BFUG consultation on future priorities of the EHEA

Analysis of the survey results

Key findings

Topic	Finding
Participation	35 responses: 30 from BFUG members (29 country-level responses covering 28 countries, plus the European Commission) and 5 from consultative members. 20 of 35 answers (57%) rest on a limited internal consultation and 14 (40%) on an external or membership consultation.
Topics for the future	Seven areas are rated high priority for 2030–2040 by a majority: key commitments (89%), internationalisation and mobility (83%), fundamental values (82%), AI and digital transformation (74%), lifelong learning (69%), learning and teaching (62%) and the social dimension (57%). The other six areas are rated high by 21–44%.
Implementation first	23 of 35 respondents (66%) rank full implementation of the existing key commitments as the first priority for the 2027–2030 Work Programme. 30 of 34 (88%) agree that the stock of commitments should be reviewed and consolidated.
Additional key commitments	Designating additional key commitments is the most contested item: 16 agree, 9 neither agree nor disagree, 9 disagree.
Artificial Intelligence	28 of 34 (82%) want AI named in the 2027 Communiqué, and the majority would attach a dedicated instrument.
Targets	22 of 35 (63%) support quantitative targets to 2040, mostly aligned with existing EU or international indicators (16); mobility is the area most often named (18 of 22 who support targets).
Opinions on the process	Respondents prefer follow-up based on peer support (53%), a BFUG focused on a few strategic questions (76%) and a shorter, more decision-focused agenda for ministerial conferences (73%).
Continuity with 2018–2019 consultations	The agenda is stable, with implementation coming first, the same themes as in 2018 and AI as the only new entrant. Working-method proposals made in 2018 now have majority support.

1. Purpose

The Tirana Communiqué asked the BFUG to submit to Ministers in 2027 "proposals for the main priorities for the next decade, in close cooperation with higher education institutions, staff and students".

To strengthen the evidence base for the work of the Task Force on the Future of Bologna and the Drafting Committee of the Iași-Chișinău Communiqué, the EHEA Secretariat conducted an online survey of BFUG members and consultative members in autumn 2026.

This is the fourth exercise of this kind in the last decade, following the 2018 BFUG survey, the 2019 national consultations and the 2023–2024 IN-GLOBAL surveys.

This report, prepared for the BFUG meeting in Dublin (5–6 November 2026), presents the respondents, the results by question, the main patterns across the answers and the relation of the results to the 2018 and 2019 BFUG consultations.

Co-funded by the European Union

2. Respondents and the consultation behind the responses

2.1 Number and category of responses

The survey received **35 responses**, with 30 coming from BFUG members and 5 from consultative members.

Among the 30 responses from members, 29 were country-level responses from **28 countries** and one was from the European Commission. Nineteen responses come from EU Member States and ten from non-EU members.

Respondent category	Responses	Note
BFUG members	**30**	28 countries and the Commission
Consultative members	**5**	
All responses	**35**	

Table 1. Responses by category.

2.2 Type of consultation behind the responses (Q3)

Respondents were asked whether their response was informed by a consultation, and of what kind.

- **BFUG members (30):** 17 of 30 (57%) responded after a limited internal consultation within the ministry; 12 of 30 (40%) after a consultation with external stakeholders (higher education institutions, student unions, quality assurance agencies and others); 1 of 30 (3%) without a consultation.
- **Consultative members (5):** 3 mentioned a limited internal consultation within the organisation and 2 on the basis of a current or former consultation with the membership.
- **Overall:** 20 of 35 (57%) of the responses rest on a limited internal consultation, 14 of 35 (40%) on external or membership consultation, and 1 of 35 (3%) on none.

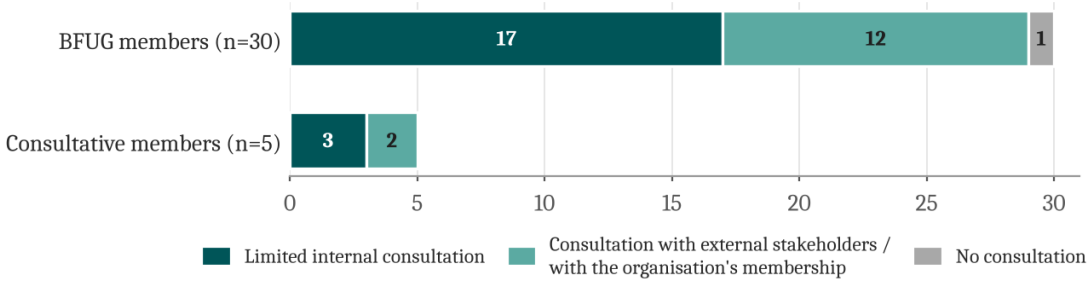


Figure 1. Type of consultation behind the response (Q3), by respondent category.

3. Results by question

Alongside the closed questions, 21 of the 35 respondents (17 members and 4 consultative members) wrote at least one comment in the free-text boxes. The comments range from one line to multiple pages, and some relay the views of national stakeholders. They are reported below under the question to which they relate.

3.1 Thematic priorities for 2030–2040 (Q4)

Q4 asked respondents whether they retain each of 13 thematic areas as a priority for intergovernmental cooperation within the EHEA in 2030–2040. The options were high, medium or low priority, "should not be addressed at EHEA level" and no opinion.

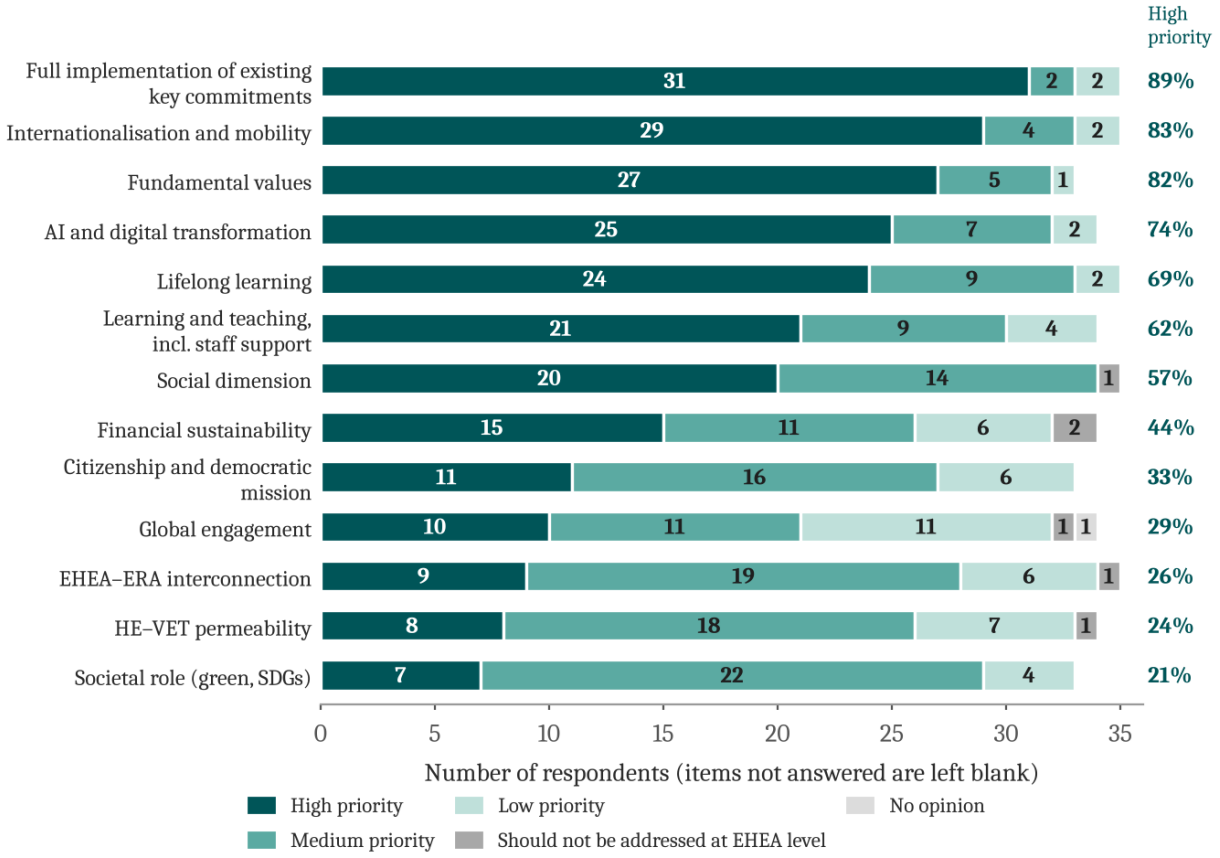


Figure 2. Priority rating of thirteen thematic areas for 2030–2040 (Q4). The percentage on the right is the share of respondents rating the area "high priority".

What the ratings show

- **Seven areas** are rated high priority by a majority: full implementation of the key commitments (89%), internationalisation and mobility (83%), fundamental values (82%), AI and digital transformation (74%), lifelong learning (69%), innovative, flexible and student-centred learning and teaching (62%) and the social dimension (57%). The remaining six are rated high by a minority: financial sustainability (44%), citizenship and the democratic mission (33%), global engagement (29%), the EHEA–ERA interconnection (26%), permeability between higher education and VET (24%) and the societal role of higher education, including the green transition and the SDGs (21%).
- **Medium priority is common in the lower tier.** For the societal role (67%), the EHEA–ERA interconnection (54%) and HE–VET permeability (53%) the most frequent answer is medium priority. Global engagement is the most contested: 10 high, 11 medium and 11 low.
- **Few outright rejections.** "Should not be addressed at EHEA level" was selected 6 times in total by 4 respondents (financial sustainability twice; the social dimension, EHEA–ERA, HE–VET and global engagement once each). No respondent selected it for more than three areas.
- **Breadth varies.** The median number of areas rated high is 6.5 of the 13.

- **Consultative members.** All five consultative members rated key commitments high, and four of the five internationalisation and mobility. None of them rated the EHEA–ERA interconnection or HE–VET permeability high.
- **Other topics (open answer).** Twelve respondents added topics of their own; together with the topics proposed in the final open question (Q18), they are grouped below.

New or reframed topics proposed (Q4 and Q18)

AI and digital transformation. The European Commission proposes two thematic priorities: AI in the digital transformation of institutions, their governance and administration; and interoperability of databases and standards for the digital interoperability of education systems. The Belgium-Flemish Community reports stakeholder calls for digital and AI literacy and common guidance on AI. ESU asks that AI and digitalisation become a dedicated thematic priority of the next cycle, together with a renewed understanding of student-centred learning, and that an EHEA-level framework be created for adapting higher education systems to the digital transformation, grounded in fundamental values. The United Kingdom asks for a flexible response to emerging issues, with particular importance for AI and for links with vocational and technical education.

Recognition, quality assurance and degrees. The European Commission asks to treat recognition of prior learning and micro-credentials as two separate topics. The Belgium-Flemish Community draws attention to the removal of accreditation barriers for joint degrees and to stakeholder suggestions for stronger recognition of professional higher education. Italy proposes a mechanism to prevent, monitor and counter education fraud, and Romania asks to treat transnational education as a separate priority.

Work, equity and staff. Switzerland proposes integration into a changing job market after a university degree, and Malta proposes equity in the transition from higher education to work: unequal access to internships, work-based learning, networks and quality employment for disadvantaged and under-represented students. ETUCE/EI asks for participation of students and staff in higher education governance and for the well-being and decent working conditions of staff. The Belgium-Flemish Community reports national stakeholder calls for student support and participation, and for affordability and accessibility of higher education.

Research, institutions and implementation. Spain proposes stronger links between higher education, research and innovation, simplification of administrative processes and greater trust in universities. Lithuania asks for a mission-sensitive approach to the EHEA that recognises the diversity of higher education institutions. Portugal asks that implementation governance, accountability and stakeholder participation be a high priority. The European Commission asks for a stronger line on fundamental values and for a publicly available state of play on implementation, linked to national plans.

The global and wider context. UNESCO asks for greater engagement with other regional structures, and for peer exchange and capacity development with non-EHEA regions, including a dedicated funding stream.

Subsidiarity. EUA notes that, given limited resources, not all topics can be addressed at the same level, and asks what can be done at EHEA level on AI. The Belgium-Flemish Community notes that, for many topics, it should first be considered whether action at Bologna level is appropriate, with a clear distinction between peer learning among institutions and common commitments at policy level.

3.2 Areas to structure the 2027–2030 Work Programme (Q5)

Q5 asked respondents to select five areas from the Q4 list, or to add their own topic, and to rank them (1 = highest priority). Figure 3 shows how often each area was placed in the top five and at which rank.

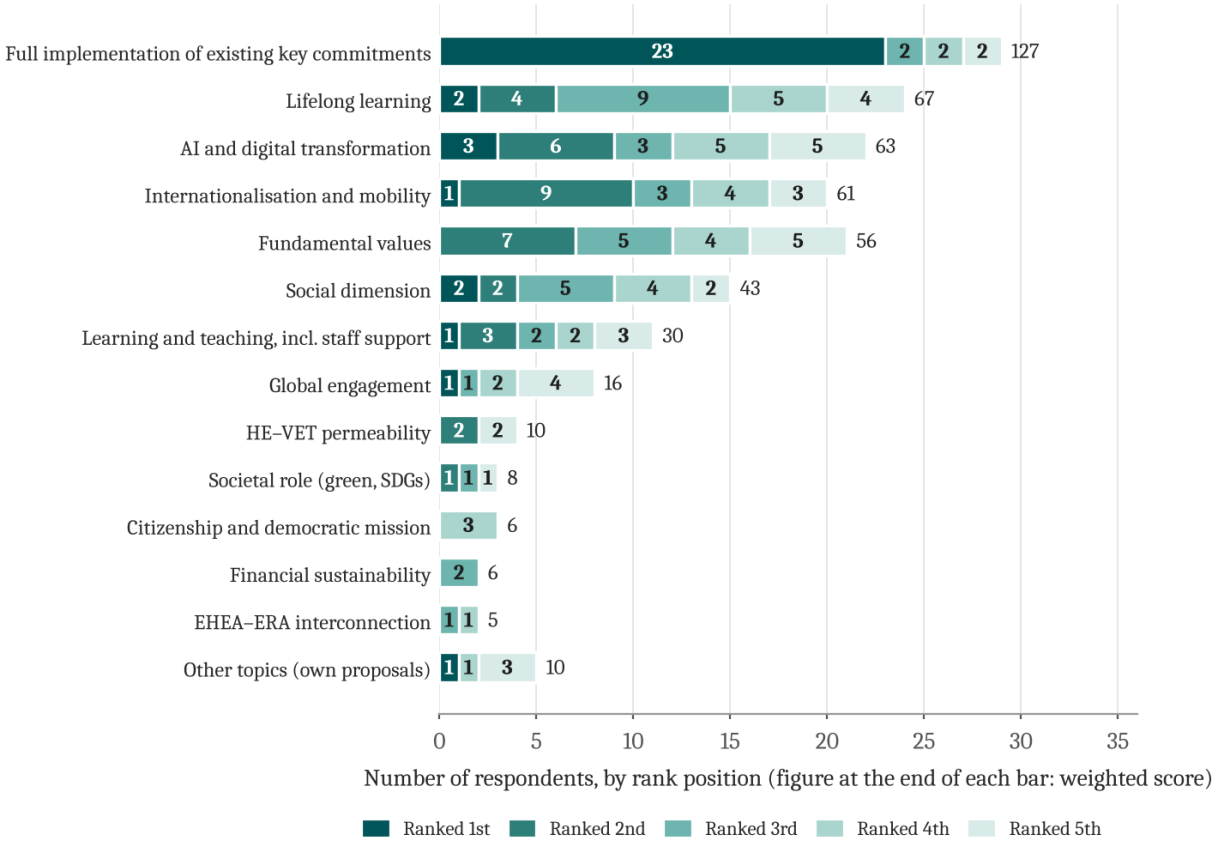


Figure 3. Areas ranked in the top five for the 2027–2030 Work Programme (Q5). Bars show the number of respondents by rank position; the figure at the right of each bar is the weighted score (5 points for first place to 1 point for fifth place).

- **One clear first priority.** Full implementation of the existing key commitments is placed in the top five by 83% and ranked first by 66%; its weighted score (127) is almost twice that of the next area.
- **A cluster of four.** Lifelong learning (67 points; 24 respondents), AI and digital transformation (63; 22), internationalisation and mobility (61; 20) and fundamental values (56; 21) are close together.
- **The social dimension and learning and teaching** follow (43 and 30 points; 15 and 11 respondents). The other six areas each appear in the top five of ten or fewer respondents; 5 respondents added a topic of their own.
- Respondents from EU Member States ranked key commitments first more often than other members (EU Member States 17 of 19, non-EU Member States 4 of 10). The same direction holds for the high rating of key commitments (EU Member States 18 of 19, non-EU Member States 7 of 10) and of the social dimension (EU Member States 12 of 19, non-EU Member States 3 of 10).

Rated versus ranked

Setting Q4 against Q5 shows where respondents regard an area as important but do not put it among the five areas that should structure the next work programme (Figure 4).

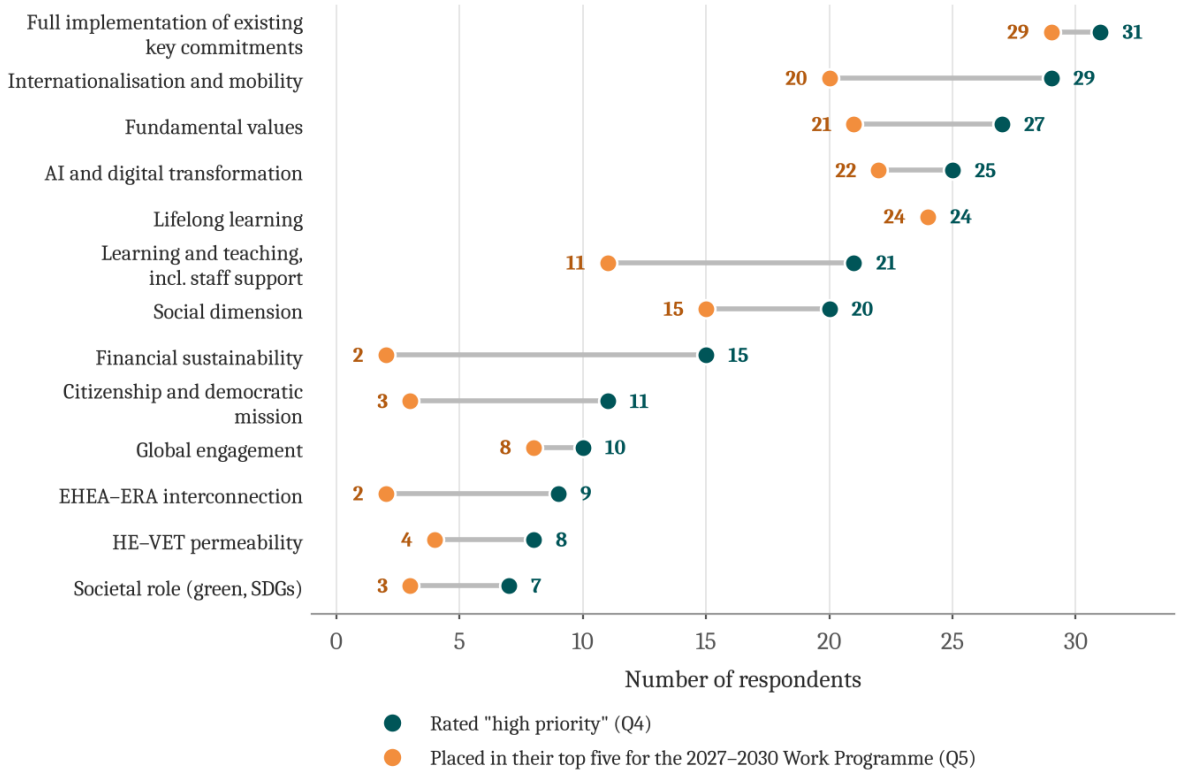


Figure 4. Number of respondents rating an area "high priority" (Q4) and placing it in their top five (Q5).

3.3 Ministerial commitments: consolidation and instruments (Q6)

Q6 asked respondents to agree or disagree with five statements about the accumulated stock of ministerial commitments. Thirty-four respondents answered all five.

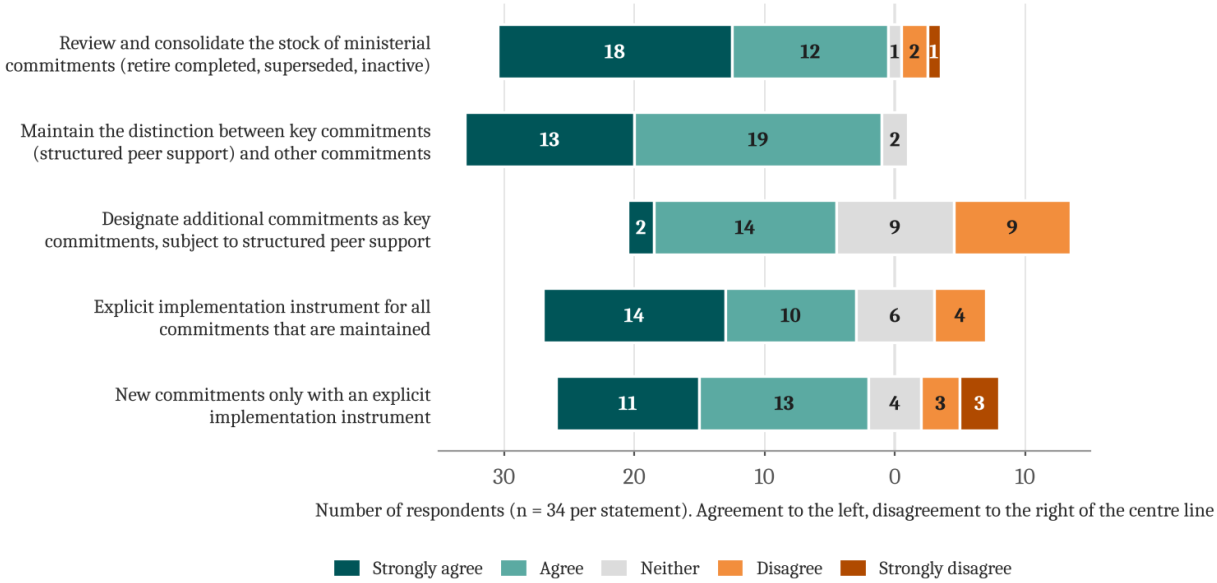


Figure 5. Agreement with statements on ministerial commitments (Q6). Bars to the left of the centre line show agreement, to the right disagreement.

Consolidation has very broad support, with 30 of 34 (88%) agreeing that the stock of commitments should be reviewed and consolidated. **The key-commitment model is accepted,** as 32 of 34 (94%)

agree that the distinction between key commitments, which receive structured peer support, and other commitments should be maintained.

Respondents are divided on adding key commitments. Only 16 of 34 (47%) agree that additional commitments should be designated as key commitments. Nine are neutral and nine disagree.

Instruments are widely expected: 24 of 34 (71%) agree that every commitment that is maintained should have an explicit implementation instrument (a working method, monitoring arrangement or support structure), and 24 of 34 (71%) that new commitments should be adopted only together with one.

Implementation and accountability in the comments. Germany states that the absolute priority must be the full implementation of existing commitments, with "structural accountability at the BFUG level" and that member states should be held politically accountable for implementation gaps of past communiqués. Switzerland gives the highest priority to implementing the key commitments. Portugal asks that implementation, coherence and demonstrable impact take precedence over the accumulation of commitments, with periodic review of existing commitments and an instrument for each; the EHEA's credibility "will depend less on the number of commitments it adopts than on its ability to translate shared principles into meaningful and demonstrable change". ESU asks the BFUG to strengthen the link between commitments, implementation, monitoring and reporting, grounded in public responsibility, transparency and accountability.

Cyprus supports a leaner, implementation-focused Process: consolidate the stock, pair each retained commitment with a concrete instrument so that small systems "can prioritise delivery over reporting", and align monitoring with existing sources instead of new data requests. Austria considers that fewer commitments per period would allow more intensive discussion of a few topics, but notes that past attempts "always ended up with all the topics on the agenda again". The United Kingdom observes that the fewer the commitments, the likelier ministers can sustain and implement them nationally, and Romania that ministers find it easier to support a short communiqué whose commitments come with the means to deliver them.

Support for consolidation coexists with proposals for new topics. The wish for fewer commitments is accompanied by a substantial list of proposed topics (Section 3.1), which is consistent with the divided answer on designating additional key commitments.

3.4 Content of the 2027 Communiqué: AI, targets and the social dimension (Q7–Q10)

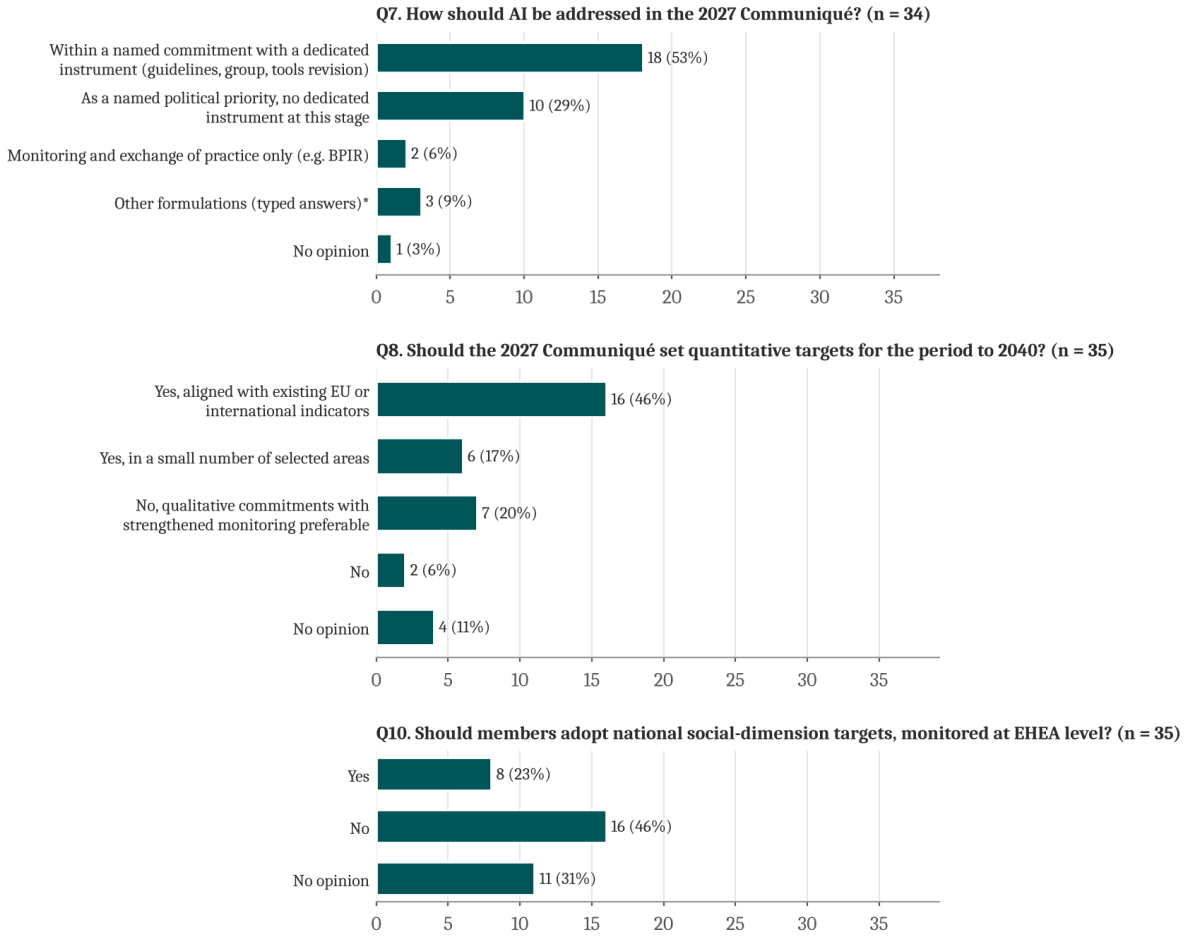


Figure 6. Results for Q7 (AI), Q8 (quantitative targets) and Q10 (national social-dimension targets).

Artificial intelligence (Q7)

Respondents want AI named explicitly. 28 of 34 (82%) would address AI as a named commitment with a dedicated instrument (18; 53%) or as a named political priority without an instrument at this stage (10; 29%). Two would limit it to monitoring and exchange of practice (for example through the BPIR) and three typed other formulations: explore the topic at BFUG level to identify the scope of EHEA mandate (1); include AI in the Communiqué, including but not limited to exchange of practice (1); embed AI in existing instruments and topics as a transversal theme.

Quantitative targets (Q8 and Q9)

Majority support, mostly conditional. 22 of 35 (63%) answered yes to quantitative targets for the period to 2040, and 16 of them specified that targets should be aligned with existing EU or international indicators; 6 would limit them to a small number of selected areas. Nine of 35 (26%) answered no, of whom 7 preferred qualitative commitments with strengthened monitoring and 2 gave a plain no. Four of 35 (11%) had no opinion.

Where targets are feasible (Q9, 22 respondents who answered yes to Q8). Learning mobility leads (18; 82%), followed by participation and completion of students from under-represented and non-traditional backgrounds (13; 59%) and quality assurance including transnational education (11; 50%). Lifelong learning participation of adult learners (5; 23%), support and professional

development of teaching staff (5; 23%), recognition of prior learning (5; 23%) and qualifications recognition and ratification of conventions (1; 5%) trail. Those who want targets want few: 19 of 22 named three areas or fewer.

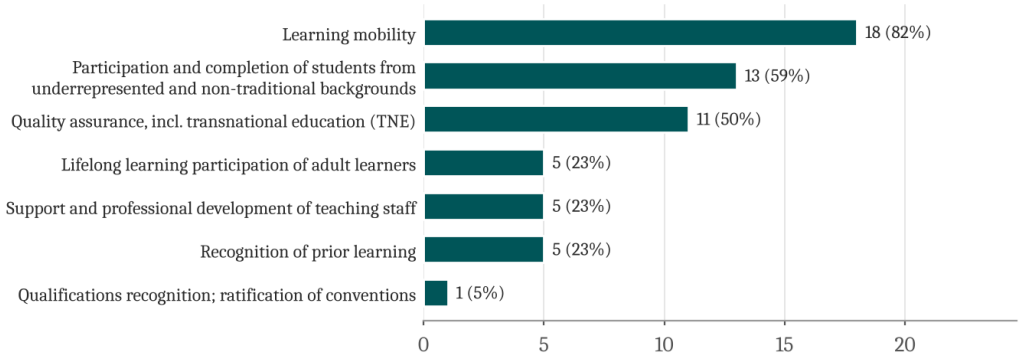


Figure 7. Areas in which quantitative targets would be feasible and meaningful (Q9; multiple answers).

Support for targets is qualified. The written comments favour alignment with existing indicators, qualitative elements and a principles-based approach. The United Kingdom prefers a principles-based approach backed by peer support to hard targets that do not reflect sectoral changes or national contexts. The Belgium-Flemish Community notes that some stakeholders emphasise qualitative rather than quantitative mobility targets. Cyprus asks that monitoring use existing data. Within the majority for targets, some respondents want them kept narrow.

National targets for the social dimension (Q10)

No majority for national targets. 8 of 35 (23%) agree that members should commit to adopting national targets for the social dimension, monitored at EHEA level; 16 of 35 (46%) do not, and 11 of 35 (31%) have no opinion. Six of the eight respondents who supported national social-dimension targets are EU Member States; the other two are consultative members.

Opposition to national targets is not opposition to targets in general. Of the 16 who said no, 10 support quantitative targets in general (Q8), and 5 of them named participation and completion of students from non-traditional backgrounds as an area where targets would be feasible (Q9). Possible readings are a preference for shared EHEA-level indicators over national targets, or a more focused approach to the participation of under-represented groups rather than social-dimension targets in general.

3.5 Follow-up, national action plans and BFUG working methods (Q11–Q13)

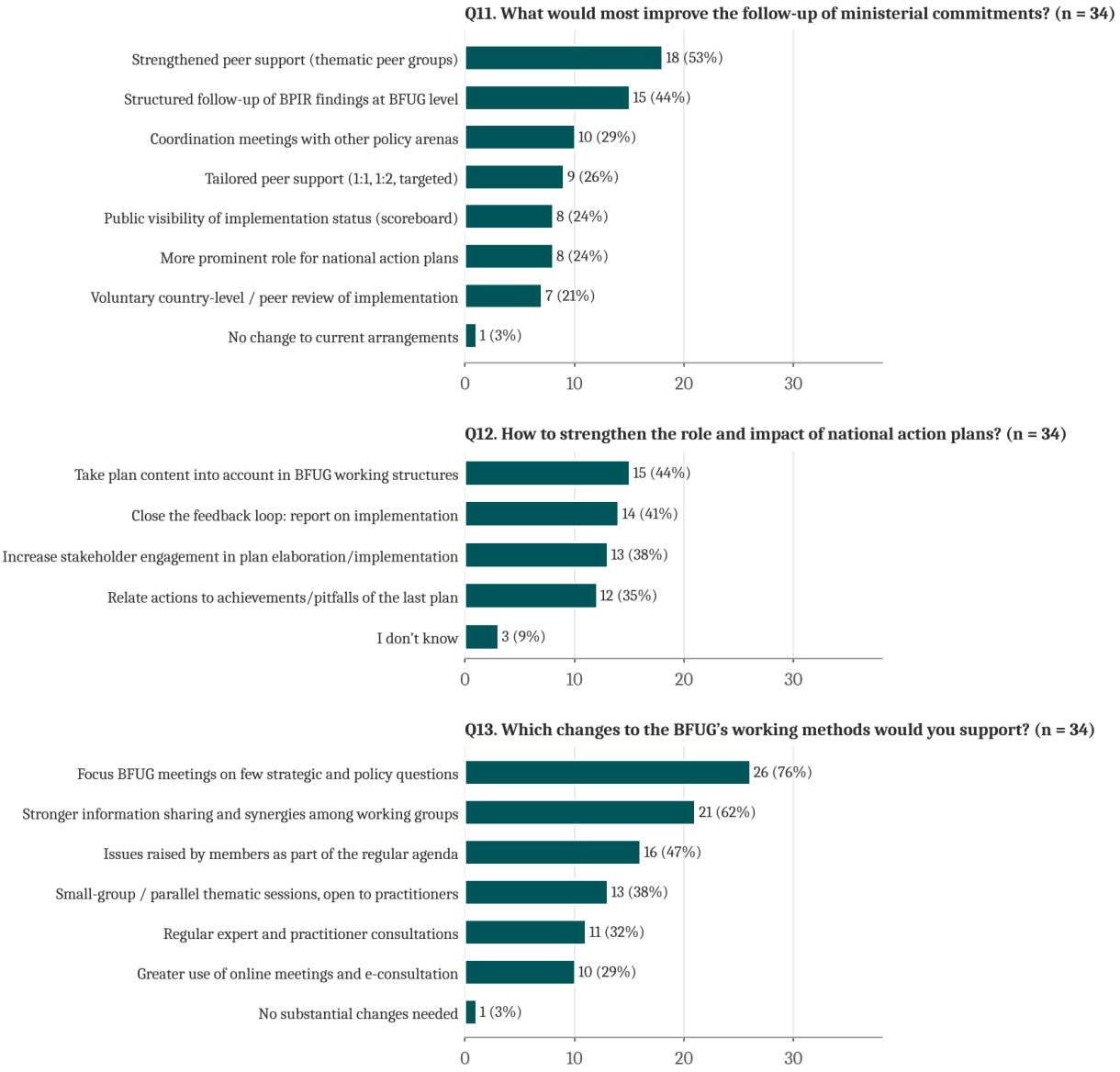


Figure 8. Results for Q11 (follow-up of ministerial commitments), Q12 (national action plans) and Q13 (BFUG working methods); multiple answers.

Follow-up of ministerial commitments (Q11)

Peer support leads. Strengthened peer support through the thematic peer group model was chosen by 18 of 34 (53%), a structured follow-up of BPIR findings at BFUG level by 15 of 34 (44%), coordination meetings with other policy arenas (EU, Council of Europe, UNESCO, OECD) by 10 of 34 (29%) and tailored peer support by 9 of 34 (26%). A voluntary country-level review was chosen by 7 (21%), a more prominent role for national action plans and public visibility of implementation status (a scoreboard on ehea.info) by 8 each (24%). ETUCE/EI suggested national Bologna Process coordination meetings of ministries and stakeholders, including academic trade unions, and information on how many such meetings take place.

Voluntary, supportive follow-up is preferred to stricter monitoring. 21 of 34 (62%) chose at least one of the three peer-based options (thematic peer groups, tailored support, voluntary peer review). The

options that would make implementation more visible or subject to review each attract between one in five and one in four respondents.

In the comments, Austria considers peer support, including tailored support, the best way to learn from each other; Romania describes the thematic peer groups as a unique opportunity to bring governments and stakeholders together. Portugal and Spain ask for more systematic use of BPIR findings in the follow-up. Germany points to the fundamental values monitoring as showing that general, non-quantified objectives can be monitored successfully. EUA suggests national Bologna follow-up groups and asks the BFUG to discuss how best to approach them.

National action plans (Q12)

No single measure commands a majority. Taking the plans into account in the work of the BFUG working structures (15; 44%), closing the feedback loop by reporting on implementation (14; 41%), increasing stakeholder engagement in elaborating and implementing the plan (13; 38%) and relating the actions to the achievements and pitfalls of the last plan (12; 35%) are close together. Three respondents chose "I don't know", and four chose 'Other option'.

In the comments, Spain says that the national action plans must be planning and monitoring instruments, not descriptive documents, with continuity and the participation of universities and stakeholders in their development. Cyprus says that reporting on implementation would make the plans more useful. The United Kingdom stresses that the wider the range of stakeholders, the greater the likelihood of success; UK-Scotland asks that plans be driven by BPIR data and leave room for national contextualisation. Malta proposes that the aim should be that every country has an identifiable, credible and monitored policy commitment in each area, rather than that every country has a plan. Switzerland suggests plans only for key commitments not yet implemented. ESU asks for a more systematic collection and follow-up of the plans, with specific and targeted measures on key policy areas, including the social dimension, and for countries to establish their own monitoring mechanisms; under 'Other option' it proposes to relate the actions in the plans to the gaps identified in the BPIR and in Bologna With Student Eyes. One respondent considers that action plans are no longer needed.

BFUG working methods (Q13)

A strategic focus is the most frequent choice. 26 of 34 (76%) support focusing BFUG meetings on a small number of strategic and policy questions, with fewer procedural or technical discussions. Stronger information sharing and synergies among working groups follows (21; 62%), then discussion of issues raised by members as part of the regular agenda if linked to EHEA priorities (16; 47%).

Opening the BFUG to practitioners is a minority choice. Small-group or parallel thematic sessions open to practitioners (13; 38%), regular expert and practitioner consultations (11; 32%) and more online meetings and e-consultation (10; 29%) each attract between 29% and 38%. One respondent wanted no substantial change. Two typed proposals: reducing and clarifying the number of BFUG sub-structures, and separating policy discussions for ministry representatives from peer learning at institutional or organisational level.

In the comments, Austria wants more in-depth discussion of EHEA commitments and less procedure, which "consumes way too much time every BFUG meeting". Hungary says that the BFUG "has become increasingly technical" and needs more space for strategic policy debate. Spain would keep strategic priorities in plenary and technical matters in specialised structures. UNESCO calls for a significant reduction of BFUG sub-entities and a clean-up of the distinction between thematic peer groups, working groups and coordinating groups, and the Belgium-Flemish Community suggests distinguishing policy discussions for ministry representatives from peer learning and information sharing at institutional or organisational level. EUA urges coordination between activities and delegates in the various

working structures. The United Kingdom asks for at least hybrid participation in working structures, because in-person-only meetings limit participation and the quality of the output, and suggests drawing on the working structures of the UNESCO Global Convention.

One member considers the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group not currently effective, lacking steering and purpose, and proposes that its role be reviewed and linked to concrete tasks and expected outcomes, or that it be discontinued.

3.6 Ministerial engagement and links with practitioners (Q14–Q15)

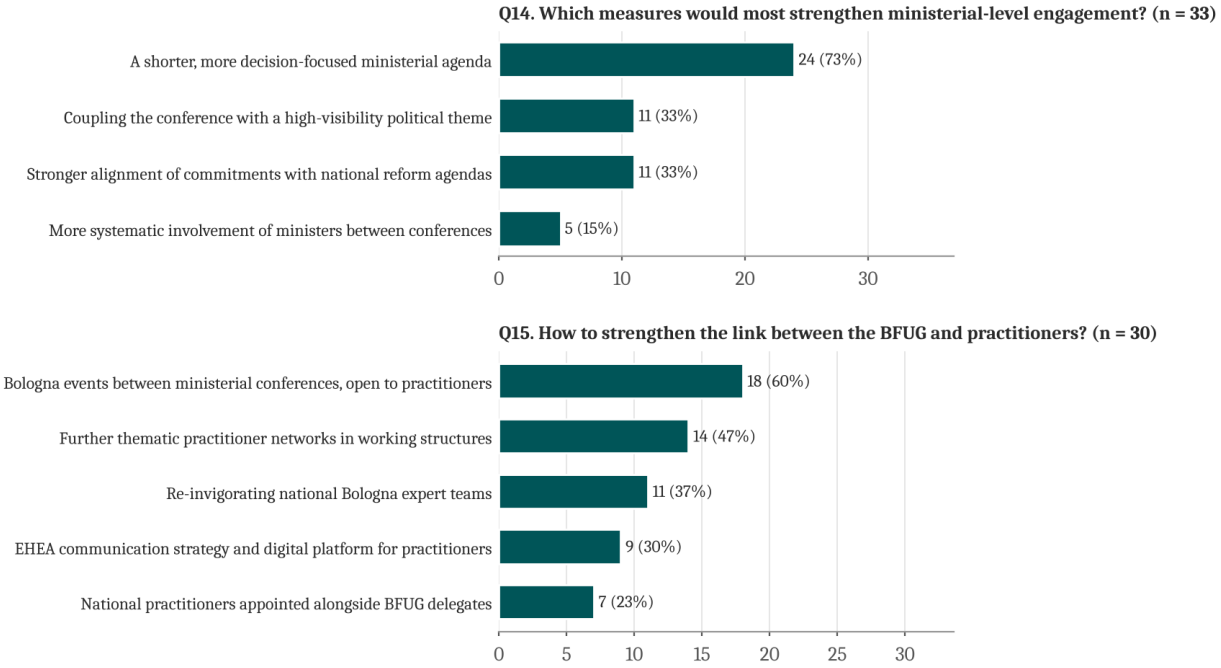


Figure 9. Results for Q14 (ministerial-level engagement) and Q15 (link between the BFUG and practitioners); multiple answers.

A shorter ministerial agenda. 24 of 33 (73%) chose a shorter, more decision-focused ministerial agenda with fewer, clearer, strategic commitments. Coupling the conference with a high-visibility political theme and stronger alignment with national reform agendas were each chosen by 11 (33%); more systematic involvement of ministers between conferences by 5 (15%). The four consultative members who answered Q14 did not choose the shorter agenda, against 24 of 29 members.

Events and networks are the most frequent choices. For the link with practitioners, organising and communicating Bologna events between ministerial conferences that are open to practitioners leads (18 of 30; 60%), followed by identifying further thematic practitioner networks and involving them in working structures (14; 47%) and re-invigorating national Bologna expert teams (11; 37%). An EHEA communication strategy and digital platform (9; 30%) and the appointment of national practitioners alongside ministry representatives in delegations and groups (7; 23%) are chosen less often.

In the comments, Romania says that work remains on the link between the policy level and stakeholders, "not in terms of stakeholder organisations but of members of the academic community", and that the political commitment behind BFUG positions should be reinforced. Austria wants a more topic- and practitioner-driven approach and still has a national expert team that other countries might find interesting. Italy proposes that working structures be given incentives to organise open seminars and events for institutions not involved in them. The Belgium-Flemish Community relays stakeholder

calls for continuity between cycles (networks, continuous student involvement) and for continued use of the European Universities alliances as experimental spaces for Bologna.

Visibility is raised repeatedly. Hungary lists the visibility of the EHEA as a high-priority topic, the Commission underlines "visibility" in Q15a, the Belgium-Flemish Community relays calls for greater visibility of the BFUG, and Austria asks for more interesting ways of running the ministerial conferences. Visibility is thus raised in connection with the EHEA, the ministerial conferences, the BFUG and, in the Commission's proposal for a public state of play (Section 3.1), implementation status. This is in line with the support for events and networks in Q15.

3.7 Global policy dialogue and the Global Policy Forum (Q16–Q17)

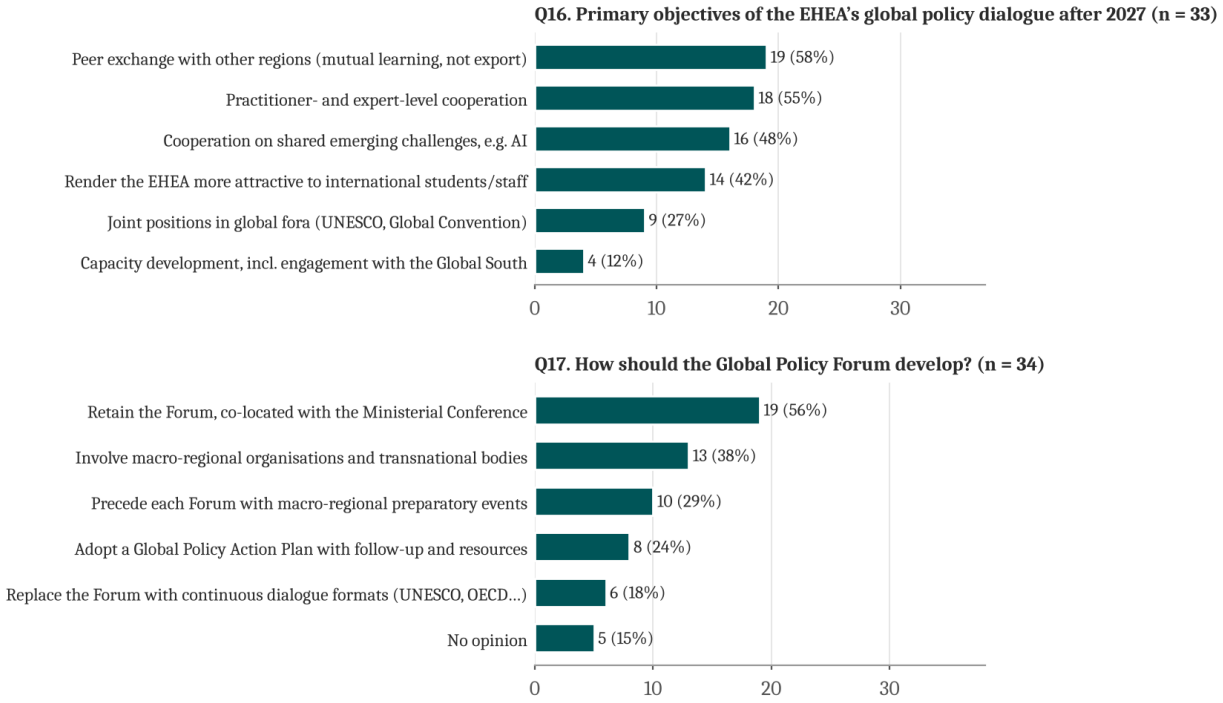


Figure 10. Results for Q16 (objectives of the global policy dialogue) and Q17 (development of the Global Policy Forum); multiple answers.

Mutual learning and practical cooperation. The leading objectives are peer exchange with other regional higher education spaces (19 of 33; 58%), and practitioner- and expert-level cooperation on recognition, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks (18 of 33; 55%). Cooperation on shared emerging challenges, in particular AI, follows (16; 48%), then making the EHEA more attractive to international students and staff (14; 42%). Joint positions in global fora (9; 27%) and capacity development including engagement with the Global South (4; 12%) rank last. ESU adds, under 'Other', support for students and scholars at risk seeking refuge in the EHEA.

The role of the Global Policy Forum. 19 of 34 (56%) would retain the Forum co-located with the Ministerial Conference; 6 of 34 (18%) would replace it with continuous dialogue formats. Of the ways to develop it, involving macro-regional organisations and transnational bodies, not only individual countries, is chosen most often (13; 38%), followed by macro-regional preparatory events (10; 29%) and a Global Policy Action Plan with follow-up and identified resources (8; 24%). Five have no opinion. Four of the five consultative members chose macro-regional involvement, against 9 of 29 members.

EUA noted that Q16 mixes methods (peer exchange), topics (AI) and objectives (attractiveness), which should be treated separately. The results for Q16 should be read with this in mind.

In the comments on the global dimension, Cyprus favours practical cooperation on recognition of qualifications, shared positions in global fora and making the EHEA an attractive and safe destination. Portugal calls for open, reciprocal engagement that promotes mutual learning, not the export of a single model. UNESCO asks for stronger peer exchange and capacity development with other regions, with a dedicated funding stream.

4. Cross-cutting analysis

4.1 Where respondents converge

Nine propositions are supported by roughly three quarters of respondents or more. Together they describe the core of the consensus.

Proposition	Support
Review and consolidate the stock of ministerial commitments	30 of 34 (88%)
Maintain the distinction between key commitments and other commitments	32 of 34 (94%)
Full implementation of the existing key commitments is a high priority for 2030–2040	31 of 35 (89%)
Internationalisation and mobility is a high priority	29 of 35 (83%)
Fundamental values are a high priority	27 of 33 (82%)
AI should have a named place in the 2027 Communiqué	28 of 34 (82%)
Focus BFUG meetings on a few strategic and policy questions	26 of 34 (76%)
AI as a high priority for the future	25 of 34 (74%)
A shorter, more decision-focused ministerial agenda	24 of 33 (73%)

Table 2. Propositions supported by roughly three quarters of respondents or more.

Close to this level are the rating of lifelong learning as a high priority (24 of 35; 69%).

4.2 Where respondents are divided

Issue	Distribution of answers
Designating additional key commitments	16 agree, 9 neither, 9 disagree (n = 34)
Quantitative targets to 2040	22 yes (16 aligned with existing indicators, 6 in selected areas), 9 no, 4 no opinion (n = 35)
National social-dimension targets monitored at EHEA level	8 yes, 16 no, 11 no opinion (n = 35)
How to strengthen national action plans	Four measures chosen by 12 to 15 of 34; no majority
Global engagement as a priority	10 high, 11 medium, 11 low (n = 34)
Breadth of the thematic agenda	19 of 32 rated as 'high' a topic that did not fall in the top six

Table 3. Issues on which respondents are divided.

5. Relation to the 2018 and 2019 BFUG consultations

This section compares the 2026 results with the two rounds of consultations held in 2018 and 2019.

5.1 The three rounds

	2018 online survey	2019 consultations	2026 survey
Timing	October 2018; reported to the BFUG in April 2019	Launched 28 June 2019; draft report 8 November 2019	October – November 2026
Responses	40 (32 members, 8 consultative)	39 (35 members, 3 consultative, 1 partner)	35 (30 members, 5 consultative)
Instrument	Online questionnaire of 13 questions	National and organisational consultations; methods varied by country	Online questionnaire of 18 questions
Focus	Priorities and governance after 2020	Vision and seven thematic priorities after 2020	Priorities for 2030–2040 and the 2027–2030 Work Programme

Table 5. The 2018, 2019 and 2026 consultation rounds.

5.2 What the comparison shows

Implementation remains the first priority. In 2018 respondents insisted that implementation of key commitments should always be seen as a priority in its own right, and the 2019 consultations echoed this. In 2026 the figures support the same message: full implementation of the key commitments is rated high priority by 89% and ranked first by 66%, and consolidation of the stock of commitments is supported by 88%.

The thematic agenda is largely stable, with some shifts in weight. The 2018 survey confirmed five of the six priorities it proposed, and the 2019 consultations upheld all seven key themes under discussion. The upper tier of 2026 comes from the same families of topics: internationalisation and mobility (83%), fundamental values (82%), AI (74%), lifelong learning (69%), learning and teaching (62%) and the social dimension (57%). The areas closest to two priorities confirmed in 2018, citizenship and the democratic mission (33%) and the EHEA–ERA interconnection (26%), are in the lower tier. The societal role of higher education, which includes the green transition raised in 2019 by four countries, has the lowest rating of the thirteen areas (21%). The designs differ (confirmation of six proposed priorities in 2018, rating of thirteen areas in 2026), so this indicates a direction rather than a measured change.

Fundamental values and AI have moved into the upper tier. Fundamental values were not on the 2018 list but came up among the free suggestions for additional topics, and AI appeared in 2019 as an early signal from Romania, France and the United Kingdom. In 2026 they are rated high by 82% and 74%, and 82% want AI named in the Communiqué.

Working-method proposals made in 2018 now have majority support. In 2018 respondents asked for fewer procedural discussions, a focus on a few strategic issues, small-group formats and closer links with practitioners (the question with the most detailed answers in that survey): thematic sessions open to practitioners, thematic networks, an e-community platform, re-invigorated Bologna expert teams and national practitioners in the working structures. The most frequent answer on governance in 2018 was cautious: answers favouring no substantial change, together with non-responses, slightly outnumbered those proposing change. In 2026, focusing the BFUG on a few strategic questions is chosen by 76%, events

between ministerial conferences open to practitioners by 60%, thematic practitioner networks by 47% and national expert teams by 37%.

Targets have majority support, subject to conditions. In 2018 about one respondent in two proposed no topic for quantitative 2030 goals or argued against setting them. The question was binary, EHEA-wide goals or none, and did not test national targets. Mobility, students from non-traditional backgrounds and teacher support were the areas named, with requests to coordinate targets with EU indicators. In 2026, 63% support targets, mostly aligned with existing EU or international indicators (16 of the 22), and mobility (18 of 22) and non-traditional students (13 of 22) are again the areas most often named. Teacher support, named in 2018, is chosen by 5 of 22, and quality assurance including transnational education, not named in 2018, by 11 of 22.

Overall assessment. The BFUG's answer to what the EHEA should do next has barely changed since 2018. The divisions of 2026 concern how to act: whether to add key commitments, how far to set targets and how to strengthen national action plans.

6. Conclusions

The 35 responses support the following conclusions:

1. **The consultation points to consolidation and delivery.** Key commitments are the first priority (31 of 35; 89% high; first for 66%), consolidation of the stock of commitments has very broad support (30 of 34; 88%) and the key-commitment model is accepted (32 of 34; 94%).
2. **The agenda is tiered.** Seven areas are rated high priority by a majority; six others are seen as relevant but not as priorities. In the ranking for the 2027–2030 Work Programme, one area leads (key commitments) and four others (lifelong learning, AI, internationalisation and mobility, fundamental values) form a second group, followed by the social dimension. Ratings and rankings diverge for several lower-tier areas.
3. **Instruments are the main open question.** A majority wants commitments to come with explicit implementation instruments. Opinions are divided on extending the key-commitment model and on quantitative targets.
4. **AI should be named, but its form remains open.** 28 of 34 (82%) want AI named in the Communiqué, and 18 of 34 (53%) want a dedicated instrument.
5. **Targets are acceptable if few and aligned.** 22 of 35 (63%) support quantitative targets, most of them aligned with existing EU or international indicators, and mobility is the area where targets are seen as most feasible.
6. **Follow-up should stay supportive and voluntary, and BFUG working methods leaner.** Peer support is the preferred follow-up (18; 53%); the BFUG should focus on strategic questions (26 of 34; 76%); ministers should have a shorter agenda (24 of 33; 73%); practitioner links should be built through events (18; 60%) and networks (14; 47%).
7. **The results continue the 2018–2019 consultations.** The substantive agenda and the diagnosis of how the Process works are stable; working-method proposals made in 2018 now have majority support; the new elements are the weight given to AI and the focus on instruments.

Additional questions that remain open

- Whether any commitment beyond the existing key commitments should be designated a key commitment.
- In what form quantitative targets could be taken forward: EHEA-wide, aligned with EU or international indicators, and limited to a small number of areas.
- What commitment and, if any, what instrument should accompany AI in the Communiqué.
- How the lower-tier areas that respondents value but do not rank, including the links with the ERA and VET and the societal role of higher education, should be handled within other policy areas.

Annex A. Respondents

BFUG members (30 responses)

No.	Respondent
1	Andorra
2	Austria
3	Azerbaijan
4	Belgium – Flemish Community
5	Bulgaria
6	Cyprus
7	Czech Republic
8	European Commission
9	Finland
10	Georgia
11	Germany
12	Greece
13	Hungary
14	Ireland
15	Italy
16	Kazakhstan
17	Liechtenstein
18	Lithuania
19	Luxembourg
20	Malta
21	Montenegro
22	Netherlands
23	North Macedonia
24	Portugal
25	Romania
26	Spain
27	Sweden
28	Switzerland
29	United Kingdom
30	United Kingdom – Scotland

Consultative members (5 responses)

No.	Respondent
1	ESU (European Students' Union)
2	ETUCE/EI (European Trade Union Committee for Education / Education International)
3	EUA (European University Association)
4	UNESCO
5	Consultative member that did not state its name

Annex B. Exploratory comparisons by respondent group

Comparison	EU Member States	Non-EU Member States
Key commitments ranked first (Q5)	17 of 19	4 of 10
Key commitments rated high (Q4)	18 of 19	7 of 10
Social dimension rated high (Q4)	12 of 19	3 of 10
EHEA-ERA rated high (Q4)	4 of 19	4 of 10
Q6.3 agree: designate additional key commitments	8 of 19	6 of 9
Q7 dedicated instrument for AI	12 of 19	4 of 9
Q8 yes to quantitative targets	13 of 19	5 of 10
Q10 yes to national social-dimension targets	6 of 19	0 of 10
Q13 focus BFUG meetings	15 of 19	7 of 9
Q13 stronger synergies among working groups	14 of 19	1 of 9
Q15 communication strategy and platform	3 of 17	5 of 9
Q16 cooperation on AI	7 of 18	6 of 9
Q16 practitioner-level cooperation	13 of 18	4 of 9