

"In Praise of Diversity: Structuring Intercultural Dialogue in European Higher Education"

Five working groups:

1. The responsibilities of the Humanistic Archipelago in creating and promoting intercultural dialogue for a "Thinking Europe".
2. Strategies for ensuring more equal access to higher education in a Europe of diversities
3. Competences for communication and collaboration in a Europe of diversities -- of language, religion, ethnic background, gender, physical and mental abilities.
4. Bridging the gap: the essential humanistic competences for citizens trained in science and technology
5. Bridging the gap: the essential scientific and technological competences for citizens trained in humanistic, social and creative disciplines.

The overall objective is to furnish guidelines and reference points which are useful in developing 'intercultural dialogue' in European higher education.

The proposed work groups are organised around different aspects of this overall theme. Each work group is asked to discuss and report on their specific topic, and also to discuss and develop statements about the competences needed for intercultural dialogue, articulating these under three points: the necessary competences at entry in higher education; the necessary competences to be formed during higher education; approaches to teaching/learning and assessment that are useful for forming and assessing those competences, using the interdisciplinary expertise of the Networks.

Before the conference, the members of each group are asked to write a short statement (1 page max.). Each one is asked to address the working group theme from the point of view of his/her Network as well as their personal view point..

In particular we note that the Networks are schools where intercultural dialogue is developed: that the Archipelago is a Network of Networks where the interdisciplinary aspects of dialogue are further developed. The Humanistic Archipelago can contribute to higher education in general by giving structure and publicity to its findings and understanding of good practice.

Here below is a brief explanation of what each work group theme may entail:

1. The responsibilities of the Humanistic Archipelago in creating and promoting intercultural dialogue for a "Thinking Europe".

The work group will formulate a general overview of the role of the 'humanities' in our Archipelago's definition (all disciplines and thematic areas that put the human being at the centre of their activities) in developing intercultural dialogue (once again in the broadest sense, of promoting awareness of diversity, knowledge and appreciation of it, and competences necessary to utilise it to gain greater understanding and to work and exist more easily and profitably together.

2. Strategies for ensuring optimal access to Higher Education in a Europe of diversities

This work group will address an important 'social dimension' of the general theme. In the London communiqué of the ministers of the Bologna signatory countries, the importance of this theme is restated forcefully. Experience of higher education in practice and various studies show that uptake, in practice, of learners from different economic, linguistic, ethnic and social backgrounds is heavily skewed, even in educational systems where the playing field is officially level. Sometimes this

reflects free choice, perhaps: most often there are structural and cultural constraints working against the full development of the potential of each person: constraints that have roots in institutional and social attitudes and often in those of the learners and their peer groups. The group will identify strategies of good practice to facilitate optimal access.

3. Competences for communication and collaboration in a Europe of diversities -- of language, religion, ethnic background, gender, physical and mental abilities.

This group will deal directly with the problems posed by diversities, cultural, social and physical, looking at the tools needed for overcoming barriers to communication and collaboration. In Europe's diverse societies, the benefits of doing so can be immense. The group is asked to identify the essential tools for turning diversity into an advantage for European society, and to formulate them in terms of competences which can be used as recommendations in higher education.

4. Bridging the gap: the essential humanistic competences for citizens trained in science and technology

The work group will look at what, from the Archipelago point of view, should be the minimum "humanistic" competences that students should possess when they receive a scientific or technological qualification. They will look at discipline specific competences and overarching general competences, necessary for knowledge and awareness of diversity, communication, collaboration and citizenship. We use 'collaboration' as elsewhere in this document in the strong sense of "working together", of being able to plan and accomplish things together.

5. Bridging the gap: the essential scientific and technological competences for citizens trained in humanistic, social and creative disciplines.

The work group will look at what, from the Archipelago point of view, should be the minimum scientific and technological competences that students should possess when they enter a programme for a humanistic qualification, and at the end of their degree programme. They will look at this general problem both from the point of view of discipline specific competences and from that of overarching general competences, necessary for logical and mathematical tasks and to achieve a basic understanding of the natural, physical and manmade world.