in higher education in Montenegro in 2019

The novelty and, at the same time, the major development in the Montenegrin higher education system is the Law on Academic Integrity adopted in March 2019. Montenegro regulated academic integrity by adopting the aforementioned Law, which was elaborated and drafted by the Ministry of Education (MoE). The Law aims at preventing plagiarism and defines various forms of violation of academic integrity. It also has a key role in promoting academic values in the Montenegrin higher education system. The Ethics Committee is the most important body established by the Law, and has a significant role in the process of maintaining academic integrity.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team took part in regular local meetings, had the initiative of organising activities at the local level, and were involved in the preparation of TAM proposals for 2020. The HERE team participated in the preparation and organization of the TAM “The Position of Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts in the European Research Area (ERA)”, which aimed to establish a stronger link between the ERA and the European Higher Education Area. The Chair of the HERE team participated in all HERE-related activities, especially in the advisory group and in the TAM proposals.

One of the most important undertakings was the preparation of the HERE publication “Reforms inside”. The publication addresses very important topics in the field of higher education, and showcases several CBHE projects of importance not only for the higher education sector, but for society in general. The HERE team took part in several local events discussing and promoting ideas of importance for higher education and society, e.g. the Conference “Unlocking Green Growth Potentials”.

Local events

Student mobility - “Mobility Day 2019” – The event was held at the Faculty of Economics, University of Montenegro. One HERE moderated the discussion on the positive impact of student mobility. NEO presented the opportunities available to students, under the Erasmus+ programme. Mobility Day 2019 also served as a promotion and dissemination event.

Round Table “Implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the higher education system of Montenegro” (17 April 2019 - Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education). Participants discussed the importance of implementing the Standards and the need to adapt them to the specificities of the Montenegrin higher education system.

TAM “Ranking of HEIs – pros and cons – how is ranking linked to quality in higher education and the EU integration process” (14 May 2019 - MoE). The seminar served as an opportunity to present and consider ranking from different perspectives. The significance and role of ranking, a number of advantages and disadvantages, as well as various methodologies and approaches to ranking were discussed. The recording of the event is available online: http://www.erasmusplus.ac.me/?page_id=4875.

The panel discussion “Dialogue with citizens: Let's talk about the facts” (14 October 2019, Nikšić). The aim of the event was to foster dialogue and enhance cooperation between the civic sector, state bodies/authorities and citizens, which is one of the goals to be achieved by the project “Education and Dialogue – on the way to the EU”.

The HERE team publication “Reforms inside”: The rationale behind was to tackle topics of importance for higher education, serving also as an Erasmus + dissemination tool, and presenting several capacity-building projects relevant for higher education and society. The main topics were: positioning of lifelong learning in the development strategy of the University of Montenegro; the problems of doctoral education in Montenegro in the light of the MARDS project (Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania – good practice paradigm); capacity building of the Faculty of Law, University of Montenegro – curricula refreshment, boosting

international cooperation and improving human, technical and library resources; Montenegro and academic integrity; student-centered education.

International events

HERE Study Visit - Vrije Universiteit VU Amsterdam (25-26 March 2019) – Even though participation in higher education has increased in Europe and Partner countries, higher education has not become more inclusive. Political pressure for equal access, but also demographic pressure and migration require universities to address a more diverse student population, and to consider diversity in their staffing policies.

HERE Seminar - Technical University of Moldova (10-11 June 2019, Chisinau, Moldova) - The seminar focused on recognition, in particular on recognition of qualifications.

HERE Study Visit - Competence-Based Learning (9-10 September 2019, Vienna, Austria) - The event gave participants an insight into CBL institutional practice, specifically in an Austrian HEI with an applied nature.

HERE Study Visit - Inclusive mobility: From good intentions to measurable outcomes – Vrije Universiteit Brussel (21-22 November 2019, Brussels, Belgium) - The aim of the visit was to take a system approach, demonstrating how Flanders and Flemish universities are strategizing and tackling the topic of inclusion in internationalisation and mobility.

The HERE Annual Conference - Charles University Prague (12-13 December 2019) – The conference aimed to address the 2019 umbrella topic - social inclusion - and to introduce a new umbrella topic for 2020.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. The HERE team publication.
2. The HERE seminar “Ranking of HEIs – pros and cons – how is ranking linked to quality in higher education, and the EU integration process” (14 May 2019 - MoE).
3. Round Table “Implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the higher education system of Montenegro” (17 April 2019).

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website http://www.erasmusplus.ac.me/?page_id=4601
- List of HERE on NEO website http://www.erasmusplus.ac.me/?page_id=4601
- HERE event pages http://www.erasmusplus.ac.me/?page_id=4607
- Country page on SPHERE website <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-montenegro>



Roundtable “Implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the HE system of Montenegro”, Podgorica (17 April 2019)



HERE seminar “Ranking of HEIs – pros and cons”, Podgorica (14 May 2019)

9.2 Central Asia

KAZAKHSTAN

Key developments in higher education in Kazakhstan in 2019

The major changes in the field of higher education in Kazakhstan were related to the implementation of the law on “Introducing amendments and addenda to several legislative acts on the expansion of academic and managerial independence of higher education institutions” adopted on July 4, 2018.

Analysis has shown that there is too much state governance in economy and in education. Prior to the above-mentioned law, the Government had 22 regulatory competences in the area of education, the Ministry had 97, while HEIs had only 19.

The amendments enlarged the autonomy of HEIs from 65 to 80%. At present, universities can independently identify and develop curricula, except for the compulsory cycle. Thus, HEIs can carry out needs assessment surveys and, based on their results, develop their own programme of training specialists, announce and recruit students i.e. HEIs can adequately respond to labour market needs.

In the past, the training of specialists was defined in accordance with the classification of over 600 specialties, many of them not relevant to labour market needs. There was lack of flexibility as it took from 6 to 12 months to introduce a new specialty in the classification system. The new system is not focused on specialties but on training directions, where universities can develop new curricula in compliance with labour market challenges.

According to the law on university autonomy, universities have the freedom to recruit staff, define the number and profile of student cohorts, in the context of specialties, the directions of training and the academic structure. To enable these changes, public HEIs changed their legal and organizational status to non-commercial organizations (NCOs).

As of mid-2019, five HEIs turned into NCOs with 100% of shares being owned by the state. 27 more public HEIs are going through the transformation process. A transformation mechanism was also developed for private universities, although the process is not compulsory for them.

The changes occurred in the area of correspondence education to enhance its quality and relevance – now it is distance education and E-Learning with a wide use of digital technologies.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

There are three important dimensions of the HERE activity: 1. At the national level the HERE act as individual consultants and members of working groups under the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and assist in developing strategic documents and supporting by-laws. 2. Training activities are organised by the HERE team jointly with the Department of Higher and Post-Higher Education and the MES in the form of regional seminars attended by university staff from all regions of Kazakhstan. 3. HERE carry out consultation sessions at universities, write article and hold presentations at various national conferences and seminars. HERE are also invited to participate in the monitoring visits of some projects that are facing problems or delays.

At the national level, five HERE were proactively involved in the development of the National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) on Higher Education - the main document regulating relations between education and employers, followed by the development of Sectoral Qualification Frameworks (SQFs) regulating the relations in a specific area of education in compliance with EU approaches. The NQFs and SQFs were approved and adopted on 27 November 2019 by the Sectoral Commission under the Vice-Prime-Minister. Their adoption bridges the national and European QF, thus facilitating mutual recognition of documents. HERE also prepared the self-certification of the NQF and SQF, a very important achievement that would have not been possible without the participation of HERE team members.

As members of the MES Working Group, the HERE prepared amendments and addenda to the normative legal acts concerning the extension of academic and managerial independence of HEIs. Among them were standard rules of admission to HEIs; the state compulsory education standard of higher education; standard activity

rules for educational organisations implementing higher and post-higher education programmes; rules concerning the organisation of the educational process based on distance education technologies. The Ministry of Education and Science also approved an order on accounting documents used by educational organisations in their activity. All the amendments mentioned were approved by Order of the Minister of Education and Science.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. The International Conference “The new societal dimension in the mission of HE” was organised based on the needs of the HERE and the academic community to contribute to reinforcing HE as a factor in social and cultural development. The event brought together top management of Kazakh universities, representatives of the academic and business communities, government bodies, non-governmental organisations, employers’ associations, representatives of EU Member States and other interested parties (over 130 participants). The keynote speaker was Mr. Lucien Bollaert, a recognized international expert in the field of quality assurance. The conference set the tone for changes to the development strategy of Kazakh HEIs. The outcomes of the conference were summarised in the form of recommendations for HEIs.
2. One HERE proposed and developed a draft programme for the TAM “Best practices and experiences in promoting academic integrity: Perspectives from Europe”. The event gathered 56 participants - HERE, MES representatives, senior leadership and academic staff. Participants gave very positive feedback. The seminar is likely to have a strong impact on the development of a quality culture in Kazakh HEIs, contributing to a decrease in corruption and plagiarism cases, building trust between students and teachers, and enhancing the visibility and image of universities.
3. Five HERE initiated the development of NQFs on Higher Education and SQFs regulating the relations in a specific area of education in compliance with EU approaches. The documents were approved and adopted on 27 November 2019 by the Sectoral Commission under the Vice-Prime-Minister, being a strategic achievement for Kazakhstan and another step towards integration in EHEA. The documents are likely to bridge the national and European QF. The self-certification of the NQF and SQF carried out in December 2019 will also contribute to facilitating mutual recognition of documents.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.kz/index.php/en/about-us/here-team>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.kz/index.php/en/about-us/here-team>
- HERE publications/articles: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pVVU_uZpWckW5KJbrUw3cvnfrJVHRTu/view
- HERE event page: <http://erasmusplus.kz/index.php/ru/novosti/90-novosti/116-global-conference-astana-1>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HEREteam.kz/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-kazakhstan>



International Conference “The New Societal Dimension in the Mission of Higher Education”, Nur-Sultan (30 October 2019)

KYRGYZSTAN

Key developments in higher education in Kyrgyzstan in 2019

According to the 2020 Education Development Strategy, the following reforms are being implemented in the field of vocational education: updating educational contents based on the competency-based approach and learning outcomes; improving accessibility and quality of education at all levels of the education system; strengthening capacity of workers at all levels of the education system; building a result-based system of management and financing of education.

In order to respond to the above-mentioned objectives, in June 2019 the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan adopted amendments to the Law on Education that stipulate the adoption of a National Qualification Framework, the introduction of PhD degree studies and the development of e-learning.

As a first step to implement these amendments, the concept of a National Qualification Framework was adopted by the Government in September 2019. The draft Framework was developed and submitted to the Government for adoption at national level. After its adoption, educational standards of a new generation will be introduced and updated with a specific focus on the competence-based approach.

A working group on the development of a PhD educational standard was established under the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). This group developed a model PhD educational standard, which is under discussions now, and still needs to be approved. The accreditation of the PhD programmes is also at development stage.

According to the Strategy on digitalization "Digital Kyrgyzstan 2019-2023", which was approved by the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic on 14 December 2018, the MES developed a programme and an Action Plan for the Development of Digital Education in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2019-2022. The Action Plan foresees the development of eLearning for all levels of education, including the regulatory base for its application, methodology and technical tools. Particular emphasis is placed on enhancing the ICT skills of teachers, through the adaptation and use of guidelines on the assessment of ICT competencies of teachers. An electronic platform for distance learning of teachers will be developed. The mechanisms for a more effective use of limited financial and human resources through eLearning, in the system of training and professional development of teachers, were developed. However, at the moment, there is no appropriate regulatory framework for the application of eLearning at broad level.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

Amendments and additions to the Law on Education lead to updated normative legal acts and introduction of new concepts. The HERE team actively participated in the discussion of the amendments as well as in working groups for developing documents.

The following documents were developed with the participation of the HERE team:

- a draft roadmap;
- a draft National Qualification Framework;
- a draft methodology for creating sectoral qualifications frameworks and professional standards;
- a draft Sectoral Qualification Framework for the education sector;
- descriptors - learning outcomes for the draft National Qualification Framework for Master's degree and PhD;
- roadmap for the implementation of the digitalization strategy "Digital Kyrgyzstan 2019-2023".

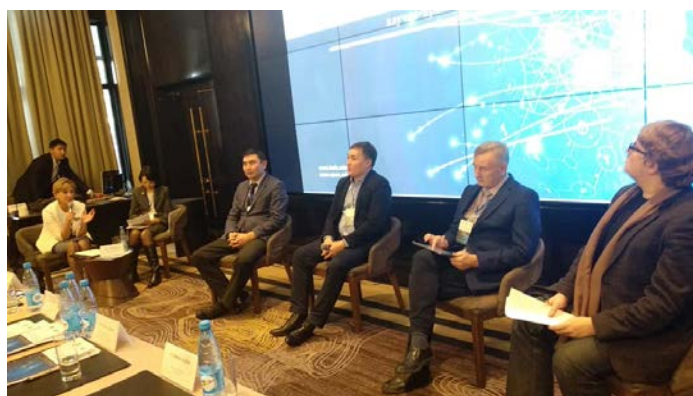
Changes in the accreditation system also took place: for instance, PhD accreditation procedures were added, minimum accreditation requirements were changed and institutional accreditation was introduced. Three HERE team members were part of the working group for developing indicative procedures of accreditation for PhD level. The HERE team also analysed state educational standards including all levels of education - "bachelor", "master" and "specialist" - and submitted a final updated text to MES for approval.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. The publication of the survey findings concerning the impact of Erasmus+ programmes on the higher education system in the Kyrgyz republic 2014-2018. The aim of the survey was to identify the effectiveness of the first phase of the Erasmus+ programme among 16 higher education institutions between 2014 and 2018.
2. The HERE contributed to the amendments made to the Law on Education related to the National Qualification Framework and the PhD degree, as well as to the Roadmap for the implementation of the digitalization strategy “Digital Kyrgyzstan 2019-2023”.
3. State educational standards for vocational and higher professional education were developed to ensure the continuity of previous education steps and to build lifelong educational path, taking into account gender balance and social inclusion.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.kg/en/here-section/here-team/#>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.kg/en/here-section/here-team/>
- HERE publications or articles: <https://erasmusplus.kg/en/wp-content/uploads/Erasmus-Impact.pdf>
- HERE event pages: <http://erasmusplus.kg/en/novosti/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-kyrgyzstan>



Conference “Digital Kyrgyzstan: Universities as Drivers for Skills Development for the Future”, Bishkek (10 December 2019)



The meeting for discussing the layouts of the State Educational Standards, Diplomatic Academy, Bishkek (5 March 2019)

TAJIKISTAN

Key developments in higher education in Tajikistan in 2019

The Government of Tajikistan set a clear vision for the future of higher education as a tool for human capital formation to further economic growth in a rapidly changing world. The National Strategy for Education Development 2020 aims to modernise the existing contents of higher education towards more professionally oriented skills to better meet labour market demand and to build Tajikistan's capacity.

With a view to developing the higher education system and integrating it into the European Higher Education Area, the Government is currently focusing on the Bologna principles and undertakes reforms such as the establishment of a credible quality assurance system. One of the first steps was to separate the State Agency for Supervision and Quality Control from the Ministry of Education and Sciences. Currently, the major overhaul of higher education governance focuses on quality assurance, teaching, learning, student assessment and internationalisation. In 2018, the Government issued a Ministerial instruction for universities to start obtaining the international accreditation of study programmes for their recognition and therewith an increased attractiveness of Tajik institutions.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team played an active role in the higher education reform process, in particular, by sharing knowledge and expertise, organising workshops and seminars, publishing articles in university newspapers and websites, and participating in the working groups on the development of the National Strategy for Education Development 2030.

The main themes of the seminars were: promoting the best practices of European and Central Asian universities, internationalisation, quality assurance in higher education and development of joint programmes, etc. HERE took an active part in the organization of TAMs, especially during the group discussions and exercises and in the publication of articles in order to disseminate key conclusions. Furthermore, the HERE team provided support to national authorities through their expertise, and gained experience from the HERE seminars on prioritizing the objectives and development of proposals in the framework of the World Bank Higher Education Support Program.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

- The HERE team published eight articles about the impact of the Erasmus+ CBHE projects on the reform process, joint programmes and diplomas, development of PhD programmes, etc.
- The HERE team provided expertise and support to the national authorities within the framework of the National Seminar on Quality Assurance organised by the Ministry of Education and Sciences for enabling HEI representatives to learn about internal and external quality assurance tools.
- Following the study visit on “Competence-based learning: basics, perspective, implementation”, that took place in Vienna in September 2019, the HERE organized a training at the regional university on various pedagogical practices: how to engage students and external stakeholders in the design of study programs, development and implementation, as well as the prospects for designing study programs based on learning outcomes (in terms of competencies) ensuring the quality of education. Participants learned about the definitions of competence-based learning, became familiar with the EU experience in the field of curriculum and course development, etc.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.tj/?cat=16>
- List of HERE on NEO website: http://erasmusplus.tj/?page_id=361
- HERE publications or articles: <http://erasmusplus.tj/?cat=16>

- HERE event pages: <http://erasmusplus.tj/?cat=16>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-tajikistan>



**Workshop “EU experience: Development of Joint Programs”,
Kurgantube State University (4 May 2019)**



**HERE Roundtable on the Development of Internal Quality Assurance
System in HEIs of Tajikistan, Tajik Technical University (11 May)**

UZBEKISTAN

Key developments in higher education in Uzbekistan in 2019

For the last two years, the national education system has been considerably reformed based on best practices from developed countries with outstanding experience. The intensive modernisation agenda, in line with the “Comprehensive Development Programme of the Higher Education System for 2017-2021”, continued to bring a number of progressive developments: quality improvement of graduate training, qualification upgrading of academic staff, large-scale development of international relations, new HEIs, establishment of joint degree programmes and faculties, new education directions and specialities, university autonomy concerning student quotas and educational programmes according to labour market needs, recognition of diplomas obtained abroad, etc. The total number of HEIs increased from 95 in 2018 to 113 in 2019. Student quotas increased accordingly. In 2019, applicants had the opportunity to apply for admission at up to three HEIs in one round.

Following the 2018 Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers on “Measures to improve the system and effectiveness of preparing personnel at the Tashkent University of Information Technologies”, the Tashkent University (TUIT) introduced the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and applied Bologna principles. Having obtained academic autonomy in 2018, the TUIT managed to introduce a completely independent student admission procedure to decide on new programmes and courses to be introduced, and to make structural changes for enhanced university governance. The experience of the TUIT will be largely promoted to all HEIs in Uzbekistan.

The 2019 Specific Decree on Structural Reforms of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education (MHSSE) on “Measures for the introduction of new management principles in the system of higher and secondary specialised education” facilitated the reform process by updating the MHSSE list of general tasks. The tasks cover the organisation of the educational process in accordance with the international practice of introducing new pedagogical technologies and teaching methods, the organisation and improvement of the continuous training system, the expansion and strengthening of international relations and the implementation of joint higher education programmes.

The most important step in the reform process was the new Concept for Higher Education Development by 2030, adopted on 8 October 2019 by a Presidential Decree. The document stated that Bologna principles and ECTS will be adopted by all HEIs in Uzbekistan by 2030.

Contribution to the HERE team to higher education development

For the last two years, the HERE have been actively involved in the reform process. Most HERE are currently holding an administrative position in the higher education system. For instance, between 2018 and 2019, one HERE worked as a Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Science, Education and Health of the Senate and had a considerable role in the development of policy papers and governmental decrees and resolutions related to higher education. Nowadays, she is the Rector of the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies and Senator of the Parliament. Two HERE are working in the social sector of the Government administration. One HERE is the Rector of the Yeosu Technical Institute, which is an example of private-public partnership. Two HERE are involved in the Working Group established by MHSSE on the Implementation of the Credit Module Education System in Uzbekistan.

HERE also contributed to higher education development through Technical Assistance Missions (TAMs) on topics that were relevant to the latest reforms. The regional TAM was organised on 23-24 April 2019, together with the MHSSE, and was broadcasted by national mass media. Moreover, HERE regularly reported to the MHSSE on the latest developments and specific aspects of the Bologna process.

After each international study visit of HERE to European universities, the National Erasmus+ Office (NEO) submitted a detailed report to the MHSSE with specific recommendations relevant to the current modernisation agenda. The HERE also provided expert advice to working groups set up by the MHSSE on development of strategy documents, regulations, draft decrees and the new Law on Education.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. In line with the Concept for Higher Education Development by 2030, the MHSSE established a Working Group on the Implementation of the Credit and Module Education System in Uzbekistan. Two HERE are part of the Group and provide their expert advice for the successful implementation of the ECTS.
2. The TAM on “Perspectives and methods of organising joint Master’s programmes in cooperation with European universities on a double-degree basis and procedures for the development and implementation of joint educational programme” took place between 23 and 24 April 2019. More than 130 participants representing 55 higher education institutions from Tashkent and all country regions, line ministries, 8 representatives of Kazakhstan HEIs and NEO, as well as HERE team members attended the event. The representatives of the State Inspection for the Supervision of the Quality of Education and State Testing Centre under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan also took part in the seminar. The NEO and HERE organised the event with the support of MHSSE. The seminar was considered a timely instrument as all HEIs were advised to develop joint degrees and set up faculties to consolidate the internationalisation process.
3. The annual HERE publication, Perspectives of Higher Education Development 2019, has become very popular in the academic community, and will be presented at the Annual Conference of HERE in 2020. It is envisaged to officially register this publication as a periodic journal in cooperation with the MHSSE.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.uz/heres/Goals-and-Objectives/index.htm>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.uz/heres/Team/index.htm>
- HERE publications or articles: <http://erasmusplus.uz/publication/Publications-of-Experts/index.htm>
- HERE event pages: <http://www.erasmusplus.uz/> , <http://erasmusplus.uz/heres/TAMs/index.htm>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/uzheres/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-uzbekistan>



TAM “Perspectives and methods of organising joint Master’s programmes in cooperation with European universities on double-degree basis; procedures for the development and implementation of joint educational programme”, Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanisation Engineers (23-24 April 2019)

9.3 Eastern Partnership Countries

ARMENIA

Key developments in higher education in Armenia in 2019

In 2019, the draft Law on Higher Education became the draft Law on Higher Education and Science, thus bridging higher education and research and putting forward several mechanisms to foster higher education and research integration. The major changes the Law brings are: more autonomy for Armenian HEIs, flexibility in the design and delivery of study programs, resizing University Boards of Trustees which must include minimum 12 members - professors, students, employers, education experts and representatives of cultural industries. Following the incorporation of most Bologna initiatives, the Higher Education Law in Armenia was rewritten in order to support comprehensive implementation, particularly to enable greater institutional autonomy and enhance effective institutional management. There has been a trend towards considering the basic principles and conditions needed to support the differentiated institutional missions and visions that are necessary to meet the demands of globalized societies, e.g. strengthening institutional (academic) autonomy and international cooperation in education and research, fostering research excellence and innovation, developing modern infrastructure, improving teaching quality, and so on.

Simultaneously, several discourses evolved in terms of fighting corruption and promoting academic integrity with the active involvement of the civil society (Education Civic Initiative, Student Restart, etc.).

The relevance of higher education to the labour market is still a major topic on the national agenda. A recent review conducted by World Bank Armenia suggests that the gap between higher education and the labour market needs institutional and national attention. A particular challenge is the insufficient relevance of the curriculum to the labour market, despite internship opportunities and practicums at universities. In 2019, the Government of Armenia approved a strategy for the Work Armenia Initiative, a three-year ambitious plan that, among other goals, aims to modernise the content of the higher education sector, align it with the labour market and increase youth competitiveness.

Internationalisation of HEIs is another national priority. Several Erasmus+ Projects contributed to promoting the dialogue in this area. Universities developed internationalisation strategies, the number of International Credit Mobility flows is increasing, and so is the geographical diversity of participating countries. Due to the increasing number of mobilities, some universities introduced mechanisms for the recognition and transfer of ECTS credits earned abroad. However, there are still challenges in relation to the recognition of staff mobility achievements in universities. The number of courses taught in English is small, which hinders the involvement of international students in the Erasmus+ credit mobility. The study programs are not flexible. The marketing and promotion of universities globally needs further development and improvement.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The activities performed by the HERE in 2019 had a multi-aspect impact on higher education reforms. The HERE team also shared its international experience to national HEIs through seminars, training, interviews and round table discussions. The HERE invited international experts to events, provided consultancy to university staff and students, and engaged different stakeholders in various activities.

The HERE were involved in the ongoing reform processes in different ways:

- Participation in the national Working Group on the preparation of the new draft Law on Higher Education and Research, as well as in public discussions explaining why the autonomy of HEIs is necessary;
- Presenting a package of student rights and responsibilities while talking about academic integrity with students from regional institutions;
- Discussing mechanisms for developing university strategy and activities towards a better (democratic) academic environment;
- One regional and two national TAMs during which HERE members helped to accelerate the implementation of the reforms by adapting good practices to the local context in the fields of internationalisation, university management and governance;

- Presentations and panel discussions on current higher education development trends and how to best implement the CBHE project idea locally (Erasmus+ Information Days);
- Consultations on the effective elaboration of CBHE and Jean Monnet Actions.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

A special interest among students and staff was raised through a series of training seminars on academic integrity and autonomy of universities held by several experts in regional institutions and in Yerevan. During interactive seminars, participants learned about the current state of academic integrity at their institutions and how the current culture may be changed.

Three different TAMs were organized in 2019:

1. Regional TAM “Promoting the International Mobility of University Staff” (25-26 November 2019) – the event was attended by HERE/NEOs from Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, and helped universities to build capacities to ensure continued international mobility of their staff, to develop foreign language policies, programmes and courses, to boost the quality of teaching and learning through the increase of international staff mobility.
2. National TAM “Holistic Approach to University Management and Governance and Shared Responsibility for Outcomes” (5-6 September 2019) - helped university administrators to develop, implement and use the holistic (whole university) approach in university governance and management system.
3. National TAM "Leading University Strategies towards Internationalisation through the Use of International Benchmarks" (4-5 February 2019) helped universities to develop national and institutional strategies for internationalisation.

HERE took part in the discussion of the draft Law on Higher Education and Research at different stages, from Parliament public hearings to mass media.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <https://erasmusplus.am/here/>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <https://erasmusplus.am/here/>
- HERE event pages: <https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusHERE/>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusHERE/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-armenia>



TAM “Driving university strategies towards internationalization”, Eurasia International University, Yerevan (4 – 5 February 2019)



Seminar “Transition from general education to higher education”, COAF Centre, Yerevan (30 May 2019)

AZERBAIJAN

Key developments in higher education in Azerbaijan in 2019

The **State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023** was adopted by the President of Azerbaijan on 16 November 2018. According to the State Programme, actions will be carried out in order to modernize the content and quality of the higher education system of Azerbaijan, which include the organisation of international double-degree programmes for the specialties that are demanded in cooperation with foreign universities. This will lead to further integration of Azerbaijan universities in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The recent **amendments to the Law on Education** introduce pathways between sub-Bachelor and Bachelor levels of education. This provides students with the opportunity to continue their education. On 20 May 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Rules on “Admission of Bachelor degree holders to secondary professional education institutions, admission of sub-Bachelor degree holders to Bachelor studies of higher education institutions, and transfer of people who have not completed their Bachelor degrees to secondary professional education institutions.”

According to these Rules, Bachelor degree holders with high average performance indicators will be admitted to secondary professional education institutions, without taking a centralised exam, and sub-Bachelor degree holders with high average performance indicators will be admitted to higher education institutions (only to programmes that are relevant to the programme they studied during their Bachelor degree) by passing the centralised exam. Those who have not finished their Bachelor studies will be allowed to transfer to secondary professional education institutions within 15 years after the completion of the fixed duration of studies.

The Cabinet of Ministers approved the “**Classification of Specialisations for Bachelor Level**” on 12 February 2019. The new classification, based on the ISCED classification, comes into force on 15 September 2019.

The President signed a Decree on “**Allocation of scholarships** to doctoral students, to students in higher, secondary professional and vocational education institutions, as well as to students enrolled in master courses at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences” on 14 February 2019. The decree applies to 110,000 students across the country. According to the decree, scholarships for the above-mentioned categories of students increased by up to 25%.

On 10 May 2019, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the “Classification of Specializations for Master Level”.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team supported the above-mentioned reforms through different publications, translations of key documents, participation in specialized committees and working groups, providing expert advice to key stakeholders.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. Contribution to the Bologna implementation report.
2. Translation of the key strategic documents on the reforms in higher education.
3. Consultations for the development of Higher Education Standards and sharing expertise for drafting the Higher Education Standards in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the Law on Education.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/page/higher-education-reform-experts-39>
 - List of HERE on NEO website: <http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/page/higher-education-reform-experts-39>
 - HERE event page: <http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/page/events-33>
 - Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-azerbaijan>
 - HERE publications or articles: <http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/images/uploader/f1832-Raziya%20Isayeva%20-%20How%20Covid-19%20is%20reshaping%20teaching%20and%20learning.pdf>
<http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/images/uploader/1ac15-Jala%20Garibova%20-%20Remote%20teaching%20in%20the%20Covid-19%20era%20adjusting%20to%20new%20tools%20and%20technology.pdf>
http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/images/uploader/ab2b2-Rules%20on%20the%20establishment%20and%20admission%20to%20doctoral%20studies_Eng.pdf
http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/images/uploader/c1870-Implementation_of_ECTS_2013.pdf
http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/images/uploader/c1870-Implementation_of_ECTS_2013.pdf
<http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/images/uploader/9fa6a-14.Decision%20on%20Approval%20of%20Bachelor%20Degree%20Content%20and%20Rules%202010%20Eng.pdf>
- More can be found at: <http://www.erasmusplus.org.az/page/publications-32>



From Social Inclusion to Skills: Pressing Themes in Higher Education Policy-Making, Prague, Czech Republic (12-13 December 2019)



Eastern Partnership Conference – Promoting Common Values through Education and Culture, Tbilisi, Georgia (25 – 26 June 2019)

GEORGIA

Key developments in higher education in Georgia in 2019

A new set of amendments to the Law on Higher Education and the Law on Education Quality Enhancement was introduced in 2019, as a follow-up to ongoing reforms.

Changes also affected vocational education and training (VET), namely involvement of HEIs in VET for eliminating dead-ends in the education system.

The main higher education developments in Georgia targeted two aspects:

- Introducing an Associate Degree – short cycle qualification (level five in the National Qualification Framework), increasing flexibility in the provision of HE programs;
- Approval of renewed National Qualification Framework (NQF) by Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport. The NQF considers the requirements of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF LLL) and European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (QF-EHEA). The document brings together all the existing qualifications, and reflects the learning outcomes of different levels of general, vocational and higher education. The Classification of Fields of Study, which is based on the UNESCO documents "International Standard Classification of Education" (ISCED-F-2013) and the "Education and Training Field 2013 - Description of Detailed Fields" (ISCED-Foet-2013), classifies the current fields of study and defines the qualifications to be awarded in each field.

A long-expected revision of a higher education funding scheme has not been translated into legal decisions and remains a discussion topic. Fine-tuning of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms is an ongoing process, reflected in a number of legal acts and broadly discussed by HEIs and experts.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team was actively involved in all the HE developments. Despite the fact that two HERE left top management positions at the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), the only quality assurance (QA) agency in Georgia, the experts were part of all the working groups and decision-making committees, thus affecting the changes of the QA system. Two other HERE were leading QA experts, providing training for colleagues and developing a guideline for authorisation and accreditation experts. The approval of the renewed NQF was the result of the intense work of a HERE team member who was a leading expert of the NQF working group, and who also contributed to the communication with HEIs (trainings and seminars). All the supporting documents and guides enclosed in the NQF were translated by the HERE team (Writing and Using Learning Outcomes, Practical Guide of Doctor Declan Kennedy, Fields of education and training 2013 (ISCED-F 2013) – Detailed field descriptions, ECTS Users' Guide).

Two important surveys were finalized and published in 2019:

1. The research project "[Analysis of Development and Implementation of the Authorization Mechanism for Higher Education Institutions](#)" – a comprehensive analysis of the first authorisation phase of Georgian HEIs with renewed standards and participation of international experts. The project reflected the feedback of governmental agencies (Ministry, NCEQE), local experts, university rectors, authorisation board members, QA staff.
2. [The Study on the Impact of Academic and Administration Mobility at Georgian HEIs](#) – a first attempt to analyse the efficiency of staff mobility at personal and institutional levels, in order to improve the implementation of Erasmus+ exchange projects (and not only). The study recommendations were discussed in Tbilisi during the International Credit Mobility (ICM) contact seminar and TAM seminar in Yerevan (see below).

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

Collaboration with governmental authorities on a daily basis is a normal modus operandi for NEO and HERE, despite the frequent staff changes at the Ministry of Education and NCEQE. The HERE team is considered a pool of reliable and competent experts, and is involved in all the higher education development activities.

The three main highlights of 2019 are:

1. Development and publication of two QA textbooks for HEIs and authorisation/accreditation experts - "Quality Assurance – approaches, challenges and possibilities" and "Guideline for accreditation experts".
2. Intensified communication with all stakeholders in order to achieve wider coverage and enhance impact of HERE activities. NEO and HERE developed a number of video podcasts following their participation in seminars and study visits. Moreover, two articles were published in the SPHERE newsletter: [The role of universities in regional development - context and challenges in Georgia](#); Information on the Cross-Regional TAM Seminar ["Enhancing Quality Assurance Impact \(Cases of Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan\)"](#).
3. Increased international cooperation: one HERE was invited to the International Bologna Process Conference "Cooperation between the Ukrainian and Georgian National Agencies for Higher Education Quality Assurance: Exchange of Experience and Best Practices from Peers" (November 2019, Kiev, Ukraine) to present recent reform developments in Georgia related to quality assurance processes. The same expert also participated in the event "Problems of Higher Education in Armenia" (October 2019, Yerevan, Armenia). The cross-regional TAM seminar on QA also reflected the international aspects of the HERE work.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/umaghlesi-ganatlebis-reformis-ekspertebi>
- List of HERE on NEO website: http://erasmusplus.org.ge/files/files/HERE/Experts_EN2020.pdf
- HERE publications or articles: <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/publications>
- HERE event pages: <http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/umaghlesi-ganatlebis-reformis-ekspertebi>
<http://erasmusplus.org.ge/en/gallery>; https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwK81a4VB4Sf3UAu_kfs12g
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/erasmusgeorgia/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-georgia>
- YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwK81a4VB4Sf3UAu_kfs12g



Annual Conference "Reform of QA system in HE and Perspectives of Development", Tbilisi, Georgia (5-6 December 2019)



TAM "Promoting the International Mobility of University Staff", Yerevan, Armenia (25 November 2019)

MOLDOVA

Key developments in higher education in Moldova in 2019

Quality assurance in higher education

- In order to extend university autonomy, the Education Code was modified.
- For compliance with European standards and the recognition of Moldovan diplomas in the EU, a new Nomenclature of Vocational Training Fields and Higher Education Specialties was approved.
- In order to offer graduates a better job and to become more competitive, the new curricula includes a compulsory foreign language course with application in the field of vocational training, an ICT course and entrepreneurship education.
- The modification of the National Qualifications Framework was approved, thus allowing the recognition of diplomas and qualifications in the European space, and opening universities to the economic and social environment.
- A new Diploma Supplement was implemented according to the European recommendations made during the Ministerial Conference in Paris.
- The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research was reorganized, with roles and responsibilities targeting the entire education system.
- To ensure quality, the biggest number of Bachelor programmes in 2019 were evaluated by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research.
- The Regulation for conferring academic titles, including the minimum standards for Lecturer and Professor, was approved and implemented.
- Seven of the most important public universities of Moldova developed a common vision concerning the National Strategy for Internationalisation of HE.

Access to higher education

A fundamental priority for the Ministry of Education is training highly qualified specialists in the fields of Education Sciences (ES) and ICT. 25% of all the state-funded places in HEIs were allocated to 90 study programmes in ES; the number of places for ICT also increased. For the ES programmes, the scholarship increased significantly. Creating a personal study path was made possible by an increased number of ECTS for traineeship and speciality subjects.

Social dimension

- 70% of the students funded from the state budget receive a scholarship, 90% of the students from rural areas benefit from dormitories.
- National authorities paid special attention to developing partnerships between universities and employers.

Higher education funding

The Methodology for the Standard Budget Financing of Public Higher Education Institutions, which aims at a fair and equitable distribution of funds among public HEIs and at the efficient use of public money based on performance indicators, was finalised and is undergoing repeated review.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team is involved in different working groups for the elaboration/updating/improvement of legislative documents related to higher education development. The main highlights in 2019 were:

- Endorsement of the National Strategy for the Integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Research Area „National Programme” (2020-2023);

- Promotion of the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) as the EC programme to support the implementation of the principles and requirements of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for Recruitment of Researchers and many other activities (as part of the MINERVA CBHE project).
- Participation in the promotion of all the initiatives aimed to strengthen quality assurance.
- Identification of the changes that need to be made to the Regulation on the access to higher education.
- Amendments to the draft Regulation on organising higher education at bachelor level and integrated studies were proposed in order to harmonize the curricula development with the labour market needs.
- Amendments to the draft Methodology for the Standard Budget Financing of Public Higher Education Institutions were proposed in order to ensure a unified understanding of the applied criteria.
- Support for the establishment of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Chişinău Candidate Section and its admission to ESN international. The HERE student representative shared the student perspective during national and international events.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. The Regulation regarding the organisation of higher education (bachelor and integrated studies) was modified based on the proposals and amendments made by the HERE team, taking into consideration curricula development and labour market requirements.
2. Following a series of workshops and roundtables organized by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank Group in Moldova, the HERE were invited to join the Committee on the identification of key challenges and opportunities in higher education. The five most important challenges for determining the priority areas in reforming Moldovan higher education were discussed and submitted for further approval.
3. The Students and Alumni Association of Moldova was admitted as candidate section to ESN international. This action was fully promoted by the student representative who is part of the HERE Moldova team.

Links to further details

- HERE section & List of HEREs on NEO website: <http://old.erasmusplus.md/en/article/heres-higher-education-reform-experts>
- HERE publications or articles: <http://old.erasmusplus.md/en/publications>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/erasmusplumoldova/>
- Country page on SPHERE website http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-moldova#_Toc488827964



International HERE Seminar “Recognition – Implications for cross-border access to higher education and mobility”, Technical University of Moldova, Chisinau (10-11 June 2019)

UKRAINE

Key developments in higher education in Ukraine in 2019

The National Quality Assurance Agency (NQAA) developed Regulations and criteria for accreditation in line with the Law of Higher Education and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015. Around 1500 QA experts were trained for accreditation by the NQAA. The accreditation of study programmes (curricula) is being provided by the NQAA since September 2019.

According to the Law of Higher Education, the Scientific and Methodological Commissions (SMCs) were formed in 2016. They have been drafting the Higher Education Standards and the HERE team shared their expertise during this process. The Ministry of Education and Sciences approved 106 Higher Education Standards in 2019. The NQAA provides accreditation taking into account Higher Education Standards in accordance with the Law of Higher Education.

The Parliament Committee on Sciences and Education, in cooperation with the Ministry and HERE, developed a Draft Law on Amendments to the Law of Higher Education and the Law of Education concerning the improvement of the educational process in higher education (adopted by the Parliament on 27 December 2019).

The Law of Pre-Tertiary Vocational Education (2019) introduced a new level of NQF (5th) for qualifications that are relevant to pre-tertiary vocational education; therefore, NQF includes 11 levels now. Tertiary (higher) education consists of 5 levels, and the Law establishes correspondence between higher education levels, postdoctoral/scientific level (Junior Bachelor – Bachelor – Master – PhD – Doctor of Science) and NQF levels (6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – 10).

The Ministry of Education and Sciences renewed NQF descriptors in line with the 2018 Paris Communiqué (European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework - QF-EHEA) as well as the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF LLL) (2017); the Cabinet approved NQF with amendments on 12 June 2019.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The HERE team performed the following activities:

- (1)** Providing expert advice on higher education reform to the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine and the Parliament's Committee on Education, Science and Innovation.
- (2)** One HERE who was a member of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Development and Implementation of the National Qualifications and other HERE participated in the development of the NQF in line with EQF LLL, QF EHEA and the new Law of Pre-Tertiary Vocational Education (2019).
- (3)** The NQAA Selection Committee includes two HERE. They will coordinate the selection of the NQAA members based on a transparent procedure until 2020.
- (4)** The NQAA includes two HERE who played the lead role in developing the Regulation and criteria for accreditation in line with the Law of Higher Education and ESG 2015, based on Erasmus+ CBHE projects outcomes.
- (5)** HERE in close cooperation with the NEO and the Institute of Higher Education of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine provided expert advice to the SMCs for elaborating over 150 drafts of Higher Education Standards during 2017-2019. The expertise was based on ESG 2015 and NQF, as well as on the Guidelines on higher education standards developed by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with HERE and NEO, in line with the competence-based approach and grounded in international experience.
- (6)** The HERE actively participated in the development of the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law of Higher Education and the Law of Education for Improvement of the Educational Process in Higher Education.

(7) HERE and the NEO team provided expertise for developing courses for the MoPED Erasmus+ project, and regular consultations upon requests.

(8) HERE prepared publications and took part in national and international seminars, workshops and conferences on higher education reform priorities in order to clarify key issues for HEIs and society at large.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. The Regulation and criteria for accreditation, developed in line with the Law of Higher Education and ESG 2015, based on Erasmus+ CBHE project outcomes. Over 1000 QA experts were trained in cooperation with HERE, and a part of them were selected by the NQAA to perform accreditation.
2. 106 Higher Education Standards were approved by the Ministry based on consultations with HERE for drafting standards in line with ESG, NQF and the Law of Higher Education (HE standards are components of the national QA system).
3. The HERE contributed to the development of the capacities of HEIs and NQAA based on the Technical Assistance Missions, international study visits and seminars and their follow-up cluster seminars on recognition and QA tools. Peer learning was made possible as the NQAA in Ukraine had the opportunity to learn from their colleagues from Georgia.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <https://bit.ly/2tNmFIT>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <https://bit.ly/2vicP27>
- HERE publications and reports:
<https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/erasmus/ka3-support-to-policy-reforms/here-materials.html>
- HERE event pages: <https://cutt.ly/1rQgBgp>; <https://cutt.ly/mrQgB89>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://cutt.ly/5rQgNiQ>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <https://cutt.ly/UrQgNcU>
- Updates on Higher Education in Ukraine: <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/higher-education-in-ukraine.html>



Eastern Partnership Conference “Promoting common values through education and culture”, Tbilisi, Georgia (25-26 June 2019)



HERE meeting on semi-annual reporting and planning, Kyiv (11 July 2019)

9.4 Russian Federation

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Key developments in higher education in the Russian Federation in 2019

The global goals formulated in the Presidential Decree of 7 May 2018, for the next five years, e.g. - enhancement of HE international competitiveness and implementation of new national projects (Federal Programmes) in the fields of education and science, remain relevant. Activities to accomplish these goals are on-going, namely in areas such as: young professionals, new opportunities for all, enhancement of HE competitiveness. The third area comprises three individual projects: Universities as Innovations Hubs (enhancement of fundamental and practice-oriented research), Up-to-date Learning Environment and Export of Russian Education (started in 2017).

The most relevant developments are:

- The elaboration of the Sector Education Development Strategy until 2024. To this end, an inter-departmental working group was formed that examines and provides expertise concerning sector strategy documents. Sector Development Strategies were adopted by regions.
- The Presidential Decree of 18 November 2019 on “Additional measures to support people who have demonstrated outstanding abilities”. Starting with the 2020/2021 academic year, the number of Presidential grants in this area will increase.

Among the local legal and normative documents adopted in 2019 by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MSHE), some relevant examples are: Communication of the MSHE on “Monitoring of international activities of HEIs” - this regulation stipulates that HEIs are to report to the Ministry in July (1 July 2019); the Russian Education Supervision Agency issued a regulation on the “Order of the intake of learners to preparatory courses of federal state universities” (17 December 2019).

One other key development is the continued implementation of the Federal Programme “Export of Education”, which in 2019 resulted in a double intake rate of foreign students.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

All HERE were actively involved in the promotion of internationalisation issues via professional HE associations (Association of Engineering Universities; Association of Technical Universities of Commonwealth of Independent Countries; Association of Classical Universities) – ad hoc meetings, consultations (on demand), presentations at events of the above associations. The most typical form of support is via Academic and Methodological Associations where the HERE report about the new EHEA developments, initiatives and challenges. The HERE also provide support through ministerial commissions and events organised by State and Regional Duma (Parliament) committees (public hearings).

Two HERE are part of the Executive Board of the Federal Programme “Export of Education”, and support the implementation of the Programme by providing relevant EU inputs. These experts are active in the national Bologna team.

One HERE expert is the leader of the national Bologna team and member of the Secretariat of the Bologna Follow-up Group. Hence, she is a direct communication link between EHEA and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In her capacity as Rector, she can also impact the Ministry via the Association of Rectors.

Three HERE are members of the National Bologna Working Group, and were actively involved in the preparation of the national Bologna Report for the 2020 Ministerial meeting.

One HERE is member of an expert group of the National Qualifications Council and is involved in the Federal Academic and Methodological Association activities, communicating new international development initiatives aimed at ensuring high quality in higher education.

One HERE's inputs to enhancing quality of HE at regional and sector levels aim at improving university-enterprise partnerships that are a prerequisite for training highly qualified specialists. The success of the sector

model, when effectively piloted, can serve as an example to other sectors and regions. The expert is active in the Sector Qualifications Councils, and provides inputs for the development of qualifications compatible with the EU qualifications in the tourist sector.

One HERE's contribution focuses more on the regional level, being member of university-employer bodies, associated member of committees of the Regional Government bodies, and providing inputs to the regional HE development strategies, internationalisation activities, and consolidation of the university-enterprise cooperation. The HERE was also appointed co-editor of a new Spanish HE journal, and is involved in regional developments in terms of enhancing the role of universities in society – promoting new university initiatives addressing civil society (schools, VET colleges).

One HERE prepared proposals for the improvement of the accreditation legal framework (an issue currently under discussion at the Federal Ministry) and quality assurance practices.

Another expert shared the acquired expertise via the Regional Rectors' Association and by developing recommendations for the MSHE on: improving the Federal HE standards approval, sector orientation of curricula on the basis of EU practices and interaction with employers, updating the migration and labour legislation for boosting academic and research exchanges and HEIs internationalization.

The HERE team members were involved as HE expert in the implementation of the Regional Development Programme "2030 Strategy" and they developed proposals for the MSHE on the organisation of advanced training for lecturers of Russian universities on HE modernisation. The training seminars were organised by HERE in Kazan, Moscow, Stavropol.

Reports were prepared about academic mobility of students and teachers, courses delivered in English, as commissioned by the MSHE, Ministry of Agricultural and other government bodies. One HERE member was involved in monitoring the implementation of recommendations for the Rectors' Union on strategic aims of the internationalisation policy of Russian HEIs.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. Enhanced profile in the national decision-making.
2. New formats of interaction with labour market stakeholders via e-platforms and projects and work-based learning opportunities.
3. Promotion of student-centered teaching and learning via academic divisions at own universities

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://www.erasmusplusinrussia.ru/index.php/en/experts> (EN)
- List of HEREs on NEO website: <http://www.erasmusplusinrussia.ru/index.php/en/experts> (EN)
- HERE publications or articles: <https://elibrary.ru/contents.asp?id=41452085>,
http://euspace.vsu.ru/UserFiles/files/images/events2019/Sbornik_RFBR_19_014_20008.pdf,
<https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=39266777>, <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=37258320>,
<https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=36676005>, <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=37538916>,
<https://cloud.mail.ru/public/35Ed/5FrgL5i4n>, <https://cloud.mail.ru/public/2vRV/4YzgLGamx>, https://entep-tudresden.de/dokument/EXPLORING_CROSS-BOARDER_COLLABORATIONS_IN_HIGHER_EDUCATION_INSTITUTIONS_TEACHING_AND_LEARNING_1572960526_6265.pdf, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11935-5_10, <https://doi.org/10.31992/0869-3617-2019-28-1-86-93>, <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=41097636>, <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=35604217>, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337707642> Training PhD students for teaching of engineering disciplines Study of Russian Universities Experience, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335015305> BOLONSKIJ PROCESS PROSTRANST

VO RAZVITIA ILI NEOLIBERALNYJ PROEKT BOLOGNA PROCESS AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT OR A NEOLIBERAL PROJECT, <http://www.ncfu.ru/export/science/nauchnye-izdaniya/nauchnyy-zhurnal-vestnik-skfu/arhiv/vypuski-2019/>, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/metodika-razrabotki-i-realizatsii-mezhdunarodnyh-sovmestnyh-programm/viewer>; <https://doi.org/10.29039/02021-0>

- HERE event pages: <http://www.erasmusplusinrussia.ru/index.php/ru/eksperty/39-sobytiya-obzory-i-komentarii>

- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RussianHEREs/>

- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-russia>



HERE working meeting, Moscow (16 December 2019)

9.5 South-Mediterranean Countries

EGYPT

Key developments in higher education in Egypt in 2019

1. Formation of a committee for the implementation of the by-laws for the Law of Innovation Incentives that allow universities to establish spin-off companies and have equities in private entities for the exploitation of research/innovation outputs of universities. This will positively impact university self-funding, strengthen the links with industry and provide perfect conditions to boost entrepreneurship and create start-ups based on innovation. A HERE member has been included in the afore-mentioned committee.
2. Expansion of the establishment of International Branch Campuses (IBC) for universities in Egypt. Currently there are three IBCs (one from Canada and two from the UK).
3. Initiation of procedures to reform the laws and regulations of recruiting university teaching/research assistants.
4. In accordance with the previously issued Law on the Establishment of Technological Universities, the first cohort of students were admitted to three technological universities in three different Governorates. This is an important step that meets national and international job needs, the plan being to have eight technological universities in the end.
5. Through the technical support of a Committee formed at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, both University and Subject Ranking of Egyptian Universities were on the rise in 2019.
6. More international partnerships and national funding allocation to enhance the recently established Egyptian Space Agency.
7. Hosting a high-level international conference in April 2019 - "Global Forum for Higher Education and Scientific Research" - with speakers from all over the world. Due to its success, it was decided to hold the conference annually starting from 2020.
8. Initiation of the "Study in Egypt" campaign to attract more international students to Egypt capitalizing on Egypt's HE historical excellence aspects and exceptional touristic assets. A HERE member is the Director of the Ministry's International Students Administration.
9. Issuing decrees for more private universities.
10. Reforming the Law of Private and Not-For-Profit Universities to provide the possibility of establishing this type of universities by the Government of Egypt. Within this context, three Government-owned not-for-profit universities are currently under construction.
11. Design and implementation of a HE Dashboard System that allows Ministry officials to access all data relevant to Egyptian HE institutions, faculty members and students, as well as to generate statistics and charts related to other aspects such as gender balance and international student trends.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

As was the case during the past years, HERE team members have been carefully chosen to represent various higher education stakeholders in Egypt, and the committee is currently regarded as a Think Tank for the Ministry of Higher Education. The HERE team was involved in meetings and discussions to draft strategies and visions for new laws and regulations.

HERE are represented in various committees of the Supreme Council of Universities. In the case of the Education Sector Committee, a HERE member was responsible for designing a reform strategy for faculties of education that entails a change of programs, and also a school university partnership for the creation of Professional Development Schools (PDS). Moreover, HERE members were represented at high-level national conferences looking at the future of education, e.g. the conference organized by the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE).

Some team members were awarded certificates of recognition for reform projects established through EU funding. Several HERE took part in the UNESCO global exercise for the Future of Education vision. TAMs were selected to reflect national HE priorities such as: Technological Incubators and Research Commercialization, Internationalisation, Joint Programs with International Partners, International Student Support, Student-Centred Learning, etc. In addition, one or more HERE members were directly involved in the above-mentioned list of key developments.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. In accordance with the previously issued Law on the Establishment of Technological Universities, the first cohort of students were admitted to three technological universities in three different Governorates. This is an important step that meets national and international job needs, the plan being to have eight technological universities in the end.
2. Initiation of the “Study in Egypt” campaign to attract more international students to Egypt, capitalizing on Egypt’s HE historical excellence aspects and exceptional touristic assets. A HERE member is the Director of the Ministry’s International Students Administration.
3. Design and implementation of a HE Dashboard System that allows Ministry officials to access all data relevant to Egyptian HE institutions, faculty members and students, as well as to generate statistics and charts related to other aspects such as gender balance and international student trends.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://www.erasmusplus-egypt.eu/index.php/en/heres/who-heres>
- List of HEREs on NEO website: <http://www.erasmusplus-egypt.eu/index.php/en/heres/who-heres>
- HERE publications or articles: http://www.scu.eg/News/News_img/1552924805281989823.pdf
- HERE event pages: <http://www.erasmusplus-egypt.eu/index.php/en/erasmus-events/higher-education-reform-experts-events>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HEREsEgypt/>



Student-Centered Learning TAM,
Faculty of Engineering, Cairo
University (27 February 2019)



TAM on Incubators, Ministry of Higher
Education, University of Barcelona, (27 March
2019)

ISRAEL

Key developments in higher education in Israel in 2019

The 2018 - 2019 academic year is the third year of the Council for Higher Education's (CHE) multiyear policy plan aiming to boost academic and institutional development in research, innovation, academia-industry cooperation and internationalisation.

Internationalisation: One of the flagship programmes promotes internationalisation, and in particular the integration of international students into the Israeli HE system. Over the last three years, public HEIs have received funding to develop institutional infrastructure and stimulate international cooperation. During 2019, this initiative underwent a first evaluation process. Furthermore, following an in-depth research and consultation process, the **Study in Israel** initiative was launched in order to promote Israel as an education destination, and increase the number of incoming students. The first phase included market analysis that examined the perceptions of students from different countries.

Innovation in Teaching: The New Campus initiative continued to generate benefits to Israeli HEIs, providing support to innovation centres within HEIs. Ten HEIs were awarded funds to advance entrepreneurship and innovation hubs. In 2019, the selected HEIs established innovation centres that offer different academic training programs and entrepreneurial experience to their students.

Moreover, the CHE promoted a reform to increase the integration of practical placements and internships into study programmes, especially in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities.

CHE also continued to promote the **Digital Learning** initiative through the [CampusIL](#) platform and the development of new courses in the high-tech field. In terms of national initiatives to foster **research excellence** and the development of new research fields, particular initiatives in the field of data science were launched, allocating funds to the establishment of institutional research centres and scholarships for outstanding PhD and postdoctoral scholars.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

In line with the national agenda, the HERE team contributed to the advancement of HE development in the prioritised fields of activity. The HERE team continued to work in the framework of two working groups: (1) Internationalisation, (2) Entrepreneurship, innovation and employability.

First, HERE contributed to the **Internationalisation process** through: a) knowledge exchange at the Mobility / International Relation Officers' Forum and the Erasmus+ Information Day; b) two successful TAMs on International Alumni Networks and Joint Degrees. This allowed the community of International Relation Officers' and other HE representatives to gain professional knowledge and training.

Secondly, HERE contributed, in the framework of another TAM, to the national **Policy Discussions on Institutional Quality Assurance Mechanisms**.

Thirdly, the HERE enriched the development of **Innovation and Entrepreneurship** in the HE sector through: a) a TAM on Enterprise Education; b) a policy paper, promoting student entrepreneurship. The initiative aims to increase the motivation of students to take part in entrepreneurial programmes by providing funding to students for their entrepreneurial project/initiative/product.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. **Study tour to Sapir's Innovation lab:** the HERE team initiated a tour to Sapir EX lab to promote the knowledge exchange on innovation in Israeli HE. The tour was hosted by Sapir College that in 2019 launched an advanced technological centre offering a platform for innovation and entrepreneurship in the Western

Negev. The event provided a unique opportunity for other HEIs to learn from the experience of Sapir in creating a space for enterprise education, offering 11 labs in different study fields. Following the event, the HERE started drafting a policy paper promoting entrepreneurship education.

2. Policy Paper on entrepreneurship education: As mentioned above, in 2019 the HERE team put a great emphasis on the theme of innovation and entrepreneurship, and published a policy paper to promote student entrepreneurship. The proposal aims to encourage HEIs to develop academic courses in the field and provide competitive funding to students for their entrepreneurial projects/initiatives/products. The initiative focuses on innovation centres in HEIs, located in remote areas and/or catering to socially disadvantaged students. In 2020, the Planning and Budgeting Committee will consider this initiative for national funding.

3. HERE presentation at the Erasmus+ 2019 Information Day: HERE team members shared knowledge from their study visit to Vienna, and discussed 21st century skills and competence-based learning (CBL). In addition, the team presented the NQF objectives and drew attention to the relevance of the European Framework to the Israeli Higher Education System.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/here>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/experts-2018-2020>
- HERE publications or articles:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Kn6KTj5QNF1QdESLsCjIcr17yHZqbUh-jebYPhEkBDU/edit?usp=sharing>
- HERE event pages: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/conference-on-iga>,
<https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/conference-on-enterprise-education>, <https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/tour-of-exlab-at-sapir-college>, <https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/international-erasmus-forum>,
<https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/seminar-on-international-students-and-alumni>,
<https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/joint-degrees-seminar>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-israel>
- Erasmus+ 2019 Information Day: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.il/erasmus-info-day-2019>
- Other Useful links: <https://che.org.il/en/>, <https://studyinisrael.che.org.il/>



The tour to Sapir Exlab, Sapir College, Negev (27 May 2019)



TAM on Joint Degrees, Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem (4 September 2019)

JORDAN

Key developments in higher education in Jordan in 2019

The Law of Higher Education and Scientific Research was slightly amended by adding a clause related to branches of international universities. The Law of Jordanian Universities was amended by adding clauses regarding Boards of Trustees and the forming of academic, administrative and financial committees.

Academic practice legislation was also modified in 2019. The purpose was to ensure equality between those holding academic ranks before and after the legislation came into force. That way those who had previously obtained an academic rank were authorized to perform academic work and issue their licenses upon request.

The Higher Education Council approved the General Policy for International Students' Admission to the Universities of Jordan. The policy was developed to attract international students.

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system in Jordan is currently undergoing substantive reforms in line with the E-TVET Strategy (2014-2020) and other related strategic plans. A new law on 'Vocational and Technical Skills Development' was passed by the Senate in 2019. This draft law aims at creating a comprehensive administrative and executive organizational structure for technical and vocational education and training. The bill also seeks to increase the participation of the private sector and other stakeholders in developing TVET, as well as giving the sectors a national responsibility to identify priority areas of training and employment. The draft law also aims to institutionalize the licensing process of technical and vocational education and training, accredit curricula and training programmes that accord with best international practices, as well as allow personnel to establish a national centre to train trainers.

At the level of HEIs, Jordan is paying more attention to quality and establishing joint programmes with leading international universities. Several capacity building workshops for academic staff were organized towards the implementation of the Jordanian NQF.

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research is putting more emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation. The Ministry also actively participates in the project of improving Academic Development Centres in universities. The two phases of the project were organised by the Ministry in cooperation with the British Council and the University of Plymouth. A number of directors and staff of Academic Development and Quality Assurance Centres participated in project workshops. The aim of the workshops was to develop these centres, as well as to update researchers and specialists in the quality assurance process.

The Ministry of Higher Education also launched a media campaign to educate, guide and encourage students to choose the appropriate specialization considering the labour market needs, and reduce their acceptance to stagnant and saturated specializations using the Choose Your Specialty website: <http://www.admhec.gov.jo/mjr2017/>. The site also includes the definition of technical education and an explanatory video to guide students to choose the specialization that matches their abilities, goals and job market needs.

Contribution of the HERE team to the higher education development

A TAM on Certificate Recognition and Verification, organized at the Ministry of Higher Education, enhanced the knowledge as to the documents required for recognition procedures, and helped participants to distinguish between recognition and equivalence. It also introduced participants to the European system, notably to the Bologna Process, the function of credits, and the qualification framework. Participants were provided with tools to do better in their everyday work (e.g. new ways to check the validity of certificates, new online tools).

A TAM on Governance and Autonomy shared lessons from the EU and the Bologna Process in order to adapt best practices in Jordan. The participants were Boards of Trustees, Presidents and Vice-Presidents of universities, HERE, Deans, Directors of IROs, professors, etc. The event shed light on problems and challenges

facing Jordanian universities, enabled university staff to understand their tasks and responsibilities, and increased awareness of university regulations.

A TAM on Entrepreneurship in Higher Education was attended by HERE, professors, administrative staff, and directors of relevant centres at HEIs. Participants gained knowledge and better understanding of entrepreneurship in higher education, particularly concerning the concept of entrepreneurial university, building entrepreneurial-integral curricula, and the need to spread the entrepreneurship culture.

Two panel discussions on governance and management of faculties of medicine were conducted to encourage policy makers to improve shared leadership, set more feasible regulations, and monitor the organisational performance. A presentation of the impact of Tempus and Erasmus+ CBHE projects in the field of health was delivered. Three round table discussions were organised on linking universities and IT labour market requirements in Jordan. The events were attended by representatives of universities in the North, middle and South of Jordan and IT stakeholders. Tempus and Erasmus+ projects in the IT field were presented.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. Six HERE actively participated in a full day event on the Reform of Higher Education based on the EU experience at the University of Jordan, Aqaba branch. The HERE delivered presentations and had discussions with the audience on internationalisation of higher education, entrepreneurship, linking universities and labour market requirements in the IT field, e-learning, and evaluating university autonomy.
2. One HERE was active in conducting Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) info sessions and in disseminating EVE at local HEIs. He delivered presentations at five public and private universities to almost 250 staff and students.
3. One HERE who attended the regional TAM on “Emerging Entrepreneurship Skills & Technical Education in South Mediterranean Countries” was interested in the *HEInnovate* tool, and organized workshops for academic and administrative staff at three universities on using this tool.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmus-plus.org.jo/en/HERE-Team/New-HEREs>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <http://erasmus-plus.org.jo/en/HERE-Team/HE-Reform-Experts>
- HERE publications or articles: <http://erasmus-plus.org.jo/en/HERE-Team/Newsletter>
- HERE event pages: <http://erasmus-plus.org.jo/en/HERE-Team/Local-Activities-Seminars>
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/erasmusplusjordan/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-jordan>
- Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Jordan: <http://www.mohe.gov.jo/en/Pages/default.aspx>



Panel discussion on governance and management of medical faculties, University of Jordan, Amman (7 February 2019)



Roundtable on linking universities and IT labour market requirements in Jordan, Jordan University of Science and Technology (5 November 2019)

LEBANON

Key developments in higher education in Lebanon in 2019

In 2019, the Lebanese higher education sector had to cope with two unprecedented crises:

1) The sector was considerably impacted by the major political developments that took place in Lebanon. With the coming of a new Minister of Education and Higher Education, an investigation started in the higher education sector related to the issuing of fake degrees by some private universities in the country. The former Director General of Higher Education was discharged from his duties. The sector is now governed by an Acting Director General of Higher Education. These events put on hold or slowed down many of the development initiatives that were ongoing at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and in the higher education sector.

A new Council for Higher Education was formed. The Ministry focused on quality assessment at both institutional and programmatic levels (MSc and PhDs). There was also an attempt to revive the law for the establishment of a Lebanese Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Based on a request received from the Ministry, the World Bank conducted a review of the structure, processes and procedures of the Directorate General of Higher Education. The purpose of the review was to make recommendations on developing a Higher Education Management Information System for the modernisation and improved efficiency of the sector.

2) Towards the end of 2019, Lebanon faced a political uprising where citizens took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the current socio-economic and political situation. In the light of this uprising, many university courses were interrupted, and HEIs needed to explore innovative approaches for running classes and engaging students.

In the context of the recent financial crisis, universities are expecting a drop in student enrolment, particularly at private universities. The crisis is expected to have additional impact on the HEIs e.g. the layoff of some staff and faculty, the departure of some faculty members, offering less classes, etc. The selection of study programmes is expected to shift to particular majors that relate to job market needs. The real impact is yet to be observed at the start of the 2020-2021 academic year.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

The team continued to support the sector through its standard TAMs and joint events organised together with local and international organisations active in the field of higher education. As a team, the HERE organised two successful seminars, one on Governance and Effectiveness in HE and another on the Student Management System in HE. A regional TAM on Teaching and Learning and two joint activities with the University Agency of Francophony (AUF) were all postponed to 2020, due to the situation in the country. To adapt to this national context that halted all big gatherings, the team intervened individually on many occasions.

Regarding the law on establishing the Lebanese Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, one of the HERE commented, upon request by the Ministry, on the latest version of the law in comparison with what was originally submitted in 2012.

Several HERE were nominated to the special committee formed to evaluate MSc and PhD programmes.

The HERE were asked by specific universities to conduct training sessions on development and structuring of research. The training started in 2019 and will continue along 2020 as new demands have been received.

One of the HERE joined the World Bank in reviewing the structure, processes and procedures within the sector, and identifying key risks and challenges.

Two HERE were designated to conduct a study on the impact of the financial crisis on the Lebanese higher education. The implementation of this study will be in early 2020.

One HERE was asked to participate as a keynote speaker at the annual conference convened by UNHCR and the German Government on refugee higher education in Berlin in June 2019. The same member represented the HERE team at the annual conference on refugees for the HOPES project funded by the EU MADAD fund.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

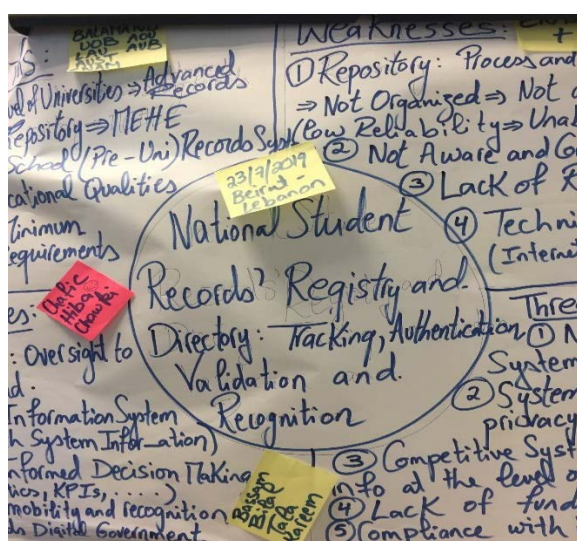
1. Many individual interventions were given by the HERE team on reform-related issues at the request of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. These interventions partly filled the vacuum that occurred at the Directorate General of Higher Education.
2. Joint actions were organised with other bodies active in the higher education sector: 1) the co-organisation with the Order of Engineers and Architects in Beirut of a seminar entitled “Architecture & Engineering Education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution”; 2) the preparation of two actions on Internationalisation and Research together with AUF, which will continue in 2020.
3. A seminar was held on “Student Management System” that brought forward a diversity of systems to exchange practices and to make recommendations at national level.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/content/26>
- List of HERE on NEO website: <http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/content/26>
- HERE publications or articles: <http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/content/837>
- HERE event pages: <http://erasmusplus-lebanon.org/content/837>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-lebanon>



Seminar
“Student
Management
Systems”,
Beirut (23 July
2019)



Working group, Seminar
“Student Management
Systems”, Beirut (23 July
2019)

MOROCCO

Key developments in higher education in Morocco in 2019

- The voting by the Parliament of the **Framework-Law no. 51.17, the first law on education, higher education and scientific research**. The Law was elaborated based on the strategic vision of the Higher Council of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research 2015-2030. The main topics are the “**contracting State-University**”, the development of foreign languages as teaching-learning languages, and transversal skills.
- **The bachelor reform** includes:
 - institutionalisation and **operationalisation** of a **credit system** based on ECTS (included in the National Pedagogical Standards Book - Cahier des Normes Pédagogiques Nationales);
 - promotion and institutionalisation of international mobility (the new Pedagogical Standards Book introduces mobility);
 - strengthening of soft and transversal skills;
 - **career development** and **professionalisation** of curricula;
 - university-business alternating training;
 - promotion of **foreign languages** as teaching-learning languages;
 - setting up a national active guidance system.
- Reform of the doctoral centres
- Institutionalisation of the **National Qualification Framework** based on the European Qualification Framework.
- Implementation of the principle of **lifelong learning** and the **validation of prior experiential learning** (VAE)
- Development and promotion of **inclusive education** (**National Inclusive Education Plan** - public and private HEIs)
- Strengthening university **autonomy** in the context of **contractualisation**
- Creation of an **Observatory for the adequacy between trades, training and the labour market needs**
- Operationalisation of the **institutional evaluation** as the “evaluation referential” was published by the ANEQ (national agency).
- Development of **e-learning** with the implementation of the MUN (Maroc Université Numérique)
- Creation of **thematic university poles**

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

As the HERE were only nominated by the Ministry and the European Delegation to Morocco by end of July 2019, the HERE participated in few activities:

1. Study visit about the competence-based approach. A report was elaborated and a valorisation will be done next year concerning other topics (as part of a TAM).
2. TAM proposals: 5 national TAMs and 1 regional TAM were proposed, in line with national priorities as defined by the Ministry, and the major developments aforementioned:
 - Soft skills and language learning;
 - Learning and training centre in universities;
 - E-learning in Morocco: state of plan and development;
 - Professionalization in Higher Education: experiences and good practices;
 - Credit system: on the ground implementation;

- Institutional evaluation (regional TAM).

Out of the TAMs proposed, two national TAMs were selected (Learning and training centre in universities; Professionalization in HE: experiences and good practices) and one regional: Institutional evaluation and accreditation of HEI.

3. Participation in the National Info Day and a first contact with HEIs and authorities. Active participation in the interactive sessions with other partners and project coordinators (a wrap-up report is in progress including the main best practices and the recommendations highlighted).

4. Two HERE members took part in the Annual Conference in Prague in November 2019. A full report is available at: <https://erasmusplus.ma/conference-annuelle-from-social-inclusion-to-skills-pressing-themes-in-higher-education-policy-making-prague-13-et-14-decembre-2019%e2%80%8b/>

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

There have not been any major achievements yet in the second half of 2019, as the most important activities and publications were planned for 2020. The HERE took active part in events, while the NEO is assessing the potential and commitment of each HERE in order to know exactly what the “task-force” should consist of.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <https://erasmusplus.ma/heres-team/>
- List of HEREs on NEO website: <https://erasmusplus.ma/equipe-des-experts/>
- HERE publications or articles: <https://erasmusplus.ma/activities-des-heres/>
- HERE event pages: <https://erasmusplus.ma/activities-des-heres/>



Annual conference "From social inclusion to skills: Pressing themes in higher education policy making" Prague, Czech Republic (13-14 December 2019)

PALESTINE

Key developments in higher education in Palestine in 2019

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) set three main strategic development objectives:

- Setting the policy formulation concerning the development of the higher education sector for the first time in Palestine.
- Highlighting the need for a more student-centred learning pedagogy and a highly structured teaching environment.
- Ensuring highly equitable, inclusive and high-quality education systems at all levels.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

1. On 10-11 April, the NEO Director along with two HERE members, MoEHE and the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission led the regional TAM in Sharm El Sheikh regarding higher education policies in the South-Mediterranean Region. This mission was locally disseminated by the Deputy President of An-Najah National University based upon her workshop on “Identifying National Priorities”, which was conducted on 24 October at An-Najah National University. The Deputy President presented the new scheme taking advantage of her capacity and experience as a former senior advisor to the Prime Minister. The Ministry subsequently adopted the main priorities as discussed in the local HERE activity. This action tied in well with the Ministry’s first strategic development goal as stated above. The following links provide information about the activity:

https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2461911390715283?_tn=-R_
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1XFMMJgJsVFXB79PrmbZNt9iCzd4K-u_l?usp=sharing

2. On 22 October, one HERE conducted a workshop at Palestine Polytechnic University on “Competency-Based Education: Innovative Teaching (ICT, diverse classrooms)”. The outputs of the workshop included evaluation that was adapted by the Ministry due to being relevant to the second strategic development. The Ministry circulated the outcomes of this activity to all HEIs in Palestine. The Polytechnic University decided to adopt this education strategy, and to also use it as a pre-requisite to the promotion of university staff. The following links provide information about this activity:

https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2460014610904961_
<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1-b17rPgemi6ODPo6oQ9ge1E3PYs-5tYh>

3. The local HERE workshop - “Access and Retention: National and Institutional” - stressed the importance of many themes including the theory, practice and trends of student access and retention. The event focused on the most likely reasons that cause students in conventional and open universities to drop out: personal, institutional, and supportive environmental. The workshop was relevant to the third strategic development goal, and was replicated by the Ministry at various levels. More information about this activity can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2442732692633153>.

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. In June 2019, one HERE participated in the SPHERE seminar: “Recognition: Implications for Cross-Border Access to Higher Education and Mobility”, during which he presented the case study of Birzeit University on credit mobility recognition. The main outcome of the seminar was raised awareness about the importance of regional recognition conventions to HEI qualification, the impact of implementing automatic recognition system and the main obstacles and problems in recognition convention. In December 2019, the HERE led a local activity with the same topic attended by MoEHE representatives and highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of recognizing the International Credit Mobility, citing Palestine and the region as examples. Based on this activity, the Head of the Accreditation Department at the MoEHE announced the Ministry’s readiness to adopt the ECTS system.

More information can be found at:

https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%E2%80%9CRecognition%20of%20Qualifications%20Obtained%20in%20International%20%20Credit%20Mobility%E2%80%9D%20on%20&epa=SEARCH_BOX
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WL1nwX1A2VfqKsZtV2gtdxN_Ed2tBv6f?usp=sharing

2. In September 2019, a HERE member led a local activity at the Polytechnic University on “Competency-Based Education: Innovative Teaching (ICT, diverse classrooms), Including Evaluation”. This activity was based on the study visit attended by two HERE members in Vienna on “Competence-based learning: Basics, Perspectives, Implementation”. The Polytechnic University decided to adopt this strategy and to utilise it as a pre-requisite to the promotion of university staff.

3. In December 2019, one HERE conducted the workshop “Strengthening University-Enterprise Linkages in Palestine (STEP) – Pilot project and successful experience”. The speakers discussed the specific roles of the Ministry and HEIs, and presented ways in which the Erasmus+ Programme aims to overcome the core challenges to the recognition of credits gained during student mobility. These challenges included: the equal recognition of grades and credit hours from other accreditation systems (ECTS), differences in teaching languages, differences in passing grades between home and international universities, and other concerns. The workshop bridged the gap between HEIs and the private sector as it was recommended to establish a coordinating body and to identify the mandates and specifications.

Links to further details

- HERE Team: <https://erasmusplus.ps/here-te/>

- HERE event pages:

- Local events: <https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2442732692633153>,
<https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2460014610904961>,
https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2461911390715283?_tn=-R,
https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/photos/a.1679117052328058/2509659009273854/?type=3&theater¬if_t=page_post_reaction¬if_id=1576413333815737

- International events:

<https://www.facebook.com/ErasmusPlusPalestine/posts/2474386632801092>

- TAM: <https://erasmusplus.ps/taam/>

- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-palestine>



Third HERE Meeting attended by the Minister of Higher Education, Ramallah (26 September 2019)



HERE's Local Training Activity on Educational Methods, Hebron (22 October 2019)

TUNISIA

Key developments in higher education in Tunisia in 2019

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) set five strategic objectives:

1. To improve the quality of university training and the employability of graduates;
2. To promote research and innovation;
3. To promote good governance and optimize resource management;
4. To revise the university map for better anchoring and regional balance;
5. To promote teacher training.

Contribution of the HERE team to higher education development

1. On 3 July 2019, the local TAM “Building a National Platform for MOOCs: Implementation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance” was carried out by the Tunisia NEO Director, the President of the Virtual University in Tunisia, the Sphere Expert Professor Marc Brown, the Vice Presidents of universities and university professors. The TAM objective was to discuss digital learning and its approaches as well as the main strategies for integrating a national platform for MOOCs. The event led to the conclusion that a vision of the digital education future in Tunisia was needed for each specialty. The TAM tied in well with the third strategic objective of the MHESR. More information can be found at: <https://erasmusplus.tn/doc/HERE-Tunisia-Seminar-Report-MOOC.pdf>

2. On 9 and 10 July 2019, the Tunisian NEO Director, the General Director of University Renovation of MHESR, the Sphere Expert Professor Lucien Bollaert and university professors carried out the local TAM “Tools and Approaches for Improving Qualifications Frameworks in the Tunisian Higher Education System”. The objective of this TAM was to focus on the approaches and the main strategies for improving Qualifications Frameworks in the Tunisian Higher Education System. Three workshops were conducted on: 1. Understanding and working with the definitions of learning outcomes and competences 2. Writing learning outcomes and competences 3. Aligning learning outcomes with congruent teaching and learning methods as well as assessing them. The outputs of the TAM consisted in the recognition of the actual framework for qualifications in Tunisia (competency referential), the best methodology of writing learning outcomes and their congruence with pedagogical and assessment methods. The Expert was impressed by the dynamism and the competency of the Tunisian academic framework and suggested to add the teaching and assessment methods to the sectoral knowledge assessment sheet. The TAM was in line with the first and the last strategic objective of the MHESR. More information can be found at: <https://erasmusplus.tn/doc/HERE-Tunisia-Seminar-Qualification-Framework.pdf>

3. On 8 October 2019, the local TAM “Development of National/Institutional Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy” was carried out by the Tunisia NEO Director, the General Director for International Cooperation of MHESR, the Sphere Expert Professor Hans-George Van Liempd, the General Director for Technological Studies in Tunisia, university professors and contact points of the Erasmus+ Programme at all universities. The aim of the TAM was to focus on the meaning, the approaches and the main strategies for integrating an international dimension in higher education. The General Director for International Cooperation explained the internationalisation strategy implemented by the MHESR. The result of the TAM was raising the awareness of the MHESR about the internationalisation strategy and its perspectives and the international trends in higher education. The TAM was in line with the first strategic objective of MHESR. More information can be found at: <https://erasmusplus.tn/doc/HERE-Tunisia-Seminar-Internationalization.pdf>

Main achievements of the HERE team in 2019

1. In May 2019, the third meeting of the HERE was carried out at Ezzitouna University. The representatives of eight universities (Sfax, Kairouane, Carthage, Tunis El Manar, Virtual, Zitouna, Monastir and Manouba), the General Director for University Renovation, the representatives of the General Direction for International Cooperation and the General Direction for Programmes and Accreditations as well as the Director of NEO Tunisia and his two deputies addressed two fundamental issues: the preparation of the 2019 TAM programme and the financial problems of Erasmus+ projects. For the first issue, three presentations took place on internationalisation, MOOCs and qualification approaches and tools. Regarding the second point, a good practice in the field of project financial management was presented and discussed through the Spaat4food project. <https://urlz.fr/bOj6>

2. In June 2019, the President of the Virtual University who is also a HERE team member participated in the seminar “Recognition: Implications for cross-border access to higher education and mobility” in Chisinau, Moldova (Technical University of Moldova). The objective of the mission was to present the Tunisian practices on credit recognition, support the student international mobility, and create new contact network. The main result was a reflection on new tools to promote international mobility. <https://urlz.fr/bOja>

3. In September 2019, the Vice President of Sousse University and the Vice President of Gabes University participated in the seminar “Competence-based education (CBE): Basics perspectives, implementation” at FH Campus Wien University in Vienna. Their participation allowed them to assess the role played by the various institutional services in terms of CBL (leadership, deans, support services for educational development, etc.), explore examples of CBL in teaching practices and better understand what it means for teachers and students, and evaluate how an institution can engage with stakeholders external to the CBL, such as the professional sector, employers, the local community, civil society, NGOs, etc. to jointly develop a program or part of the program or course.

Links to further details

- HERE section of NEO website: <https://www.erasmusplus.tn/HERE@Tunisia.php>
- List of HERE on NEO website: https://www.erasmusplus.tn/HERE_list.php
- HERE event pages: https://www.erasmusplus.tn/HERE_ErasmusPlus_Tunisia.php
- HERE Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HEREErasmusPlusTunisia/>
- Country page on SPHERE website: <http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-tunisia>



TAM “Building a National Platform for MOOCs: Implementation, accreditation and quality assurance”, Science City Tunis (3 July 2019)



TAM “Development of National / Institutional Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy”, Science City Tunis (8 October 2019)

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