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REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND SPORT

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

Higher Education Expert Conference
Date: 20-21 September 2018, Vienna/Austria

EU INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT NATIONAL POLICIES OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Stojan Sorčan, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Republic of Slovenia

WG 5: EU initiatives to foster flexible learning

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Programme of the Expert Conference:

- „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.“
 - „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.“
 - („The national/member state **policy perspective**.“ - learning from errors)
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Presentation

- **Challenges** of HE policies to foster flexible learning
 - **Shortages** in implementation of flexible learning identified in Slovenian national context
 - **Key structural elements** of HE system that should be addressed by potential future EU initiatives
 - Design and systemic implementation of multi-level **EU initiatives** to support policies of flexible **learning environment**
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1. Challenges of flexible learning policies

Challenges of flexible learning (FL) policies

- *complexity* -

- Many **issues** linked to FL: social inclusion, completion rates, skills demand, lifelong learning, student-centred learning, open & distance learning, new technologies
- Multiple **dimensions** of FL: flexible pathways (access & admission), teaching and learning flexibility (pedagogy), organisational flexibility, quality of impacts
- Multiple **approaches** to FL: recognition of formal & informal learning, diversity of student population, institutional approaches, national support
- Many **international initiatives** on FL initiated by: European Commission, Bologna process, ESU, EUA...



Multi-level, Multi-actor and Multi-issue Dimensions of Governance of the European Higher Education Area, and Beyond



Martina Vukasovic, Jens Jungblut, Meng-Hsuan Chou, Mari Elken and Pauline Ravinet

Introduction

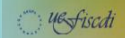
With massification and increasing focus on knowledge as the foundation for inclusive and sustainable social, cultural, political as well as economic development, higher education has become more salient and politicized (Busemeyer et al. 2013; Gornitzka and Maassen 2014; Jungblut 2015). In this chapter, we employ a novel framework (Chou et al. 2017) that provides the analytical precision required to dissect and examine these developments and unpack their implications for the future development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

To start with, the centrality of knowledge implies that decisions (planned as well as those already taken) concerning higher education are more connected to policy developments in many other sectors, such as research, welfare, environment,

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European Higher
Education Area:
The Impact of Past
and Future Policies



Challenges of flexible learning (FL) policies

- *mindset of governance* -

- **Multi-level** dimension: distribution of authority at different governance levels...
...regardless of their formal regulative competence!
- **Multi-actors** dimension: heterogeneity of the „state“ and its institutions as well as non-state actors ... „insiders“ and „outsiders“
- **Multi-issue** dimension: HE is interlinked with many other policy sectors (research, welfare, environment, trade, migration and security)

Source: Multi-level, Multi-actor and Multi-issue Dimensions of Governance of the European Higher Education Area, and Beyond, Martina Vukasovic, Jens Jungblut, Meng-Hsuan Chou, Mari Elken and Pauline Ravinet, European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies, Springer Open, 2018, p. 321-334

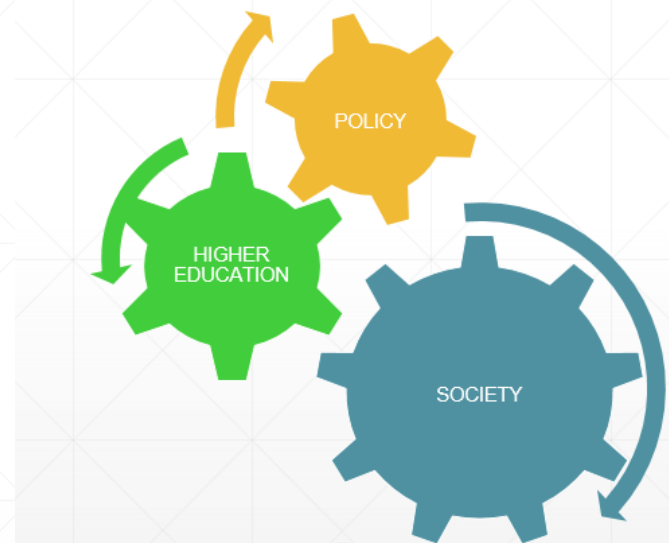
Brussels, 30.5.2017
COM(2017) 247 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

on a renewed EU agenda for higher education

{SWD(2017) 164 final}

Need for systematic approach



- **The different components of higher education systems do not always work together seamlessly:** funding, incentive and reward mechanisms in higher education are not always configured to reward good teaching and research, innovation, social inclusion and engagement. Cooperation with schools, vocational providers and adult learning is often limited.

2. Shortages in implementation of FL identified in Slovenian national context



EU implementation of key commitments

- „**Structural barriers and institutional inflexibilities**, e.g. inability to serve the needs of an increasingly **heterogeneous student population**, may amplify **individual risk settings**“

Source: The European Higher Education Area in 2018, Bologna Process Implementation Report

- Persisting gaps between **policy** and **practice** (*Jamil Salmi*):
 - No systematically **targeted policies**, but mainstream strategies to expand access
 - No available student background **data**
 - Many learning difficulties results from inadequate **secondary education**
 - Facing **new equity** challenges

Source: Social Dimension Within a Quality Oriented Higher Education System, Jamil Salmi, European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies, Springer Open, 2018, p. 151

HE policy framework to support FL

- *strategy* -

- Enable studies **without tuition fees**
 - System of **social transfers** for students
 - **Widening access** and open **admission** to higher education
 - Inclusion of **underrepresented groups** of the population in HE
 - Various financially supported **instruments for HEIs**
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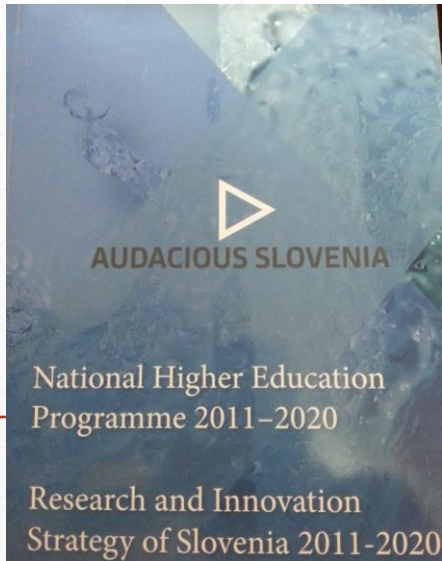
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Vision: free HE studies once in a life time

- *under certain conditions* -

- Mainstream policy without **tuition fees** for everyone (under certain conditions)
 - In public HEIs and in private HEIs for concessions
 - 1. and 2. cycle plus additional year
 - 3. cycle (subsidized)
 - Additional treatments for **students with special needs** (parents, disabilities...) – responsibility of HEIs
 - Financial **support** for student life
- No specific policy targets for improving **equality of opportunities**
 - No analysis of the structure of the student body
 - *Act for improving of student social situation* (adapted 2017) KATERI ZAKON JE TO?



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Policy measure: Modification of part-time study

- reduced work load per year -

- In the light of **lifelong learning**, we wish to provide all citizens with the same rights regardless of the period of life in which they decide to study.
- **Measure:** The organisation of study: degree study programmes comprise 60 ECTS per year with a full-time work load or 30 to 45 ECTS per year with a part-time/reduced work load.



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Widening access to HE

- **A majority of age cohort enrol in tertiary education**
 - Enrolment rate: among 15-19 year-olds in Slovenia is 94%
 - Attainment rate: 45% of adults aged 25-34 in Slovenia had attained tertiary qualification
 - Increased share of **women** with tertiary education from (40% to 56% in the last decade).
- **Upward social mobility** is still a challenge
 - Only 9 % of adults whose parents have not attained upper secondary education attain tertiary education, compared to 59% among those with at least one tertiary-educated parent

Source: Slovenia - Country note - Education at a glance 2018: OECD Indicators



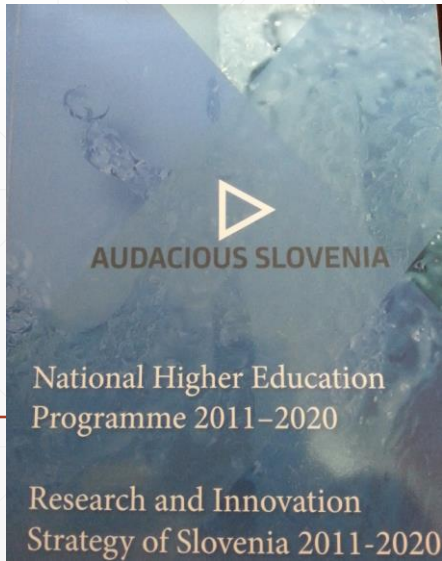
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Policy measure: Modification of entry conditions

- a. Modification of current conditions for the first study cycle;
- b. Determination of entry conditions for the second and third study cycles is in discretion of higher education institutions upon the conclusion of the preceding study cycle by candidates,
- c. The decision-making with regards to limiting enrolments is transferred to universities, which take into consideration the funding of higher education, except in the field of EU regulated professions and the education of teachers

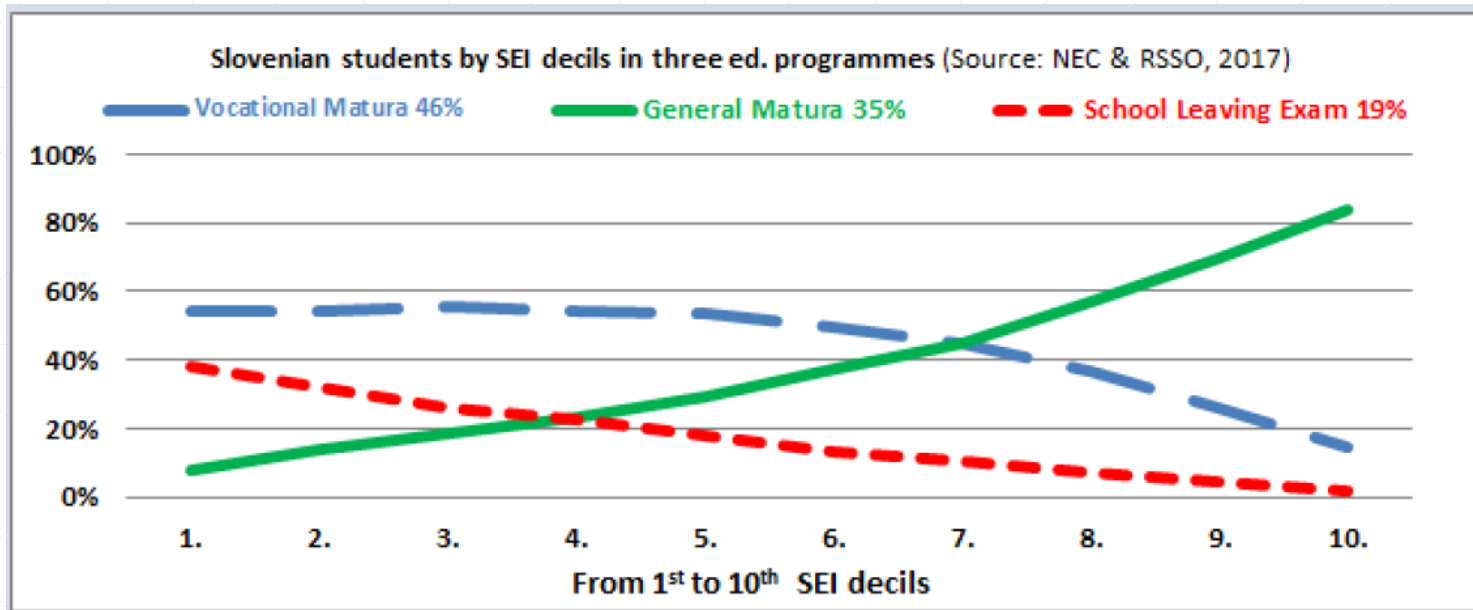


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Free access to HE does not guarantee equity



- The higher is the SEI decile of the student's family, the higher the probability of the student finishing upper secondary education in Slovenia in the most demanding and prestige **Gimnazija programmes with General Matura Exam**, and the higher the probability of the student enrolling in tertiary education university programs (Cankar, Bren, Zupanc, 2017).
- Source: Darko Zupanc & Gašper Cankar, Encouraging the further development of Higher Education Act, Interreg, Daube Transnational Programme, EU-LAB, Slovenia, 2017

A Typology of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Impact on the Equity of Access, Progression and Completion in Higher Education



Cezar Mihai Haj, Irina Mihaela Geanta and Dominic Orr

Introduction

In a world confronted with more numerous and diverse challenges than ever, having educated people becomes vital for economic and social development. The EU target stating that by 2020 the average share of 30–34 year-olds in EU member states with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% is on track, already reaching 39% in 2016 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014). A large part of this has been achieved through expanding the share of upper secondary graduates qualifying to enter higher education. This share increased by 4% between 2008 and 2015.

At the same time, on European level, the demographic decline can no longer be ignored, with some countries being more affected than others. For children and young people aged 0–29, the percentage in the overall EU-28 population has decreased from 41% in 1994 to 36% in 2004, to reach 33% in 2014 (Coyette et al. 2015). This translates into a smaller pool of potential students from which HEIs can select. And this demographic decline is starting to impact on European countries' higher education systems, with the absolute numbers of higher education entrants decreasing by 19% in the same timeframe (Orr et al. 2017a).

However, even within this framework, some higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to see growth in their entrants' numbers. When surveyed on this by the

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A. Curaj et al. (eds.), *European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77407-7_12

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Policy recommendations !?

- Policy-makers could **reshape the selection processes at secondary education level**
- HEIs should be allowed to experiment with ways of **identifying student potential**
- Incentives should be provided for **HEIs to become more inclusive**
- HEIs could **use Bologna tools to facilitate transition** throughout higher education by extensive use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to facilitate movement between different study programmes and institutions.
- HEIs should improve their **communication** of the choices provided to students
- An increased collaboration between **schooling and higher education**
- Source: Cezar Mihai Haj, Irina Mihaela Geanta and Dominic Orr, A Typology of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Impact on the Equity of Access, Progression and Completion in Higher Education, European Higher Education Area: The impact of Past and ture Policies, Sprineger Open, p. 184-186

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University entry 'should be background, not just exams'

By Sean Coughlan

BBC News education and family correspondent

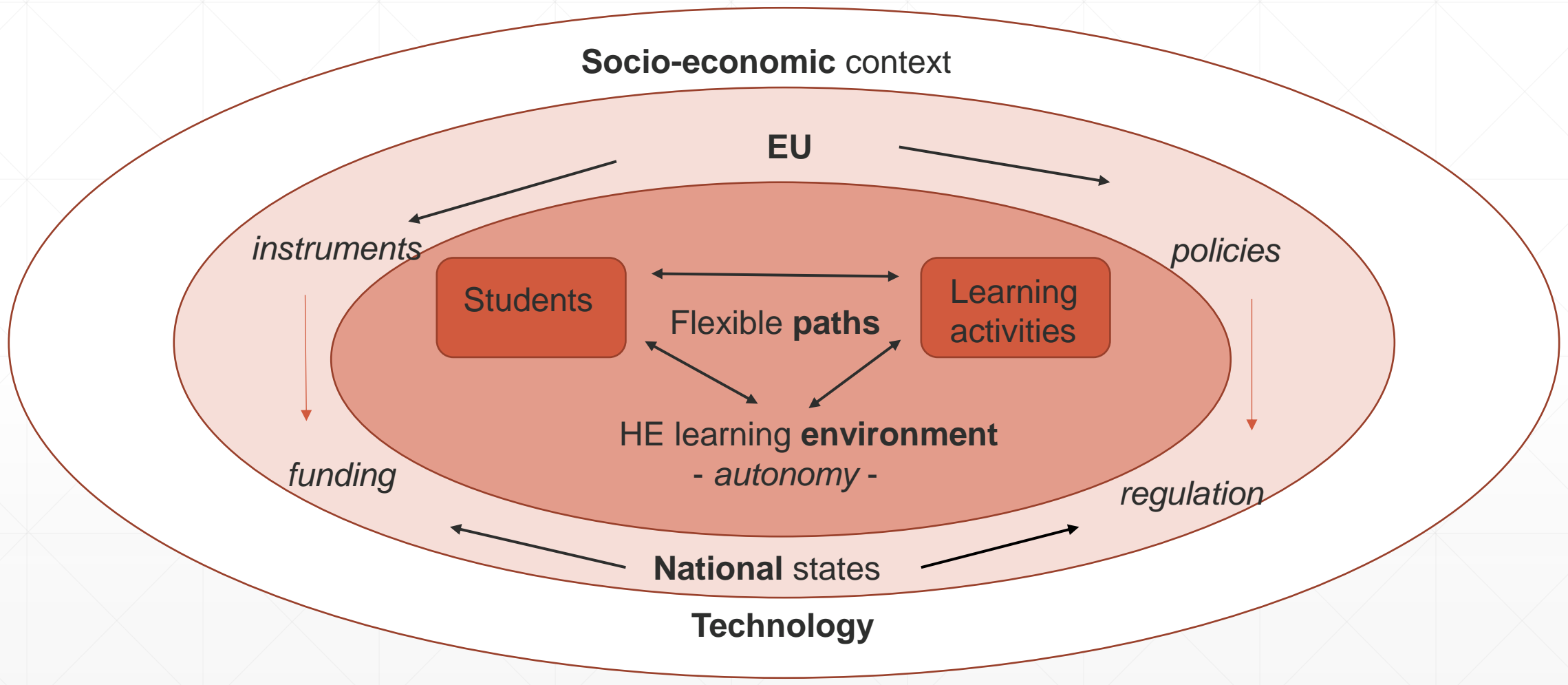
🕒 10 July 2018

[Share](#)Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-44770772>

3. Identifying key structural elements of HE system that should be addressed by future EU initiatives

Flexible learning environment

- *policy platform* -



4. Design and systemic implementation of multi-level EU initiatives to support policies of flexible learning environment

Back to principles...

- „Response to challenges lay in **reforming HE structures and systems** ... the challenges could be made only through **European cooperation**, as well as in the proposition that intergovernmental process **needed to include higher education institutions, students, faculty, international institutions and other stakeholders** to be successful“ (S. Bergan, L. Deca, 2018)

Source: Sjure Bergan, Ligia Deca, Twenty Years of Bologna and a Decade of EHEA: What Is Next?, European Higher Education Area, The Impact of Past and Future Policies, Springer Open

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Policy values from student perspective:

- HE is a **public good** and **public responsibility** – publicly steered and supported
 - It must be **open** for **all parts of society**
 - Access must be **free**...without barriers.
 - Process of teaching and learning must be **student-centered**.
 - The process of redefining basic values and principles in governance needs **extensive discussions** and **strong involvement** of affected stakeholders, especially students and HEIs.
 - Source: ESU, 2018 Introduction to ESU's Policies in Higher Education (amended), BM74 – BLED
-

EU topics

- *call for common action* -



- Many EU **policy topics** that need national HE policy responses:
 - **Social inclusion** through equal **access** and better **success** for **wider student body**
 - Lifelong learning process
 - Measureable targets
 - Financial incentives
 - Link between **upper secondary education** and **HE**
 - Permeability of the educational system
 - Innovative approaches to provide **flexible learning paths** (pedagogy, structure of study, digitalization...)
 - Collecting **data**, **monitoring** and **evaluation** of the process
 - National and international **cooperation** with all HE stakeholders
-