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BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP (BFUG)

PROCEEDINGS 2015-2018

This document outlines how the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) is operating for the 2015–2018 period, in terms of structure, meeting management and communication. The provisions set out in this document are not to be considered as strict or definitive rules, but as guidelines for the BFUG proceedings and its sub-structures (the Board, Working Groups, Advisory Groups and the Bologna Secretariat).

With regard to the prior periods, the document in Annex 1 reports an historical overview of the BFUG proceedings since the BFUG has been established. The documents in Annex 4, Annex 5, Annex 6 and Annex 7 are also historic documents provided for information purposes.

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I. Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)

a. Role

The BFUG is the executive structure supporting the Bologna Process in-between the Ministerial Conferences. It is in place since autumn 1999. The BFUG is entrusted with preparing the Ministerial Conferences, policy forums and with overseeing the Bologna Process between these, including taking forward matters that do not need to be decided by the Ministers or that have been delegated by the Ministers. The BFUG meetings play an important role in overseeing the implementation of the ministerial Communiqués as well as in developing the Bologna Process.

The BFUG has the possibility to set up Working and Advisory Groups in order to deal with specific topics in more details. Such as expressed in the work plan 2015-2018, BFUG and consultative members have been invited to express their interest in participating in one or more Working Groups (WGs) or Advisory Groups (AGs) and as Co-chair by completing a declaration of participation, provided by the Secretariat. All WGs/AGs are open to participation from BFUG members, experts nominated by national authorities, consultative members and international experts proposed by the group. Composition should reflect the diversity of the EHEA.

On the basis of the Yerevan communiqué, the BFUG work plan 2015-2018 has been restructured in three Working Groups (WGs) and four Advisory Groups (for more details, see Annex 2). The BFUG decides on the Terms of References of the Working and Advisory Groups and decides which of the recommendations of the Working/Advisory Groups will be proposed to the Ministers. If it deems necessary, the BFUG may also provide an opportunity for all members and consultative members to express their views on the recommendations and reports.

b. BFUG Membership: the current three categories

BFUG membership is based on the membership of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA currently has three categories: member, consultative member and partner.

- **EHEA/BFUG Member:** the members are the 48 countries and the European Commission (listed in Annex 3). To become a member of the EHEA, countries have to be party to the European Cultural Convention and to declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education. The document in Annex 4 details the procedure to become an EHEA member. In 2015 Belarus became a member of the EHEA. Ministers at the Yerevan ministerial conference stated that they were "welcome[ing] Belarus as a member of the EHEA and look[ing] forward to working with the national authorities and stakeholders to implement the reforms identified by the BFUG and included in the agreed road map attached to Belarussian accession".
- **Consultative member:** this is a non-voting category of members who represent stakeholder organisations and other institutions that have a European scope to their work and are instrumental in the implementation of the Bologna Process. The explicit criteria for consultative membership can be found in Annex 4. The current eight EHEA consultative members are: Council of Europe (CoE), UNESCO, European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE), European Students' Union (ESU), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Education International (EI) and BUSINESS EUROPE. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in 2008 from an initiative of the Bologna Process. EQAR has a similar status to the consultative members (non-voting member of BFUG), but has so far not been officially named consultative member.
- **Partner:** organisations that wish to be associated with the Bologna Process/the BFUG but are not included in the Consultative member category. At present, the following four organisations are BFUG partners: the European Association for International Education (EAIE), The Council of European professional and managerial staff (Eurocadres), Eurodoc, the European Association for Promotion of Science and Technology (Euroscience). They can, upon request, attend BFUG events and may be invited by a WG/AG to send an expert who will participate to the work.
- Further technical experts, such as Eurostat, Eurostudent or Eurydice may be associated to the BFUG and invited to events upon specific request.

c. Chairmanship: BFUG Co-chairs and BFUG Vice-chair

The current chairing arrangements foresee that the Bologna Process will be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU member country (see the document in Annex 5). Moreover, the host country of the next Ministerial conference is nominated as the Vice-chair. The following chairing arrangement is due to be applied in the period 2015-2018:

Semester	Co-chair from EU-Presidency	Co-chair from non-EU country	Vice-chair
1 July – 31 December 2015	Luxemburg	Liechtenstein	France
1 January - 30 June 2016	Netherlands	Moldova	
1 July – 31 December 2016	Slovakia	Montenegro	
1 January - 30 June 2017	Malta	Norway	
1 July – 31 December 2017	Estonia	Russian Federation	
1 January - 30 June 2018	Bulgaria	Serbia	Host of 2020 conference
<u>1 July – 31 December 2018</u>	<u>Austria</u>	<u>Switzerland</u>	
<u>1 January - 30 June 2019</u>	<u>Romania</u>	<u>TFYR of Macedonia</u>	
<u>1 July – 31 December 2019</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Turkey</u>	

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Each country is responsible to nominate a person who will be in charge of fulfilling the tasks of the chairmanship. The **Chairs** have a joint responsibility to take forward the aims and actions laid down by the Ministers responsible for Higher Education in the Bologna Declaration and subsequent Communiqués of ministerial conferences. The Co-chairs, in close cooperation with the Vice-chair, chair the Bologna Ministerial Meetings and the Bologna Policy Forum as well as the sessions of the BFUG and the BFUG Board. The Co-chairs jointly represent the EHEA in European and international meetings. In the decision-making process the Chairs assume the responsibility to lead the way towards compromise and to provide political impetus for moving the Bologna Process forward.

The Co-chairs may delegate tasks, such as external representation, to the Vice-chair. The Vice-chair ensures continuity between the rotating chairmanships.

d. Functioning of the BFUG meetings

BFUG meetings are in principle hosted by one of the EHEA Co-chairs and are convened at least once every six months. The working language of the BFUG is English (see Annex 6 for more details).

All EHEA/BFUG members and consultative members may attend each BFUG meeting. Each EHEA/BFUG member country and consultative member has the authority to designate its BFUG representatives, according to internal procedures. Each EHEA member and consultative member sends a maximum of 2 representatives to the BFUG meetings. On every agenda point, each BFUG delegation is invited to express the position of the country, institution or organisation in question on the respective matter. The Chairs, in consultation with the Board, have the authority to invite experts/individuals to contribute to BFUG meetings under specific points for which they have the required expertise.

The BFUG Co-chairs lead the discussions on all points of the agenda as well as declare the meeting open or closed. The Co-chairs sum up the conclusions whenever they deem necessary. The Co-chairs maintain the right to speak and to vote in their capacity as BFUG delegates, except in cases where an additional national expert has been appointed to sit as a national representative.

The current decision making procedure within the BFUG is based on a consensual understanding that the Co-chairs of the BFUG summarise at the end of each agenda point. In exceptional circumstances and when the BFUG so decides, a decision through vote may be used.

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As a general rule, the BFUG meeting documents should be circulated by the Secretariat at least fifteen days prior to the meeting, after being set-up by the Chairs of the BFUG and by the BFUG Working and Advisory Groups. All comments or significant changes proposed by the BFUG members to these documents have to be submitted at least five days prior to the meeting. This rule is proposed so that every BFUG delegation has enough time to circulate the BFUG meeting documents within its specific consultation structure.

The Secretariat is in charge of drafting the minutes of the meetings of the BFUG/AG/WG/Board in consultation with the Chairs. These minutes are then circulated to the members (BFUG/AG/WG/Board) for feedback no later than one month after the meeting. The members have the possibility to within 15 days send amendments to the minutes, which will be taken into consideration by the Chairs in the process of finalising the minutes. Minutes of the meetings (BFUG/AG/WG/Board) generally will be approved via email in order to have them available for timely publishing on the website.

II. BFUG Board

a. Role and composition

The BFUG Board is an advisory committee for the Chairs and the Secretariat to prepare the BFUG meetings. The responsibilities of the Board were defined by the BFUG during its meeting in Rome (see Annex 7). It also deals with the Working and Advisory Groups, since one Co-chair of each WG/AG is member of the BFUG Board meetings.

The current members of the Board are:

- the BFUG Co-chairs double Troika (the outgoing, present and incoming Co-chairs of the BFUG);
- the BFUG Vice-chair;
- the European Commission;
- four of the consultative members (Council of Europe, EUA, ESU, EURASHE);
- one of the Co-chairs of each Working and Advisory Group.

The Co-chairs and Vice-chair of the BFUG are the same for the Board.

b. Functioning of the BFUG Board meetings

The Board usually meets at least one month (preferably six weeks) before each BFUG meeting. The host of the Board is normally one of the EHEA Co-chairs. The minutes of the Board meetings, taken by the BFUG Secretariat in consultation with the Chairs, will be approved via email and published as described above.

III. Ministerial Conferences

Within the governing period 2015-2018 the Ministerial Conference will take place in spring 2018, hosted by France. The country hosting the upcoming Ministerial Conference acts as a Vice-chair of the Bologna Process / European Higher Education Area. As agreed by the Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the country organising the upcoming Ministerial Conference also hosts the Bologna Process Secretariat between two consecutive ministerial meetings. This applies to the governing period 2015-2018 in which France is hosting the BFUG Secretariat.

In connection with the Ministerial Conference, since 2009, a Bologna Policy Forum (BPF) is organised, which gathers partner countries from outside the EHEA.

Ministers decide at Ministerial Conferences about the central aspects of the EHEA, including its further developments and commitments by its member countries. The Ministerial Conference also decides on new applications for membership to the EHEA as well as any other main changes to the process. A communiqué is adopted at each Ministerial Conference that outlines decisions taken by the Ministers. The Ministerial Conferences are prepared by the BFUG.

For the preparation of the Draft Communiqué from the next Ministerial Conference 2018 in Paris, a drafting committee composed of the Co-chairs chairing in spring 2018, the two outgoing Co-chairs of that period, the former Co-chairs and the Vice-chair will be set up. The drafting committee will be in charge from spring 2017 and be supported by the Secretariat.

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During the governing period 2015-2018, the host for the next Ministerial Conference in 2020 will be selected. The procedure for the Selection of the 2020 Ministerial Conference host can be found in Annex 8. Each member country of the EHEA can apply for hosting the Ministerial Conference and is expected to provide the necessary logistical and financial support to ensure the successful organisation of such an event.

IV. BFUG Secretariat

Between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2018, the Secretariat of the Bologna Follow-up Group is held by France, as organiser of the next 2018 EHEA Ministerial Conference. It will continue along the same lines as agreed previously at the BFUG meetings: the Secretariat will provide neutral support to further the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area under the exclusive authority of the BFUG, its Co-chairs and Vice-chair.

The structure is working in an international way including staff members provided by EHEA member countries.

The main tasks of the Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat are:

- supporting the Chairs in their work
- providing administrative and operational support for the BFUG and its Board;
- supporting all BFUG Working / Advisory Groups;
- acting as an external and internal contact point for the European Higher Education Area;
- preparing the Ministerial Conference in France (2018) and the Fifth Bologna Policy Forum under the supervision of the BFUG.

In order to provide up to date information not only for the BFUG but also to the wider public, the Secretariat maintains the European Higher Education Area website (<http://www.ehea.info>).

The document in Annex 9 outlines more specifically the tasks of the BFUG Secretariat.

V. EHEA Communication: EHEA Website and Backoffice

As part of the EHEA communication efforts, with the launch of the European Higher Education Area, a EHEA website www.ehea.info was established. The website will be further developed and updated by the BFUG Secretariat with support from the BFUG and its sub-structures.

As a general rule, all documents that are not explicitly excluded will be published on the website. Documents distributed for BFUG meetings will be published on the website in advance of the meetings unless the Co-chairs have decided otherwise.

The country pages of each BFUG member will be partially edited under the responsibility of the member. The pages concerning BFUG Working Groups and other substructures will be edited by the BFUG Secretariat, in close cooperation with the Co-chairs of the concerned WGs/AGs.

For the internal use of the BFUG members or that of Working/Advisory Groups the Secretariat has created a password for a protected website area, generically called "the Backoffice". This area allows for document storage and exchange, events' registration, calendar setting. In September 2016, a new website will be launched which will offer public access to the full archive with exception of only those documents which have been decided to be confidential.

The EHEA website is listing an open calendar of events, organised by the BFUG Working and Advisory Groups as well as the EHEA member countries and organisations. For an external event, due to be published on the official EHEA website, it has to be related to the Bologna Process and should be organised or at least supported by one of the countries or organisations participating in the Bologna Process. Moreover, the event should in principle be open to participants from all Bologna countries and should be in line with the priorities of the BFUG work plan. Invitations, presentations, reports and conclusions can be published on the website and forwarded to the BFUG on request of the organisers.

For an event to be published on the EHEA website, the organisers have to fill in a template provided by the Bologna Secretariat. The final decision on whether or not an event is considered a part of the BFUG events is taken by the Bologna Secretariat.

VI. ANNEXES

- Annex 1: Historical Overview – Information on the former BFUG Proceedings
- **Annex 2: BFUG Work Plan 2015-2018**
- **Annex 3: List of members, consultative members and partners of the BFUG**
- Annex 4: Requirements and Procedures for Joining the European Higher Education Area
- Annex 5: Briefing Note for Decision by the Ministers (BFUG co-chairing)
- Annex 6: Language Regime for EHEA Ministerial Conferences
- Annex 7: Responsibilities of the Board – Tasks of the Secretariat
- **Annex 8: Procedure for the Selection of the 2020 Ministerial Conference Host**
- **Annex 9: Role of the Bologna Secretariat: Terms of Reference 2015-2018**