

## **WG monitoring, Meeting 14 February 2024**

### **Discussion on future monitoring, and options for the 2027 report**

#### **Introduction**

The last WG meeting began a preliminary discussion on the approach to future monitoring. Although the monitoring mandate for the period beyond the Tirana Ministerial Conference has not yet been established, it is important to think ahead of the adoption of the Tirana Communiqué and consider the best way in which monitoring can be undertaken. A reflection is needed in light of the difficulties experienced with the current process, and the need for a sustainable system to be put in place.

In its Madrid meeting the BFUG acknowledged the issues raised by the WG co-chairs on developing the 2024 implementation report, and the need for discussion ahead of the next phase of EHEA development. It awaits a proposal for further discussion.

#### **Monitoring challenge**

Within the EHEA, each Ministerial Communiqué establishes new policy commitments that are added to those already existing. Those that are already existing remain important, and it takes time and effort for them to be fully implemented across all countries. While it is important not to lose sight of commitments, it is equally important to recognise that not every commitment can be monitored for every ministerial conference.

The BFUG agreed in Madrid that it is not feasible to monitor an expanding agenda of policy commitments during each round of the monitoring process. The main lesson from developing the 2024 monitoring report is that the actors involved - EHEA member countries and the EACEA/Eurydice analysts - have reached a limit of saturation in providing, collecting and analysing the information presented in this report.

Any process involving so many higher education systems is complex, and for the 2024 report there have been difficulties both for BFUG data providers and for the data collectors/analysts. From the BFUG data provider perspective, the most challenging aspect has been to provide evidence-based answers to a questionnaire that covers such a broad range of issues – some of which are entirely new and some which have tackled topics through asking questions in a new way.

For the data collectors/analysts the first difficulty was to develop a high-quality, and conceptually clear questionnaire on all of the requested topics and commitments. The tension between complexity of topics and the range of issues to address led to a hybrid approach where in parts the questionnaire

may have been insufficiently clear for many countries, and where in other places questions may have been overly superficial.

As a result of countries facing difficulties in completing the questionnaire within agreed deadlines, significant delays built up. This meant in practice that the process of drafting the report had to be done in parallel to clarifying the information submitted. Exchanges with countries were needed for every country involved, and in most cases responses have led to a series of exchanges in order to fully understand the responses. However, it is impossible to analyse and report objectively when fully evidenced answers have not been provided.

It is also important to point out that the process of checking and correcting a lengthy report on several different topics is also very labour intensive for BFUG members, and not simple to handle for the data analysts.

It is therefore important for the BFUG to consider how to establish priorities and agree the most important issues for monitoring in the future.

### **Addressing the challenge**

The task that the WG on monitoring is addressing is to develop a proposal for a sustainable, structural solution that ensures that future monitoring is reliable and meaningful. The quest is for a coherent, longer-term vision and identity for EHEA monitoring.

This document proposes three options for future reports, explaining their rationale, their advantages and their limitations. Within these options it opens the discussion on the 2027 reporting. The document concludes with a group of questions that could lead to the basis of a proposal.

#### **Option 1: Thematic monitoring**

The first option is to move from reports mapping many topics to thematic reports focusing on one main thematic topic. A thematic report would be able to monitor implementation in greater depth than a report covering many policy commitments. If this option were pursued, the work on monitoring implementation of other commitments through the implementation report would necessarily be paused. Nevertheless, this does not mean that work on addressing challenges of implementation and providing peer support would cease. Such activities could still be taken forward by dedicated working groups. However, no comparative reporting on these topics similar to the current Bologna Process Implementation Report would be undertaken.

The BFUG would need to agree on criteria for the selection of thematic topics. The focus could be on emerging and new policy priorities, or on a policy priority where a new form of commitment has been made (such as adoption of a policy document annexed to a Communiqué).

For the 2027 report, the most obvious candidate for such a thematic report would be 'fundamental values'. In the Tirana Communiqué, ministers will adopt a package of definitions and statements that

establish a common understanding of the identified fundamental values of the EHEA. The Communiqué will also call for the development of a monitoring framework to monitor the way in which these values are protected and promoted across the EHEA systems.

The objective of the 2027 monitoring report would be to develop a monitoring framework on fundamental values of the EHEA, and report on the state of play. The rationale for this proposal is to engage fully with an extremely significant policy commitment in the EHEA, enabling a focused and in-depth process to be established that takes forward the monitoring of the implementation of fundamental values.

This approach responds appropriately to the challenge of developing a monitoring framework for fundamental values. Monitoring would build upon the work of the WG on Fundamental Values as well as the methodological conclusions that will emerge from the NewFAV project<sup>1</sup>.

It is already clear that monitoring fundamental values is a complex endeavour that will require significant expertise and commitment if it is to be successful. Dedicating the available resources of EACEA/Eurydice to this option would give the best possible chance of success.

Conversely it is important to recognise that, without focused attention and commitment from a dedicated group, there would be a high risk that the monitoring framework for values in the EHEA is not achieved by 2027.

**Advantages:** The thematic monitoring option would allow more thorough and meaningful comparative analysis of national implementation to take place. It would increase understanding and awareness of how particular topics and policy commitments are tackled in each country, and would complement the range of supportive actions and projects that are developed between countries.

In the case of the suggestion to focus on fundamental values for 2027, it would give the best possible opportunity for a monitoring framework on fundamental values to be developed and realised.

**Limitations:** The main limitation of this option is that all topics that are not under consideration in the thematic report would not be monitored. In the case of a 2027 report on fundamental values, there would be effectively a pause until 2030 before a different thematic area would be selected and mapped.

## **Option 2: Monitoring focusing on a small number of key indicators across different policy areas**

This scenario aims to provide a solution to maintaining an overview of progress on key policy indicators. A small number of key indicators would be identified across a range of thematic policy commitments, and updated information provided. The number of qualitative indicators could be

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<sup>1</sup> The Erasmus+ funded "New building blocks of the Bologna Process: fundamental values (NewFAV)" aims to support the implementation of the Bologna Process commitments, in line with the Rome Communiqué and contribute to the BFUG Fundamental Values Working Group, by proposing a set of indicators on monitoring and assessment of fundamental values. It will be completed in summer 2024.

restricted to about half the number used in the 2024 implementation report. The BFUG would also be responsible for deciding if indicators remain from one edition to the next, or if they are changed. If they are changed, however, the list should not grow, but rather one indicator would be replaced by another.

Responsibility for the choice of key indicators would rest with the BFUG, based on a proposal to be developed by the WG monitoring.

If this option were pursued, the volume of information to be collected would be significantly reduced compared to the 2024 report. This would enable a better (shorter and less complex) questionnaire to be designed, more timely data collection to be undertaken and a more effective 'data cleaning' phase to be included. As BFUG members would be able to dedicate the necessary time and attention to providing fully documented answers (as the volume of questions would be much reduced), a robust and reliable implementation report could be envisaged.

It is important to point out that, if this scenario were to be followed, there would not be the possibility to explore new topics in detail as through the thematic report option. For example, this would imply that, for the 2027 report, work on developing a monitoring framework for fundamental values would have to be undertaken separately from the Bologna Process Implementation Report. In other words, the BFUG would need to outsource this task, while a working group could follow the process.

**Advantages:** This scenario would ensure continuity in providing regular implementation monitoring of the main policy commitments. The process would be lighter for BFUG members – compared to the 2024 reporting – and high quality could be ensured.

**Limitations:** The developmental work of exploring new topics and policy priorities could not be done. For example, the work on establishing a monitoring framework on fundamental values by 2027 would need to be outsourced.

### **Option 3: Approach alternating thematic and comprehensive monitoring**

While Options 1 and 2 are conceived as two different approaches to future monitoring, this option is designed as their combination. It would be an approach that alternates thematic reports and more comprehensive policy reports. Thus, these two options could be combined by considering a five-year cycle encompassing two ministerial conferences. For example, it would be possible for 2027 to follow Option 1 and provide a thematically-focused implementation report, while Option 2 would follow for 2030, with a more broadly-scoped report focusing on key policy indicators.

It should be underlined that this scenario does not foresee combining the thematic and comprehensive monitoring within a single report. This is because such an approach would certainly lead to monitoring challenges comparable to the current challenges outlined at the beginning of this document.

**Advantages:** This scenario would combine benefits of both Option 1 and Option 2: one out of two editions of the Bologna Process Implementation Report would be thematic, while the other one would be more comprehensive.

**Limitations:** While Option 1 and Option 2 would provide a unified identity for upcoming Bologna Process Implementation Reports, the report's identity across different editions may appear less clear with this last option.

### **Points for discussion**

The questions which the BFUG could address now are:

- 1) Would you consider that any or all of the three options outlined above would make sense for future monitoring?
- 2) When considering the 2027 report, would you prefer a thematic monitoring (as outlined under Option 1) or monitoring across different policy areas (as outlined under Option 2)?
- 3) When considering a longer-term vision, would you prefer alternating between thematic and more comprehensive reports (Option 3) or a single type of monitoring (Option 1 or Option 2) across the different editions of the report?
- 4) Apart from the options presented, would you see any other option for future monitoring, taking into account all the challenges?