

# Programme

Higher Education Expert Conference

The New Student: Flexible Learning Paths and  
Future Learning Environments

20-21 September 2018

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# The New Student: Flexible Learning Paths and Future Learning Environments

Date: 20-21 September 2018

Venue: FHWien der WKW - University of Applied Sciences for Management & Communication, Währinger Gürtel 97, 1180 Vienna

The future development of higher education learning environments is one of the key topics to secure more responsive higher education systems for a significantly changed student population.

In the last few years areas of higher education have been identified that need to be modernized with the aim of creating learning environments that work for the new student population as well as addressing societal needs. It has become evident that flexibilization of learning is one of these areas. Higher education is more than ever challenged to provide various paths of flexible learning (e.g. flexibility in the admission requirements, place, pace and modes of learning). Legal and institutional frameworks as well as teaching and learning have to adapt accordingly.

The conference examines how to support flexible learning and what these developments mean for the future of higher education in Europe. It will provide participants an opportunity to discuss current trends in the European higher education systems and will present innovative examples of strategy and policy implementation and areas where further action is needed. Moreover it will deal with the question, how national governments and the European Union can provide assistance in this task. The presentation of selected good practices will enhance the discussion on solution approaches and will ultimately feed into the specific recommendations.

## The conference explicitly addresses

- Policy-makers from the field of higher education
- Representatives of higher education institutions (students, academic staff, non-teaching staff, management)
- Higher education stakeholders

# Programme

Presentations from the conference will be published online after the event, unless requested otherwise by the author.

**Moderators:** *Elmar Pichl*, Director General for Higher Education, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research & *Karin Riegler*, Vice-Rector for Teaching and Promotion of Early Stage Artists/Researchers of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria

## Day 1 - Thursday, 20 September 2018

09:00-09:30 Registration and welcome coffee

09:30-10:00 **Opening session**

*Heinz Fassmann*, Austrian Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research

*Tibor Navracsics*, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

*Beate Huber*, Chair of the Academic Board, FH Wien, Austria

10:00-11:30 **Plenary session I – Different aspects of flexible learning**

The objective of this first session is to develop and deepen a common understanding of the needs of a diverse student body and to give an overview of different approaches to flexible learning paths. In order to discuss flexibilization in higher education from different perspectives, the session concludes with a dialogue of various stakeholders and reflects on future learning environments.

### **Introduction to conference topic**

*Elmar Pichl*, Director General for Higher Education, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research

### **Key Note: Meeting the Needs of a diverse Student Body & Flexible Learning Paths**

*Ronald Barnett*, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education, University College London Institute of Education, United Kingdom

### **Dialogue: Flexible Learning Paths from different perspectives**

*Ronald Barnett*, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education, University College London Institute of Education, United Kingdom

*Stéphane Lauwick*, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)

*Robert Napier*, European Student's Association

*Christa Schnabl*, Vice-Rector for Educational Affairs, University of Vienna, Austria

*Kinga Szuly*, Head of Sector, Higher Education Policy, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission

11:30-12:00

*Group photo followed by Coffee break*

12:00-13:15

### **Breakout session I - Thematic inputs**

In the first round of the parallel working groups participants will get a theoretical input and will learn about good practice.

*Working group 1: Strengthening alternative access routes through validation of non-formal and informal learning*

- *Anke Hanft*, AQ Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria and University of Oldenburg, Germany
- *Stephane Lauwick*, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
- *N.N.*, tba

Chair: *Barbara Birke*, AQ Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria

*Working group 2: Identifying the needs of an increasingly diverse student population*

- *Sunniva Braaten*, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), Norway
- *Kristina Hauschildt*, Eurostudent, German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW)
- *Gertraud Leimüller*, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, winnovation consulting gmbh; Deputy Chairwoman, Kreativwirtschaft Austria, Vienna, Austria
- *Robert Napier*, European Students' Union (ESU)
- *Christina Raab*, University of Innsbruck, Austria

Chair: *Elisabeth Westphal*, Universities Austria (uniko)

*Working group 3: Institutional approaches to flexible learning environments*

- *Claude Müller Werder*, “program FLEX”, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Switzerland
- *Iris Kolan*, „Studium flexibel“, University of Applied Sciences Südwestfalen, Germany
- *Margreet Engelhart-Sjouw*, „Flexstuderen“, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

Chair: *Gudrun Salmhofer*, Head of the Educational and Student Services, University of Graz, Austria

*Working group 4: National support for flexible learning environments*

- *Anke Rigbers*, German accreditation agency evalag foundation
- *Bert van der Zwaan*, former Rector Magnificus Utrecht University and former chairman of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), Netherlands
- *Erna Nairz-Wirth*, Head of the Education Sciences Group, Institute for Business Education, WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Austria

Chair: *Regina Aichner*, Bologna Service Point, Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD)

*Working group 5: EU's initiatives to foster flexible learning*

- *Kinga Szuly*, Head of Sector, Higher Education Policy, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission
- *Michael Gaebel*, Director, Higher Education Policy Unit, EUA
- *Stojan Sorčan*, Director General, Directorate of Higher Education, Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

Chair: *Gerhard Volz*, Head of Sector Erasmus+ Higher Education, Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD)

13:15-14:15

*Networking Lunch*

14:15-15:45

## **Breakout session II - Solution storming**

Based on the provided information in the breakout session I the second round of the parallel working groups focuses on policy implementation. This session should conclude with specific recommendations.

*Working group 1:* Strengthening alternative access routes through validation of non-formal and informal learning

*Working group 2:* Identifying the needs of an increasingly diverse student population

*Working group 3:* Institutional approaches to flexible learning environments

*Working group 4:* National support for flexible learning environments

*Working group 5:* EU's initiatives to foster flexible learning

15:45-16:15

*Coffee break*

16:15-17:15

## **Plenary session II - Future Learning Environments**

The opportunities of new technologies such as virtual learning environments and new learning modes are the focus of this session. Moreover it will reflect on the chances and challenges arising from Learning Analytics (LA).

### **Opportunities of digitalisation for teaching and learning**

*Dominic Orr*, Institute for Education and Socio-Economic Research and Consulting (FiBS), Germany

### **Opportunities of learning analytics for future learning environments**

*Martin Ebner*, Member of the fnm-Austria Chairmanship, Head of the Department for Educational Technology, Graz University of Technology, Austria

19:00

*Formal dinner*

## **Day 2 - Friday, 21 September 2018**

09:00-09:30

Welcome coffee

09:30-11:00

## **Plenary session III – Blockchain in higher education**

Blockchain technology may offer possibilities to foster flexible learning paths since it could present a new way of tracking

academic performance. This session address the question what blockchain technology could mean for higher education.

### **The Blockchain Principles and their Potential**

*Walter Dettling*, Lecturer for Business Information Technology and Mathematics, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland

### **How could blockchain technologies contribute to opening up higher education? Policy perspectives from the "Going Open" report.**

*Andreia Inamorato dos Santos*, European Commission, Joint Research Centre

### **The UNIC Blockchain Initiative**

*Antonis Polemitis*, CEO, University of Nicosia, Cyprus

11:00-11:30

*Coffee break*

11:30-12:45

## **Plenary session IV - Results of the conference**

In this session, we bring together the most important issues and recommendations of the parallel working groups. Furthermore, a thematic summary of the conference and conclusions based on the discussions in the working groups will be presented.

### **Presentation of recommendations and key insights of the working groups**

*Barbara Birke*, AQ Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria

*Helga Posset*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research

*Gudrun Salmhofer*, Head of the Educational and Student Services, University of Graz, Austria

*Regina Aichner*, Bologna Service Point, Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD)

*Gerhard Volz*, Head of Sector Erasmus+ Higher Education, Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD)

### **Thematic summary**

*Kinga Szuly*, Head of Sector, Higher Education Policy,  
Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture,  
European Commission

*Elmar Pichl*, Director General for Higher Education, Austrian  
Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research

*Martin Unger*, Head of Research Group, Higher Education  
Research, Institute for Advanced Studies, Austria

### **Concluding remarks and closure of the conference**

12:45-14:00

*Lunch*

## Breakout Sessions I&II - Abstracts

### Working Group 1: Strengthening alternative access routes through recognition of prior learning focusing on non-formal and informal learning

**Moderator:** *Barbara Birke*, AQ Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria

**Rapporteurs:** *Edith Winkler*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research & *N.N.* Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria

The urge to establish alternative routes to higher education through the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning has been on the agenda for years. But progress in implementation is slow and further action is needed. While knowledge and awareness of recognition and validation practices is accumulating on institutional as well as national level, there are still a lot of obstacles to be addressed. Although the general attitude on recognition is positive, implementation seems to be faced with reservation and lack of trust but also organisational, financial and legislative challenges.

This session will consider how higher education institutions are adapting to keep up with the development of effective and inclusive systems of recognition and validation.

#### Leading questions:

- The hard facts enabling implementation (e.g. development and implementation of clear routines/validation processes; time and money; legal framework etc.) are well known, but how do we address the soft facts (eg. general attitude/commitment to recognition of non-formal and informal learning within HEIs/on national level)?
- What is needed to overcome these obstacles?
- Question of Outreach: Do we want all HEIs (in a system) to fully use the range of recognition/validation procedures? Are we paying too little attention on the question of supply on demand on student's side (universal vs target-group specific)?
- What about the role of quality assurance (agencies)?

#### Part 1: Thematic inputs (12:00 – 13:15)

- *Anke Hanft*, AQ Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria and University of Oldenburg, Germany
- *Stephane Lauwick*, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)

## Part 2: Thematic inputs and solution storming (14:15 – 15:45)

- N.N, tba

### Working Group 2: Identifying the needs of an increasingly diverse student population

**Moderator:** *Elisabeth Westphal*, Universities Austria (uniko)

**Rapporteurs:** *Helga Posset*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research & *N.N.* Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria

Today's heterogeneous student population asks for flexible learning, which is also a key for the development of skills required in a rapidly changing world of work (professional skills in combination with transversal and generic skills, lifelong learning etc.). On the one hand the need or demand for flexible learning paths results from widening participation in HE (e.g. first generation students, non-traditional entry routes, new delivery modes) and on the other hand from a more diverse student lifecycle. Taking different needs of an increasingly diverse student population into account, should in the end lead to more customised learning offers and better completion rates.

#### Leading questions:

- Which types of students need different modes of delivery, different teaching modes and flexible learning paths? How large are the target groups concerned?
- What are the demands for
  - modes of delivery: e.g. blended learning, part time or full time, dual study programmes, modularisation
  - teaching modes: didactic concepts and e.g. online teaching
- What is the impact of different modes of delivery and different teaching modes on student success and skills acquisition?
- What is the contribution of flexible learning paths to social inclusion and which concepts are most valuable for different target groups? (concerning educational background, compatibility, etc.)

## Part 1: Thematic inputs (12:00 – 13:15)

- Findings of the current Eurostudent VI report (2018), *Kristina Hauschildt*, Eurostudent, German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW)
- Create your UNIverse – students' expectations, winnovation, *Gertraud Leimüller*, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, winnovation consulting gmbh; Deputy Chairwoman, Kreativwirtschaft Austria, Vienna, Austria

## Part 2: Solution storming (14:15 – 15:45)

- Different modes of delivery and teaching for diverse students: Which support works best?
  - the students' point of view, *Sunniva Braaten*, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), Norway
  - the institutional point of view, *Christina Raab*, University of Innsbruck, Austria
- Flexible Learning paths and student-centred teaching from the students' perspective. BOLOGNA with Student Eyes 2018, *Robert Napier*, European Students' Union (ESU)

## Working Group 3: Institutional approaches to flexible learning environments

**Moderator:** *Gudrun Salmhofer*, Head of the Educational and Student Services, University of Graz, Austria

**Rapporteurs:** *Eva Erlinger-Schacherbauer*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research & *N.N.* Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria

Higher education institutions are requested to “develop more flexible modes of delivery of higher education (cf. Modernisation Agenda). As there is no common understanding what “flexible modes”, “flexible learning paths” might mean, flexible learning is to be discussed from a range of perspectives (pace, place and modes of delivery).

This session will consider how higher education institutions are aligning their actions to keep up with the demand of creating and implementing flexible learning environments for a diverse student body. It will address the responses of HEIs to the challenges and expectations raised by flexibilising their programmes. The session aims at introducing to the topic and presenting institutional examples as well as discussion.

### Leading questions:

- What types of flexible learning (paths) are in place within a HEI? All programmes or target-specific programmes?
- What has been done in order for flexibility to take root within the institution and to support a common understanding of flexibility (taking into account the specific frameworks of institutions/programmes)?
- What are the main factors supporting or impeding these processes?
  - Developing clear processes / strategies, commitment of all HEI stakeholders (administration, teaching, students ...), balance between institutional frame-work and students' needs;
  - General attitude toward flexible learning environments;

- Infrastructural and pedagogical flexibility;
- Time and money;
- Other enabling factors?
- What is the contribution of digitalisation, statistics, learning analytics ...?

### Part 1: Thematic inputs (12:00 – 13:15)

- *Claude Müller Werder*, “program FLEX”, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) , Switzerland
- *Iris Kolan*, „Studium flexibel“, University of Applied Sciences Südwestfalen, Germany

### Part 2: Thematic input and solution storming (14:15 – 15:45)

- *Margreet Engelhart-Sjouw*, „Flexstuderen“, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands

## Working Group 4: National Support for Flexible Learning Environments

**Moderator:** *Regina Aichner*, Bologna Service Point, Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD)

**Rapporteurs:** *Sabine Koch*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research & *Martin Unger*, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria

Higher Education Institutions carry a responsibility to reflect, to question and to shape the ongoing social transformation process in a proactive way. According to the Sustainable Development Goals (UNO 2016), nations committed themselves to “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”. In this context the two speakers will enter into a controversial dialog, discussing fields of tension, within the debate on flexible learning, such as: (How) does widening participation in higher education correspond with the claim of being a global-oriented research university? Is there a need for a standardized approach to flexible learning and how would this correspond to foster innovative and creative-thinking in higher education? This discussion will examine arguments and establish conclusions in small groups.

### Leading questions:

- What can national governments do to ensure the development and implementation of flexible learning paths and conducive future learning environments? Should these goals be integrated in the budgeting process?
- What directives for flexible learning pathways should governments set for the entire higher education system or individual types of higher education

institutions? What aspects/issues should remain to be the exclusive responsibility of individual universities?

- Is the quality assurance system the appropriate steering instrument to ensure compliance with these directives and at the same time to avoid unintended side effects?

### Part 1: Thematic inputs (12:00 – 13:15)

- *Anke Rigbers*, German accreditation agency evalag foundation, Germany
- *Bert van der Zwaan*, former Rector Magnificus Utrecht University and former chairman of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), Netherlands

### Part 2: Solution storming - Conclusions and recommendations (14:15 – 15:45)

- *Anke Rigbers*, German accreditation agency evalag foundation
- *Bert van der Zwaan*, former Rector Magnificus Utrecht University and former chairman of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), Netherlands
- *Erna Nairz-Wirth*, Head of the Education Sciences Group, Institute for Business Education, WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Austria
- *N.N.*, tba

## Working group 5: EU's initiatives to foster flexible learning

**Moderator:** *Gerhard Volz*, Head of Sector Erasmus+ Higher Education, Austrian agency for international mobility and cooperation in education, science and research (OeAD)

**Rapporteurs:** *Anna Schinwald*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research & *N.N.*, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria

Flexible learning paths allow greater student choice and the possibility to pursue higher education at different institutions, in different countries, over a longer period of time and by different learning methods. Providing flexible learning paths is a challenge for higher education institutions and raises questions of adequate national governance. At the same time flexibility is becoming an increasingly supranational topic and there already exist various measures to promote and support flexible learning at European level.

The latest example is the European Universities Initiative which is currently under discussion and which will serve as a kind of acid test for different initiatives that are already in place, such as modularisation of studies, quality assurance or mutual recognition of learning periods abroad.

After a short presentation of already existing EU initiatives to support flexible learning, this working group will focus on the support that Higher Education Institutions and Member States wish for. Participants will have the possibility to discuss their experiences with EU initiatives and provide their ideas how existing measures can be more efficient and sustainable.

### Leading questions:

- How can the EU support Member States and higher education institutions in realising flexible learning paths?
- How to raise the impact of European measures for the modernization of higher education?
- Which are the current challenges in the area of mutual recognition in the tertiary education?

### Part 1: Thematic inputs (12:00 – 13:15)

- *Kinga Szuly*, Head of Sector, Higher Education Policy, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European
- *Michael Gaebel*, Director, Higher Education Policy Unit, EUA
- *Stojan Sorčan*, Director General, Directorate of Higher Education, Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

### Part 2: Solution storming (14:15 – 15:45)

This conference is co-financed by:



 Federal Ministry  
Republic of Austria  
Education, Science  
and Research

The conference follows the Austrian Green Label standards

