

# Discussion Paper on Implementation and Key Commitments

## Emerging issues

The purpose of this document is to facilitate a discussion within the BFUG on how to improve implementation of the key commitments and social dimension and how to address the implementation gaps in the future.

Structured peer-based support for the implementation of the Bologna key commitments was introduced in the Paris Communiqué in 2018. Since then, the BFUG has worked to improve the full and effective implementation of key commitments through the work in the Thematic Peer Groups. Over the years the work in the TPGs has been active and productive, focusing on key commitments but also dealt with several connected and emerging themes. The work of the TPGs has been supported by Erasmus+ funded projects.

The final report of the BICG from the previous working period concludes that the change in the implementation has been positive, but slow. To strengthen implementation, the report notes that countries that have not fully implemented the key commitments are not always active in the TPG's work. In some cases, active participation does not help, if countries are not committed to making changes. Good representation in TPGs with expertise in the field and good communication and collaboration with the BFUG members have been highlighted repeatedly over the years as good practice.

The Tirana Communiqué acknowledges the important contribution of the TPGs in improving the incomplete and uneven implementation of the key commitments and recognises that more work is needed to improve the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education. The Communiqué also introduces a commitment to have and publish national action plans to address remaining implementation gaps.

So far 40 National Action Plans have been submitted and published on the EHEA website. The national action plans include both areas where implementation is lagging and areas where BFUG members want to improve the status quo even when commitments had already been met. TPGs have integrated NAPs in their work plans as they concern key commitments and social dimension, but NAPs include additional themes like Internationalisation and mobility, fundamental values, learning and teaching, artificial intelligence, and/or digitalisation too.

The final report of the BICG from the previous period highlighted the rapid evolution of the world of higher education, with increasing presence of flexible learning pathways, personal approaches to learning, microcredentials, joint degrees and university alliances, etc. The report states that these changes can be accommodated by the EHEA by the already agreed tools if they are correctly and completely implemented across the EHEA. The Tirana communiqué put forward the future-proof development, dissemination and possible expansion of Bologna tools and it gave a mandate to revise the ECTS Users' Guide and the ESG. The rest of the tools are not under similar review for this current cycle. In addition, digitalisation and artificial intelligence affects the activities of

higher education institutions and the use of the Bologna tools. Without a common approach, higher education systems risk moving in different directions making cooperation and mobility more difficult.

## Questions for discussion

While the methodology of peer support has worked well, and is particularly beneficial to the countries, organisations and individuals actively involved in the TPGs some questions for the future work and for better implementation are worth considering:

- What kind of experiences have been gained from National Action Plans (NAPs) in addressing implementation gaps together with the work of TPGs? How could the NAPs be better utilised and what should be their role in the future?
- How should the BFUG examine the mandate from the Tirana Communique to analyse the "future-proofness" of the Bologna tools?
- How should the digital interoperability of higher education systems be supported?