

### **WG III: Digitization in higher education**

In the workshop on “Digitization in higher education” 15 experts from ministries, higher education and research institutions as well as representatives from industry discussed achievements and current trends in France and Germany. The morning session started with three keynote addresses by Mehdi Gharsallah (Strategic Councilor for Digitalization at DGESIP, Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l’Innovation), Peter Hassenbach (Division Head “European Higher Education Area, Internationalization”, Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) and Nadine Rentel (Professor at Westsächsische Hochschule Zwickau).

In his presentation, Mehdi Gharsallah highlighted the rich experience in France with digital educational projects that shall serve the three goals of 1) Giving access to everyone to university knowledge, 2) promoting the values of the French Republic and 3) Developing digital skills and competencies. Among many initiatives, the lighthouse project regarding online courses is FUN MOOC, a national platform offering more than 500 online courses that are being developed by French universities. Other projects deal with e.g. domain specific self-assessments in the area of foreign languages, digital skills and natural sciences. Given the important number of implemented projects over the last 15 years, it has become difficult to identify the right resource from the perspective of the potential user. Therefore, the ministry created a central repository that is accessible under [sup-numerique.gouv.fr](http://sup-numerique.gouv.fr). A more recent initiative called “Campus Connecté” concerns the inclusion of rural areas by setting up physical learning centers for people that risk to be “digitally disconnected” due to their geographical but also social position.

Peter Hassenbach started his talk illustrating implemented and ongoing online-learning initiatives in Germany. Examples cited were onCampus from TH Lübeck/Virtuelle Fachhochschule, Virtuelle Hochschule Bayern and the mooc.house from the Hasso Plattner Institute among others. Given the federal structure of the German higher education system, the approach is marked by different regional or even individual projects on the university level. Some course creators use international platforms like edX to make their courses accessible to a wide audience. In the following, M. Hassenbach addressed more strategic issues, including the question of how to come from a strategy for digitization in HE to its implementation as a working IT-infrastructure. He stressed the concern that there is increasing pressure on managing the digital change in HEI referring to other sectors where digitization has led to completely different business models. Regarding the organization of international student mobility, he pointed out the need for standards in data exchange between the different institutions of the EHEA (student identity, records recognition, etc.). He also presented a related DAAD call for proposals.

In the third keynote, Nadine Rentel adopted another perspective on digital methods and tools in the context of internationalization. She reported experiences from a DFH/UFA-funded research seminar on didactic concepts for digitally based learning of foreign languages and intercultural competencies. The contributions of the seminar dealt with various innovative aspects such as the use of social networks, collaborative note taking and e-portfolios in order to increase the motivation and involvement of students in the learning process. Examples were also given for the use of virtual classrooms as well as the integration of digital resources coming from the daily life of the learners in order to extend the traditional (closed) classroom setting. In one project, student groups from France and Germany produced videos in order to reflect their own expectations – and sometimes fears – towards their future international mobility. This was

especially interesting from an intercultural point of view as the self-representations of the French and German groups differed significantly.

Based on the inputs from the keynote speakers, a broad discussion of the topics at the crossroads of internationalization and digitization took place during the remaining time of the morning session. After lunch, the participants of the workshop concentrated their exchange on three major thematic areas 1) Flexible Learning Paths and Programs, 2) Student Centered Learning at HEI and 3) Change Management at Universities.

#### 1) Flexible Learning Paths and Programs

There was a large consensus that HEI should ease the recognition of externally acquired competencies within their degree programs. It was expressed that this is nothing more than consequently implementing the ideas underlying the Bologna Process. This leads to the question of how to implement mechanisms for quality assurance at least on an EU-level for the credits obtained outside the diploma issuing institution. With the European Qualification Framework (EQF) a common reference system exists to describe the levels of learning outcomes along the categories “Knowledge”, “Skills” and “Responsibility and Autonomy”. If the corresponding descriptors were consistently used in module descriptions, this would improve the recognition process within the EHEA. Another aspect of flexible learning paths is of technical nature. It addresses the interoperability and authenticity checking of credentials. Advances in this field are expected by the experts from incumbent technologies such as the blockchain as well as from conceptually work on micro-credentials.

#### 2) Student Centered Learning

Without an involvement of the student in the learning process, no learning can take place. Thus, the question was not how to involve the student in the learning process, but rather how to let students take part in the definition of the way learning is organized. The experts agreed that it is not enough to put the student into the information loop, but to integrate the students into the course preparation process and its implementation. A controversial discussion took place on whether students should also participate in the definition of the target competencies of a course, a majority of the participants were reluctant regarding this perspective. Especially with MOOCs, it would be possible to give students the power to evaluate courses. Representatives of MOOC-platforms however stated that simple scoring models would not be an adequate way of doing this. Guided surveys seemed to be a more appropriate. Another stakeholder for the evaluation of skills acquired in a course or a program would be the future employer, as one of the industry representatives remarked.

#### 3) Change Management at Universities

Finally, the discussion turned to the impact of the digital transformation on the academic institution, its governance and the competency profiles of the academic staff. With the advent of more online courses and digitally based assessments, the role of lecturers is supposed to change, too. Their importance as “holder of knowledge and its transmission” will decrease, as information about nearly every subject is publicly available. Although technical expertise will still be mandatory, the focus might shift to accompany students on their learning path by guiding them to the right resources and providing feedback about achieved competencies. Blended learning modes (offline/online – remote/classroom) are supposed to spread over the next years. In order to make this shift happen inside HEI, the concerned staff should be rewarded for the

experimentation with and the use of new digitally blended formats. Change in HEI will only catch up to the speed of the digital transformation in more advanced sectors, if the university management boards make digitization a priority and shape the incentive system accordingly.