

EHEA Long-term Secretariat: Call for expressions of interest for hosting countries and organisations

Proposal of the BFUG Task Force on Establishing a Long-Term Secretariat

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Explanatory note

This document provides the call for expressions of interest for hosting the Secretariat of the European Higher Education Area, including the application, evaluation, and selections process and criteria. The document is for comments and adoption by the BFUG. In order to keep the overall time schedule, the call would need to be launched soon after the BFUG in February 2025¹.

Following the suggestions of the BFUG Board, the TF SEC included a weighing system for the Principles of the EHEA-SEC, and for all sections and items of the application a scoring, similar to the traffic light approach of the Bologna Process Implementation Report. This would help the individual reviewers to express and communicate their evaluation results. On this basis, the TF SEC will be able to analyse the submitted applications in small teams (at least 3 TF members) and agree on final overview which will provide a summative analysis and serve as an input into the BFUG discussion and decision.

The applications and their analysis including evaluations with weighing and scores would allow every BFUG member to form a view on the applications, and inform the discussion of the BFUG on the best hosting arrangement. This approach also seems best to address the diversity of applications that the call may receive, especially as the applications may provide only a limited scope of detail to understand fully specific conditions and circumstances within individual countries or organisations. One may assume that several, maybe all proposals will be of good quality, but also quite different from each other, due to specific individual elements and features.

The evaluation results will be available in autumn 2025, and would be discussed at the Copenhagen BFUG in December 2025. The decision on the hosting arrangement could be taken immediately, or at the Spring BFUG 2026, especially should there be more applications shortlisted.

¹ For more details on the objectives, process of identification of possible long-term EHEA Secretariat, agreed roadmap and concepts, please, consult the Term of Reference of the Task Force for establishing a long-term Secretariat and reference to conceptual document from the period 2022 – 2024 which are referred to in the chapter II of the proposed call.

Call for expressions of interest for the hosting of the Secretariat of the European Higher Education Area

I. Overall Context

The BFUG has been exploring during the 2021-2024 period the replacement of the present arrangement of a rotating Secretariat (usually staffed and hosted by one BFUG member for one working period) by a long-term Secretariat (with professional international permanent staff and situated in a fixed location).

The Task Force on the Review of Rules and Regulations for the Governance of EHEA concluded that such an arrangement is principally feasible, and provided some concrete suggestions on how it could be established. The Ministers, in the [Tirana Communiqué](#) (2024), tasked the BFUG to further explore the issue, in order to prepare a decision in Spring 2026 and, if positive, ensuring the launch of the Secretariat in June 2027.

To this purpose, a new [Task Force \(TF\) on establishing a long-term Secretariat](#) has been set up. One of the questions to be clarified is whether the Secretariat could be hosted by one of BFUG members/consultative members. The BFUG agreed that while such a hosting arrangement would not be mandatory², it might be useful for the Secretariat and its work, in terms of material and immaterial benefits and advantages, as laid down below.

² The EHEA-SEC can be principally established without any specific hosting arrangement.

II. The role and tasks of the Secretariat

The role of the Secretariat is defined in the [Rules of Procedures of the EHEA and the BFUG](#), which are based on the present model of the rotating Secretariat, and in consideration of the long-term Secretariat in “[Long-term EHEA Secretariat. Principles and Roadmap](#).” For further information about the activity of the EHEA Secretariat, please refer to the [Terms of Reference](#).

The following elements of the work of the Secretariat are relevant in relation to the hosting party:

A. Operational role of the Secretariat

- The Secretariat supports the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and its working structures by:
 - Providing neutral administrative, technical, operational and logistical assistance for the meetings and events of the BFUG and its working structures.
 - Preparing and maintaining official documents, such as reports and meeting minutes.
 - Coordinating communication with and between BFUG members, the BFUG’s working structures and other relevant parties.

B. Accountability and Independence

- The Secretariat operates under the authority and guidance of the BFUG.
- The BFUG oversees the Secretariat’s work and ensures its alignment with EHEA goals.

C. Requirements for its work

- To fulfil its role, the Secretariat has to enjoy full freedom of operation, without any external pressure. This regards its entire work, including publishing, media use and public speaking.
- The Secretariat’s international staff members, whether employed or seconded and their families may require work and resident permits.

III. Role and Responsibilities of the Host

A. Principles of the establishment of the Secretariat

The hosting arrangement should respect the following principles on which the Secretariat is based:

1. *Independence and Accountability*

The Secretariat should operate independently from the country and/or organisation (with)in which it is hosted. Its legal, financial and organisational arrangements should ensure its independence, minimise the risk of undue influence. It should operate under the authority of and be fully accountable to the BFUG including its governing structure arrangements, reporting and appointment of its staff. Its main source of funding should be contributions by the EHEA members.

2. *Sustainability*

The chosen arrangements for the Secretariat must be sustainable, with a clear perspective on how it can function for a longer term.

3. *Staff*

The Secretariat must be able to recruit and contract a sufficient number of staff, with suitable profiles and competences, from different EHEA countries. The employment rules of the country in which the Secretariat is based should allow for this, under flexible and fair contracts.

In addition to its own staff, the Secretariat should be able to accept secondments from EHEA members and consultative members, according to the rules approved by the BFUG.

4. *Legal Environment*

Regulations of the country where the Secretariat will be located must ensure the rule of law, allow its operation without undue influence of the national and local authorities. There should be no obstacle for receiving funding from different other EHEA countries.

5. *Non-Profit Principle*

The Secretariat would operate on a non-profit basis, with any surpluses reinvested into its budget. It may accumulate a reserve, which however should not exceed one annual budget. Otherwise, the fees for EHEA members should be reduced.

B. Specific responsibilities of the host

Deducting from the description of the role and mode of operation of the Secretariat, the hosting party would not have any immediate legal, financial or organisational responsibilities or competences, beyond those shared by all BFUG members collectively. But, unlike other BFUG members, the host is in a special position as it is familiar with the national legal and regulatory framework in which the Secretariat operates and can lend its knowledge and competences to

support the Secretariat, e.g. by providing advice, and sharing resources, in order to find the most appropriate arrangements and solve or avoid problems.

The relationship between the host and the Secretariat must ensure the Secretariat's operational independence under the BFUG while enabling the host to support its functions through infrastructure, in-kind contributions, and collaboration. By fostering this partnership, the host plays a valuable role in advancing the mission of the EHEA and in contributing to its success. The BFUG is recognisant and grateful for this contribution.

This engagement would be a voluntary one, that has its limits in the host's resources and competences, but also as it must not compromise the independence of the Secretariat. Therefore, the call distinguishes between compulsory and optional elements that applicants should consider in their expression of interest.

In designing the application, the applicants should consider that the expected size of the EHEA Secretariat is around 8 (eight) full-time equivalent personnel.

Based on these principles, applications should address the elements below. In case of a consortium, they should be respected by all consortium members.

1. Legal and Operational Recognition (compulsory)

Support the Secretariat to function effectively within its national jurisdiction, including its recognition as an operational entity with legal personality, ability to enter legal arrangements and flexibly employ staff, ability to easily receive funding from other EHEA countries without substantial financial costs

Support the Secretariat in the process of receiving visas, residence and work permits for its employed staff and seconded staff members.

2. Facilitation of Collaboration and Local Support (compulsory)

Assist in navigating national and local administrative processes to ease the Secretariat's operations, especially assisting the Secretariat with legal registration in the country, including judicial procedures if appropriate, and offering guidance in adequately complying with legal frameworks, for example on fiscal, social security and employment related matters.

3. Coordination and Communication (compulsory)

Designate within the host's organisation a liaison person or contact point to facilitate smooth communication between the Secretariat, the BFUG and its working structures and the host.

4. Financial and in-kind contribution (optional)

The main source of income for the Secretariat must not come from the host, but from the regular contributions of the BFUG members. But as any other BFUG member, the host can allocate to the Secretariat a financial contribution beyond the required one. This should take place via the usual process through which BFUG members would contribute to the Secretariat's operating costs. As such, the application should only refer to the host's own additional contribution to the hosting the Secretariat.

The host is welcome to contribute to the Secretariats operation in-kind support, such as: provision of an office, at no cost or at an advantageous rate, or the bailment agreement for it, furniture, office equipment, and other resources; access to meeting venues and logistical support for events; interpretation or translation services for logistical purposes, if required; advantageous fiscal treatment, for example in relation to taxes and fees. The host can propose secondments to the EHEA Secretariat through the same procedure as any other BFUG member.

Any potential financial or in-kind contribution of the host should not imply any influence on the Secretariat's operations and agenda.

C. Engagement in the establishment of the Secretariat

1. *Transparent and reliable engagement and commitment*

Whatever the engagement or contribution of the host is, it should be reliable, predictable and transparent. Expressions of interest should spell out what the host may offer, but also the limitations, in terms of the nature, volume and duration of any support or contribution, and distinguish between guaranteed and potential provisions.

2. *Initial support for the establishment of the Secretariat*

While hosting is an enduring task, it can be assumed that the Secretariat will need the host's support in particular during the first 1-2 years of its establishment, and even more so in the first months before and after its establishment, with regards to

- Establishment of the legal status in the country
- Identification of premises
- Visa, resident and working permits for staff members

IV. Submission and review of applications

- Applications should be submitted by emailing the filled application form (Annex 1) and the budget template (Annex 2) to EHEA Secretariat - secretariat@ehea.info - by **12th of June 2025 at 12 CEST** in zip format. Late submissions will not be considered.
- The EHEA Secretariat will register all applications received in good time and perform an administrative compliance check.
- If an application has been submitted on time, but does not pass the administrative compliance check, e.g. because of an incomplete application form, or a missing document, the applicant will be invited to supplement it within 48h.
- The EHEA Secretariat will submit the applications to the Task Force.
- The Task Force will review the applications. At the start of the process, Task Force members should clearly indicate any actual or potential conflict of interest; as a result, they may not participate in the review process or the analysis of individual applications. A Task Force member must not analyse the application submitted by its own country or organisation.
- The Tasks Force, at any stage, may request additional information and clarifications from the applicants. These communications will be facilitated by the EHEA Secretariat.
- Each proposal will be reviewed by at least 3 TF members. The Task Force members will conduct this task independently and submit their analysis to the EHEA Secretariat. In case of major disagreements between the 3 reviews, additional analysis can be organised.
- The EHEA Secretariat will record the reviews and share them with the Task Force, for a meeting in September 2025. The Task Force will analyse the proposals, discuss the reviews, and form an opinion.
- The EHEA Secretariat will submit all applications, the reviews by TF members and the opinion of the Task Force to the BFUG
- At the December 2025 BFUG meeting, the applicants will be invited to present their applications. The BFUG may decide on a host, or to shortlist several candidates, for a decision to be taken after the BFUG meeting, in a written procedure, or at the spring 2026 BFUG.
- The final selection has to be taken in at the spring 2026 BFUG. At the same meeting the Go/No-Go decision on the Secretariat will take place, which will allow the process to be formally concluded by an agreement between the BFUG, represented by its Co-chairs, and the host.

V. Evaluation criteria & checklist for applicants

Applications will be analysed based on the following aspects:

- ability to meet the principles described in section III:
 - Independence and accountability
 - Sustainability
 - Staff
 - Legal environment
 - Non-Profit Principle
- suitability and flexibility of the country's legal framework and the proposed legal form;
- openness and flexibility of employment regulations in terms of hiring nationals from other EHEA countries as well as receiving secondments.
- accessibility of the proposed location from across the EHEA;
- cost (budget required for usual salaries, premises, other costs and taxes).
- potential commitments of the country (if any, with a clear indication that this should not impact the neutrality and independence of the Secretariat, the approach should be generally open for in-kind contributions, e.g. provision of an office space).

A. Assessment scale

Applications and their responses will be evaluated on the basis of the following scale:

Level of meeting the criteria	Score / colour
does not meet requirements	Red / 1
partially meets requirements	Yellow / 2
fully meets requirements	Green / 3
exceeds the requirements and shows evidence	Blue / 4

B. Principles and Requirements for the Secretariat. Issues for Assessment

Principles and requirements for the Secretariat	Resulting responsibilities and tasks for hosts	Weight
A. Principles		80%
1. Independence and Accountability		20 %
The Secretariat should operate independently from the country and/or organisation (with)in which it is hosted. Its legal, financial and organisational arrangements should ensure its independence, minimise the risk of undue influence. It should operate under the authority of and be fully accountable to the BFUG including its governing structure arrangements, reporting and appointment of its staff. Its main source of funding should be contributions by the EHEA members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no immediate legal, financial or organisational responsibilities or competences, beyond those shared by all BFUG members collectively³. lend its knowledge and competences, due a special position due to the host's familiarity with the national legal and regulatory framework no interference into the Secretariat and its work⁴ 	
2. Sustainability		15 %
The chosen arrangements for the Secretariat must be sustainable, with a clear perspective on how it can function for a longer term.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Secretariat to function effectively within its national jurisdiction, including its recognition as an operational entity with legal personality, ability to enter legal arrangements and flexibly employ staff, ability to easily receive funding from other EHEA countries without substantial financial costs Any engagement or contribution of the host should be reliable, predictable and transparent. Expressions of interest should spell out what the host may offer, but also the limitations, in terms of the nature, volume and duration of any support or contribution, and distinguish between guaranteed and potential provisions. 	

³ The main source of income for the Secretariat must not come from the host, but from the regular contributions of the BFUG members. But as any other BFUG member, the host can allocate to the Secretariat a financial contribution beyond the required one. This should take place via the usual process through which BFUG members would contribute to the Secretariat's operating costs. As such, the application should only refer to the host's own additional contribution to the hosting the Secretariat.

⁴ The relationship between the host and the Secretariat must ensure the Secretariat's operational independence under the BFUG while enabling the host to support its functions through infrastructure, in-kind contributions, and collaboration. By fostering this partnership, the host plays a valuable role in advancing the mission of the EHEA and in contributing to its success. The BFUG is recognisant and grateful for this contribution.

Principles and requirements for the Secretariat	Resulting responsibilities and tasks for hosts	Weight
3. Staff		15 %
<p>The Secretariat must be able to recruit and contract a sufficient number of staff, with suitable profiles and competences, from different EHEA countries. The employment rules of the country in which the Secretariat is based should allow for this, under flexible and fair contracts.</p> <p>In addition to its own staff, the Secretariat should be able to accept secondments from EHEA members and consultative members, according to the rules approved by the BFUG.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the Secretariat in the process of receiving visas, residence and work permits for its employed staff and seconded staff members. • No unduly restrictions for citizens of EHEA countries 	
4. Legal environment		15 %
<p>Regulations of the country where the Secretariat will be located must ensure the rule of law, allow its operation without undue influence of the national and local authorities. There should be no obstacle for receiving funding from different other EHEA countries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the Secretariat to operate independently, without undue interference of authorities, limited bureaucratic efforts, ability to receive funding from abroad etc. • Assist in navigating national and local administrative processes to ease the Secretariat's operations, especially assisting the Secretariat with legal registration in the country, including judicial procedures if appropriate, and offering guidance in adequately complying with legal frameworks, for example on fiscal, social security and employment related matters. 	
5. Non-Profit Principle		15 %
<p>The Secretariat would operate on a non-profit basis, with any surpluses reinvested into its budget. It may accumulate a reserve, which however should not exceed one annual budget. Otherwise, the fees for EHEA members should be reduced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable the Secretariat to operate as a non-profit organization, as an association, a foundation, or under another status to be specified 	
Additional requirements		20%
6. Envisaged costs for the Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A realistic calculation of the approximate costs – in the itemized budget template provided – around 8 full-time equivalent personnel 	5%
7. Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country and venue of the Secretariat must be suitable for in- and outgoing travel for citizens of all EHEA countries 	5%
8. Support (non-material)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the hosting country/organisation administration can support the Secretariat, and how this support will 	10%

Principles and requirements for the Secretariat	Resulting responsibilities and tasks for hosts	Weight
	<p>be organised and offered⁵.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also specification how the host can contribute to the Secretariate in a initial period of its establishment⁶ 	
Financial or in-kind contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indication of any in-kind, volume and duration⁷ 	Bonus⁸

⁵ e.g. by providing advice, and sharing resources, in order to find the most appropriate arrangements and solve or avoid problems. This engagement would be a voluntary one, that has its limits in the host's resources and competences, but also as it must not compromise the independence of the Secretariat. Therefore, the call distinguishes between compulsory and optional elements that applicants should consider in their expression of interest.

⁶ While hosting is an enduring task, it can be assumed that the Secretariat will need the host's support in particular during the first 1-2 years of its establishment, and even more so in the first months before and after its establishment, with regards to a) establishment of the legal status in the country; b) identification of premises, c) visa, resident and working permits for staff members

⁷ The host is welcome to contribute to the Secretariats operation in-kind support, such as: provision of an office, at no cost or at an advantageous rate, or the bailment agreement for it, furniture, office equipment, and other resources; access to meeting venues and logistical support for events; interpretation or translation services for logistical purposes, if required; advantageous fiscal treatment, for example in relation to taxes and fees. The host can propose secondments to the EHEA Secretariat through the same procedure as any other BFUG member. Any potential financial or in-kind contribution of the host should not imply any influence on the Secretariat's operations and agenda.

⁸ The in-kind contribution as an optional offer will be considered, mentioned in analysis, but not scored.

Annex 1 – Application Form

Application Form for the expression of interest for hosting the EHEA Secretariat

- Please fill in the template attached (Annex 1) containing the application form.
- Please try to respond to the questions of the form as complete and accurate as possible. The maximum number of words are estimative (not an eligibility criterion).
- If you have any questions, please address them to the TF Co-chairs and the Secretariat. Questions and responses will be shared with all potential applicants.
- Feel free to include additional information and documentation that you think might be helpful, in the application or referenced as annexes.
- Based on the expression of interest, you may be invited to answer further questions, in writing and/or during online meetings with the TF. A presentation of the application to the BFUG is expected in autumn 2025.

A. Administrative information	
1. Applicant (or consortium leader)	<i>Insert text</i>
2. Legal representative	<i>Insert text</i>
3. Contact person and information	<i>Insert text</i>
4. Consortium members (if applicable), contacts	<i>Insert text</i>
B. Facts and information regarding the hosting of the Secretariat	
<i>Please provide the necessary factual information as accurately as possible. Also indicate in case of issues where you are not entirely sure, and that you do not know.</i>	
5. Legal form (max. 2000 words)	
<i>Please advise on what would be best legal form for the Secretariat in the national context and describe the regulatory framework. Please describe the national legislation to the extent in which it allows flexibility for the governance and operations of the Secretariat.</i>	
a) As an association	
b) As a foundation	
c) Any other form	
d) Any other explanation or information you want to add	
<i>Insert</i>	<i>text</i>

6. Location (max. 400 words)

- Do you suggest a particular, or several venues and locations?**
- If so, under what conditions and why do you think they are suitable?*
- If not, can you propose how venue and location should be identified, regarding the criteria and the process?*

Insert text

7. Budget

Please include an approximate budget estimate, based on national costs and the resources required for the operation of the Secretariat, that would be realistic for a Secretariat established in this location. Please note that if established, the main source of income for the Secretariat is not expected to come from the host, but from the regular contributions of the BFUG members.

Send the budget separately as an annex, based on the template provided in annex 2.

8. Other models (max 400 words) – optional

Can you suggest any other entity comparable to the EHEA Secretariat, located in your country, that could serve as a model?

Insert text

C. Conditions to be met

9. Complying with the hosting principles (max. 6000 words)

Elaborate separately how your application complies with each principle in section III) for hosting the Secretariat.

a) Independence and Accountability

The Secretariat should operate independently from the country and/or organisation (with)in which it is hosted. Its legal, financial and organisational arrangements should ensure its independence, minimise the risk of undue influence. It should operate under the authority of and be fully accountable to the BFUG including its governing structure arrangements, reporting and appointment of its staff. Its main source of funding should be contributions by the EHEA members.

b) Sustainability

The chosen arrangements for the Secretariat must be sustainable, with a clear perspective on how it can function for a longer term.

c) Staff

The Secretariat must be able to recruit and contract a sufficient number of staff, with suitable profiles and competences, from different EHEA countries. The employment rules of the country in which the Secretariat is based should allow for this, under flexible and fair contracts. In addition to its own staff, the Secretariat should be able to accept secondments from EHEA members and consultative members, according to the rules approved by the BFUG.

d) Legal environment

Regulations of the country where the Secretariat will be located must ensure the rule of law, allow its operation without undue influence of the national and local authorities. There should be no obstacle for receiving funding from different other EHEA countries.

e) Non-Profit principle

The Secretariat would operate on a non-profit basis, with any surpluses reinvested into its budget. It may accumulate a reserve, which however should not exceed one annual budget. Otherwise, the fees for EHEA members should be reduced.

10. Ability to fulfil the roadmap (max. 1200 words)

Please detail the necessary steps and the approximate time needed to establish the Secretariat once a decision would be taken by the BFUG.

- a) *Between Spring 2026, and June 2027, is it realistic to establish the Secretariat in the country, legally (legal status, registration, visa, residency and working permit for the director and other staff members, etc.) and physically (identification of venue and rental of office premises)*
- b) *Would you as the host be able to provide the necessary support to ensure this*

Insert text

D. Host motivation, contribution and self-assessment

11. Motivation and capacity of the host (max. 800 words)

What is your motivation, your main ideas and intentions in offering to host the Secretariat? In what ways can you, directly or through related administration and organizations and agencies contribute to the support of the Secretariat? (pls. avoid overlap with the next question)

Insert text

12. Financial and in-kind contributions (max. 600 words) – optional

Expressions of interest should spell out what the host may offer, but also the limitations, in terms of the nature, volume and duration of any support or contribution, and distinguish between guaranteed and potential provisions

13. Relevance (max. 400 words)

Why do you think your proposal is suitable?

Insert text

E. Summary

14. Summary (max. 500 words)

Please summarize the main points, in presenting how you manage that the EHEA Secretariat could operate, within the hosting arrangement that you proposed above

Insert text

F. Annexes – optional

Please list below the annexes that you attach to this application, apart from the budget

**Name of the legal representative, position
Signature of the legal representative**

i "suggest" does not mean provide or offer.