

Recommendations for BFUG members to encourage active involvement of the academic community in developing and addressing EHEA goals

April 2024

Disclaimer: *Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.*



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Recommendations and action points	5
1. Establish national implementation plans reflecting national priorities related to the Bologna Process (BP) reforms and tools.....	5
2. Consult with and use national Higher Education Bologna experts and consider establishing Bologna hubs.	17
3. Seek to identify appropriate resource for this purpose and stakeholders should be active in seeking funding opportunities.	21
4. A Coordination Group drawing on the experience of the Task Force should be established within the BFUG.....	23
5. Use diverse, contemporary, means of communication, such as those developed by the Task Force	24
Conclusions	29
Annexes.....	30
Annex 1: The Austrian BFUG structure	30
Annex 2: Knowledge Sharing within the ENIC-NARIC Networks	32
Annex 3: Bologna Professor Gala	35
Annex 4: Bologna Hub Peer Support projects.....	37
Annex 5: SPHERE Initiative	38
References	40

Acknowledgements

The co-chairs of the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community wish to thank the expert Elena Cirlan for writing the report and the members of the Task Force for their insightful discussions and feedback.

We also want to thank the co-chair Daniela Cristina Ghițulică for her leadership and coordination and John Reilly, Robert Wagenaar, Ann Katherine Isaacs and Alin Matei for their valuable contribution to the report.

Additional thanks go to the IN-GLOBAL project coordinator Vera Lucke for her continuous support and all individuals and organisations who dedicated time and effort by participating in the focus groups, consultations or responding to the survey.

Introduction

The Ministers responsible for higher education in the member countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) committed through the Rome Communiqué to build “a more closely connected and sustainable higher education community, which fosters inclusion, communication, cooperation, and solidarity, essential for the relevance and excellence of the future EHEA. To accomplish this, we commit to keeping our national higher education sectors informed about and involved in EHEA developments, and to working closely with student and higher education associations and networks on the development and implementation of national reforms. We recognize the importance of the broad consultations carried out to identify priorities for the future of the EHEA and ask the BFUG to organize EHEA events such as transnational seminars, workshops and hearings involving the wider higher education community (students, academic staff and external stakeholders), to discuss present and future goals and explore collaborative ways to address them.” (BFUG, 2020, p. 8).

There is a widespread concern that higher education (HE) stakeholders¹ and society at large are not sufficiently informed about the Bologna Process (BP), its structures, accomplishments and impact and that participation in the BP activities is reduced to particular stakeholder groups. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) created the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community (TF) to tackle this concern and take up the Ministers' commitment. Members of the TF are ten member countries of the EHEA, as well as five consultative members and the European Commission².

This document is developed in the framework of the TF with the support of the Erasmus+ project Enhancing Internal Knowledge and Global Dialogue of EHEA (IN-GLOBAL)³.

It proposes recommendations to address the above-mentioned concerns based on the knowledge and experience of TF members as well as:

- the results of a 2018 survey and 2019 consultations regarding the vision for the EHEA after 2020⁴,
- data from three focus groups with HE stakeholders,
- the results of the 2023 survey focussing on stakeholders' perception of the BP, and
- consultations with the BFUG members.

¹ For the purpose of this report, higher education stakeholders refers to government representatives, higher education institutions' staff (including HEIs management, academics, administrators), students, quality assurance agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres' staff, employers and other higher education actors.

² Albania, Belgium Flemish Community, Germany, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Romania, United Kingdom, Ukraine, EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), ESU (European Students' Union), EUA (European University Association), EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), ETUCE – EI (European Trade Union Committee for Education - Education International).

³ www.in-global.eu

⁴ <https://www.ehea.info/page-governance-thematic-priorities-after-2020>

The three focus groups gathered 30 participants from 26 EHEA countries⁵ to collect information about BP practices and activities, challenges that the EHEA countries encounter regarding BP collaboration, knowledge sharing and information dissemination.

Participants represented different HE stakeholders, governments, quality assurance (QA) agencies, ENIC⁶-NARIC⁷ centres, higher education institutions (HEI) and national student unions. The outcomes concur with the findings of the 2018 survey of BFUG members and consultative members, of the 2019 consultations, and the IN-GLOBAL survey, answered by 227 organisations representing stakeholders and 1703 individuals.

It is hoped that the recommendations will encourage and support active involvement of the academic community in sharing knowledge about the present and future goals of the EHEA and in exploring collaborative ways to reach them.

The Task Force recommends:

1. To promote greater, consistent engagement of higher education stakeholders with the BFUG working structures and activities, it would be helpful for member states to establish national implementation plans reflecting national priorities related to the Bologna Process (BP) reforms and tools.
2. To support effective implementation of the objectives to which members have agreed in the Communiqués they should consult with and use national Higher Education Bologna experts and consider establishing Bologna hubs.
3. To achieve the EHEA objectives adequate, sustainable resources are necessary. Member states should seek to identify, within their budgets, appropriate resources for this purpose, and stakeholders should be active in seeking funding opportunities.
4. To ensure continuity in information, knowledge sharing, development and effective implementation in the evolving Bologna process, a coordination group drawing on the experience of the Task Force should be established within the BFUG.
5. To widen and enhance knowledge, understanding, engagement with the EHEA and the Bologna Process diverse, contemporary, means of communication, such as those developed by the Task Force, should be exploited pervasively and consistently.

⁵ Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

⁶ European Network of Information Centres in the European Region

⁷ National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

Recommendations and action points

In the following chapters, data, context elements and action points for each recommendation are presented. These should be read as suggestions for possible actions to enhance knowledge sharing at the EHEA, regional and national levels which Members may choose, according to their context, needs and resources. Some actions refer to a stakeholder that should lead, others are relevant for all.

1. To promote greater, consistent engagement of higher education stakeholders with the BFUG working structures and activities, it would be helpful for member states to establish national implementation plans reflecting national priorities related to the Bologna Process (BP) reforms and tools.

Based on its discussions, forum meetings with stakeholders, and a detailed survey, the TF concluded that in many countries, there seems to be a lack of a coordinated approach for the implementation and communication of the BP commitments. This suggests that, in these cases, there are no effective implementation plans which involve all national/regional HE stakeholders. The dynamic and far-reaching nature of the ongoing reforms proposed by Ministers means that in all countries there is a need for active developmental implementation of change.

For these reasons, the TF recommends that following each Communiqué, it would be helpful for member states to establish Bologna implementation plans. Such plans should seek to engage all relevant stakeholders. While the Task Force does not think it appropriate to be prescriptive it suggests that, as far as possible, plans should be action based and include quality monitoring and data collection. The TF envisages that Bologna information would be an aspect of the normal standard data capture process.

Having reliable data is an essential indicator of successful policy implementation and helps to identify areas which require further attention. This could be reflected in periodic national implementation reports. In countries where the main coordinating body for BP-related activities is the ministry of education, it is reasonable for it to facilitate consultations with the HE stakeholders to set the national priorities and compile the national implementation plan. In other countries, this role could be fulfilled by other designated bodies. responsible for coordinating the activities related to the BP policies, reforms, information dissemination and exchange. Austria represents an example of good practice in publishing data based National EHEA Implementation Reports before each BP Ministerial Conference. They inform the HE community and the public about the targets, indicators and status of implementation in Austria. A description of the Austrian BFUG structures and knowledge sharing and coordination activities is provided in *Annex 1*.

Role of different organisations

The TF recognises that all countries have to accommodate competing claims on resources and that in this context the implementation of the BP recommendations competes with other demands. However, because Ministers have approved the proposals and they constitute the agenda for ongoing enhancement and reform, the TF considers that the task will be facilitated if the recommendations are integrated in an implementation plan which correlates with and reinforces national objectives.

To help in the production of the plans and to secure wide support the TF urges national authorities to utilise and benefit from the depth of knowledge and experience of its HE stakeholders. The following section considers each of the key stakeholders, their experience and their potential contribution to a coordinated implementation strategy.

HE stakeholders have rich experience and knowledge of BP commitments which should be used in preparing and executing a national implementation plan. This chapter reviews the main stakeholder organisations and the nature and impact of their engagement in the BP. It identifies good practice examples, it suggests how the roles stakeholders their activities and engagement might be strengthened.

✓ Bologna Follow-up Group

The BFUG⁸ is the executive structure overseeing the PB. It has been in place since autumn 1999. It is entrusted with preparing the Ministerial Conferences, policy forums and overseeing the BP between these. It also takes forward matters that do not need to be decided by the Ministers or that have been delegated by the Ministers. The BFUG plays an essential role in implementation of the Ministerial Communiqués and developing the EHEA.

More than half of the individual respondents to the survey on stakeholders' perception of the BP did not know about the EHEA-level governing structure, nor were 18% of national and European organisations in the sector familiar with it.

The 2019 online consultation with BFUG members and consultative members, which investigated possible changes to the working methods and structures of the BFUG post-2020, indicated that greater involvement of stakeholders, researchers and practitioners in the BFUG working structures and in meetings, seminars and consultations should be ensured (BFUG, 2019a). To strengthen the connection with HE practitioners and their contribution to the BP discussions, the 2018 survey respondents suggested organising parallel sessions in the BFUG meetings with practitioners to discuss in-depth specific thematic issues; to include in the BFUG working methods regular expert consultations with practitioners; to consider creating thematic practitioner networks for specific topics; to organise online/virtual meetings to increase opportunities for discussion (BFUG, 2019a).

Besides the Ministerial Conferences, a few events are organised as part of the BFUG and its work structures. The 2018 survey respondents indicated a need for greater involvement of stakeholders, researchers and practitioners in the BP-related events. Most favoured organising more Bologna events at EHEA and national levels. These views are endorsed by the TF members.

According to the 2023 survey on stakeholders' perception of the BP, "conferences, workshops, training" are by a large margin the best-known activity/channel for individuals and organisational respondents.

The formats suggested for these events are primarily practically oriented workshops, seminars, peer-learning activities, virtual conferences focused on the priorities that emerge from the Ministerial Communiqués and the BFUG workplan (BFUG, 2019a).

⁸ <https://ehea.info/page-the-bologna-follow-up-group>

It has been suggested that events and seminars labelled as “Bologna”, aimed at facilitating exchange between the BFUG and the HE sector should be organised. A possible model is a series of Bologna one or half-day seminars over a period of time, organised thematically and by stakeholder groups. Respondents showed a clear interest in local as well as Europe-wide workshops, trainings and conferences for practitioners, peer-learning activities and staff exchange/mobility opportunities.

Data from the focus groups show that peer-learning activities are beneficial for exchanging information and knowledge, for brainstorming different topics, challenges and possible solutions. Peer learning is helpful to inform policy development and to conduct deep discussions about the practices employed by different actors. The respondents to the 2018 survey confirmed the usefulness of peer-learning activities and suggested that there should be more peer-learning activities in the BFUG working structures (BFUG, 2019a). This was echoed by responses to the 2019 consultations that indicated that more peer-learning activities and sharing of best practice among HEIs and academics is needed (BFUG, 2019b).

Some respondents to the 2023 survey pointed out a relatively low participation in peer learning activities from certain countries possibly due to expensive travel costs. It was suggested that there should be more online peer-learning activities to tackle this issue, but careful attention should be given to how these are organised.

Staff exchange is a good tool for exchanging practices and information. In the Bologna Thematic Peer Groups (TPG) a staff exchange scheme allows site visits between the group members. This provides an excellent opportunity to discuss specific topics and exchange information about initiatives and practices developed in different countries.

Considering all the working structures of the BFUG⁹, it is evident that communication among these and with national HE stakeholders is essential to capture relevant views on specific topics. To ensure that the BP succeeds in its initiatives, a well-informed HE community and active participation and contribution of the HE stakeholders in the policy-making process is essential. This would instil ownership and responsibility for policy implementation.

The 2023 survey on stakeholders’ perception of the BP shows that less than half of the respondents (46%) consider that information about the BP and EHEA concepts, policies and tools is at least “about sufficient” or “more than enough”. A large number of respondents (34%) consider the information is only “somewhat sufficient”, or even “insufficient”.

Individual respondents – predominantly students and academics – are less satisfied than organisational respondents: 11% consider information “insufficient”, and 21% “did not know” what to answer. These results indicate that there is a need for intensive efforts to improve access to and understanding of information about the BP and the EHEA. It has been suggested that easy-to-read material about the history of the process and its objectives and stories by people who have been involved in the BP may help inform and engage HE stakeholders.

⁹ <https://www.ehea.info/page-work-plan-2018-2020>

It has been suggested that to improve and ensure wider and better understanding of the BP policies, commitments and reforms in the Ministerial Communiqués by the HE community and society at large these they should be officially translated by each BFUG member country with due regard to accurate representation of terminology and concepts. These official translations could be made available on the EHEA website for further dissemination. To ensure that the messages of the Ministerial Communiqués are understood by a wider audience, online information sessions could be considered and recordings posted on the EHEA website.

A topic discussed by the TF members and in the focus groups, mentioned by many of the 2018 survey respondents, relates to the BFUG meeting documents. The BFUG Rules of Procedure 2021-2024 indicate that “the BFUG meeting documents should be circulated by the BFUG Secretariat 15 days prior to the meeting, after being discussed in the BFUG Board once prepared by the Chairs of the BFUG and by the BFUG Working Groups or other sub-structures” (p. 8). However, it has been strongly recommended that the documents for the BFUG meetings be made available with more than two weeks in advance of the BFUG meetings to allow enough time for wider consultations with stakeholders at the national level, at least before the approval of final versions.

✓ E4 group and other BFUG consultative members

The E4 Group, that consists of stakeholder organisations representing quality assurance agencies (ENQA)¹⁰, universities (EUA)¹¹, professional higher education institutions (EURASHE)¹² and students (ESU)¹³ contributes to Bologna process reforms and tools. It plays a pivotal role in providing information to members and the public by *translating* policies into practice, in representing their constituencies and advocating for their interests at EU and EHEA policy levels. They organise events, create opportunities for HE stakeholders to share best practice, participate in projects, working and thematic groups. They consult their members, conducting studies on HE-related topics, which inform and feed into policy discussions at the EU and EHEA levels. The E4 organisations collaborate, exchange information and organise joint events such as the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF). They use various communication channels and tools, newsletters, mailings, websites, and social media, to reach their members and the wider public.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)¹⁴ is a consultative member of the BFUG. It is a federation of 127 education trade unions in 51 countries, representing 11 million members all over Europe. It is the social partner for teachers and other education personnel at the European level and a defender of their interests. ETUCE is the regional structure of Education International (EI) in the European region, and facilitates the sharing of knowledge between its member organisations and helps coordinate policies. Education trade unions have a crucial role in social dialogue, collective bargaining, information sharing, communication, consultation, and most importantly, ensuring the rights of their members and making the teaching profession attractive. ETUCE and its member organisations use multiple

¹⁰ <https://www.engq.eu/>

¹¹ <https://eua.eu/>

¹² <https://www.eurashe.eu/>

¹³ <https://esu-online.org/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ei-ie.org/en>

communication channels and tools. At the European level, ETUCE has also peer learning activities with the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE).

As described above, these organisations contribute greatly to knowledge and information sharing and dissemination. The TF encourages them to continue these efforts in representing and informing the HE community and involve it in activities.

Other consultative members¹⁵ are the Council of Europe, UNESCO and BUSINESSEUROPE.

✓ **Ministries and other bodies with responsibility for disseminating BP information**

There are various approaches to coordinating and organising activities and disseminating information about the BP in the EHEA countries. The responsibility is determined by national structures.

The 2023 survey on the stakeholders' perception on the BP shows that, in most countries, the organisation responsible for disseminating information about the BP activities, policies and reforms is the ministry of education (25 countries) or a national agency (6 countries). Similarly, the primary responsibility for the promotion of the HE system internationally is, in most of the cases, the ministry of education (17 countries) or a national agency (14 countries). These findings concur with the testimonies of the focus group participants that the ministry of education is the main coordinating body that disseminates information and organises activities. Several participants of the focus groups shared the good practice of having contact points dedicated to BP at their ministry. These facilitate direct communication with stakeholders and provide support in implementing the EHEA priorities.

The National Agency Erasmus+ Education at the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD) has two main responsibilities: to offer information tailored to specific groups and to organise events and consultations for educational institutions interested in the development and implementation of Bologna targets. The Austrian Bologna Service Point at the OeAD "operates as the independent, cross-sector advisory and information point for the entire Austrian HE sector. It organises events, facilitates networking and maintains know-how and organisational expertise related to Bologna initiatives." (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, p. 64) (see *Annex 1*). Such bodies exist in Poland, Sweden, Ukraine and Kazakhstan but operate on a smaller scale and have fewer responsibilities.

According to participants in the focus groups, in several countries there is no dedicated BP organisation. While the ministry of education coordinates and organises events, there is no space to discuss and exchange on specific issues in a meaningful manner with relevant representatives. In these cases, the Ministry of Education could consider establishing a dedicated body or unit at the ministry or mandating an existing organisation to develop the national/regional implementation plan, coordinate and organise activities related to BP, and ensure continuous dissemination of information.

Several participants in the focus groups pointed out that political instability, which results in continuous amendments in the legislative framework and changes in the implementation strategies and priorities presents a big challenge.

¹⁵ <https://www.ehea.info/page-consultive-members>

In federal countries, the implementation of the BP goals involves a complex political landscape where each territorial structure has authority for HE. This was reported to be the case in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When new policies or tools are developed internationally, these are typically disseminated and discussed at conferences, often organised by national agencies or university associations. Similar activities are organised by the ministries of education in Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary and Slovakia. Participants in the focus groups pointed out that little attention is given to the BP, which is seen as less relevant in countries where the main Bologna reforms were implemented long ago.

According to the data collected, it seems that national meetings with HE stakeholders, where HE issues, including the BP, are discussed, are convened either on a regular and/or on an ad hoc basis, depending on the need. In some instances, the BP sets the agenda for the HE events at the national level. Focus group participants pointed to events organised at the national level. For example, in the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports conducts activities like the *College Days of Education Policy*, where strategic discussions related to the BP topics take place. These examples suggest that a national implementation plan might benefit from a related activities and events programme.

National consultations regarding the implementation of the BP commitments, the needs of stakeholders, their views on the future of the HE and other aspects have been conducted in EHEA countries. These are coordinated by bodies with a role in the HE such as the ministry responsible for education, QA agencies, ENIC-NARIC centres, NRCs, university associations, and student unions. The consultations have been conducted using emails, online questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus groups or other forms. Some countries conduct regular surveys dedicated to HE stakeholders to gather information on specific topics and stakeholders' needs. This data could be included in the national Implementation Reports.

According to the 2023 survey on BP stakeholders' perception, organisational respondents generally feel adequately consulted in their national structures, while individuals feel less so. It is remarkable that many individual respondents are not able to say whether they are adequately consulted; in the case of students, nearly 50% responded in this way.

There is a broad consensus that when a consultation requires the views of the sector, all relevant stakeholders should be involved. This, obvious rule, is not always followed. In the consultation on "The Future of the EHEA" conducted in 2019 to provide information about the ideas of the HE stakeholders, some countries only consulted ministerial personnel (TF, 2023).

Ministries of education coordinate and appoint the national BFUG members who play an important role in ensuring a two-way communication between the BFUG and national stakeholders. They are seen as the primary conduit for the national conclusions to reach the BP discussions and vice versa.

However, the focus group discussions revealed that in many cases, policy debates at the EHEA level take place in a vacuum. The conclusions may not even reach practitioners and students as this depends on national structures and context.

In many EHEA countries the link between the national BFUG members and the national HE stakeholders is not strong, consequently information on the discussions and decisions at EHEA level does not reach practitioners. Some 2018 survey respondents recommended that BFUG members maintain closer relations with their ministers/organisation leaders and that they should have a clearer mandate to take positions. Another suggestion was to appoint two national BFUG members: a ministry representative and a national HE expert, thus ensuring that practitioners' views are considered in the BFUG structures and national discussions (BFUG, 2019a).

The focus group discussions revealed another challenge: the frequent change of national BFUG members, leading to loss of 'historical memory' and the link with stakeholders. Often, less experienced member country representatives lack information about how the BFUG operates. It is not easy to grasp the complexity and dynamics of the process and this hinders active participation in BFUG discussion

✓ QA agencies

The development of the national QA systems has been an extraordinary phenomenon in the BP with HE systems agreeing that independent QA is necessary to ensure accountability, support enhancement, and follow the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) (Eurydice, 2020, p. 73). QA agencies play an important role in information dissemination and organisation of BP related activities. The focus group participants, especially students and HEI representatives, confirmed that the agencies act as bridges between stakeholders. It is likely that the mandatory inclusion stakeholders in their activities means they are in close, continuous contact with HEIs, national student unions and employers. They collaborate closely with governments as they normally participate in numerous discussions and initiatives. For these reasons national QA agencies should be included in the discussions about national implementation plan.

The ESG standard 2.4 for external quality assurance in HE refers to peer-review experts. It requires that quality assurance be carried out by external experts that include (a) student member(s).

The guidelines, specify that "at the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners." And that "the involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable" (ESG, 2015, p. 19). This practice has proven to be valuable for institutions, QA agencies and the experts as they learn about and disseminate new good practice.

The survey conducted as part of the QA-FIT project¹⁶ showed that besides being an external QA body, most agencies fulfil other functions: provide information and guidance (88%), do research and analyses (at regional and/or national level) (70%), propose policies and laws for

¹⁶ <https://www.enqa.eu/projects/quality-assurance-fit-for-the-future-ga-fit/>

quality assurance of HE (at regional and/or national level) (61%), and collect data (at regional and/or national level) (53%) (ENQA forthcoming publication, 2023).

QA agencies organise events for stakeholders. In Armenia, the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation organises the annual *Education Quality Weeks* for all HE stakeholders, including students, academic and administrative staff, and international experts. They provide an opportunity to share views, discuss developments, projects, trends and good practice in QA. Topics linked to QA, such as accreditation, recognition, and qualifications frameworks, are addressed. Other agency representatives shared information about the events which they organise and meetings with HEIs quality assurance officers in which they discuss BP-related issues. They agreed that some of these discussions are at a theoretical level and that there is a need for academic and administrative staff to be more engaged in discussion at the meta-level and their practical impact.

Agencies collaborate internationally and transnationally. In Kazakhstan, the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating collaborates fruitfully with the agencies from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, organising events on topics related to BP. In Spain, the agencies have diverse competencies. Smaller meetings and focus groups are held among agencies working on the same HE areas/topics to share experiences.

QA agencies organise events related to the BP. In Latvia, the Academic Information Centre organises an information seminar at least once a year with representatives from HEIs, student organisations, ministry, and employers' unions. Additional meetings are held separately with different stakeholders.

✓ ENIC-NARIC centres

ENIC-NARIC centres have an important role providing and disseminating information, as described in *Annex 2*.

According to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), the National information centre facilitates access to authoritative, accurate information on the higher education system and qualifications of the country in which it is located; facilitates access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of other countries; gives advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations (Council of Europe, 1997).

ENIC-NARIC centres contribute to policy discussions and national legislation and should be included in discussion and activities related to the national implementation plan. In Turkey, the centre gathers information from students and stakeholders for a report to the Council for HE and this feeds into the HE legislative decision-making process.

Focus group participants said that the ENIC-NARIC centres cooperate with the national QA agency on specific topics, but this cooperation is limited. It was suggested that QA agencies and the ENIC-NARIC centres should communicate and collaborate more on topics of mutual interest, invite each other to events, organise joint events, conduct joint research and consultations. Information sharing between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres should be improved to identify common challenges and solutions. In countries where the agency and the centre are under one 'roof', the flow of information is smoother.

The centres could have an essential role in training HEIs' recognition experts and raising awareness of all recognition-related policies and discussions. However, HEI participants said that communication between ENIC-NARIC centres and recognition practitioners, is challenging. There is considerable turnover of HEI practitioners who may not work in a department dedicated to recognition so that there is no direct connection. It was agreed that the link between the national centres and HEI recognition practitioners needs to be stronger.

The discussion indicated that the ENIC-NARIC centres should be more involved in the national and international HE discussions to ensure that policy decisions on recognition are well informed.

The ENIC-NARIC Networks use the peer review model as a quality assurance instrument for the ENIC-NARIC networks based on the criteria of the LRC to improve compliance with the LRC. These reviews are funded and conducted as part of a project. Over half the ENIC-NARIC centres have participated in these projects (ENIC-NARIC Networks, 2023). The focus group discussions revealed that this activity is a valuable instrument for learning how the other centres are structured, their recognition processes and procedures, challenges and gaps and how to tackle them.

✓ National Unions of Students (NUS)

Students' involvement on the BP varies from country to country. Due to the ESG and national QA systems, student participation in HEIs' governing structures, internal and external QA, programme and curriculum development and national policy discussions has become more of a reality. Student input and feedback are considered essential for programme development and education. However, in some countries, students are not systematically involved in discussions related to the implementation of BP.

Focus group participants reported that national student representative bodies take the initiative and make proposals, consult students on issues and report on the results.

However, this often leads to no effective change. Students are still not considered equal stakeholders in the HE decision-making process and are frequently not involved in relevant discussion.

National student unions organise events and working groups, participate in international projects and debates with students and other actors engaging the student body in activities related to the BP. An innovative example from The National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania is described in *Annex 3*.

Student Unions facilitate conversations with students in HEIs, to explain reforms and gather input.

The TF suggests that students should be involved in the discussion about the national implementation plan. Data the NUS gather should be considered and included in the national Implementation Report as well as in determining national HE priorities.

✓ HEIs and NRC

HEI representatives are involved in policy discussions at national and international levels. However, the level of involvement differs greatly. Some respondents to the 2019 consultations

reported that the current structures rely on top-down approaches with HEIs' involvement varying from country to country. Better communication between governments and HEIs is needed as they have valuable experience and are in the best position to face future challenges of the EHEA (BFUG, 2019b). An opinion shared by some participants in the focus groups is that there is a big gap between ministry and HEIs perceptions of the EHEA tools and policies. The latter often perceive them as an imposition rather than added value. This is primarily due to the lack of participation of HEI stakeholders in the policy discussions. An important question is which HEI actors are involved, in most cases, only the HEI management is involved.

Ensuring smooth, direct communication between the ministry and different levels of the institutions' hierarchy is not straightforward. It depends on the number of institutions in a system and the existence and engagement of structures such as National Rectors' Conferences (NRCs) and national university associations. The discussions in the focus groups revealed that information shared with the umbrella organisations does not always reach all HEIs.

Generally, NRCs and national university associations play an essential role in information dissemination among institutions. The Irish Universities Association (IUA) represents 8 universities and plays a critical role in the dissemination of information about the BP. It coordinates and participates in projects but not always related directly to BP.

Some participants in the focus groups pointed to the challenge of motivating HEI staff to participate in national debates, activities and trainings. It is equally challenging to motivate them to apply changes in line with the BP priorities. It was suggested that participation in discussions, events, projects and peer-learning activities (national and international) would help motivate them. Academics, researchers and administrators should be directly involved in the discussions about the national HE priorities and in developing the implementation plan.

Some participants said that the internal and external QA procedures help lead colleagues and international peers to discuss good practice, challenges and solutions. Internal quality assurance evaluations play a significant role in knowledge sharing assessing progress, and alignment with BP goals.

HEIs employ a variety of successful practices for internal knowledge and information sharing in the context of the BP. Among these are seminars and information sessions about the BP and its impact; regular meetings with stakeholders, including employers and students, which ensure continuous communication and feedback; and internal discussions about a wide range of topics, including QA and updates from the ministry.

HEIs act as information and knowledge hubs in local/regional/national development. They organise events with the participation of local, national and international experts.

Information sharing within institutions and among academics varies from institution to institution and dissemination tends to be topic-specific, addressing the needs of specific groups or individuals responsible for areas, like mobility or accreditation.

Institutions organise practice-oriented meetings but these are not held regularly, their frequency depends on project funding. Projects related to teaching and learning and QA provide training opportunities, although these initiatives are not regular but project-dependent.

Collaboration between institutions at national and international level through European and global platforms such as European University Association¹⁷, International Association of Universities¹⁸, and the Global University Associations Forum¹⁹, projects, internationalisation activities, mobility programmes, and university alliances contribute to information exchange and peer learning.

Key action points

✓ BFUG

- Be generally more pro-active in engaging the wider academic community on a consistent basis in the work of the BFUG.
- Organise online information sessions about the Ministerial Communiqué.
- Organise parallel sessions in the BFUG meetings with practitioners to discuss thematic issues in depth.
- Include regular, consistent expert consultations with practitioners in the BFUG working methods and consider creating thematic networks.
- Organise online/virtual meetings/peer-learning activities to increase opportunities for discussion, enhance participation of different countries and create more space for peer-learning in the BFUG work structures.
- Organise events labelled as Bologna events or seminars to facilitate exchange between BFUG and the HE sector.
- To allow enough time for wider consultation with stakeholders at national level, ensure that the final versions of policy documents are made available more than two weeks in advance the BFUG meetings where these will be approved.
- Create easy-to-read material explaining the history and objectives of the BP, containing core information about the BFUG working structures and the decision-making process.

✓ E4 group and other BFUG consultative members

- The E4 group and other BFUG consultative members to continue their efforts in representing and informing the HE community and involve it in activities.

✓ Ministries

- The coordinating body (ministry of education or other national organisation) to facilitate consultations and organise meetings with the HE stakeholders to set the national priorities and involve them in drafting the national implementation plan.
- Consider establishing a dedicated unit at the ministry or mandate an organisation to lead the development of the national implementation plan, to coordinate and organise activities related to BP and ensure continuous dissemination of information.
- The national coordinating body(ies) to organise regular and ad hoc meetings, events and consultations with all the HE stakeholders, including practitioners, creating space for more profound and meaningful discussion.
- Develop a National Bologna Process Implementation Report which would include relevant data gathered by HE stakeholders.
- Translate the Ministerial Communiqués, in their language to improve understanding.

¹⁷ <https://eua.eu/>

¹⁸ <https://www.iau-aiu.net/>

¹⁹ <https://eua.eu/resources/projects/838-the-global-university-associations-forum-%E2%80%93-guaf.html>

- Ensure continuous communication between governments and HEIs. Expand direct communication between the ministry and different levels of HEIs' hierarchy, to use all HEIs' valuable experience.
 - Ensure that the national BFUG members communicate/report BFUG discussions to stakeholder representatives and the ministry;
 - Ensure communication and information exchange among the national representatives in BFUG working structures to exchange updates from their respective structures and harmonise their positions.
 - Empower the national BFUG members with a clear mandate.
 - Consider appointing two national BFUG members: a ministry representative and a national HE expert, guaranteeing that practitioners' view is captured in the BFUG and national discussion.
- ✓ **QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres**
- QA agencies and the ENIC-NARIC centres should continue to provide valuable BP knowledge resources for HE stakeholders and society.
 - QA agencies and the ENIC-NARIC centres should communicate and collaborate more to find common ground on topics of mutual interest. Their collaboration could include inviting each other to events, organising joint events, and conducting joint research and consultations.
 - QA agencies should organise discussions with HEIs' QA practitioners not only on theoretical but also practical levels.
 - ENIC-NARIC centres and HEIs should strengthen the link between the centres and HEIs' recognition practitioners.
 - Consider the possibility of the ENIC-NARIC centre training HEIs' recognition experts and raising awareness of all recognition-related matters.
- ✓ **NUS**
- Continue organising events.
 - Set-up working groups, conducting studies, debates and consultations related to the BP and students' perceptions of the BP.
 - Participating in international projects.
 - Engaging the student body in activities related to the BP.
- ✓ **HEIs**
- Ensure good wide information sharing within the institution.
 - Continue initiating and organising activities related to BP knowledge and information sharing.
 - Organise regular BP practice-oriented meetings involving academic staff and other HE representatives.
- ✓ **All HE stakeholders**
- Collaboration between the academic community, government and ENIC-NARIC centre and QA agencies should be strengthened.
 - Involve students systematically in discussions related to the BP implementation.
 - Consider students as equal stakeholders in the HE decision-making process.
 - Consider organising practically oriented Bologna events at EHEA and national levels and ensure significant involvement of stakeholders, researchers, practitioners in the BP-related events.
 - Participate in and conduct consultations whenever relevant, using tools such as emails, online-questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus groups or other forms; when the consultation requires the view of the whole sector, all relevant stakeholders should be involved.

- Use the peer review model to enhance the exchange of knowledge and experience among various actors.
- Participate in events, activities, consultations organised by the E4 and other relevant organisations.
- Subscribe to E4 and other relevant organisations' Newsletters and follow their websites for news and publications.

2. To support effective implementation of the objectives to which members have agreed in the communiqués they should consult with and use national Higher Education Bologna experts and consider establishing Bologna hubs.

The surveys and reports documented in this paper reveal that although the BP can demonstrate considerable success there are serious areas of concern relating to the permeability and unevenness of knowledge, understanding and implementation, which must be addressed if the process and the communiqués are not to become paper rhetoric. For the successful future of European higher education, a more constructive, proactive approach to consistent quality assured implementation is essential.

In 2004, the European Commission set up National Teams of Bologna Promoters in the European Union (EU), EEA countries and the EU candidate countries. Later these were called Bologna experts. The initiative was discontinued in 2015. The TF members, the focus groups participants and respondents of the 2023 survey agreed that the Bologna expert teams worked very well and had a strong impact on the BP implementation by sharing their knowledge and expertise with stakeholders. The need to continue this initiative is widespread.

These findings are echoed by the 2019 consultations, which showed that this initiative was widely approved. Some countries and organisations suggested that the Bologna expert teams should be re-activated to ensure dissemination of information about the BP and its work and peer-learning activities at regional and national levels (BFUG, 2019b). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the work of the national Bologna expert teams could be financed through Erasmus+ projects and that guidance for re-activating this initiative and collaboration with existing Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) would be beneficial.

The Bologna experts worked at national and EU levels and collaborated with experts from non-Erasmus countries, such as the HEREs. This exchange contributed significantly to the HE reforms and development and offered opportunities for training and peer learning.

Countries, such as the Netherlands, retained the model of Bologna experts and are currently continuing it. In Austria, there is a Bologna coordinator in each HEI. They meet once or twice a year and report to the national BFUG, strengthening the link between HEIs, ministry and BFUG. There are national EHEA experts, formally referred to as the Bologna experts, representing all 4 HE sectors. They conduct on-site consultation visits at HEIs. These are free of charge because they are funded through a project. During a visit, the experts provide informational assistance in the implementation and further development of the HEIs' own prioritised Bologna goals (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, p. 71) (*see Annex 1*). This represents a good practice of a peer-to-peer activity that allows for practice-oriented discussions regarding the BP implementation.

The TF is proposing that each EHEA member state establish a team of experts on a consultative basis according to criteria proposed below and specific country priorities and needs. The experts would constitute an international network of Bologna/EHEA experts meeting virtually every four months and, depending on the availability of resources, in person once a year. Experts would join appropriate thematic networks which might be broadly subject-oriented or focused on the implementation of specific Bologna instruments. The experts will be a national and international resource assisting the EHEA process. Their work will be supported by a BFUG Coordination Group.²⁰

To reactivate the national Bologna expert teams, it is necessary to identify the organisation that would coordinate and support the teams and develop a process for setting up the teams. The process should be transparent and include a call for nominations and selection criteria such as sound knowledge and experience of the Higher Education system in their country, good knowledge and understanding of the Bologna process, the objectives and values of the EHEA and best practices in the application of the approved instruments (EHEA tools). They should represent a variety of subjects and type/size of HEI. Each team should seek to have a gender balance. Student members will be selected by the country's relevant student body on criteria similar to those above. Each country will determine the number of experts for each team to provide a diversity of disciplines and types of institutions.

Each team member should be willing and able to devote a minimum number of days each year to national and international activities as a Bologna expert.

The objectives of the Bologna experts should inter alia be:

- to spread knowledge and understanding of the EHEA objectives and tools
- to assist, monitor, enhance, meaningful implementation of the EHEA objectives
- to liaise with and support Ministries and other stakeholders
- to train trainers in HEIs to be a Bologna oriented institutional resource
- to provide mentoring support
- to promote best practice
- to engage in peer-to-peer learning
- to participate in the international and thematic networks.

The national teams and the international network will draw on the experience and outcomes of projects such as those managed by the DAAD (<https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/project>) – Annex 4, and the EUA (e.g. SPHERE/HERE project (<https://eua.eu/resources/projects/584-here.html>)) - Annex 5, but will represent a broader more inclusive community. They should also be informed with the activities and outcomes of the proposed BFUG Coordination group work.

The coordinating organisation should organise regular meetings of experts, share relevant information and materials, including those prepared at the EHEA level, and inform about and invite to relevant events and activities.

²⁰ The Coordination Group will make use of preparatory work done by the current Task Force on Enhancing knowledge sharing in the EHEA. Its formation is subject to approval by the BFUG.

The national experts should be part of an international, EHEA network that would allow for training, exchange of information and experience through meetings, events and seminars organised in person and online. These activities would create an international knowledge base which would subsequently feed into further EHEA development.

To make optimum use of experts' time and support the green agenda, full use will be made of online meetings. However, it will be essential to have physical local, regional, national and international meetings to strengthen the network, exchange best practices, address issues relating to inclusion, innovation, interconnectivity, sustainability and build mutual support, trust and solidarity.

Experts should be available to provide support online and through in-person visits, with the object of establishing Bologna informed, resource, personnel at an institutional level according to successful models in Austria and the Netherlands. Consequently, it is essential to secure sustainable funding for staff activities.

To complement their knowledge and experience of change implementation in individual HEIs and ensure that the objectives are achieved, the Bologna expert teams will need adequate resources: information, materials, funds for travel and staff time, reports of BFUG working groups and other relevant papers to enhance their knowledge and understanding about the process. Materials would include short videos, training material, information/explanatory notes, power point presentations - emanating inter alia from the TF and the proposed BFUG Coordination Group. These materials will be tailored by the experts to their needs. The teams and individual experts will generate further materials and presentations through their work and collect and disseminate good practice examples.

Noting the coherence of these proposals with the Erasmus+ sector-specific priorities in higher education, supporting and facilitating transnational and international cooperation and implementation of Bologna policies and tools, the TF recommends that Bologna expert activities should be included within Erasmus + calls dedicated to the realisation of the Bologna objectives.

According to the 2023 survey, 'Bologna hubs' are the least known and used communication tool/channel: only 10% of respondents were familiar with them, the lowest rate of all instruments. There are currently different types of national fora comprising representatives of HE stakeholders. In Norway, before each BFUG meeting, the Ministry of Education and Research convenes what could be considered a national board of the BFUG. It consists of representatives of the QA agency, recognition body, student and university organisations, HEIs, and other relevant HE stakeholders. This makes it possible to discuss the topics that will be addressed at the BFUG meeting. A similar meeting is held on the initiative of the ministry whenever new issues concerning the BP come up (e.g., when new terms need to be clarified or important changes need to be discussed). In Austria, there is a well-established national EHEA/Bologna network that has been active for the last 15 years. In France, the national BFUG members, the representatives engaged in BFUG working structures, which represent government officials, QA agencies, HEIs, and other stakeholders, convene 2-3 times a year at the Ministry of Education's initiative to synchronise efforts and exchange updates from their

respective structures. There are similar structures in Sweden - the Swedish National Bologna Reference Group and the UK - the UK's Bologna Stakeholders Group.

The TF suggests that 'Bologna hubs' could be established at national and HEI levels to include students, academics, researchers, HEI management and administrative staff, national authorities, Bologna expert teams and HEREs.

Through the activities of such hubs, participants could:

- share information,
- debate the objectives of the BP, the implementation of its commitments at national and HEIs levels,
- determine common actions and propose recommendations for the EHEA member country.

Being part of such a hub will empower the national-level HE stakeholders through support and guidance from the HE education authority and other relevant experts, institutions and organisations.

Key action points

- Identify the organisation to coordinate and support the Bologna experts team and develop a process for setting up the teams, organise regular meetings of the experts, share information and materials, including those prepared at the EHEA level, and inform about and invite to relevant events and activities.
- The relevant student body(ies) to select the student members.
- With the support of a BFUG Coordination Group, establish an international, EHEA network for training, exchange of information and experience through meetings, events and seminars organised in person and online.
- Provide resources, from national and European levels funds, for financing the activities of the Bologna expert teams, and materials that would include short videos, training material, information/explanatory notes, power point presentations etc.
- The Bologna experts team will engage (inter alia) in:
 - national/international training to ensure shared understanding, messaging, and updating of knowledge so that each expert has an active sense of an international (EHEA) network committed to the full and correct implementation of Bologna aspirations and instruments - training to be monitored by the proposed BFUG Coordination Group
 - online discussion forums,
 - peer to peer training,
 - fostering interconnectivity through collecting and sharing information about topics relevant to the BP,
 - sharing information about national policies on Bologna / EHEA initiatives,
 - events - institutional, regional (country), national, international,
 - counselling - in institutions, groups of institutions on a geographical or thematic basis,

- liaising and working actively with - national authorities, quality assurance agencies, qualification agencies and professional bodies,
- promoting dialogue to foster a dynamic 'Bologna' process, considering sector feedback, experience and the transfer of grassroots developments and ideas to the policy-level.
- Consult national HE stakeholders regarding the composition and level at which the Bologna hub should function.
- Determine the coordinating body(ies) and objectives and responsibilities of the Bologna hub.
- Organise meetings of the Bologna hub with a prepared agenda and background information circulated in advance.
- Include Bologna expert/hub activities within Erasmus + calls dedicated to the realisation of the Bologna objectives.

3. To achieve the EHEA objectives adequate, sustainable resources are necessary. Member states should seek to identify, within their budgets, appropriate resource for this purpose and stakeholders should be active in seeking funding opportunities.

There is a need for systematic, structured mechanisms to support and promote knowledge-sharing initiatives at the national and EHEA levels unless this is achieved, effective coherent implementation throughout the EHEA will not be realised.

The main challenges reported by the focus groups participants are lack of funds, human resources and staff overload. These are the main reasons for lack of BP-dedicated structures at the ministries and HEIs, making it difficult to reach the wider HE community. These issues are especially evident in countries with a large HE system. Some focus group participants explained that to secure funds for activities and staff, they apply for EU funded projects whenever there is a call related to the BP.

Another challenge is frequent staff turnover at the coordinating body and loss of historical memory related to the BP policy implementation and activities. This leads to general lack of understanding of the BP importance and why it should be a priority.

The TF members and the focus group participants agreed that it is essential to build on existing structures and networks and synergy between projects, initiatives, and organisations to maximise the impact of Bologna-related activities. In each country it may be possible, within existing budgets, to identify strands which could be used to support BP implementation.

Projects are excellent for working on BP topics. They provide a platform for debates, research and consultations, information sharing, and organisation of events that gather stakeholders and advance the implementation of the BP commitments. Projects can be organised at national and EHEA levels, allowing peer learning and exchange of information. They represent a model for securing funding for such activities during the project period. For these reasons, HE stakeholders need to apply for and participate in national, and EU calls for projects. Related to this, some representatives of the focus groups reported a lack of staff trained to apply for projects, which results in missing opportunities or rejected applications. Therefore, stakeholder organisations need to offer trainings on project applications.

Both focus group participants and the 2023 survey mentioned projects that have considerable impact on information and knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning, and advancing understanding of the BP commitments and policies and their implementation: PROFORMANCE and PROFORMANCE+²¹, Bologna Hub Peer Support²² (see *Annex 4*), Twinning²³, Tempus, HERE and SPHERE²⁴ (see *Annex 5*). Most of these projects represent a continuation of earlier projects. Considering these examples, it becomes evident that projects should build on each other's results to have long-lasting impact and use resources wisely.

Some focus group participants said that there is a lack of synergy and cooperation between groups working on similar projects. To tackle this issue, in Poland, initiatives to streamline and optimise activities are underway to create a comprehensive mapping of initiatives to identify areas of overlap and ensure coordination. The TF suggests that whenever there are projects on the same or related topics, opportunities for exchange of information and findings should be created to optimise the project results. Some countries draw on the expertise of Bologna experts in their projects. In the Netherlands, the Bologna experts participate and collaborate in international projects ensuring the information and results are disseminated within the whole system.

The 2023 survey results showed that projects do not always seem to be widely known: only 15% of the individual respondents have engaged in EHEA-related projects while 44% of organisational respondents indicated participation. 40% of organisations have only "heard of" EHEA-related projects, and 16% are not familiar with them at all. It is good practice to share information on projects, activities, outcomes and consortium composition on dedicated websites. In this way, stakeholders and the public can have free and open access to the project resources and be informed about these initiatives and the possibilities to participate.

Key action points

- Schemes for financing BP knowledge sharing and implementation should be available to fund activities at EHEA and national level.
- HE stakeholders to apply for EU-funded projects whenever there is a call related to BP to secure additional funds for activities and communication but also allocate funds from their own budget to ensure continuity.
- Provide capacity-building opportunities for developing applications and implementation of projects.
- Project consortiums to share information on projects, their activities, outcomes and consortium composition on dedicated websites, thus, informing HE stakeholders and the public.
- Projects to build on each other's findings and results to have a long-lasting impact and use resources wisely.

²¹ [Home | Proformance](#)

²² <https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/de/>

²³ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/twinning_en

²⁴ <https://eua.eu/resources/projects/584-here.html>

- Streamline and optimise activities and create a comprehensive national/regional mapping of the ongoing initiatives to identify areas of overlap and ensure coordination.

4. To ensure continuity in information, knowledge sharing, development and effective implementation in the evolving Bologna process, a Coordination Group drawing on the experience of the Task Force should be established within the BFUG.

As this paper stresses, although the BP has achieved considerable success there are profound areas of knowledge and implementation concern. It is essential and urgent that these are addressed if the process and the communiqués are not to become paper rhetoric. For the successful future of European higher education, a more constructive, active approach to consistent quality assured implementation is essential. The current structures do not encompass a body dedicated to the coordination of implementation.

The Task Force on Enhanced Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community has worked in the period 2020 – 2024 based on an action plan²⁵ that included several activities:

- development of recommendations for BFUG members, including guidelines to organise events, guidance for activating Bologna experts' networks and for starting national and local level Bologna hubs,
- development of dissemination tools such as videos and messages with EHEA visual identity, series of TV/radio reportages /podcasts on topics related to the BP,
- organising sessions and side events during the BFUG meetings,
- developing the EHEA website and newsletter.

Concepts for different types of dissemination tools were developed, but it is imperative to keep momentum in this process and to continue creating specific concepts on BP topics.

The activities and tools developed are available in the TF report²⁶. These activities were welcomed and proved their usefulness for different HE stakeholders.

Key action points

A Coordination Group should be set up as part of the next BFUG work plan, which would have the following main responsibilities:

- to coordinate and liaise with stakeholders on implementation activities,
- to develop resources and tools adapted to an evolving BP,
- to assemble a team specialised in creating content about the BP and its work – audio, video and text,
- to support and coordinate Bologna experts and hubs and other national and EHEA initiatives,
- to provide an international platform for peer exchange.

²⁵ https://www.ehea.info/Upload/EKS_TF_Action_Plan_2023_final.pdf

²⁶ [Link to the final version of the report, when available.](#)

5. To widen and enhance knowledge, understanding, engagement with the EHEA and the Bologna Process diverse, contemporary, means of communication, such as those developed by the Task Force, should be exploited pervasively and consistently

In order to support the engagement of stakeholders with the BP policies and goals and to enhance knowledge and understanding among all higher education stakeholders different communication channels and tools need to be employed. This section describes the communication tools employed, as well as their usage. Further information can be accessed in the TF Report.

Websites and other platforms

Websites and digital platforms allowing for online debates are an important source of information about the BP. The EHEA website²⁷ comprises information about the Bologna structures, topics, events, and members. The public can access and consult materials resulting from and feeding into meetings, events, and other fora. According to the 2023 survey on the stakeholders perception of the BP, most individual students and academics rarely or never visit the EHEA website (80-90% visiting never or less often than once per year). Organisations, however, use the EHEA website much more frequently, nearly 60% at least once or several times per year. This suggests that the EHEA website is currently mainly targeting a specialist audience, and making known its resources and availability to the broader HE community would be helpful. Some respondents to the 2019 consultations suggested having an e-community platform on the BFUG website based on lists of national practitioners to support visibility, communication, and cooperation.

Most of the ministry websites comprise a page dedicated to Bologna history and activities, and it usually also describes how the ministry is involved in these activities. This allows stakeholders to access the latest information. Besides this, some countries use Wikis in some areas where they develop issues that interested parties can follow even though they are not part of the working groups. Some countries also share databases, for example, related to all their recognition decisions of qualifications. This facilitates the exchange of information on the recognised qualifications.

Newsletters and mailing lists

Many participants in the focus groups reported that their organisations have mailing lists of people they frequently contact and inform, among other things, about the BP activities and work. In Sweden, the ministry has a list of national contacts used for communication purposes.

Some ENIC-NARIC centres reported that communication with HEIs occurs mainly by phone and email. Also, applicants and students can address their inquiries by telephone or email to the ENIC-NARIC centre. Some have a call centre that supports applicants by responding directly and in a timely way to their requests.

It is remarkable that newsletters covering EHEA topics are not well-enough known, especially among students and academics: 65% of students and 47% of academics were not familiar with newsletters covering EHEA topics. To ensure good communication between the various BFUG

²⁷ <https://www.ehea.info/index.php>.

working structures, newsletters and other information bulletins sent through mailing lists are good tools.

Based on these findings, an EHEA newsletter has been set up as a comprehensive information source regarding the main findings, innovations, events and ideas promoted throughout the EHEA and shaping it. In its first phase, the newsletter will be sent to a continuously increasing EHEA mailing list. At the same time, whenever possible, the website and social media will include a “Subscription” button, for all interested individuals to subscribe and receive the newsletter. Also, the newsletter history, with its articles and content, will be available through a website link.

One of the benefits of the newsletter is to gather information about the target group because it provides statistics about time users spend reading the newsletter, what content they prefer, mail availability, and much more, depending on the newsletter creation service used. The newsletter is more than a dissemination and community engagement tool. It is a tool helping the BFUG to learn more about the people following the news about the EHEA.

An important recommendation is to create a sign-up button dedicated to the newsletter on the website, as using acquired mailing lists makes the emails prone to end up in the spam folder.

Social media channels

Regarding the use of social media by the BFUG and its working structures, some participants in the 2019 consultations emphasised that there is need to enhance the use of social media for communication and dissemination of information among practitioners. Currently, the following EHEA social media channels are in place:

- X/Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BFUGsecretariat>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EHEA.info>
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/european-higher-education-area

As with most digital channels, the social media channels offer more than simply the dissemination aspects of a communication channels. Through Facebook, LinkedIn and Youtube, statistics regarding readers, including country of provenance, preferred language, reach of content, engagement of content, age segments and other relevant information can be gathered. As in the case of the newsletter, the social media channels are a target-group analysis tool.

Video content

Currently, video content is experiencing an unprecedented golden age in the communication and PR landscape. Its dominance stems from its unique ability to effectively disseminate information and foster vibrant online communities. From its engaging nature to the popularity of the platforms that offer video streaming and hosting services, the video medium excels in information dissemination and enhancing attention span, comprehension and retention. Moreover, video personal narratives resonate with audiences and provide compelling examples of the value of higher education reforms.

These are among the arguments for using YouTube as a dissemination channel. EHEA's official video channel is: https://www.youtube.com/@ehea_info.

The video content suitable to be published by the BFUG are interviews, panel discussions, educational webinars, educational-style videos, virtual tours or even case studies.

Three distinct content types that can be used to enhance knowledge sharing about the EHEA through a video content series are suggested: short-form video content, video interviews, and feature presentations. Short-form videos are easy to consume, mobile-friendly, and highly shareable. Short-form videos can be used to increase engagement, boost brand awareness, stay informed, and connect with others. Video interviews aim to capture personal experiences, insights, and success stories from individuals within the EHEA, fostering relatability and authenticity. Lastly, the feature format provides an in-depth exploration of specific themes, offering a cohesive narrative that delves into the impact and benefits of the EHEA. Together, these content types contribute to a versatile and engaging video series that promotes dialogue, awareness, and participation in the European Higher Education Area community. Most importantly, all the content can be published on the official EHEA YouTube channel, from where audience can be diverted to other websites, through the comments section. Feature videos along with interviews are recommended, with the intention of kickstarting a new communication medium through which the BFUG can disseminate essential and even instructive videos. Ideally, the interviews, should be filmed in on-site locations, (university premises/rectors Offices, laboratories), contain relatable personal experiences and include practical guidance on various aspects of the life of the public it targets.

At the same time, the reportage component of the video series serves as a compelling narrative tool, offering in-depth explorations of specific stories within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Through immersive storytelling, this segment aims to provide viewers with a deeper understanding of the Bologna Process, its outcomes, and the transformative journeys of students, teachers, and researchers. The diverse range of topics covered in these reportages or features is carefully curated to showcase the multifaceted nature of the EHEA community.

Podcasts

Podcasts are digital audio or video recordings that are made available for download or streaming over the internet. They are typically distributed as a series of episodes, each of which focuses on a particular topic or theme. This content format can be listened to on a variety of devices, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers which makes their informational delivery very effective. Listeners can access podcasts through various platforms, such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and many more.

Podcasts offer a dynamic platform for the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) to disseminate comprehensive information and engage in meaningful discussions surrounding the Bologna Process. This is why, launching a dedicated podcast series focused on various facets of the BP, such as interviews, discussions, and expert insights, can facilitate deeper understanding and engagement among stakeholders.

Events

Events play a vital role in fostering dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), making them essential platforms to engage stakeholders and promote awareness of BP-related initiatives and developments. To cater to different audience preferences and learning styles, a diverse range of event formats can be organized, depending on the available resources, including conferences, workshops, webinars, and seminars. In order to help achieve this, potential themes, along with a general guideline for organizing events have been provided, along with types of events, their description, an event task list and a flexible budget model which can be adapted in order to fit the needs and the context.

Other dissemination tools

It is suggested that BFUG sets up an online forum/discussion group which would serve as a platform for stakeholders to engage in discussions, share insights, exchange best practices, and collaborate on common challenges and interests related to the EHEA. The platform would help community building, knowledge sharing and would act as a feedback mechanism for multiple BFUG public messages and for policy development.

At the same time, 2024 is the year the Bologna Process celebrates 25 years. Commemorating this milestone and future similar ones, warrants the development of a distinctive anniversary identity that encapsulates the journey, achievements, and aspirations of the EHEA. This identity should evoke a sense of pride, unity, and reflection among stakeholders, highlighting the transformative impact of the BP on higher education across Europe. In this spirit, multiple proposals for an anniversary identity have been crafted in order to accommodate this need.

A concept which can be connected to different events is the introduction of excellence recognition and awards within the European Higher Education Area. By acknowledging outstanding contributions, innovative practices, and successful initiatives, these awards serve as a powerful event catalyst and position the BFUG as an authority within the EHEA, once the awards are widely known. By simply showcasing exemplary achievements, potentially leading to collaborations and knowledge sharing among institutions, the BFUG has the opportunity to organize an important yearly contest between various stakeholders.

Key action points

- Increase the frequency of updates of the EHEA website (a new „News” section was proposed), both in order to answer as many questions as possible about the BP and to increase the search engine ranking of the website.
- Create dedicated sections / dedicated website at the national / institutional level, to disseminate information about the BP and its latest evolutions.
- Create either a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section or a forum within the website, as a gateway for inviting people to create content, answer questions and create conversations from which valuable data can be extracted.
- Ensure constant frequency of an EHEA newsletter, adding new email addresses on request by users.
- Consider using social media channels for posting more long-form content, as this kind of content ranks best and is the hardest to find in today’s informational ecosystem.

- Organise a team dedicated to creating content, especially text and video content for the online channels.
- Develop multi-language resources, materials, and publications to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for stakeholders from diverse linguistic backgrounds within the EHEA.
- Introduce excellence recognition and awards to acknowledge outstanding contributions, innovative practices, and successful initiatives within the EHEA, encouraging excellence and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.
- Develop guidelines for all essential aspects of knowledge sharing to facilitate institutional learning and iterative communication adjustment, as well as data collection protocols (with the purpose of improving the guidelines).
- Consider introducing [LLM](#) technology usage (similar to ChatGPT or Gemini), to facilitate resource searching.
- Use video/audio content to launch storytelling campaigns featuring testimonials, success stories, and case studies that highlight the impact of the BP on individuals, institutions, and societies within the EHEA.

Conclusions

All the data, reviews, focus group comments, which have been considered, and the TF members own extensive experience convince us that notwithstanding the laudable work and achievements of the BFUG members, there remains an urgent imperative to revitalise the vision, spirit, values, knowledge, understanding, implementation and ownership of the Bologna Process among the whole academic community, so that we can genuinely ‘transform education together’. If this is not addressed urgently, it is our view that the process risks becoming increasingly irrelevant and out of touch with the vibrant, but often disparate, disconnected, developments in Higher Education in the Bologna signatory countries. In the report we made five simple, limited, feasible, recommendations for a new way forward. We explained the background and objectives of our recommendations, which in all cases are in full accord with the letter and spirit of the Ministerial communiqués.

We commend the report and our recommendations in full expectation of their implementation, by selecting those actions that are feasible and adequate in every national context.

Annexes

Annex 1: The Austrian BFUG structure

The Austrian national BFUG structure is a good example of a well organised system aiming to implement BP commitments, policies and priorities and to ensure efficient information flow among various actors. Besides the relevant federal ministries, members of the Austrian BFUG include representatives from the following institutions and interest groups: Universities Austria (uniko), Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK), Association of Austrian Private Universities (ÖPUK), Rectors' Conference of Austrian Public University Colleges of Teacher Education (RÖPH), Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH), ENIC NARIC AUSTRIA, National Agency Erasmus+ Education at the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD), Austrian Bologna Service Point at the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD), National EHEA experts, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Regional governments, Federation of Austrian Industries (IV), The Chamber of Labour (AK), The Chamber of Agriculture, Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)/Public Service Union Austria (GÖD), Austrian Federal Economic Chambers (WKO), Various Departments of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

Some of the most prominent structures are:

The Bologna Contact Point in the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research acts as the bridge between the national and European levels within the EHEA, the Austria Bologna Contact Point in the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research – Dept. IV/11 provides support in implementing EHEA priorities at Austrian higher education institutions.

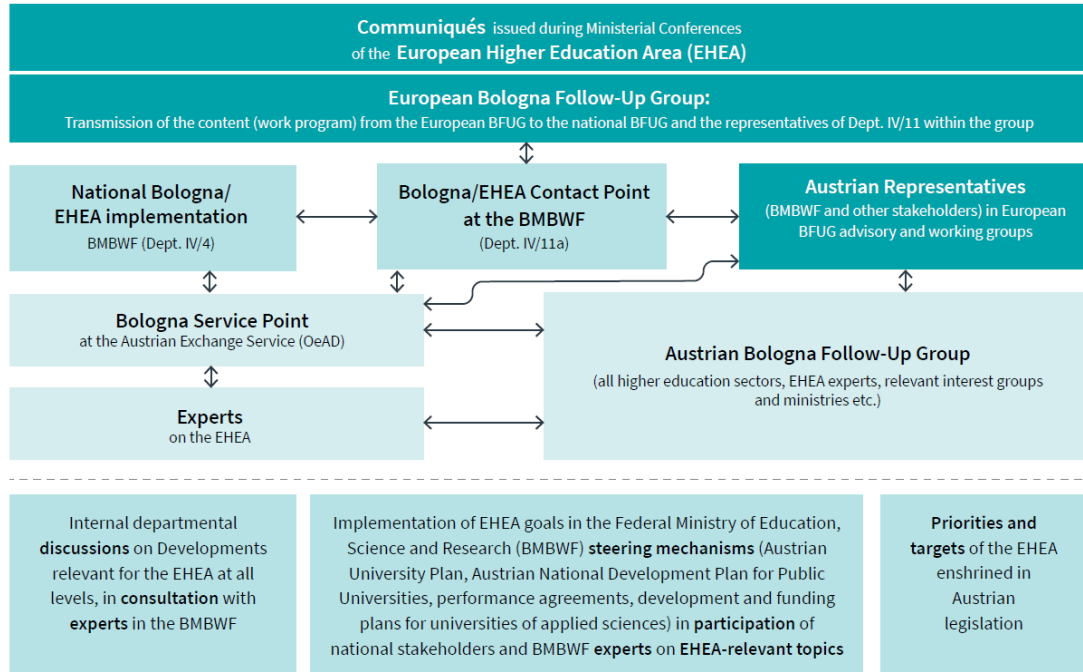
The National Agency Erasmus+ Education at the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD): the national agency advises, guides and supports cooperative education initiatives in Europe. Its services cover all ages and education levels. The Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD) offers information tailored to specific target groups and organises events and consultations for educational institutions that are interested in the further development and implementation of Bologna targets.

The Austrian Bologna Service Point at the Austrian Exchange Service (OeAD) operates as the independent, cross-sector advisory and information point for the entire Austrian higher education sector. It organises events, facilitates networking amongst various actors and maintains know-how and organisational expertise related to Bologna initiatives.

The national EHEA experts provide advice, support and guidance for Austrian higher education institutions in the implementation of EHEA targets and priorities, and play a role in the content design and organisation of national events related to the EHEA context (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, pp. 62-65).

The Bologna coordinators serve as permanent, i.e. institutionally established, contacts at Austrian higher education institutions. They are a unique information hub at higher education institutions in the EHEA, are appointed by management at their respective higher education institution and reflect in their diversity of functions the broad manner in which the Bologna Process has been conceived (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, p. 72).

The EHEA/Bologna network



Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, p. 63.

Annex 2: Knowledge Sharing within the ENIC-NARIC Networks

The [ENIC-NARIC Networks](#) are the result of an ongoing collaboration between the national information centres on academic recognition of qualifications of in total 55 countries (countries of the EHEA + Australia, Canada, Israel, Monaco, New Zealand, USA), which are operating under the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). The NARIC Network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) was established in 1984 with the European Commission as secretariat and comprises today all Member States of the European Union + North Macedonia, Serbia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Türkiye. The ENIC Network (European Network of Information Centres) was established in 1994 by the Council of Europe and UNESCO as co-secretariats and comprises all 55 countries mentioned above.

The ENIC-NARICs are linked through various communication channels and communicate regularly between each other and with stakeholders.

External communication and knowledge sharing of the ENIC-NARICs:

- Joint ENIC-NARIC Website www.enic-naric.net (most comprehensive information platform on recognition). The website is regularly updated by the ELCORE Working Group (Working Party on Electronic Communication for Recognition), other volunteers from the ENIC-NARIC Networks and the Technical Support Team (current Erasmus+ project). Content to be published is decided by the ENIC Bureau and NARIC Advisory Board who are elected every two years.

The main features of the website are:

- 55 country profiles with description of education systems and links to information resources regularly updated by each country through dedicated access;
 - Collection of recognition tools and project outcomes;
 - Specific pages with information on recognition-related topics, mobility tools, quality assurance, etc.;
 - Information on other world regions;
 - Dedicated gateways for stakeholders, like students, workers, HEIs, employers, and credential evaluators;
 - Section on currently relevant topics and new policies.
- Every ENIC-NARIC has a national website with information on recognition procedures in the country. Guidelines and training on information provision are available to all centres. Most of the national websites are linked to the international ENIC-NARIC website.
 - Communication on social media ([X](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)) creating new content and forwarding relevant posts from centres and stakeholders. The ELCORE prepares a social media strategy before each major event and aligns it with communication strategies of relevant stakeholders and the co-secretariats.
 - The ENIC-NARICs carry/carried out many Erasmus+ projects and projects of the Council of Europe and have developed a number of useful tools, publications and other outcomes. The outcomes are published on the ENIC-NARIC website and shared on social media and during in-person meetings, online meetings and via e-mail.

- The ENIC President and other members of the ENIC-NARIC Networks are regularly invited to conferences and meetings of stakeholders within and outside the region to present the ENIC-NARIC Networks' work and achievements and to have dialogue.
- Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education projects (e.g. RecoNow, RecoLATIN, RecoASIA, etc.) and other initiatives (e.g. cooperation with other regions, like the APNNIC Network, ASEM Education, colleagues in Africa, Middle East, Latin America, cooperation on the UQPR, etc.) have enhanced knowledge sharing and peer learning on recognition and have led to the establishment of National Information Centres on the example of the ENIC-NARICs also in other world regions.
- Publications to share ENIC-NARIC perspectives in online and paper press on recognition-related topics and upcoming challenges (e.g. University World News, UNESCO publications, etc.).

Internal communication and knowledge sharing within the ENIC-NARICs:

- Electronic Mailing Lists for daily communication between the credential evaluators working at the centres: The ENIC-NARICs use a software called Mailman to which each country can subscribe the members, which can then communicate with each other by writing to a specific e-mail address that arrives to everyone on the list. Rules are established for sending messages, e.g. do research first, write a clear subject line, etc. The ELCORE and Technical Support Team are responsible for the maintenance and for adding and removing contacts.
There are several mailing lists, the two most important ones are the following:
 - Today the "Recognition" mailing list has over 550 subscribed addresses and the members of the mailing list exchange questions and answers on complicated recognition cases on a daily basis.
 - The "Head of Centres" mailing list is used to inform on policy related topics, about events or to carry out specific surveys on urging topics (e.g. in the last years on school leaving qualifications during COVID-19 restrictions or on information resources in countries with war).
- Event watch: Three to four times a year the ELCORE asks all countries about events, webinars, and publications to be signaled and, after gathering all the information, sends out an informative e-mail with the list of upcoming events, training opportunities and relevant publications.
- Especially during crisis situations, the ENIC-NARICs can react quickly and share knowledge by organising webinars and online workshops on specific countries' education systems, regions and urging topics, like in the last years on Afghanistan, Ukraine, etc. Using the expertise that is there in the different centres, knowledge sharing and peer to peer training is very frequent in the ENIC-NARIC Network.
- Each country has dedicated access to the Restricted Area of the ENIC-NARIC.net website with the following useful material:
 - Archive of documents and meeting material
 - Archive of more sensitive material concerning recognition
 - Shared folder of promotional material
 - Archive of study visits, sensitive project outcomes, surveys

- The Annual Joint ENIC-NARIC Meeting taking place each year in June in one of the Networks' countries is fundamental for the ENIC-NARICs to meet in person. There are workshops to discuss and share information on certain topics, plenary sessions for information sharing and discussion, and lots of networking opportunities. The Annual NARIC meeting is usually taking place in November/December in Brussels or online and enhances exchange of information on projects, initiatives and policies.
- The ENIC-NARICs have developed specific training formats for credential evaluators who are specialised in certain world regions and therefore exchange specific information. An online format called "face-the-case" discussed cases from a certain region or country sent-in by the participants with a panel of experts, whereas in-person meetings of specialists on a certain region are also organised since 2023 to foster expert discussion and knowledge sharing. Study visits to centres to learn on specific topics and to get to know each other are also quite common on the Networks.
- To enhance quality, the ENIC-NARICs have developed a peer review mechanism in which centres on a voluntary basis do a self-evaluation and are then site-visited by other centres and national experts resulting in a report that in many cases influences national policy, regulations, and practices.

Annex 3: Bologna Professor Gala

The Bologna Professor Gala²⁸, organized by the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR), stands as a testament to the commitment to the principles and objectives of the BP within the Romanian higher education framework, and might stand as an example of innovative practice regarding knowledge sharing about the BP.

It honours exceptional professors who have demonstrated exemplary dedication, innovation, and excellence in their teaching methodologies and academic leadership. The Gala serves as a platform to recognize and showcase the tireless efforts of these educators, acknowledging their pivotal role in shaping the future of education in Romania. Through a rigorous selection process, nominees are chosen based on their outstanding achievements, impact on students' lives, and contributions to the field of education. The selection process begins with ANOSR inviting students from across Romania to nominate in a public questionnaire, published usually once a year, their favourite teachers who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and proficiency in their field. Following the nomination phase, ANOSR analyses the students' answers and conducts a comprehensive training session with approx. 70 future student evaluators. These training sessions focus on instilling a deep understanding of the BP values, innovative teaching practices and offer the student evaluators a broad perspective of what students should seek in an exemplary educator. Once trained, the students evaluators engage in a rigorous evaluation process. This involves participating in the courses taught by the nominated teacher, conducting interviews with both the teacher and the students who participate constantly at their classes, offering nuanced assessments and scores based on a predetermined evaluation criteria. After gathering and analysing the feedback and assessments provided by the students evaluators, ANOSR meticulously evaluates the data to determine which teachers have most effectively embodied the principles of the BP and innovative teaching methods. Finally, ANOSR awards prizes to the selected teachers, thereby recognizing and celebrating their exceptional contributions to education.

The Gala usually lasts for two or three days and, during the first days, sessions and workshops are organized for the participants, both the awarded teachers and the students from ANOSR local unions, converging to explore and embody the very essence of BP values. Through dialogue and immersive activities, participants delve into the pillars of the BP: fostering student-centered learning, promoting academic mobility and exchange, cultivating a culture of continuous improvement and championing diversity and inclusion. The attendees engage in dynamic discussions, share best practices and glean insights from the others, in the spirit of the Bologna ideals. The insights convened during the BP Gala are systematically collated and used as invaluable resources, guiding future endeavours on matters pertaining to Bologna values, that are organized by ANOSR.

The Gala itself is an evening filled with inspirational speeches, testimonials from previous honourees, and a celebration of the invaluable influence of educators on society. The Gala not only highlights individual accomplishments, but also emphasizes the collective importance of fostering an environment conducive to learning and academic growth.

²⁸ <https://anosr.ro/en/gala-profesorului-bologna/>

Within the context of the Gala, the BP serves as a guiding principle, emphasizing the importance of academic excellence, innovation in teaching methodologies, and the continuous professional development of educators. This alignment with the BP underscores the Gala's dedication to fostering a dynamic educational environment that adheres to European standards of quality and innovation.

After the end of the Gala, the teachers are added in the Bologna community – a group where the teachers converge to exchange feedback, disseminate best practices and foster ongoing dialogues in alignment with BP values. This dynamic platform serves as a point of connection and communication, to perpetuate the legacy of the BP.

Moreover, the Gala provides a platform to showcase how educators embody and contribute to the core values of the BP. By honouring these exemplary professors, the event emphasises their role as catalysts for positive change within the higher education landscape, aligning with the broader goals of the BP in advancing academic excellence, fostering collaboration, and enhancing the overall quality of education across Europe.

This event is an opportunity for the academic community, students, and stakeholders to come together and pay tribute to the educators whose dedication and passion have significantly enriched the educational landscape of Romania. The Gala provides a platform to showcase how educators embody and contribute to the core values of the BP. By honouring these exemplary professors, the event emphasises their role as catalysts for positive change within the higher education landscape, aligning with the broader goals of the BP in advancing academic excellence, fostering collaboration, and enhancing the overall quality of education across Europe.

Annex 4: Bologna Hub Peer Support projects

DAAD project “bologna hub” – Exchange on the implementation of European higher education reforms. The bologna hub offers actors of the German and European higher education landscape thematic platforms for exchange. The project is based on an analysis of national and European priorities in higher education and focusses on offers that support the internationalization activities of universities. At the national level, the project facilitates the development and dissemination of exemplary ways to use the Bologna instruments and to provide information about current topics in European higher education policy.

The focus is on the following thematic core elements:

- Developing mobility-friendly curricula
- Formulation of competency-based learning outcomes
- Automatic recognition of study achievements and the associated use of digital instruments
- Development of joint international study programs
- Quality assurance of international (joint) study programs and degrees
- Promotion of a mobility-friendly work environment for university staff

Additional focal points have been added over time:

- Fundamental values such as academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in higher education governance, public responsibility for and of higher education
- Innovative methods to improve the quality of teaching and learning, including new teaching/learning formats such as micro-credentials
- Digitalization and improvement of digital skills among students and teachers as well as the use of digital teaching formats such as virtual exchange
- Coordination and continuous exchange with other higher education systems worldwide
- Support of higher education systems to enhance use of resources and skills to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030.

Project activities place a strong focus on peer learning and peer support measures, from which all members of the EHEA and Germany benefit. Formats that are carried out in this context are:

- Online seminars/conferences
- Network meetings
- Training
- Video tutorials
- Expert exchange.

The EU project Bologna Hub Peer Support also plays an important role in that regard. With a pool of European Bologna Experts, the project supports higher education institutions in the entire EHEA in the implementation of Bologna reforms through methods of peer-learning. Based on the individual needs of higher education institutions, the experts provide tailor-made support during counselling meetings.

Annex 5: SPHERE Initiative

The 'SPHERE – Support for Higher Education Reform Experts' initiative works with the network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) - a pool of experts supporting the modernisation of higher education in countries neighbouring the EU, specifically in the Southern Mediterranean, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership Countries and in Central Asia. Their activities are financed through the Erasmus+ programme and coordinated at the local level by the National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs).

The SPHERE initiative is implemented by OBREAL Global (Coordinator) and the European University Association (EUA) providing training and networking activities for the HEREs, in the framework of a service contract with the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission.

Overall objective

The overall objective of the SPHERE initiative is to consolidate the coordination and training of the HERE network so that they are able to achieve their goals and namely to:

- Follow EU higher education policies (e.g. Bologna Process) and related policy fields (Development, Enlargement and External Action policies), raise awareness about these policies nationally, and analyse their impact on national education policies;
- Contribute to the implementation of reforms in higher education in line with the policies and overarching priorities of the European Commission.

Specific objectives

- To provide updated information and specific training regarding EU higher education policies and reforms, corresponding to the needs of the HERE;
- To organise cooperation and networking between the National HERE Teams and between them and the EU Experts;
- To help HERE raise awareness about EU higher education policies and programmes and to promote higher education reforms in the Partner Countries not associated to the Erasmus+ Programme, addressing the European Commission's overarching priorities;
- To disseminate the results of on-going EU projects and develop a matrix to identify fields of interest to be addressed in upcoming calls for proposals in line with EU and National Educational Policies.

Planning & Activities description

SPHERE activities include:

- international large-scale conferences
- joint events with the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), as well as with Bologna experts and other relevant EU experts
- thematic seminars
- study visits
- online annual HERE gatherings
- Technical Assistance Missions (TAM) for each of the 25 Partner Countries and follow-up activity/publication of results from each event
- development and maintenance of a HERE Virtual Platform
- support the development of national workplans for the HERE Teams

- production of publications
- communication and dissemination of the different actions

These activities are clustered in terms of objectives:

1. Annual HERE gatherings and annual conferences are viewed as Community and Reflection activities for HERE, engaging diverse expertise and experiences and providing room for hands-on interaction, group work, and (regional) networking. They also provide an opportunity for reflection on activities provided by SPHERE2 and the work of the different HERE teams.
2. Capacity Building and Training is provided through the seminars and study visits, which explore topics identified under the HERE annual work programme and focus on higher education reform and practice approaches in higher education institutions (HEI) and systems, offering illustrative and thought-provoking examples. Policy reform and practice needs identified in the work plans of national HERE Teams are addressed through technical assistance missions (TAM).
3. A dedicated third cluster of activities relates specifically to enhancing synergies with the Bologna Process. This includes the joint conference between the HERE and the BFUG. 25 national events and, in some instances, TAM follow-up events, will focus on specific national priorities and challenges with regard to issues addressed by the Bologna reforms.

References

Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, EHEA Implementation Report, [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Austrian EHEA Implementation Report 2020.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Austrian_EHEA_Implementation_Report_2020.pdf) (accessed 19/10/2023)

BFUG, 2019a, Governance and Thematic priorities after 2020 Outcomes of the online survey, [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/65 BFUG meeting Bucharest/BFUG RO MK 65 9 2 Survey outcomes.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/65_BFUG_meeting_Bucharest/BFUG_RO_MK_65_9_2_Survey_outcomes.pdf) (accessed 20/09/2023)

BFUG, 2019b, Future of the EHEA - Thematic discussion on vision and priorities, [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG FI TK 67 7 1 National Consultations .pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_FI_TK_67_7_1_National_Consultations_.pdf) (accessed 27/10/2023)

BFUG, 2020, Rome Ministerial Communiqué, [https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome Ministerial Communiqué.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf) (accessed 19/09/2023)

BFUG, 2022, Rules of Procedure <https://www.ehea.info/page-the-bologna-follow-up-group> (accessed 13/10/2023)

Council of Europe, 1997, Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, ETS No.165, <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165> (accessed 28/10/2023)

ENIC-NARIC Networks, 2023, *enic-naric.net*, <https://www.enic-naric.net/page-standards-guidelines-quality-assurance> (accessed 29/10/2023)

European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, The European higher education area in 2020 – Bologna process implementation report, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/756192>
<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/european-higher-education-area-2020-bologna-process-implementation-report> (accessed 28/10/2023)

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), 2015, Brussels, Belgium. https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf (accessed 29/10/2023)