



Last modified: 31.01.2018

SUPPORT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY BOLOGNA COMMITMENTS

Proposal to the BFUG from AG3 on Dealing with Non-Implementation and WG2 on Implementation

Introduction

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a unique international collaboration on Higher Education, where 48 countries, with different political, cultural and academic traditions cooperate on the basis of open dialogue, shared goals and common commitments. Although membership is voluntary, the convergence and reform of the higher education system in all EHEA countries, and as such the entire concept of the EHEA, relies on the implementation of a common set of commitments: structural reforms and shared tools, which have been agreed to and adopted at a political level in all member countries. Furthermore, the EHEA is grounded in a number of shared fundamental values, including a commitment to academic freedom, free mobility by students and staff, institutional autonomy and the full and equal participation of higher education students and staff in institutional governance.

The EHEA has come a long way in reforming the higher education system of its member countries. Nonetheless, implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly. Such problems with implementation may threaten the integrity of the Bologna Process and undermine the functioning, credibility and ultimately the existence of the EHEA.

As a result, the Ministers at their meeting in Yerevan in May 2015 asked the BFUG to submit proposals for addressing the issue of non-implementation of key commitments in time for their next meeting in Paris 2018. Advisory Group 3, dealing with non-implementation, was given the mandate to develop those proposals, and what follows is a proposed mode of support developed to aid the implementation of Bologna Commitments. The proposal was developed in collaboration with WG2 on Implementation.

Proposed support for the implementation of key Bologna commitments

Support for the implementation of key Bologna commitments¹ takes place through a cyclic programme with dedicated peer groups, which aim to improve the implementation of specific key commitments of the Bologna process. It is based on the established cyclic reporting mechanisms of the Bologna Process and the principles of collaboration, equality, mutual learning, peer-support and peer-counselling. Its main purpose is to improve full and effective implementation of Bologna key commitments throughout the EHEA.

The procedure follows the Bologna philosophy of peer- and process review which fits well with the collegiate and improvement-oriented ethos of the EHEA and aims to make implementation of key commitments more transparent.

¹ The three key commitments BFUG has identified as the focus for further work in the period 2018-2020 are:

- A Three-Cycle System compatible with the QF-EHEA and scaled by ECTS: Programmes are structured according to the three cycle-system of the Bologna model and scaled by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Qualifications achieved in each cycle are defined in a National Qualification Framework (NQF) which is compatible with the Qualification Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)
- Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC): Cross-border recognition practices are in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition convention, including promoting through the national information centres or otherwise, the use of the UNESCO/Council of Europe Diploma Supplement or any other comparable document by the higher education institutions of the Parties
- Quality Assurance in conformity with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG): Institutions granting degrees assure the quality of their programmes leading to degrees within the three-cycle system following the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015). External quality assurance (be it at programme or institutional level) is performed by Agencies that have demonstrably complied with the standards and guidelines stipulated in the current ESG. This is best ensured where only those agencies registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) are allowed to operate in the country.

The timeframe proposed for a single cycle is the period between Ministerial Conferences, thus following the normal monitoring timeframe in the EHEA. The programme will be supported by the facilitating Bologna Implementation Coordination Group, which includes but is not limited to the chairs of the peer-support groups involved, and appointed during the Ministerial Conference. The terms of reference for this group can be found in a separate document. Guiding notes for the peer groups are also submitted as a complementary document to this model of support.

Steps of support for implementation of key Bologna commitments



1. **Survey:** The level of implementation of the key commitments is surveyed based on data submitted during the BFUG's normal monitoring procedures, using the scoreboard indicators² in the Bologna Implementation Report. The implementation of the key commitments is addressed in a supplementary report thereon. *Timing: before ministerial*
2. **Invite:** The BFUG delegates of all EHEA countries are formally invited³ by the BFUG co-chairs to take part in one or more thematic peer groups⁴, each focusing on one key commitment. Based on the information surveyed and reported in step 1 countries will be asked to self-identify their needs and expertise to commit to the mode through which they can contribute to the improved implementation of key commitments of the Bologna Process in the EHEA as a whole.
 - (a) Countries that self-identify as having **successfully implemented a key commitment** (indicated by none of the relevant scoreboard indicators being red, and not more than one being orange) will be invited to suggest ways in which they are willing to support countries having difficulties with implementation of that key commitment, e.g. through peer-learning, reverse peer-review or other activities designed to share their examples of successful implementation and aid others in achieving the same.
 - (b) Countries that self-identify as **not or insufficiently having implemented** a key commitment (identified by having one or more red scoreboard indicator, and two or more that are orange) will be invited to indicate what peer support would be beneficial to aid implementation and how it aims to use that support.

Each country is expected to join at least one of the peer groups.

² See supplementary list of scorecard indicators pertaining to the three current Bologna key commitments.

³ All BFUG delegates will be sent identical letters.

⁴ Guiding notes on the operation and activities of the peer groups have been provided in a separate document.

As it is possible to face implementation challenges in one or two key commitments while having implemented the other(s) successfully, countries could indicate a need for peer-support in certain areas while offering peer-support in others, as appropriate.

Timing: within one month after ministerial

3. **Response:** The BFUG delegate sends a reply to the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group indicating what the country's implementation goals are when it comes to the key commitments and nominates representatives to the peer groups in those areas where the country requires support or can offer support, respectively. The representative(s) should be people with responsibility for the key commitment concerned, and BFUG delegates are strongly encouraged to involve relevant stakeholders who could offer, or be the recipients of, peer-support or peer counselling in the area. In the peer groups they will be able to obtain advice on how to reach these goals. *Timing: before the first BFUG meeting of the new working period.*
4. **Peer support:** At this point peer-support will start. The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group facilitates the grouping of countries offering peer-support and those wishing to take advantage of such support into thematic peer support groups. Each peer group will be dedicated to supporting the implementation of a single key Bologna commitment. These peer groups will include both countries that have sufficiently implemented the key commitment concerned and countries coping with challenges to be addressed for full implementation. Based on the goals identified in step 3 each peer group designs its own action plan with specified activities and impacts for each country concerned, including the expected involvement of relevant stakeholders. *Timing: As all relevant implementation information is available before the preceding Ministerial conference, this step should be initiated no later than after the first BFUG meeting following a Ministerial Conference.*
5. **Update:** Each peer support group gives an annual update to the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group on how the countries collaborating in that group have used peer support to enhance or support implementation. The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group in turn produces a summary report for the BFUG.
6. **Data:** All EHEA countries submit their data for the next implementation report which will mark the starting point of a new cycle.
The supplementary report on implementation of key commitments (see step 1) will show current implementation alongside level of implementation in the previous report for all countries. Submitted plans on implementation of specific key commitments will be highlighted in the supplementary report.

Incentives for improved implementation of key commitments

The normal Bologna reporting process and the proposed support programme act by their very nature as incentives for improved implementation, in the way that the Implementation Report highlights levels of implementation, and the programme supports improvements through targeted peer-learning and support. In addition it is proposed that countries that have made significant progress will be offered the opportunity to highlight their work on implementation at the Ministerial Conference.

In the event that no action has been taken by a country and no improvement in implementation can be noted from the data submitted during two cycles, the lack of improvement will be brought to the attention of the Ministerial Conference. The Ministers will be asked for recommendations on how to proceed on a case by case basis.

Practicalities and roadmap between February 2018 and December 2018

- **BFUG meeting of 5-6 February 2018:**
 - o presentation and adoption of the joint proposal regarding a new approach to support the implementation of Bologna key commitments within the EHEA (explanatory note, proposal for the implementation of the key commitments , terms of reference of the BICG and a guiding note for the peer groups);
 - o adoption of a call to all countries to show interest in becoming a member of the initial coordination group (in the initial phase: limited to 4 members and one member representing the monitoring working group, to be joined by the chairs of the peer groups once they known)
 - o to mandate representative chairs of WG1, WG2, AG2 and AG3 to draft the invitation letter and the background documents for the peer groups;
- **Between February BFUG meeting and April BFUG meeting:** the interested chairs of WG1, WG2, AG2 and AG3 draft the invitation letter and the background documents for the peer groups;
- **BFUG meeting of 24-25 April 2018:**
 - o final approval of the proposal and all relevant documents, including the final report of AG3
 - o presentation of the first draft of the invitation letter to all countries inviting them to show interest to participate in one or more of the intended peer groups and to act as a coordinator of one of those groups;
 - o composition of the initial coordination group discussed and finalised;
- **May 24th-25th 2018 : EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris:**
 - o Ministers debate and agree the model of support to aid implementation of key commitments, including the proposal, the terms of reference, the guiding note for peer support groups and the composition of the coordination group;
 - o ministers ask the BFUG to implement the new approach as soon as possible;
- **At Ministerial Conference once the proposal has been accepted:** meeting of the initial coordination group; agenda: discussion and adoption of the invitation letter and the background documents;
- **15 June 2018:** the invitation letter is sent out by the Co-chairs of the BFUG
- **June-September 2018:** the countries send their response to the BICG who will process them on behalf of the BFUG
- **First half of September 2018:** the initial BICG group establishes the peer groups in consultation with the BFUG representatives? Of countries that have expressed their interest in the each particular peer group;
- **The BFUG of 28 September 2018:** joint kick-off meeting of the peer groups (the member countries) back to back to the BFUG. Chairs that are not already members of the BICG will become members once appointed.
- **October-November 2018:** first meetings of the peer groups.