

## New Digital Education Action Plan: Public Consultation

### Position Paper: German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

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*Higher Education Institutions and the European Higher Education Area are facing new societal challenges. The covid-19 pandemic underlined the importance of international connectivity, collaboration and global cooperation for developing forward-looking solutions, maintaining peace as well as economic stability in Europe and beyond.*

*Higher Education Institutions are playing a key role for these aims while internationalisation processes and strategic aims are reset through the means of digitalisation. Digital education and exchange will play a tremendous role for HEIs of the future and the European (Higher) Education Area by 2025.*

*Learning from the crisis implies a continuity of online learning, virtual exchange and blended mobility. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) is highlighting the following five priorities in terms of European cooperation, the potential of digital Higher Education and exchange. DAAD would like to thank the European Commission for having the possibility of sharing its position on the renewed Digital Education Action Plan.*

#### 1. Mobility and Inclusion

*From its very beginning academic exchange was characterised by cross-border physical mobility. As the numbers of participants remain static, it is crucial to understand what hinders people taking part in mobility programmes. Evidently, equal opportunities are one of the challenges to be tackled. Funding programmes need to reach out for yet excluded or underrepresented groups.*

- **Mobility for all:** Besides physical mobility, new formats of blended and virtual mobility, as - for example - foreseen in the upcoming Erasmus+ programme, should create more inclusive opportunities while addressing socio-economic and cultural disadvantaged groups (including quality assurance and recognition). The implementation demands the co-operation and support of multiple stakeholders within universities (International Offices, Faculties, IT departments etc.)
- **Improving education through better data analysis and foresight:** for this purpose, defining measurable benchmarks in accordance with the Strategic Framework for Education and Training 2030 is essential. In-depth data analysis should support evidence-based decision-making at national and European level. Such data is also key to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups in all educational fields.
- **Digitalisation of administrative processes** as ground for the digital transformation of international cooperation and student mobility processes should enhance efficiency (paperless/ seamless processes) and raise the number of mobilities and exchanges. Close connection to European developments, such as Erasmus Without Paper shall be ensured while respecting the national status quo, perspective and challenges of International Offices and administrative staff. Digitised administrative processes need to be complementary to organisational structures. Strengthening international cooperation and mobility through digital means requires the modification and adaption

of (new) intra-institutional processes. Incentives for HEIs and the providence of additional financial resources are crucial for successful implementation

## 2. Networked IT infrastructures and seamless data mobility

*Digital transformation comes with technological innovation. Digital education initiatives across Europe and beyond are using and developing new digital communication tools, e-learning services and platforms. Making digital services and IT infrastructures interoperable is key for cross-border communication, mobility and exchange.*

- **Enhancing flexibility to ensure individualized learning-paths** as well as the integration of innovative formats in curricula, able to adapt to societal needs and technological developments while respecting ethical standards.
- **Joint action on interoperability of digital technologies**, services, IT infrastructures and Campus Management Systems for creating compatibility between mobility data systems and data exchange between HEIs.
- **Exchange on European data formats and emerging, common standards.** Creating joint approaches for the development of networked digital ecosystems and data mobility should be accepted as preconditions for international mobility and exchange.
- **Seamless data exchanges** based on data protection and online safety as well as EU regulations (e.g. GDPR).
- **Inter-operability and connectivity of systems, platforms and hubs** to link European and national developments. The creation of joint IT solutions ('clearing house'), e.g. within European University Alliances, should be shared within the EHEA to avoid doubling and ensure the efficient usage of resources.
- **Further creation and awareness of interconnecting online learning possibilities**, e.g. through the Higher Education Hub (former Action 4) resp. the project "OpenU-Online Pedagogical Resources for European Universities".

## 3. Digital Capacities

*Digital capacities cover technology (equipment, infrastructure, availability of broadband) as well as working up organisational capabilities enhancing new modes of teaching and training. Reducing gender-related, socio-economic or geographical barriers should be the guiding principle to overcome inequality and exclusion mechanisms.*

- **Digital Skills and Competences** support both, the new and changing ways of how education is carried out and the capability of navigating through a digitalised world. Both open a space, where new practices can be developed, elaborated and support the lifelong learning based on the learner's needs. Acquired future-oriented skills and competences bolster the employability of students, the reputation of teachers amplifying the digital transition and open new career paths for administrative staff. In the case of students, knowledge transfer of digital skills and competences should be strongly considered when it comes to reviewing curricula. In this context, the Digital Competence Framework 2.0 should be reviewed and refined.
- **Technical infrastructure** needs to be provided for teachers and learners for not creating exclusion. While teachers and learners must be equipped with technical means (laptops, software, cloud solutions etc.), the access to broadband internet, enough data or server capacities all over Europe must be made available – regardless of geographical or income restrictions.
- **Transparency on data exchange and data sovereignty** through the whole participant's (students and administrative staff) mobility life cycle. Every technological

development, digital environment and all digital processes should be user centred. The digital sovereignty of the users is the guiding premise.

- **Digital Tools and Online Platforms** supporting a successful mobility and recognition upon return by reducing the administrative work. User-friendliness and accessibility, especially for handicapped people, need to be the driving forces when it comes to the design.

#### 4. Virtual Exchange and online collaboration

*Virtual exchange as collaborative online, and particularly research or project-oriented formats, can offer high potential for implementing and testing new forms of exchange for Higher Education Institutions and their internationalisation processes. Not only digital skills, but also other basic skills such as the ability to reflect and work in a team or intercultural and language skills are systematically developed. One of the main features of cross-campus teaching and learning is the student-centred approach.*

- **Test and develop new and innovative collaborative teaching and learning formats** (e.g. networked curricula) for enhancing international cooperation and the competitiveness of European HE in a global knowledge society.
- **Quality Assurance:** Use existing tools, standard and guidelines in order to further develop innovative teaching and learning while ensuring recognition and exchange.
- **Access to international exchange for all** while respecting societal and technological diversity.
- **Internationalisation@home:** set up targeted communication strategies, implement new formats or use online tools to reach out and involve non-mobile groups in order to foster the experience to study, work and exchange within diverse cultural groups and strengthen intercultural competences for everyone. Further, those activities can be used as supporting measures before, during and after physical mobility to create flexible and diversified learning and mobility paths

#### 5. Linking cross-border cooperation to funding programmes

*A high variety of cooperation projects are addressing above-named priorities and develop, test and implement digital initiatives. Creating synergies, learning from each other and linking results to funding programmes is highly important in order to adapt funding programmes and policy agendas to the outcomes of such initiatives.*

- **Peer-learning approaches and stakeholder groups** between countries, institutions and individuals can be used to create synergies and communities of practice, learn from each other and raise awareness of already existing methods and measures; share knowledge of common risks and constraints to prevent initiatives from failing.
- **Evidence-based policymaking** by including the institutional perspectives, scientific outcomes and evaluation results in policy guidelines (ensure flexibility: agile development, dynamic processes) while adapting to societal changes.
- **Cross-sectoral knowledge exchange** between all education areas is important to avoid isolated solutions that are not scalable or open to others.
- **Connecting results and experiences of project cooperation** to create effective synergies and avoid the creation of parallel structures.
- **Provide long-term funding opportunities** to implement digitalisation within processes of Higher Education Institutions as well as innovative teaching and learning methods in a sustainable way. Nationally funded initiatives shall create the possibility to be linked to international funding programmes, such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 or Digital Europe Programme.