Working Group 2 " Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments"

FINAL REPORT

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Summary

Executive summary

The report of working group 2 'On Implementation' gives an account of the work done by the working group according to the Terms of Reference. The ToR include a list of tasks as well as a list of decisions to be implemented after the Yerevan Communiqué and a list of commitments the ministers agreed upon in Yerevan as well. The report doesn't cover all the decisions and commitments included in the Yerevan Communiqué. That was not the aim of the working group. The purpose of the working group was to support countries in the implementation exercise. The working group has explored different ways of fostering the implementation of the agreed goals: organising reversed peer reviews bringing together countries that are in different stages of implementation, national seminars with an international perspective and thematic sessions including experts in the area from different countries. The overall aim of all those activities was mutual learning, sharing ideas and experiences and having a dialogue. The working group has identified strengths and weak points in the way we have operated.

The strengths are related to:

- The active involvement of the different stakeholders in the different initiatives in particular in the reversed peer reviews;
- The willingness of the countries to enter in a policy dialogue fostering the mutual understanding of the implementation issues;

Weak points are related to:

- The disperse character of the initiatives; the list of events was characterised by a diversity in terms of purposes and goals, topics, context and orientation.
- Coherence among the different events was missing and there was no ex ante concertation;
- The lack of follow-up of the outcomes of the events;
- The lack of sufficient international orientation of most of the initiatives

In our recommendations on working methods for implementation to the BFUG, we would like to keep the strengths and to address the weak points:

- All countries should engage in an active dialogue across the EHEA and in particular with the countries that have not yet fully implemented the structural reforms;
- The concept of reversed peer review should be further developed
- All countries should intensify their cross-border cooperative efforts and make the necessary resources available;
- In order to concentrate and focus our efforts and to avoid a too disperse and wide-ranging list of actions the BFUG working plan should include a cross border concerted joint action programme in order to foster the implementation with a clear purpose and focus, an evaluation of the usefulness of the actions/initiatives and a follow-up of them;
- The BFUG should encourage different stakeholders to organise cross borders targeted events as a means to follow-up and to enhance the visibility.

The main focus of the working group was to foster implementation of the agreed goals within the EHEA. The report includes a theoretical background on the notion of implementation within the EHEA based on the findings of research conducted in that topic. The research revealed that implementation of agreed commitments is a complex, multidimensional and multilevel issue and that a distinction should be made between implementation as policy adoption through legislation and implementation as policy enactment through practice. Furthermore, we should also be aware of the fact that the agreed goals are of a different nature: a distinction could be made between agreed structural reforms and agreed policy themes, preferences and priorities.

Based on the material that was available and taking into account the relatively limited working period we have selected nine topics/commitments: the short cycle, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the recognition practice, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning, staff mobility, student mobility, the social dimension and employability. In the different paragraphs on each topic we have looked at the context, we have made an analysis of the conclusions of the activities that have been organised around that issue and we have formulated some recommendations for future implementation work. Some of

recommendations are related to the topic itself other recommendations are related to how to foster the implementation.

The main recommendations on topics/commitments refer to:

- The short cycle as an autonomous cycle in the European higher education landscape and the articulation between the short cycle and the first cycle;
- The full implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in particular the Article 7 regarding refugees and the forthcoming subsidiary text (November 2017) and the full implementation and the use of the notion of substantial differences in all recognition practice;
- The improvement of the recognition practice by fostering the automatic recognition at system level within the EHEA and the creation of a culture of recognition;
- Recognition of prior learning: to create favourable framework conditions allowing recognition of prior learning in a consistent way and to involve the practitioners in the implementation;
- Staff mobility and in particular the creation of an environment supportive to staff mobility
- Student mobility and in particular removing barriers and obstacles to a full recognition of credits gained abroad and stimulating the mobility of students from disadvantaged background;
- The internationalisation of quality assurance: to fully implement the ESG 2015, to allow the HEIs to choose a QAA for their External Quality Assurance, to provide the framework conditions stimulating the HEIs to develop joint study programmes, to allow the use of the European Approach, to recognise the role of governments in supporting the development of adequate frameworks and systems for the delivery and quality of both inbound and outbound CBHE;
- The social dimension: building a more socially inclusive higher education system requires measures and actions in different areas and a multidimensional approach in order to mainstream the social dimension;
- Employability: to develop and improve arrangements concerning graduate tracking at national and at institutional level in order to improve our knowledge of what graduates of higher education do following their studies.

Introduction

Working Group 2 'On Implementation' was established by the BFUG as part of the 2015-2018 work plan. WG2 was tasked with fostering the implementation of the agreed commitments in the Yerevan Communiqué and commitments in previous communiqués where relevant. Its remit was to support member states in their implementation actions of the agreed goals at national and institutional level. It was mandated to coordinate a programme of actions based on policy dialogue and peer learning and review.

Support was supposed to be provided through participation in events, seminars, and peer learning activities.

WG 2 met six times in Brussels (January 2016), Tbilisi (June 2016), Nice (November 2016), Vienna (March 2017), Malmö (June 2017) and Zagreb (October 2017).

The WG 2 was co-chaired by Helga Posset (Austria), Bartlomiej Banaszak (Poland), Noël Vercruysse (Flemish Community of Belgium) and Nino Kopaleishvili (Georgia till February 2017) and Maia Margvelashvili(Georgia from March 2017 on).

The co-chairs have drafted the report with contributions by some members of the WG for specific topics.

The BFUG secretariat represented by Fabien Neyrat (till June 2016) and by Mariana Saad (from July 2016 on) has provided the secretariat for the working group.

Some 34 BFUG members and consultative members have participated in the work of WG 2.

The large membership of the group means that WG 2 has been broadly representative of both the members and the consultative members of the BFUG. Generally most of the representatives of the members and the consultative members attended all meetings and engaged in the discussions, although there were a couple of exceptions.

In addition the co-chairs of WG 2 have met three times with the co-chairs of the BFUG and the co-chairs of the others BFUG structures. In particular we have liaised with the co-chairs of working group 3 and advisory group 3. Full implementation and non-implementation are the two opposite ends of the implementation continuum. WG 2 has approached the implementation issue from the perspective of full implementation and has searched for appropriate working methods to foster implementation. That journey led us to the formulation of some methodological recommendations and recommendations connected to the implementation of a specific topic.

1 Reflections and theoretical background

1.1 Self-reflection on the work mode of working group 2 'On Implementation'

1.1.1 Terms of Reference[1]

In general the working group is responsible to provide support to member states for the implementation of agreed goals at national and institutional level. It is mandated to coordinate a programme of actions based on policy dialogue and peer learning and review.

The Terms of Reference define the purpose and outcome of this working group as following:

'The working group on implementation is responsible to provide support to member states for the implementation of agreed goals on a national and institutional level. It is mandated to coordinate a programme of actions (such as peer learning, voluntary peer review, conference, seminar, workshop etc.) based on policy dialogue and exchange of good practice; actions proposed and organised by countries, institutions and/or organisations. The Working Group will develop policy proposals based among others on conclusions from events aiming at providing support to countries in achieving the implementation of agreed key commitments within the European Higher Education Area.'

The Terms of Reference include also a list of specific tasks:

- *To use the implementation report 2015 as evidence base to identify topics for peer learning and voluntary peer review actions;*
- *To contact BFUG countries with the assistance of the BFUG secretariat to clarify the needs of peer learning;*
- *To specify a range of topics in agreement with the BFUG;*
- *To gather and coordinate actions organised by countries, institutions and organisations;*
- *To guide and assist countries, institutions and organisations in organising activities;*
- *To ensure and foster the involvement of national, European and international stakeholders in the organisation of the events, the attendance of the events and/or active participation in drafting common policies;*
- *To ensure the dissemination of upcoming activities and their emerging results;*
- *To report back regularly to the BFUG on feedback, results of action taken, national policy recommendations if needed, and on reflections on the WG concept.*

Furthermore, the terms of reference identified the implementation of the agreed structural reforms as a prerequisite for the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area and for its success in the long run.

The terms of reference listed also the implementation of the Yerevan agreed commitments as part of the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference do also include a reference to the conclusions and the recommendations laid down in the 'Bologna Process Revisited' document as well as the outcomes of the research work carried out by higher education researchers in general and the conclusions and recommendations summarising the second Bologna Researchers' conference in particular.

1.1.2 Working method

Membership of the working group was initially intended to be based on the commitment to organise an event contributing to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the working group. We started our work with a list of very diverse initiatives mostly inspired by the national higher education policy agenda or national Bologna agenda. Many of the events were part of the national Erasmus + project KA3 Consolidation of the EHEA. Of course we may say that goals of the mentioned Erasmus + project are similar to the goals of our working group.

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[1] See Annex item 1 for the full text of the ToR of WGII.

The proposed initiatives didn't really focus on the implementation of the agreed structural reforms. The aim of most of the proposed events was evidently not to have a policy dialogue between countries that are in a different stage of implementation as it was suggested in the Yerevan Communiqué.

Before we could start our work as a working group there was already a list of events on some of the specific tasks included in the Terms of Reference. Nevertheless, for the first meeting we had developed two papers describing the state of affairs regarding the implementation issues related to quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition, social dimension, mobility based on the monitoring report 2015, the Yerevan Communiqué and the report of previous structural reforms working group.

During the following meetings of the working group we have had thematic discussions about the social dimension, the short cycle, internationalisation of quality assurance, mobility of students and staff and the recognition of prior learning.

After the first meeting there was an update of the lists of events and some new events were added in line with the Terms of Reference. Although the ToR refer to the concept of 'key commitments' but that was before the BFUG has identified the 'key commitments'. In the subsequent meetings the working group decided to put some focus on the implementation of the 'BFUG key commitments'.

As an outcome of our discussions on how to support the implementation of agreed structural reforms the working group adopted a working paper introducing the concept of a 'reversed peer review'[2]. Based on this approach two initiatives took place: one dedicated to quality assurance and one dedicated to qualifications frameworks.

Our report is based on the outcomes of three types of actions:

- Actions organised by members of the working group and directly related to the tasks of the working group;
- Thematic sessions as part of the regular meetings of the working group;
- Actions organised by members of the working group or other countries, organisations or institutions as part of Erasmus + projects or other projects (FAIR report, PLA mainstreaming Social Dimension…).

We have used the implementation report 2015 as evidence base to identify topics (key commitments) and partners for the reversed peer review and policy dialogue. Representatives of the institutions attended the peer reviews about quality assurance[3] and qualifications frameworks[4]. The stakeholders were also highly involved in the PLA on permeability[5] between the different categories of higher education (articulation between short cycle and the first cycle). Generally spoken the stakeholders (representatives of HEIs, QAA, ministerial departments, students and practitioners) have been involved in all the actions that will be included in our report. But we also have to admit that the involvement of the stakeholders varied among the different countries participating in the activities.

The secretariat disseminated the information regarding the planned activities. We have to admit that the response was relatively disappointing. Of course there could be good reasons as there are probably too many events and that most of them were organised in a national context.

Furthermore, we have also developed a format/template for describing the initiatives: aims, audience, reporting outcomes; asking the organisers to focus a part of the programme on the implementation of the key commitments. The response was rather low with not too many results/feedback from organisers of events.

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[2] See Annex item 2 Concept note Reversed Peer Review
[3] See Annex item 3 Report on the "Reversed Peer Review" with regard to QA in higher education, Ghent 16.12.2016
[4] See Annex item 4 Report on the "Reversed Peer Review" ... qualification frameworks in the EHEA, Ghent 24.,25.4.2017
[5] See Annex item 5 Conclusions of the PLA on Permeability, Brussels, 20. ,21.6.2016

1.1.3   Genesis and outlook

The working group has to rely on the voluntary initiatives and contributions of the members of the working group in particular and of the BFUG members in general

Reflecting on the way the working group has started its journey we could say that the working group started in a reversed order: first the events and thereafter the Terms of Reference. As a consequence the list of proposed events didn't directly meet the needs of the working group, neither the terms of reference strictly.

In general the concept of 'Reversed peer review'[6] was welcomed by all the participants and actors involved in Bologna matters as an innovative approach to bring together countries to discuss issues related to implementation of the agreed structural reforms at national and institutional level. The participating countries were in different stages of implementation and are facing different challenges linked to conditioning domestic and policy specific factors as defined by Eva Maria Vögtle. It was rather difficult to stir the interest of countries that have sufficiently implemented the commitments concerned in participating in and contributing to such events.

The 'reversed peer review' offers plenty of opportunities of an in depth policy dialogue and exchange of good practices and as well as opportunities to involve the academic communities, professional practitioners and stakeholders. The two exercises that took place demonstrate the value of bringing together representatives from public authorities and institutions coming from very different higher education systems to discuss the implementation of quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks. By bringing together different actors who are responsible for the implementation it could contribute to bridge the gap between *le pays politique* et *le pays reel* (see page 14). It gives also the opportunity to the participants to tell their own story and to explain their own context. The aim is to achieve a better understanding of the different approaches and a better insight on the way the key commitments could be implemented. It offers an opportunity to learn from each other in a productive way. Although the organisation of such events requires important human and financial resources we would like to recommend that the countries intensify their cross-border cooperative efforts to make available the necessary resources. We included in the annex the reports of the two reversed peer reviews that took place in Ghent: one dedicated to Quality Assurance and the other dedicated to Qualifications frameworks.

The report of the working group takes also into account the conclusions of a broad range of actions the members of the group were part of, organised or attended, as far as they are relevant to the group's task as defined in the ToR. Many of these initiatives were not organised from the perspective of the working group and their conclusions are often of a very general nature. As these events were not part of a common approach but were organised at a national level, it was actually difficult to draw from them guidelines or recommendations for further policy developments and for changing practices.

The mandate of the working group is very broad. It requires members' holistic approach to issues being a subject of WG activities. This could be perceived as an asset taking into account how much different aspects of the Bologna Process are interrelated. However, this may also create challenges when other working structures have also broad terms of reference. Blurred boundaries between working groups in terms of scope were some of the reasons for long discussions during working group meetings on what the group should focus on and what it should report. They were also a rationale for additional coordination meetings of co-chairs of the working groups next to the meetings of the BFUG Board.

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[6] See Annex item 2 Concept note on RPR

1.2 Theoretical Background and reflections on the implementation concept

1.2.1   Commitment - Yerevan Communiqué

Nonetheless, implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic and superficial ways. Continuing improvement of our higher education systems and greater involvement of academic communities are necessary to achieve the full potential of the EHEA. We are committed to completing the work, and recognise the need to give new impetus to our cooperation.

***Implementing agreed structural reforms** is a prerequisite for the consolidation of the EHEA and, in the long run, for its success. A common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance standards and guidelines, cooperation for mobility and joint programmes and degrees are the foundations of the EHEA. We will develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning. Full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level requires shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and academic communities and stronger involvement of stakeholders. Non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA. We need more precise measurement of performance as a basis for reporting from member countries. Through policy dialogue and exchange of good practice, we will provide targeted support to member countries experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals and enable those who wish to go further to do so.*

We [the ministers] ask[ed] the BFUG (…) to involve higher education practitioners in its work programme.

The **Terms of Reference** include the following sentence: *the working group will also make full use of…. as well as the outcomes of research work carried out by higher education researchers in general ….*

This chapter refers to research conducted by a number of Bologna Higher Education researchers[7], and reflects on different aspects of the implementation concept.

Already in 1986 Cerych and Sabatier [8] identified in their book 'Great Expectations and mixed performance' also five factors affecting implementation:

- Goals and extent of change and in particular goal clarity and consistence and scope of change ;
- Underlying theory and assumptions: adequacy of causal theory;
- Commitment and resistance to policy objectives;
- Centralised versus decentralised control;
- Adequacy of financial resources
- Environmental (social and economic) change

Originally and in its simplest form implementation was about political decisions (formulation on goals) and how these decisions were carried out and transformed into policy (means) in order to implement them. The factors mentioned above are general and crucial in all implementation whatever the organisation or process under study.

The Bologna Process started as a process of traditionally voluntary intergovernmental policy creation. The voluntary nature of the process can be challenged. Some researchers came to the conclusion that the Bologna Process has become institutionalised, an institutionalisation evident in the regularity of the ministerial and other formal meetings and in formal monitoring and stocktaking exercises. Some argue that it has gradually evolved into a permanent intergovernmental institution. But there are no legally binding requirements that oblige the signatory states to implement reforms and there is no central

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[7] Eva Maria Vögtle, Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study, Palgrave Macmillan 2014.;

Christina Sin, Amelia Veiga & Alberto Amaral (2016) European Policy. Implementation and higher education. Palgrave Macmillan;

Johanna Witte, Change of degrees, degrees of change (2006) Enschede CHEPS/UT ;

Martina Vukasovic and Mari Elken, Higher Education Policy Dynamics in a Multi-level Governance context: a comparative study of four post-communist countries, in Pavel Zgaga, Ulrich Teichler and John Brennan (eds) (2013) The Globalisation Challenge for European Higher Education: Convergence and Diversity, Centres and Peripheries, Peter Lang.

[8] Cerych and Sabatier (1986), Great Expectations and Mixed Performance: the implementation of higher education reforms in Europe, Trentham Books.

steering authority. However, many countries were really committed to implement the agreed goals and take many initiatives both at national and at international level to foster the implementation. The initiatives aimed at sharing knowledge, ideas and practices and mutual learning and getting a better understanding of the implementation context.

Policy implementation in the realm of the Bologna Process is concerned with processes of policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence at different levels, according to Vögtle[9].

Although the implementation of the structural reforms is crucial, the main challenge was and remains curriculum reforms (use of ECTS, the learning outcomes approach) as pointed out by some researchers.

We may distinguish three patterns of policy diffusion/transfer: a top-down mechanism, a bottom-up mechanism and a horizontal mechanism.

- A top-down mechanism is a process where actors at the highest level promote policy transfer and convergence by coercion for instance.
- A bottom-up mechanism implies to a certain extent that actors experience similar challenges at the same time and react to them in similar ways; for instance transnational advocacy coalitions promote certain policy approaches.
- The horizontal mechanisms focus on interdependencies among countries/actors causing policy diffusion/transfer mechanisms including learning, competition, cooperation and symbolic imitation.

These patterns also function as perspectives on how different actors on different levels view implementation.

Mechanism of policy diffusion and transfer:

- Networks and knowledge communities: through networks and knowledge communities, best practices and problems perceptions can diffuse and lead to the emergence of common normative goals.
- Norms, legitimacy and opinion leadership leading to the emergence of a common culture comprising broad consensus on the set of the appropriate social actors, appropriate societal goals and means of achieving those goals.
- Policy learning is a process where policy makers use the experience of others and of the past to update/change their beliefs on the consequences of reforms. Policy learning occurs due to benchmarking and performance comparisons. Also bottom-up feedback[10] may have an impact on this learning.

There are a lot of domestic and policy specific factors that are conditioning policy diffusion and transfer. It is important to keep in mind that there are 48 national governments/ministries interpreting the decisions made in an intergovernmental process. The factors below also have an impact on the different governments' interpretations and on the implementation at the institutional and individual level.

- Cultural factors
- Institutional factors
- Socio-economic factors
- Policy specific factors.

For a more elaborated description of all those elements we would refer the reader to the work of Eva Vögtle[11].

Policy convergence can have different meanings: convergence in policy goals, policy content, policy instruments, policy outcomes and policy styles. The question arises on what policy implementation has to focus on: the goals, the content, the instruments, outcomes or styles[12]?

According to Veiga as mentioned in Sin (2016)[13] there are two perspectives of policy implementation:

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[9] Eva Maria Vögtle, Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study, Palgrave Macmillan 2014.
[10] The feed-back is important in policy (system) analysis since it means that a bad / unclear decision can be adjusted / corrected when receiving new information (Learning).
[11] Eva Maria Vögtle. Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study, Palgrave Macmillan (2014).
[12] Based on the research work done by Eva Maria Vögtle and published in her book Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study, Palgrave Macmillan (2014).

- Policy adoption, mostly through legislative measures
- Policy enactment in the meaning of realising policy through practices.

Policy implementation cannot be seen as a linear process. Also the stocktaking process demonstrates initially a naïve faith in the linearity of policy implementation overvaluing the adoption of policies and the passing of legislation as implementation criteria. We have to take into account that there is an implementation stair case (Trowler)[14] and that implementation may be conceptualised as mutual adaptation and a learning process and as negotiation and interaction (Gornitzka, cited in Sin[15]). The perspective of policy implementation processes is essentially that of policy enactment in the meaning of realising policy through practice. The Bologna Process is realised in and through practice.

There are two dimensions that are relevant when implementation is studied: the *pays politique* and the *pays réel*. Below is a descriptive model of possible relations between these dimensions. The balance between the dimensions have an impact on the implementation of policies.

Four Combinations	Pays *reel* +	Pays *reel* _
Pays politique +	+ + Implementation	+ -- Implementation problem
Pays politique _	- + Implementation problem	_ _ Non-implementation

The *pays politique* is dominated by the official field of political discourse (dominated by the national governments and the supranational bodies). The *pays réel* is dominated by institutional dynamics and the pedagogic field. The implementation problem is also reflected in the gap, or imbalance, between the *pays politique* and the *pays réel*.

The gap may work out in both directions. We have too little knowledge about the implementation of the Bologna Process at institutional level. We have too little information about the extent to which the Bologna process is embedded into the institutional practice and the key features of the Bologna process are durably set in practice or are simply taken on as lip service.

Policy implementation in the realm of the Bologna Process is concerned with processes of policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence at different levels.

Although the implementation of the structural reforms is crucial; the main challenge was and remains curriculum reforms. The perspective of policy implementation processes is essentially that of policy enactment in the meaning of realising policy through practice.

As stated in the Yerevan communiqué a strong involvement of all stakeholders at national level and cross-border is a crucial success factor in order to achieve a sustainable implementation. As Johanna Witte reports: *'A consistent finding from my interviews is that personal participation in European-level meetings and activities tends to foster a positive attitude towards the idea of the European higher education area and increases enthusiasm for mutual policy learning[16].'*

Implementation is not an end in itself, it is a means towards a more integrated and consolidated EHEA.

Considering the different agreed goals and commitments as defined in the subsequent communiqués we have to conclude that the agreed goals are of different nature:

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[13] Christina Sin, Amelia Veiga & Alberto Amaral (2016) European Policy Implementation and higher education. Palgrave Macmillan.
[14] Eva Maria Vögtle in her book Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study, Palgrave Macmillan 2014.
[15] Christina Sin, Amelia Veiga & Alberto Amaral (2016) European Policy Implementation and higher education. Palgrave Macmillan.
[16] Johanna Witte, Change of degrees, degrees of change (2006) Enschede CHEPS/UT

- Agreed structural reforms;
- Agreed policy challenges, policy themes, preferences and priorities.

Based on the findings of different research papers we may see the Bologna Process in three different ways: the Bologna process is:

- a process of vertical higher education policy convergence;
- a process of transnational communication about policy dissemination and coordination;
- a transnational platform for defining common responses to the challenges and problems higher education systems are facing and which higher education systems have to cope with.

Eva Vögtle defines three indicators of policy implementation for measuring the factual implementation/convergence:

- The policy adoption
- The instrumental design of the policy adopted
- The degree of implementation

In particular when it comes to the design of the policy adopted the national peculiarities emerge, which can make the realisation of the EHEA more troublesome.

Looking at the monitoring report we may conclude that the implementation of agreed structural reforms measured by the indicator 'policy adoption' is completed. Of course there is still room for further developments (for instance regarding the cross-border activities of quality assurance agencies and regarding recognition).

When it comes to the agreed policy issues, preferences and priorities the situation is less satisfactory taking into account that those policy issues have been repeated in the subsequent communiqués be it in different wordings (for instance: learning outcomes, automatic recognition, student-centred learning, teaching quality, employability, curriculum reform…).

Policy implementation of the agreed Bologna goals is a complex process characterised by different dimensions and perspectives:

Policy adoption	Policy enactment
Structural reforms	Problem solving, policy preferences, challenges
Policy convergence	Convergence in the design of the instruments and the degree of implementation
Top-down/vertical implementation	Bottom-up/horizontal implementation
Le pays politique	*Le pays réel*
Outputs	Outcomes
Summative objectives	Formative objectives
Harmonisation of structures	Convergence in policy goals
Non-(or insufficient) implementation concerns a limited number of countries	Non-(insufficient) implementation concerns a significant number of countries
Single loop learning	Double loop learning (including a reflection on the in 1999 agreed goals)
Legislative implementation	Academic implementation
Structures	Content
Network of officials	Network of practitioners
Process	Activities/outputs
Rational/instrumental perspective on trust	Cognitive/normative perspective on trust[17]

In the previous working period the BFUG adopted the paper 'The Bologna Process Revisited'.[18] The aim of that exercise was to give a new impetus to the Bologna Process and to overcome the perception of a kind of Bologna fatigue. The terms of Reference refer to that document.

With respect to the work of the working group the conclusions and recommendations laid down in the 'Bologna Process Revisited' are still relevant. To mention some of them:

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[17] Bjorn Stensaker and Äse Gornitzka, The ingredients of trust in European Higher Education in Barbara Kehm, Jeroen Huisman and Bjorn Stensaker (eds) (2009) The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target. Sense Publishers.
[18] http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Bologna%20Process%20Revisited_Future%20of%20the%20EHEA%20Final.pdf

- We need more efficient communication of the common European vision and broader participation in order to highlight its benefits for the participating countries and institutions;
- We need to develop a feeling of ownership of the goals pursued and of the results obtained;
- It is wise to consider the two main levels of implementation (the national and the institutional one) separately, handle them with different approaches and evaluate them in different ways. We have to be aware that implementation at the institutional level can be supported by national (and European) initiatives and incentives;
- Student-centred learning (and more in general curriculum reforms) was not sufficiently assimilated and implemented by the academic community. More generally curriculum reforms and student-centred learning can only take place when all members of the academic community are willing to engage in a constructive dialogue and in a process of cooperative learning (at programme, institutional, national and European level).
- The pan-European character of the process should be enhanced; its added value for national (and institutional) policies should be made more visible and steps should be undertaken to involve the whole academic community in elaborating the concrete paths towards its realisation.

Originally a lot of research on and discussion around implementation was about problems and why good ideas/ intensions went wrong. But it is also appropriate in this report to refer to five success factors the authors of the report[19] 'Structural Higher Education Reforms: design and evaluation' have identified:

- Stakeholders' involvement and consensus;
- Adequate funding and funding instruments;
- Construct to the extent possible a win-win reform design;
- A timeframe for implementation and evaluation that is commensurate with the scope and complexity of the reform;
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation are valuable in supporting adaptation of the reform design and ensuring that it is in tune with the context of the implementation.

1.2.2   Some concluding remarks

The Bologna Process has been successful as a driver for national policy changes and adaptations leading to the implementation of structural reforms at least with regard to the degree structure and quality assurance. We may argue that in that respect there is a relative high degree of policy convergence when it comes to policy adoption. When delving deeper into the matter we see a huge diversity with regard to the design of the instruments/tools and the degree of implementation. The attempt to establish a transnational process of problem solving and of defining common answers to the problems and challenges our higher education systems are facing, was less successful: the same policy issues (social dimension, internationalisation, LLL, employability, RPL, academic values) have been repeated (in different wording) communiqué after communiqué.

At the end of the day (after nearly 20 years) we are still stuck at the macro-level: the adoption of policies with regard to the structural reforms. And still the implementation of the commitments regarding recognition is lagging behind.

The European Higher Education Area remains to a large extent an area covering 48 different higher education systems that have adopted similar structural reforms at the macro-level. It remains a nice patchwork of different patches held together by a certain degree of coherence. A sufficient degree of structural policy convergence has been achieved facilitating the exchange and mobility of students and early stage researchers. We have realised one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process: the mobility of students and early stage researchers (with the support of the Erasmus plus programme). Although we have to admit that there are still some obstacles that are not completely removed: recognition and the portability of grants and loans, mobility of under-represented/disadvantaged student groups.

But if we want to move to the establishment of a more integrated EHEA and to enhance the Pan-European character of it then we have to achieve a higher level of convergence with regard to the design of the instruments and tools (criteria of QA, learning outcomes, student-centred learning, ECTS, qualifications frameworks) and a higher degree of implementation. This implies a stronger involvement of

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[19] Structural Higher Education Reforms – Design and Evaluation, A report prepared by Jon File, Jeroen Huisman, Harry de Boer, Marco Seeber, Martina Vukasovic and Don Westerheijden, EU Publication April 2016 DOI 10-2766/79662.

the practitioners while recognising the importance of the national level in the translation and mediation of Bologna policy.

1.2.3 Some questions and answers based on the insights from the theoretical background and our reflections

What are the key determinants/enablers of a successful implementation?
- Steering competence of the public authorities
- Matching European preferences with national actions
- Ability to find a consensus
- Involving and active participation of all the stakeholders and in particular the academic community
- Clear benefits/added value
- Clear vision/objectives

What may constitute an incorrect or superficial use of the Bologna tools?

- Implementation limited to policy adoption/structural reforms

What may be the factors that could hinder a successful implementation?
- Ambiguity of the objectives/goals to be achieved
- Differing perspectives of the Bologna Process
- The perception of reforms as top-down impositions (related to a lack of academic engagement)
- Lack of common understanding of the different concepts (student-centred learning, learning outcomes, joint degrees, international QA activities, social dimension)
- Resistance (recognition of prior learning)

Summarising we come to the following insights that underpin our methodological recommendations:

- From the research we learnt that implementation is a complex, multidimensional and multi-level process and in particular we should distinguish the implementation as policy adoption through legislation and implementation as policy enactment through practice.

- Regarding the implementation issue we should be aware of the fact the agreed goals are of different nature: we could make a distinction between agreed structural reforms and agreed policy themes, preferences and priorities.

- The list of events which working group has to rely upon was characterised by a huge diversity in terms of purposes, topics, orientation (mostly national and less international and cross-border) , connected to national policy objectives and only partially or indirectly to the Terms of Reference of the working group.

- There was no formal system of reporting by the organisers to the WG

- The participation of the stakeholders among the different countries was uneven;

- There was rather a loose ex ante concertation.

- There was also a substantial time gap between the Yerevan conference and the real start of the working group. The active working period was limited to 20 months.

- The terms of reference of the working group were relatively vague and there was some overlap with other working groups and advisory groups.

- The reversed peer reviews demonstrated the willingness of the countries and the stakeholders to enter in policy dialogue and review in order to foster/improve the implementation of the key commitments.

- The organisation of well-structured and well-prepared events requires substantial resources.

- The quality of the preparation of the events is crucial for its success.

- We have to be aware of the fact that implementation at the institutional level is a process that takes times.

- We need more efficient communication of the common EHEA vision in order to highlight the benefits and the achievements.

- We need to create a new momentum aiming at a further development of the EHEA in a more coherent way and enhancing the pan-European character of the Bologna Process

- European as well as national stakeholders have to play a more active mediation and translation role.

- The consolidation of the European Higher Education Area requires a proper implementation of the agreed structural reforms but also a shift of the focus from structures to a dialogue among stakeholders about the 'content' while respecting the diversity of systems and the autonomy of institutions.

- A cross border dialogue could contribute to a better understanding of the diversity and the different contexts of the implementation.

1.2.4   Methodological recommendations

1. **We strongly suggest that all countries engage in an active dialogue across the EHEA and in particular with the countries (including the stakeholders) that have not yet fully implemented the structural reforms that are crucial for the consolidation of the EHEA. We recommend to further develop the concept of 'reversed peer review' as an instrument and tool to provide support to the members experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals. These reviews should include a follow-up and monitoring exercise to look at whether the activity was useful and whether the conclusions have been implemented. We would like to advise to establish thematic (related to one structural reform) peer groups including representatives (ministries, HEIs, practitioners and students) of countries that have sufficiently implemented the agreed structural reform and countries that have not yet reached a sufficient level of implementation.**

2. **We recommend that the next working plan should include a cross-border concerted joint effort/action programme involving all higher education stakeholders and actors to address the key challenges regarding the implementation of the agreed goals and to realise them in practice. We advise to focus and concentrate our efforts during the following working periods on one basket/group of interrelated topics/issues (**possible suggestions could be**:** recognition, recognition of prior learning, learning outcomes and QF's as one group, transparency tools, mobility (staff and students) and QA as another group, social dimension, LLL and employability as a third group?) **The programme should include clear purposes and aims and a mechanism of follow-up, evaluation of the usefulness of the actions and initiatives and monitoring the impact (from conclusions to actions). The activities should include a mix of countries, experts, practitioners and policy makers. We recommend that the countries intensify their cross-border cooperative efforts and make the necessary resources available in order to carry out such a program for instance by hosting such events. The programme should be ready to start in June 2018 right after the Paris Ministerial conference.**

3. **The BFUG should stimulate the different actors involved in the Bologna process to organise cross-border targeted events as a means to follow up on implementation, and also to enhance the visibility of the process within the EHEA.**

4. **The BFUG could consider experience of working groups established for the period 2015-2018 while discussing the outline of the BFUG Work Plan 2018-2020.**

2 Implementation of selected topics/commitments

2.1 Topic: Qualifications Framework: Short Cycle

2.1.1 Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➢ *to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according the ESG, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications*

2.1.2 Context

The position of the short cycle qualifications is a heavily discussed issue in the EHEA. Should the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF for EHEA) include the short cycle qualifications as a distinct cycle? The QF for EHEA as it was adopted in Bergen mentioned the short cycle as a kind of a sub-cycle of the first cycle: 'within the first cycle '. Following the recommendations made by the Structural Reforms Working Group to the ministers in Yerevan, the ministers decided that the short cycle qualifications should be included in the QF for EHEA as a distinct cycle. Countries that have short cycle qualifications should include them in the NQF for HE. Those countries have to make provisions for the recognition of those qualifications in particular to progress to the next cycle of HE (the bachelor programmes). Countries that do not have short cycle qualifications aren't obliged to organise it. But those countries have also to make provisions for the recognition of those qualifications from other EHEA countries allowing those graduates to progress in their first cycle (bachelor) higher education. The use of ECTS, a diploma supplement, the use of learning outcomes and a system of QA in line with ESG could foster the recognition.

2.1.3 Analysis

Working group 2 has discussed the implementation of the short cycle commitment during its meeting in Tbilisi. As an outcome of that discussion the WG2 proposed to the BFUG to delete the wording 'within the first cycle' in the QF for EHEA as it was adopted in Bergen in 2005.

WG 2 felt that it won't be appropriate to ask the countries to go through a new self-certification procedure when they have included the short cycle qualifications in their own NQF.

Under the umbrella of the Erasmus + programme – KA3 Consolidation of the EHEA – the Flemish Community of Belgium organised a peer learning activity on permeability between the different categories of higher education: level 5/short cycle to level 6/bachelor and level 6/bachelor to level 7/master. The conclusions of this PLA are enclosed in the annex[20].

CEDEFOP working paper 'Qualifications at level 5: progressing in a career or to higher education'.[21]

2.1.4 Conclusions

The Peer Learning Activity demonstrates that the short cycle qualifications or level 5 qualifications are characterised by a huge diversity regarding

- The drivers, rationales and purposes are depending on demographic changes, societal changes, economic changes; technological changes, the needs of the labour market;
- Short cycle higher education plays a role in the social dimension of higher education, widening participation and ensuring success in higher education, in improving the position of graduates on the labour market and the further development of the higher education system as a whole;
- There are across the EHEA and even within a single country different types of institutions that have been authorised to offer level 5 qualifications;
- The name of the degree or qualification or certificate awarded;
- The student body;

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[20] See Annex item 5 Conclusions of the PLA on permeability.
[21] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6123_en.pdf

- The learning pathways;
- The QA system;
- The use of credits and learning outcomes approach;
- The transition to the next cycle.

Some countries make a distinction between 'educational' qualifications awarded by education institutions and 'vocational' qualifications that could also be awarded by other providers, reflecting the distinction between education and training.

In Yerevan the ministers committed themselves to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications.

In order to fulfil that commitment we should proceed to a revision of the Dublin descriptors and the Qualifications framework for higher education as it was adopted in Bergen without modifying all the Dublin descriptors but by just deleting the wordings phrase 'within the first cycle'. As a consequence the short cycle becomes an autonomous cycle in the qualifications framework for higher education in the EHEA. Those small changes don't imply that the four cycles should be considered as four subsequent cycles. This revision will lead to the use of the following terminology: short cycle, first cycle, second cycle and third cycle. For most of the countries the proposed deletion of the wordings 'within the first cycle' won't have consequences for the finalised self-certifying process or self-referencing process. It could be advised that the countries that are including short cycle higher education into their qualifications framework for higher education to consider an update/revision of the self-certifying process.

We have to avoid that the short cycle becomes a dead end for the students. Therefore all countries and the higher education institutions should take the necessary measures to ensure that the holders of short cycle higher education degrees can progress to the first cycle by recognising and validating and transferring the credits when those holders would like to enrol in a first cycle study programme within the national borders or cross border while complying with the national requirements regarding access and admission to the programmes concerned. Furthermore the countries and the higher education institutions should take the necessary measures to ensure that holders of vocational or professional qualifications at level 5 but which qualifications aren't included in the national qualifications framework for HE can progress to the first cycle study programmes by recognising and validating and transferring the credits when those holders would like to enrol in a first cycle study programmes within the national borders or cross border while complying with national requirements regarding access and admission to the programmes concerned. The use of the ECTS credit system or a credit system comparable to the ECTS system, a diploma/certificate supplement, the use of learning outcomes and a system of quality assurance compatible with the ESG could foster the recognition and validation of the learning and those vocational qualifications.

2.1.5 Recommendations

1. **We recommend the ministers to make a small adjustment of the Dublin descriptors and the Qualifications framework for higher education as it was adopted in Bergen and to delete the wordings/phrase 'within the first cycle' in paragraph including the descriptors of the short cycle.**
2. **We recommend that the ministers and the higher education institutions should take the necessary measures to ensure an advanced entry in the first cycle for the holders of a short cycle higher education degree included in the national qualifications framework of the country of origin and provided that the Bologna tools are applied to those degrees.**
3. **We encourage all countries to consider measures to ensure an advanced entry in the first cycle if relevant for the holders of a EQF level 5 qualification or equivalent while those qualifications have been placed as post-secondary non higher education qualifications.**
4. **We recommend keeping the diversity of the learning provisions in place but also encourage the use of the ECTS credit system and a system of QA in compliance with the ESG.**

2.2 Topic: Quality Assurance

2.2.1 Yerevan Communiqué - Policy measures adopted

➢ *the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*

➢ *the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*

Commitments

➢ *to enable our higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR registered agency for their external quality assurance process, respecting the national arrangements for the decision making on QA outcomes*

2.2.2 Context

Quality Assurance is an integral part of the process of voluntary convergence and coordinated reform that characterises the EHEA. Of the three policy measures adopted in Yerevan, two relate to QA: the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Furthermore, the policies adopted in the Bologna Process have supported external quality assurance (EQA) activities crossing borders.

2.2.3 Analysis

The main vehicle for disseminating the revised ESG was the Erasmus+ funded EQUIP project. The project was conducted by a consortium including EURASHE (coordinator), ENQA, EUA, ESU, EI, EQAR, University of Oslo and Portuguese Polytechnics Coordinating Council. Over the first half of 2016, webinars and workshops were organised looking at how, in the light of ESG 2015, QA must respond and what the implications are of the new focus on learning and teaching. In 2017, a series of focus groups for different stakeholders were organised to verify and further consolidate the evidence collected through the previous phases about implementation challenges with the ESG 2015. One of the important outputs of the EQUIP project was a *Comparative Analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005[22]*, which highlights the new focus areas of the ESG 2015.

Since Yerevan, a number of QA agencies have undergone review against ESG 2015, the majority of which were coordinated by ENQA. While most were reviews of agencies that previously demonstrated compliance with the ESG 2005 already, four national quality assurance agencies and one European subject-specific agency have newly demonstrated compliance with the ESG and became registered on EQAR, which per 1st June 2017 lists 47 agencies in total.

Responding to the transition to ESG 2015, the Register Committee of EQAR adopted a new policy on the *Use and Interpretations of the ESG[23]*, to increase transparency, understanding and consistency within the decision-making process of the Register Committee.

Joint programmes: In 10 EHEA countries, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes[24] is available to all higher education institutions. In 18 further countries, the European Approach is available to some institutions or subject to further national conditions. Two joint programmes have been successfully accredited based on the European Approach, while a few external QA procedures based on the European Approach are planned or currently carried out by EQAR-registered agencies.

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[22]   Comparative analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005 (2016). Available at: http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/associated-reports/EQUIP_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf
[23]   Use and Interpretation of the ESG (2015)
http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v1_0.pdf
[24]   European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2015). Available at:
https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/bologna/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

Cross-border quality assurance: A big change coming with the ESG 2015 is that responsibility for ensuring periodic review now lies with the institution itself, which should be able, as stated in the Communiqué, to freely choose a suitable QA agency from among those registered in EQAR. It appears that an increasing number of HEIs wish to be evaluated by an agency from another country, in order to raise their international profile.

Cross-border QA often takes place in parallel to the obligatory, national external quality assurance arrangements due to a lack of a legal framework allowing the recognition of such procedures. While cross-border QA activities take place in most EHEA countries, only in 13 EHEA countries is cross-border evaluation/accreditation by a suitable EQAR-registered agency recognised as part of the obligatory, national external quality assurance system. In another 10 EHEA countries, cross-border external QA is available only some higher education institutions or subject to additional, specific requirements.

In 2016-2017, the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) together with EQAR developed a set of "key considerations" for cross-border QA. Reaffirming that the ESG are the basis for all QA in the EHEA, the document aims to support and inspire higher education institutions and agencies when engaging in cross-border QA activities.

Quality assurance of cross-border higher education: As per the findings of the Erasmus Mundus supported project 'Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education' (QACHE) carried out in 2013-2016, there is a lack of comprehensive information concerning cross-border higher education (CBHE) throughout the EHEA. It appears that in many cases, national frameworks for the quality assurance of CBHE are not yet developed and there is very little comprehensive information available, while at the same time the main responsibility for QA should lie at the exporting country. The main project output was the QACHE Toolkit[25], which aims at supporting QA agencies and institutions willing to engage in cross-border activities.

Governments have a key role to play in supporting the development of adequate frameworks and systems to support the delivery and quality of inbound or outbound CBHE for the benefit of all stakeholders. This would protect the system from dubious providers and low quality education provision and quality assurance services.

In case there are no national regulations regarding the way a foreign agency should operate in another national system the Agency should duly consider the contextual specificities in which the institution operates and should strive to fully understand the implications and make reasonable adjustments to existing methodology, continuing to ensure that such adjustments do not contravene the ESGs.

2.2.4 Conclusions

Per 1st June 2017 23 EHEA countries[26] fully implement the Bologna key commitment that external QA is performed by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG, preferably registered on EQAR. In six further countries, external QA is performed by ESG-compliant agencies for some, but not all higher education institutions.

Many other countries are, however, in the course of establishing national QA agencies, which actively network and exchange with colleagues across European (e.g. through affiliation to ENQA or regional networks) in an effort to align external QA with the ESG.

The European Approach for joint programmes is not yet available to most all HEIs in the EHEA, as legal provisions do not always allow carrying out single, joint external evaluation or accreditation procedures. While cross-border external QA remains at less than 10% of all external QA activities of EQAR-registered agencies, it is significant for some agencies and for those EHEA countries where the legal frameworks allows for the recognition of cross-border external QA procedures as part of the obligatory, national QA system.

European-level support for the creation of a European approach for quality assurance in CBHE through the comprehensive implementation of the QACHE Toolkit and by means of developing favorable policy for cross-border cooperation, and through capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the competencies of QA agencies, would respond to many of the challenges related to CBHE.

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[25] Cooperation in Cross-border Higher Education. Toolkit for Quality Assurance Agencies (2015). Available at:
http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/QACHE%20Toolkit_web.pdf
[26] Presentation of the EQAR Strategy 2018-2022 at the members' dialogue.

2.2.5 Recommendations

We recommend that

1. **Higher education institutions within the EHEA should be evaluated on a cyclical basis by an external quality assurance agency operating in substantial compliance with ESG 2015;**
2. **The governments should provide conditions for the agencies to carry out their work in line with the ESG 2015.**
3. **More efforts should be put into allowing recognition of cross-border EQA in legal frameworks, as set out in the Communiqué. Peer-learning events and activities could be organised to exchange experiences, good practices and common pitfalls in legal frameworks for cross-border QA.**
4. **QA agencies and HEIs engaging in Cross-border Quality Assurance are encouraged to reflect on the "Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the EHEA" outlined by ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE and EQAR.**
5. **The governments should provide the framework conditions stimulating the HEIs to develop joint study programmes and, in particular, removing obstacles in order to allow the use of the European Approach for joint programmes. Governments and other stakeholders should join their efforts in order to promote the use of the European approach.**
6. **Governments should recognise their key role in supporting the development of adequate frameworks and systems for the delivery and quality of both inbound and outbound CBHE. While joint procedures of quality assurance between the sending and receiving country are strongly encouraged, the primary responsibility for QA should be recognised as resting with the sending country.**

2.3 Topic: The Lisbon Recognition Convention

2.3.1 Changes of the Lisbon Recognition convention (LRC) – Yerevan Communiqué

➢ *to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, reporting to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016, and asking the Convention Committee, in cooperation with the ENIC and NARIC Networks, to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017, taking due account of the monitoring of the Convention carried out by the Convention Committee;*

2.3.2 Context

In the Yerevan Communique ministers asked countries to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, taking due account of the monitoring of the Convention carried out by the Convention Committee.

2.3.3 Analysis

In 2015 the elected bureau of the LRC Committee monitored the implementation of the LRC Bureau and its report [27] was adopted at the convention Committee Meeting in Paris in February 2016.

The survey was sent to the 53 parties to the convention and the bureau received 50 responses. The focus was on the legal implementation of the convention and countries had to send links to relevant legal acts and orders to prove the implementation of the convention in national legal acts.

The main provisions of the LRC was monitored: access to an assessment, criteria and procedures of recognition, time limit for assessments, the right to appeal, recognition of refugees' qualifications and the information on educational systems and on recognised higher education institutions in national ENIC-Offices websites. Furthermore, the bureau asked countries about the interpretation of the basic concept substantial differences. The LRC outlines that foreign qualifications should be recognised as comparable to similar national qualifications, unless the competent recognition authority can prove substantial differences between the qualifications.

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[27] MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION: http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring_the_Implementation_of_the_Lisbon_Recognition_Convention_2016.pdf

The monitoring showed that 28 countries of 50 have detailed regulations on the criteria and procedures of recognition implemented in national legislation. In most cases the regulations focus on the procedures of recognition and are not very detailed about the criteria of recognition. The monitoring also showed that in general many countries have an emphasis on quantitative criteria such as nominal duration and workload in their legislation and not to the same extent on qualitative criteria such as learning outcomes, level, profile and quality. The same results came out of the analysis of what countries perceived to be substantial differences.

The monitoring also showed that a minority of countries do not give adequate information on their educational systems and on national recognised higher education institutions. This information is important for credential evaluators in order to understand and fairly assess qualifications from these countries. A few countries have only information on recognition procedures in national language making it very difficult for applicants to apply for recognition, if they do not understand the language of the country in which they seek recognition.

It is appropriate to refer here to the FAIR-project[28]. Importantly, the project did show that the level of awareness of LRC expectations is lacking at institutional level in some systems, even when the HEIs are responsible for the (academic) recognition.

One of the most significant findings of the monitoring of the implementation of the LRC was that only 8 countries have implemented article 7 of the LRC: The access to fair recognition of refugees' qualifications even in cases where the qualifications cannot be proven. Out of the 8 countries only few of these had truly implemented article 7, while some of them only proved to have legal provisions on softer requirements of documentation or where provisions in which recognition is only related to access to bachelor programmes.

The Convention Committee adopted a clear statement after the meeting in Paris in February 2016 asking countries to take measures which secure the access to recognition of refugees' qualifications no later than 2018. Furthermore, the Convention Meeting asked the LRC Bureau to speedily draft a subsidiary text to the convention on the recognition of refugees' qualifications.

Events following the monitoring of the implementation of the LRC have mainly focused on the implementation of article 7 on refugees' qualifications. The Commission initiated a PLA on recognition of refugees' qualifications in May 2017[29] focusing on exchanging practice on measures to recognise refugees' qualifications.[30] Additionally, the subsidiary text on the recognition of refugees' qualifications was adopted at the extraordinary Convention Meeting in Strasbourg in November 2017 after a hearing process including the ENIC-NARIC Networks[31]. The subsidiary text focuses mainly on the creation of background documents of refugees' undocumented qualifications, which is an authoritative description by a competent authority of the applicants claimed qualifications. The background document provides a foundation for the possible inclusion of refugees into further education or the labour market. Examples of background documents from Denmark, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden are provided in the text. The subsidiary text explicitly mentions the importance of the portability of the background documents in order to smoothen recognition procedures in case the refugees move to another country within the convention area.

The monitoring exercise also showed that all countries have implemented appeal procedures of recognition decisions and statements and that the vast majority of countries finalise recognition within the recommended 4 months' time limit.

2.3.4 2.3.4 Conclusions

The monitoring exercise did show that most countries have implemented the main provisions of the LRC to a large extent. However, the LRC Bureaus report showed that progress must be made in important areas to improve recognition.

These areas relate to the use of more qualitative criteria in recognition of foreign qualification and not just to focus on quantitative criteria. Information provision in a widely spoken language about the procedures of recognition to applicants and information on national education systems and recognised HEIs to credential evaluators in other countries are also necessary. Finally, the implementation report

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[28] https://www.nuffic.nl/en/news/nuffic-news/new-european-recognition-report-published
[29] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29
[30] The conference report and the background material are available at https://www.uhr.se/bolognarpl
[31] Remember to insert link to subsidiary text expected to be adopted in November 2017

shows that very few countries have legally implemented article 7 of the LRC concerning refugees' right to recognition even in cases where their qualifications cannot be proven.

It should also go without saying that recognition refers to recognition of a qualification indifferently the mode of the delivery the education and the programme (e-learning and learning periods abroad) and indifferently whether the holder of the qualification has been exempted from parts of the programme based on recognition of prior learning. Sometimes those qualifications are labelled as non-traditional qualifications, while those qualifications should be treated in the same way as the regular/traditional qualifications since they are part of the QF. It is the institution that has awarded the degree that is responsible for the recognition/validation and accreditation of the learning that took place outside the regular programme. We would like to refer here to the ESG in particular the guidelines under Standard 1.3 'Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment': the implementation of student-centred learning and reaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths and considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate.

2.3.5 Recommendations

We recommend:

1. **That countries fully implement article 7 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention establishing the right of refugees to have fair access to recognition even when their qualifications cannot be proven. Particularly emphasis should be put on the duty of competent recognition authorities to create background documents as described in the subsidiary text to the LRC on the recognition of refugees' qualifications and of the portability of background documents carried out by competent recognition authorities. Moreover it is also important that the rules and requirements are clearly stated by the ENIC-NARICs and the information on processes and requirements is made available to all stakeholders[32].**

2. **That countries through national legislation make explicit in their recognition criteria that substantial differences should be related to the five elements of a qualification: level, learning outcomes, profile, workload and quality. Additionally, the formal rights of the foreign qualification should be considered.**

3. **That countries inform applicants on recognition procedures and provide adequate information in a widely spoken language on the ENIC-Office websites on national education systems and recognised higher education institutions.**

4. **That countries should remove obstacles impeding the full recognition of all qualifications independently of the learning path leading to the qualification.**

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[32] A lesson learnt in the EUA Refugee Coalition Group.

2.4 The Recognition practice

2.4.1 Commitment - Yerevan Communiqué

> *to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are automatically recognised at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications;*

2.4.2 Context

All actors in the EHEA have agreed that automatic recognition is a cornerstone of the EHEA and is a key element in order to realise the EHEA vision as it was expressed in the Yerevan Communiqué. The Pathfinder Group traced out a path towards automatic recognition. So in order to reach our destination we have to take a lot of little steps.

During the past three years there were some initiatives aiming at paving the way towards automatic recognition[33]:

- The Erasmus+ project regarding automatic recognition in Flanders;
- The FAIR (Focus on Automatic Institutional Recognition) project
- The Erasmus+ project GEAR (Greece Exploring Advanced Recognition in Higher Education)[34]
- The Erasmus+ project Paradigms
- The Erasmus+ project Mastermind Europe
- The Nordic-Baltic Admissions manual
- The Baltic Automatic Recognition project Aurbell [35])

2.4.3 Analysis and conclusions

The ERASMUS+ project Paradigms[36] aims at identifying and exploring good practice in applying automatic recognition within EHEA.

The project has identified four different models of automatic recognition.

1. Legal bilateral and multilateral agreements: This model can be seen in the Benelux agreement, where the Benelux countries have agreed on the acceptance and full recognition of bachelor and master programmes Across the EHEA a number of regional multilateral agreements have emerged.

2. A legally implemented unilateral list of degrees, which are automatically recognised: In Portugal a unilateral list of degrees from EHEA countries have been legally implemented applying automatic recognition for all degrees mentioned in the list. Flanders is now working on the (legal) automatic (unilateral) recognition of the higher education qualifications awarded by a HEI in Portugal, Denmark and Poland. Combined with a firm political commitment from the Portuguese, Polish and Danish side we hope to establish a de facto mutual recognition

3. Non-legal multilateral agreements: The Nordic-Baltic ENIC NARIC Offices have made a non-legal multinational agreement on automatic recognition[37]. A website, www.nordbalt.org , has been developed with description of the educational systems and most notably a recognition grid showing the comparable degrees for the Nordic-Baltic region. Poland has also adopted regulations which allow for automatic recognition of qualifications from EU, OECD or EFTA countries at system level (for the purpose of further studies and access to non-regulated professions). A degree awarded by an institution operating in the education system of an EU, OECD or EFTA country, upon completion of 1) 3-year studies or first cycle studies with the nominal duration of min. 3 years - confirms possession of a first cycle degree in Poland 2) second cycle studies or long cycle studies with the nominal duration of min. 4 years - confirms possession of a second cycle degree in Poland.

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[33] See annex item 6 on Automatic Recognition
[34] https://gear.minedu.gov.gr/en/home/
[35] http://www.aic.lv/portal/en/par-aic/projects/aurbell-automatic-recognition
[36] The Paradigms project is an ERASMUS+ project led by NUFFIC, Netherlands and with the participation of 9 ENIC-NARIC-offices. The project runs from spring 2016 to spring 2018.
   The aim of the project is to identify and explore systems of automatic recognition within EHEA and subsequently come up with recommendations and guidelines for EBIC-NARIC offices on possible ways to apply and support automatic recognition in their national setting in line with the recommendation of the Yerevan Communiqué.
[37] See Annex item 7 Benelux Agreement and Annex item 8 on Country Seminars in Flanders and DK et al.

4. De facto automatic recognition: This refers to some ENIC-NARIC Offices which apply full recognition/automatic recognition of either all EHEA bachelor degrees or all EHEA bachelor and master degrees.

The three first models are usually based on the pre-condition that participating countries have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, apply the ESG's and have self-certified and referenced their qualifications systems to the EHEA Framework and the EQF if applicable. De facto automatic recognition is based on the experiences of the competent recognition authorities and implicitly on QA and QF.

Legally implemented bilateral and multilateral agreements have the advantages of fully securing the transparency of recognition decisions and the rights to recognition to applicants. The back draw is that the process of drafting the agreements is lengthy and often complicated. Furthermore, the agreements are inflexible and require renegotiations in case of changes in the degree structures in any of the participating countries.

The Portuguese approach with a unilateral legally implemented list of list of recognised degrees bears to a large extent the same advantages and difficulties as the legally implemented bilateral or multilateral agreements: Full transparency of decisions and lengthy bureaucratic implementation processes. This approach adds some more flexibility towards changes in educational degree structures, since the Portuguese authorities do not have to renegotiate the list in case of changes in the educational degree structures in other countries. However, a unilateral decision does not secure reciprocity of recognition.

Non-legal multilateral agreements have the advantages of being flexible and easy to implement, e.g. by creating a website like in the Nordic-Baltic case. However, this approach cannot fully guarantee the implementation of the agreement, since this is not a legal agreement and central authorities have no possibilities of implying sanctions or to fully monitor the agreement in case it is not applied by HEIs, unless this is regulated in other legislation within each country. It could be advised that those agreements include a reference to the appeal procedure as a means to ensure those agreements are fully applied.

Lastly, the de facto automatic recognition is a highly flexible way of implementing automatic recognition, if central recognition authorities have assessed that the general standards of recognition is full level recognition of all comparable degrees within EHEA. This model is by far the most voluntary model and can accommodate changes within countries' educational systems and is based on a high degree of trust in the assumption that countries actually apply de facto automatic recognition.

Although Automatic Recognition doesn't guarantee automatic admission to any cycle of higher education, each of the four models has a highly symbolic value expressing the political willingness to achieve automatic recognition in higher education. Reciprocity and mutual recognition are key issues in order to enhance the acceptance and the implementation of automatic recognition. Automatic recognition guarantees that the holder of a foreign qualification will be treated in the same way as the holder of a comparable domestic qualification in particular when it comes to get access to the next cycle. Automatic recognition has the potential to lower the administrative burden with respect to the applicants as well as the HEIs and the agencies.

From the **FAIR project**:

- The current national recognition infrastructure should be reviewed in terms of transparency, efficiency; consistency and ability to apply the LRC.

- Continuous efforts should be made to implement and sustain the LRC by encouraging HEIs to train their admission officers in good practices of recognition. This can be thought of as a building a national recognition culture.

- Encourage (recognition)/admission officers to form a national (transnational) platform of experts in order to raise the awareness of the LRC and exchange information and knowledge about foreign qualifications with the purpose of securing a smoother and more fair institutional recognition decisions

- Only evaluate a qualification based on its five main elements (level, quality, workload, profile and learning outcomes) and additionally the formal academic rights attached to the qualification in its home country and where possible (i.e. qualifications from within the EHEA) standardise decisions on the level and quality of foreign qualifications This way a flexible form of automatic recognition may be introduced into the evaluation of foreign qualifications.

The FAIR project has shown that HEIs are willing to adapt their recognition/admission processes and procedures in order to make them more transparent, consistent and efficient. The FAIR project has also

shown that sometimes relatively simple adjustments can make a significant contribution to smooth and transparent recognition of foreign qualifications.

GEAR (Greece Exploring Advanced Recognition in higher education), aims at tracking recognition processes of modules and incur simplifications in their conduction. Just like a gear gives speed, GEAR will endeavor to tackle obstacles in the intricate recognition processes, since recognition is a precondition for large-scale academic mobility and a complementary tool guaranteeing internationalisation. The aim of the project was to review the Greek national legislative context regarding recognition. The project will be finalised by May 2018.

Excerpt from the **GEAR project**:

- The need to establish and cultivate a culture of mutual trust and confidence among HEIs persists as a corner stone in the bilateral agreements and relations among HEIs simplifying procedures.

- The importance of recognition tools (ECTS, DS, QA and Learning outcomes) is unquestionable so they need to be further developed to depict skills and competences, students will have acquired by the end of their studies.

At the institutional level recognition is closely linked to admission in so far that the **Mastermind Europe** project is talking about a paradigm shift: from recognition of diplomas to admission including an assessment of competencies focusing on three sets of competencies: substance-related knowledge and skills, general academic competencies and personal competencies and traits. The reasoning behind this shift is the huge diversity of the study programmes within the EHEA with regard to length of the studies, the orientation and the grading system. The mastermind Europe project sees competency-based admission as an alternative to recognition. The Mastermind Europe project even goes a step further by introducing the notion of Learning Incomes arguing that the assessment of the applicants' documents without prior definition of the "Learning Incomes" is equally problematic: it leads to a comparison (often the applicants' documents) without a benchmark of explicit "Learning Incomes". Furthermore the project aims at developing processes and concepts for institutional admission approaches – of which assessment and testing of competences is one, but not the only point. Important is that institution developed clearly structures well designed approaches, tested and improved in practice, to be fair towards all applications, and also ensure that they admit them to the right programmes. Automatic recognition at system level guarantees the students access to the admission procedures.

As it was many times said and repeated learning outcomes (and even 'learning incomes') are a crucial concept and tool in the higher education practice. It is considered as being the linking pin between QF, QA and Recognition. The report of the Structural Reforms Working Group[38] defined learning outcomes as a crucial building block of the European Infrastructure for transparency and recognition. Also the Bucharest Communiqué emphasised that a meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed in order to consolidate the EHEA. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, Diploma-Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance. Further work is to be done to realise a meaningful application of learning outcomes within the EHEA.

2.4.4 Recommendations

1. **We encourage regional initiatives (the Baltic region, the Nordic Region, The German Speaking region, the Balkan countries and the Benelux, etc.) to connect their regional multilateral agreements in order to come to a cross-regional agreement.**
2. **We recommend countries to foster recognition at system level so that the institutions would only have to decide on admission.**
3. **Where recognition is carried out by agencies and institutions, we encourage them to to standardise recognition decisions on the structural elements/criteria: level, quality and workload and the rights attached to the qualification in particular as a first step towards full automatic recognition It should be taken into account if the Bachelor gives access to Master programmes and if the master gives access to doctoral studies in the country of origin.**

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[38] http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Final%20Report%20of%20the%20Structural%20Reforms%20WG.pdf

4. **Where recognition is carried out by agencies and institutions, we encourage them to cultivate a culture of recognition by fostering the establishment of transnational platforms of institutional recognition/admission officers so to provide capacity-building and staff development opportunities.**
5. **We call on the academic communities to elaborate further on the development, the mutual understanding and practical use of learning outcomes approach in a cross border perspective, in particular in designing curricula in order to foster a culture of mutual (normative-cognitive) trust and confidence among HEIs and academics.**

2.5 Topic: Recognition of Prior Learning

2.5.1 Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➢ *to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning, as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognise prior learning;*

➢ *to review national qualifications frameworks, with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;*

2.5.2 Context

RPL has been on the Bologna agenda since 2003, but progress in implementation is slow and uneven. There are guidelines and policy recommendations in place, such as the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP)[39] and the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, issued by the Council of the European Union, December 2012[40].

2.5.3 Analysis

Focusing on the Yerevan Communique commitment: "to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning cited above the Swedish Council for HE arranged a conference "Refugees' impact on Bologna Reform – Recognition of Prior Learning and inclusion in the light of increased migration" in Malmö, June, 2017[41]. The refugee situation has made the need for functional processes more obvious in many countries, even if all groups of applicants for RPL experience more or less the same difficulties.

The conference, which gathered policy makers and practitioners from 23 countries, highlighted the issue of previous recommendations that have not been implemented, and the fact that legal implementation which allows RPL decisions mean different things, and is interpreted differently across the EHEA. Legislation can refer to either admission or credit transfer, or that it is allowed to recognise non-traditional learning for credits. It can be a generous legislation, which allows validation of the vast part of an academic programme, or a more narrow interpretation, which means that it is ok to admit adult students on other merits than the upper secondary school diploma. Many practitioners in countries where legislation does allow RPL decisions for admission and/or credit transfer still find it very difficult to apply RPL in practice, to get consistency in the process and to find financing for a time-consuming process. Further, it seems common that formal issues contradict a learning outcomes-based approach within the same system, i.e. a missing formal upper secondary school credential makes it impossible to get validated credit transfer at bachelor's level etc. Throughout the conference, it was made clear that continuous guidance and counselling as well as learning outcomes based course- and level descriptors are key to success in RPL.

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[39] http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073
[40] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29
[41] The conference report and the background material are available at https://www.uhr.se/bolognarpl

2.5.4 Conclusion

There is a need for documentation of processes and more fora for sharing of practices and peer learning. There is also a need for definitions of what is meant by different kinds of RPL and validation activities, to enhance collection and comparability of statistics and processes. Practitioners at HEIs have to be involved to a greater extent. Further, it is necessary to underline the financial gains for the society as well as for the individual, if non-formal and informal skills can get validated and RPL is improved, and persons don't need to study formally what they already know. Crucial for a functioning process is that the outcomes are consistent and that there is trust in the process and the results. There is need for guidelines how to quality assure the RPL process at institutional level.

2.5.5 Recommendations

We recommend

1. **That proper attention should be paid to the validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as recognition of prior learning both in Internal Quality Assurance and in External Quality Assurance in accordance with the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG 1.4) .**
2. **That the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee considers whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by the Committee by 2022.**
3. **That the governments review national legislations to allow recognition of prior learning in a consistent way and avoid contradictions regarding formal requirements, and to establish explicit routines and structures, which can be applied at HEIs.**
4. **That governments and/or public authorities involve practitioners and the relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the reformed legislation and routines.**
5. **That peer learning activities for practitioners are organised in order to exchange knowledge and to build trust in RPL, nationally and cross-border.**

Mobility and internationalisation

2.6 Topic: Staff Mobility

2.6.1 Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➢ *to promote staff mobility taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalisation*

2.6.2 Context

The importance of staff mobility has been widely acknowledged within the Higher Education community. The latest reference to staff mobility on the Ministerial level is in the Yerevan Communiqué (May 2015): recommendations to enhance staff mobility within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) clearly states that mobility of all groups of staff - not only academic, but also administrative and technical) - should be taken into consideration as a key factor for internationalising higher education systems.

From an implementation point of view, staff mobility is lagging compared with student mobility and the benefits that staff mobility provides the individual, the students, the institutions and the EHEA are not fully exploited.

2.6.3 Analysis

Analysis of staff mobility is taken from:

- Conference on "Ways and perspectives for non-teaching staff mobility", organised by DAAD in Berlin, June 2017
- Presentation by Riku Matilainen, ETUCE: "Staff (im-)mobility - challenges of and driving forces behind mobility WG on Implementation", 20 March 2017, Vienna
- Report of the 2012-2015 BFUG working group on mobility and internationalisation
- Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017. Euryd ice Report

As the Eurydice Report on Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017 shows, the definition and targets of staff mobility vary considerable within the national international strategies. In consequence, there is no common comparable view or statistics on staff mobility so far.

Since 2007 non-teaching and teaching staff has been able to have an Erasmus mobility period for training with different formats: international weeks, job shadowing, institutional visits, structured workshops or courses, and other[42]. Further opportunities beyond Erasmus+ exist on national level.

The positive impact of staff mobility is diverse; it favours both the (professional) development of the respective staff member and the international profile of the institution:

By experiencing different international working environments mobility contributes to professional development and improves skills in different ways. But the positive effects go far beyond the individual level: Mobility will also assure and increase the quality of education, teaching, research, administration, management and student services by the creation of networks, sharing of good practices and knowledge.

From a systemic point of view, staff mobility provides practical European networking and fosters wider understanding of internationalisation and cultural diversity on the grass root level.

Last but not least, it is vital for a stronger European knowledge circulation that not only the learners but also the teachers are mobile. The connection between research and teaching is important in this context since it has the role of generating and defusing new knowledge.

However, in practice staff mobility still faces several barriers. Two of the main points are the missing structures and resources of support and the ignorance or underestimation of the benefits of staff mobility. Furthermore, the organisational culture of HEIs rarely takes into account that the idea of the internationalised institution comprises all levels of staff.

When it comes to **teaching staff mobility** the focus tends to be on research cooperation, while mobility based on teaching is comparatively underdeveloped. The professional benefits for mobile teachers and other experts are less obvious since experience and the knowledge accumulated is not seen as a merit with a positive impact on career progression.

The mobility of **non-teaching staff** has gained momentum just recently. Though, in most cases it is limited to single measures and not explicitly part of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy. As experience shows, most HEIs lack of appropriate structures in order to facilitate the mobility of technical and administrative staff, who often feel less involved in the dynamism of internationalisation.

But exactly non-teaching staff members often need more support and incentives from outside in order to venture the step abroad. In contrast, reality shows that they have less information and support of their superiors due to the ignorance of possible benefits staff mobility might bring for the services and international profile of the institution.

When planning mobility, higher education institutions staff faces all sorts of hindrances, like lack of career prospects, uncertainty of livelihood, spouses' work or work prospects, moving and travel costs, restrictive visa procedures, child care, lack of international connections, lack of support services and social security should be developed.

2.6.4 Conclusions

- Mobility is on the agenda of policymakers and interest and activities in staff mobility are growing. Steps have been taken in the right direction in this respect, but it is problematic to get a comprehensive picture of the state of implementation of staff mobility due to a lack of systematic information.
- The mobility within Erasmus+ is essential for staff mobility so far, although other programmes (strategic partnerships, funding by the Universities etc.) exist.

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[42] There has been a continuous growth in staff mobility numbers up to 57.488 staff mobility periods in total 2013/14 (Erasmus facts, figures and trends 2014) including 38.108 teaching assignments and 19.380 staff training periods.

- Untapped potential (especially for non-teaching staff) has to be explored.
- Transparent and easily accessible structures of staff mobility can widen participation.
- Successful internationalisation (of institutions) relies also on international experienced staff members, comprising administrative as well as teaching or technical staff.
- Staff mobility promotes the internationalisation of the single Higher Education system. Beyond, it also benefits international cooperation systems such as European Higher Education Area or European Research Area.
- Acknowledge staff mobility as a catalyst for student mobility.

2.6.5 Recommendations

1. **Recalling the 2015 Yerevan recommendations, staff mobility must be further enhanced – especially by the establishment of supportive environments and structures and intensified funding opportunities in order to raise the number of mobilities. All types of staff should be involved in mobility and mobility then as to be recognised, e.g. in staff development.**
2. **As mentioned by the 2015 recommendations we recommend that a system for monitoring staff mobility in the European Higher Education Area should be established, based on the given definition of staff and the nature of mobilities. The objective pursued is to develop a shared view on mobility and also to take initiative to enhance staff mobility in number and quality.**

2.7 Topic: Student mobility

2.7.1 Commitment - Yerevan Communiqué

➢ *"We will enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We will provide mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas, while working to make it possible for them to return home once conditions allow. We also wish to promote the mobility of teacher education students in view of the important role they will play in educating future generations of Europeans."*

➢ *"Implementing agreed structural reforms is a prerequisite for the consolidation of the EHEA and, in the long run, for its success. A common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance standards and guidelines, cooperation for mobility and joint programmes and degrees are the foundations of the EHEA. We will develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning."*

2.7.2 Analysis

No events on mobility were proposed to the working programme of the WG nor did any of the WG members take part in a PLA with regard to mobility which might lead to the conclusion, that the topic has not been visibly promoted during the 2015 to 2018 period or that it is not very high on the agenda. But quite the opposite[43] is the case: the ERASMUS+ programme's 30th anniversary has been celebrated and is well established and widely accepted. There are even calls for substantially more funding after 2020 for this programme.

With regard to the 20% benchmark for mobility (20% of graduates should have had a study or training period abroad) as agreed in the Bucharest Ministerial Conference Paper 2012 *Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA* member states have long been called upon to draw up national mobility and internationalisation strategies. The initial phases of active promotion and strategic planning, during which there is a stronger focus on public communication and raising of awareness, were successfully completed in most countries. Most EHEA member countries and a large part of higher education institutions have come up with mobility strategies of their own (see Implementation Report 2018). Some political leaders already call for a new benchmark that every student should have profited from a mobility experience.

It is important to also stress international mobility as a means to enhancing the quality of higher education and the employability of participating students as well as a driver to secure and develop a better understanding of common European values.

2.7.3 Conclusions

Student mobility seems to be well established at the institutions thanks to programmes and measures that have already been implemented and student exchange seems to work smoothly. In order to achieve the 20% mobility benchmark of the European Commission[44], the European Erasmus+ program coordinates and organises student mobility of individuals as well as strategic partnerships and cooperation projects. In the field of monitoring mobility, the collection of new data on credit mobility will enable better comparability between the member states.

If we want that by 2020-2030 all students will have had an opportunity to go abroad, the Erasmus+ budget will not be enough, even in the best case scenario of a substantial increase. Complementary modes of mobility (virtual, blended etc.) are necessary to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student body (students who for personal reasons – work, family etc. - cannot be mobile for six months, but could complement a shorter physical mobility with a virtual one).

For a successful mobility period, leading to full recognition of credits accumulated abroad, it is crucial to implement certain quality measures. The most important is the timely signature of the learning agreement by the student, as well as the sending and receiving institutions. Online available and regularly updated course catalogues help mobile students and their sending institutions to prepare the learning agreements. Transparent procedures for the recognition of credits and learning outcomes within a reasonable timeframe after the mobility period are indispensable elements of high quality mobility. Even if these principles are part of the ECTS Guide and the Erasmus+ Charter for Higher Education, recognition still seems to be a topic of concern for a number of students.

Mobility of students needs to become more inclusive. Looking into the extent and the reasons for underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in mobility has taken place during the last few years and countries have identified under-represented groups in mobility and some have set goals and put in place different measures at national or institutional level.

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[43] See Annex items 9 The Austrian Higher Education Mobility strategy and
  Item 10 Academic mobility of students and staff, Belarus,
  As well as Annex item 11 the NESSIE network.
[44] At least 20 % of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad.

2.7.4 Recommendations

We recommend:

1. **That all countries take the necessary steps to complete the implementation of the EHEA mobility strategy by 2020 and in particular to further enhance the quality and quantity of student mobility, for example by widening the usage of mobility windows embedded in the curricula and if necessary, to consider initiating legislative modifications in order to create a favourable environment for mobility windows.**
2. **That all countries in consultation with the stakeholders monitor the data with regard to meeting the 20% mobility benchmark by 2020 as agreed by ministers in the EHEA;**
3. **That the BFUG takes measures to follow-up and to evaluate the implementation of the mobility strategy 2020 with a view to measuring the effects on the quality of higher education and with paying specific attention to balancing mobility flows.**
4. **To remove any remaining obstacle to a full recognition of the credits gained abroad By2020 the entire mobility cycle should be digitalised – from student selection to recognition of credits. The cooperation of member States is needed to overcome paper signature requirements. The electronic exchange of student data is expected to improve the recognition of credits gained abroad, while at the same time respecting rules of data privacy.**
5. **To take actions in order to facilitate and stimulate the mobility of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.**
6. **To promote mobility culture from primary/secondary education and through higher education from a more holistic perspective.**

2.8   Topic: Social Dimension

2.8.1 Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➢ *to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy*

Making our systems more inclusive **through equal and better access and success for a widened audience** is an essential aim for the EHEA as our populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic changes. The developments in the field of widening access and participation are based on the assumption that equity and diversity in higher education promote excellence and enable new knowledge to be created and fostered. It is therefore necessary to mainstream the social dimension on all levels (student level, institutional level, ministerial level) and to cooperate with stakeholders in and outside the higher education sector and intermediary institutions between e.g. higher education and the labour market.

2.8.2 Context

The 2007 London Communiqué formulated the "share[d] […] societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations". In order to reach this goal, the EHEA member states „declare[d] the commitment […] to implement appropriate measures on a national level". In the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué, and in the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué member states committed to making the EHEA higher education systems more socially inclusive, and the EHEA Social Dimension Strategy and its guidelines could assist member states in drawing up their own strategy or collecting initiatives and policy measures which equal such a strategy.

In the strategy *"Widening Participation for Equity and Growth. A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020"* the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) calls for the development of effective policies to ensure greater access to, participation in and completion of quality higher education for non-traditional learners and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are still too many c a p a b l e students who are excluded from higher education systems because of their socio-economic situation, educational background, insufficient systems of support and guidance and other obstacles. The overall objectives of the strategy are:

- to develop a coherent set of policy measures to address participation in higher education,
- to engage in, encourage and promote the use of peer learning on the social dimension and to
- to support evolving data collection on the social dimension making optimal use of existing data resources across the EHEA
- to encourage higher education institutions to continue to develop and expand lifelong learning opportunities
- to improve opportunities for flexible learning by encouraging diversification of the way in which learning content is delivered
- to recognise the importance of teaching and learning – which strongly depends on e.g. feasible curricula, academic freedom, and many more – for successful completion
- to further facilitate graduates' employability
- to request the BFUG to report on progress at the next Ministerial Conference in 2018 in order to effectively monitor the implementation of this strategy for the development of the social dimension and lifelong learning

During its second meeting in Tbilisi in June 2016 Working Group II "Fostering Implementation" chose the Social Dimension as a thematic input. Martin Unger (Austria, Institute for Advanced Studies), representative of the PL4SD project (an initiative of the 2009 -2012 WG on SD, project period 2012 to 2015) presented the outcomes of the project and conclusions for policy development for policy makers. The PL4SD project collected about 300 measures at ministerial and institutional level dealing with the social dimension and undertook to a review of national social dimension approaches in three pilot countries, namely Armenia, Lithuania and Croatia. Experiences with these projects have had impact on the 2015 report and recommendations of the WG on the Social Dimension.

The PL4SD project identified the following areas that need to be developed further:

- Lack of evidence and evaluation of the effects and impact of the measures adopted at ministerial and institutional level on Social Dimension.
- How to get the students and the central bodies of universities involved in Social Dimension issues?
- Integrate the Social Dimension concept into the higher education funding systems and evaluate its efficiency.
- Relation between secondary school system and Higher Education system. There is an important drop in numbers of students ("early leaving") with low economic and social background before the end of the secondary school. How to bridge the policy gap between the two systems?
- The role played by "soft factors" such as social habits and the different educational background of the students. For example, many homepages of e.g. universities are only understandable by those with an "academic" background?

2.8.3 Analysis

A number of EHEA member countries have come up with coherent strategies on the social dimension in higher education, to widen participation in Higher education, for example: Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland Croatia, the UK, and Austria, but this list is probably not complete (see also Implementation Report 2018).

Following the presentation of the Austrian "National strategy on the social dimension of higher education" in February 2017 Austria invited policy makers, practitioners from higher education institutions and international experts, the Austrian and European Students' representatives to the University of Linz for an international PLA "Mainstreaming the Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Strategies, Tools, Raising Awareness" in March 2017[45].

Representatives from the UK, Ireland, Croatia, Iceland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, ESU, the EC, Austria, discussed their status quo in the development of SD measures and strategies to mainstream the social dimension.

The necessity of sufficient and relevant funding of HEIs is discussed against the background of HEIs being required to use the financial resources efficiently. The current discussion in Sweden of a proposal to change the university law in order to broaden access and participation is exemplary of a certain tension that SD practitioners and policy makers face in practically all EHEA countries: Sufficient funding is important to enable high quality teaching and learning in a diverse surrounding, but a number of measures can be implemented at low or no cost.

In Yerevan the ministers committed themselves to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy. There are good examples of countries which have developed a national social dimension strategy. Other countries have put in place a set of measures aiming at realising the objectives with regard to the social dimension without calling it a strategy. Building a more socially inclusive higher education systems requires measures and actions in different areas and a multidimensional approach: the teaching and learning dimension, the design and the delivery of the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, student facilities, transition from secondary to higher education, the transition from HE to the labour market, tuition fees, opportunities for combining working and learning, part-time studies, second chance learning paths, flexible learning paths etc. Other countries have a policy measures in place aiming at strengthening the social dimension by a more universal approach by offering free education, universal study grants in combination with good counselling systems, flexible admission pathways, recognition of prior learning and student centred learning.

Striving for an inclusive higher education means that higher education systems and institutions should mainstream and integrate the social dimension in all their purposes, functions, delivery of HE and actions (in order to enhance the quality of HE for all students and to make a meaningful contribution to an equitable society (paraphrasing the new definition of internationalisation). Higher education practitioners have to play an important role.

2.8.4 Conclusions

The PLA in Linz, Austria concluded that while individual ways have to be found for each country for setting policy measures with regard to the SD there are still a lot of common tools that can be identified when it comes to mainstreaming the SD.

- New methods/tools fostering SD should be tested and successful methods/tools should be (adapted and) transferred to other types of HE institutions.
- It will be imperative to change the mindset of policy makers, leaders of higher education institutions (HEIs), (teaching) staff and students at HEIs. The Social Dimension has to be taken into consideration in all policy contexts, be it teaching and learning, student support, higher education financing, tracking students, study information, etc.

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[45] See Annex item 12 Summary of the PLA „Mainstreaming the Social Dimension, Linz, March 2017; all documents also available at www.sozialerhebung.at/sozdim

- It will be necessary to include the social dimension in budgeting: Financial incentives might be an instrument to accelerate implementation of SD policy measures. This has to be connected with implementing the social dimension in quality assurance, and for that cause criteria that best illustrate the implementation of the social dimension on an institutional level should be developed.
- Further exchange of SD practitioners at national (those working at HEIs) and international level will be needed to profit from other experience.
- It will be crucial to set measureable targets and check whether goals are being achieved. In that context the development of data continues to be an important issue. Policy measures will have to be evaluated, and then adapted according to the evaluation results. Although more difficult to measure, the fostering of a socially inclusive culture in higher education is seen as a challenge of great importance and a necessary precondition for successfully mainstreaming the social dimension.
- The (political) realm of school education has a direct impact on higher education policy and has to be addressed more effectively, e.g. in the course of implementing outreach measures, teacher education etc.

2.5.1   2.8.5   Recommendations

1. **We recommend to expand and disseminate information on the social dimension aiming at further raising of awareness for the social dimension at system-level and institutional level.**
2. **We recommend "Mainstreaming" the social dimension in all policy contexts, be it teaching and learning, student support, higher education financing, tracking students, study information, quality assurance, etc.**
3. **We recommend to set up supportive monitoring (e.g. improve of data availability and interpretation and information structures) and evaluation procedures**
4. **We encourage countries to consider incentivising funding and resourcing of HEIs with regard to SD.**
5. **We recommend to put more emphasis on the link between school education and higher education; encouraging the interface between school education and higher education, e.g. by implementing outreach measures, incorporating aspects of SD into teacher education.**
6. **We recommend to strike a balance of targeted (e.g. measures tailored for under-represented and/or disadvantaged groups vs. mainstreaming (e.g. SD budgeting, outcome oriented planning) approaches and measures with regard to SD or more universal measures built in higher education systems supporting all students .**
7. **We encourage all countries to implement the commitment to draw up Strategies for the SD in accordance with The Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area.**
8. **We recommend establishing a European thematic network of higher education practitioners to foster inclusive higher education. We would like to start with some five or six countries which are ready to put some resources in the functioning of the network by organising some seminars and conferences of HE practitioners (2 seminars per year and one conference every two years).**

2.9 Topic: Employability

2.9.1 Commitment - Yerevan Communiqué

> ➢ *to ensure that competence requirements for public employment allow for fair access to holders of first cycle degrees, and encourage employers to make appropriate use of all higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle;*
> ➢ *to ensure, in collaboration with institutions, reliable and meaningful information on graduates' career patterns and progression in the labour market, which should be provided to institutional leaders, potential students, their parents and society at large;*

2.9.2 Context

Employment and employability are among the key concerns of European governments as well as of most citizens. Both governments and citizens expect education, including higher education, to play a leading role in addressing Europe's employment needs. The Structural Reforms Working Group (SRWG; active in the framework of the BFUG work plan 2012-2015) discussed thoroughly the question of how the concept of employability should be defined in the context of EHEA. SRWG proposed a number of recommendations concerning employability, some of which were included in the Yerevan Communique. The mandate of the Implementation Working Group covers two commitments listed in the Appendix to the Communique which concern employability.

The working group on implementation did not have a thematic session on employability. The issue of employability of holders of first-cycle degrees had not been taken up, neither at the WG meetings nor at the events which were reported to the group. However, the issue of employability was tackled at the meetings of the working group during discussions focused on other topics. WG members pointed out that 18 years after the beginning of the Bologna Process there are still misinterpretations of "employability". They claimed that critics use very restrictive definitions of what "employability" means – much narrower than the definition of the BFUG itself which defines employability as subject-specific, methodological, individual and social competences which enable somebody to successfully take up and pursue a profession / an employment and empower him or her to life-long learning.

At the first meeting of the working group, Polish co-chair presented briefly the conclusions from the peer learning Seminar on tracking graduates' career paths" which was held on 3-4 of September 2015 and was funded with support from the European Commission. The conclusions listed in the "Non-Paper: Chair's Conclusions"[46] (see annex …) directly correspond to the Ministers' commitment from Yerevan concerning graduate tracking.

2.9.3. Analysis and conclusions

WG members pointed out that 18 years after the beginning of the Bologna Process there are still misinterpretations of "employability". They claimed that critics use very restrictive definitions of what "employability" means – much narrower than the definition of the BFUG itself which defines employability as subject-specific, methodological, individual and social competencies which enable somebody to successfully take up and pursue a profession / an employment and empower him or her to life-long learning. Graduate tracking, is more and more often considered as a very significant tool supporting the improvement of graduates' employability, dialogue between higher education and the world of work and transparency of educational offers. Among the methods used, surveys, including census or sample surveys and panel design, as well as systems taking advantage of administrative data, are the predominant ones. Some HEIs also make use of qualitative research methods, such as in-depth

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[46] See Annex item 13 Peer Learning Seminar "Tracking graduates' career paths", Poland Sept. 2015

interviews and focus groups. All methods have their advantages and limitations and should be carefully selected depending on the purpose of tracking.

Due to the information needs of potential students and their parents, society, the higher education sector, employers and public authorities regarding access to comparable, representative and objective information on career paths of graduates from particular HEIs and study fields, European governments ever more often opt for creating tracking arrangements that take advantage of administrative data. At the same time HEIs need in-depth analysis of their graduates' career paths for the purpose of a full-fledged internal quality assurance system and institutional management. Therefore, surveys are an important tool for HEIs allowing them to explore issues relevant from a HEI's perspective. Surveys also help in contextualising the results of tracking based on administrative data which are a good source of evidence but alone do not necessarily determine the quality of a programme. Qualitative research methods are also very useful in this context.

There is a strong need for further improvement of implemented arrangements which can be supported by mutual learning. Discussions on a possible European approach to graduate tracking, which was suggested in the SRWG report, may take into consideration the relevance of information on particular aspects of graduates' career paths in the European context, as well as methodological problems concerning the representativeness of data. It could be considered to what extent data collection should be coordinated in the framework of the joint European enterprise with voluntary participation of countries, and to what extent we should rather trust the robustness of data collected under national tracking systems, improve mutual understanding of the indicators used and explore the possibilities of making reliable comparisons between particular countries.

2.9.4 Recommendations

We recommend with the objective of improving our knowledge of what graduates of higher education do following their studies, to develop or improve graduate tracking systems at education system level and at institutional level, and to build more focused cooperation among experts aiming at improving mutual understating of methods and indicators used across EHEA.

[3   Annex]