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Draft guidelines for BFUG peer support 2018-2020

Background and objectives

With the Paris Communiqué, "[a structured peer support approach](#) based on solidarity, cooperation and mutual learning" was adopted. In the work programme of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for 2018-2020, peer support will focus on completing the implementation of three key commitments:

- a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS,
- compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention,
- quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

To this end, the BFUG has established a coordinating body, the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG), to organise three Peer Groups, one for each peer commitment.

The Peer Groups themselves will agree on further actions aimed at fostering, improving and speeding up implementation in the participating countries and report to the BICG which will make a summary report to the BFUG on progress achieved prior to the next ministerial conference.

Working methods

At its September 2018 meeting, the BFUG will formally establish the three peer support groups. The BICG has identified a set of specific themes or topics related to the key commitment of each Group and based on the interests and needs indicated by the BFUG members and consultative members in a survey conducted during the summer of 2018. These thematic suggestions are included in an Annex to these guidelines.

Each Group will have up to three Co-chairs, who will be responsible for planning and coordinating the Groups' activities, with the support of the BFUG Secretariat. The Co-chairs facilitate and steer the discussion and encourage members to share their national and other contextual viewpoints ensuring that the discussions are geared towards supporting further implementation of the key commitments in the participating countries. The Co-chairs are also responsible for reporting to the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG). The BFUG Secretariat takes minutes of all meetings and liaises with the meeting hosts and group members about meeting logistics.

The Groups are free to organise their work as they find most useful. However, the BICG recommends the following:

Each Group should organise at least two meetings that gather all the group members together: one in 2018 to launch the work and one by early 2020 to wrap up. In addition, each group may choose to organise further joint meetings of the whole group, separate meetings on specific sub-themes and/or

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combinations of the two depending on the topics to be tackled. The specific themes or interest of a smaller range of countries might be addressed by specially established sub-groups, supported by specific projects (see below). Working methods that engage members and enable support for those needing to implement changes through sharing of practices and/or policies are particularly welcome, and small group exercises are encouraged where appropriate.

The Co-chairs should prepare the first meeting of the Group taking into account the needs of the member countries as indicated in the implementation scorecard and the survey. At the first meeting the Group should prepare its work plan, including the topics it will work on, the working methods, timeline of activities and the expected outcomes to be achieved by each country by the end of the working period.

The Co-chairs are encouraged to prepare for meetings well in advance, in collaboration with the BFUG Secretariat, in order to provide the group members with a structured format for discussions that will lead to the expected outcomes of each meetings and, eventually, to the peer support activities as a whole. Documents should be sent at least 10 working days in advance and the first draft of the minutes, with the agreed action points, should be available within 10 working days after the meeting.

Special attention should also be paid to sharing information outside the meetings. The BFUG Secretariat will provide each Group a dedicated web-page under www.ehea.info that will allow the Group to communicate about its activities and results. Within 1 month after each peer support activity (involving either the entire Peer Group or part of it), a short summary will be published on the Peer Group's website.

To ensure efficiency, the members should preferably send only one person to each meeting. However, other arrangements can be made in agreement with the Co-chairs. It is expected that further project activities organised to support the work of the groups will allow for broader participation. In addition, where this has not already been done, countries are encouraged to establish national teams to support follow up and implementation.

Support through European Commission projects

The European Commission sent to National Authorities for Education in the Erasmus+ (“Programme”) countries in the end of August 2018 an invitation to submit project proposals to support the work of the Peer Groups¹. The “Programme Countries” can make proposals for projects including both EU and non-EU countries and organisations belonging to the BFUG. The BICG encourages the Erasmus+ “Programme Countries” to consider this opportunity creatively and proactively, and to build meaningful projects with EHEA “Partner Countries” and organisations to address common implementation concerns. The deadline for submitting proposals is **23 October 2018**. A similar call is expected to be launched in 2019. The Co-chairs of the Peer Groups will facilitate exchange of information about participation of the members in the different peer projects. Ideally, all Peer Group members will be involved in at least one project for targeted peer support.

¹ Projects under the strand 1 of this Erasmus+ call can cover:

- (a) Activities of sub-groups within the three Bologna Peer Groups formed by 3-6 countries and relevant consultative members. Peer support, in particular peer counselling or peer review, is usually more efficient if it involves such a smaller set of partners. Outcomes of the activities of these sub-groups must feed into the work of one of the three Bologna Peer Groups.
- (b) Larger activities involving all members of one of the three Bologna Peer Groups (for example, for larger peer learning events or seminars, involving one of the three Bologna Peer Groups with all its members).

Timeline, outcomes and reporting

The Groups are expected to be active from September 2018 to April 2020. The Groups' work will be based on a **work plan to be sent to the BICG by 31 January 2019**.

The main focus of the Groups' work will be ensuring further implementation of the key commitments as outlined in the Paris Communiqué. To monitor progress in this regard, each group is expected to send to the BICG **an interim report by 30 June 2019 and a draft final report by 15 February 2020**, respectively. The reports should outline the challenges identified and the progress made in addressing them in the participating countries. The reports should also reflect on the methods used and their effectiveness to tackle the challenges identified.

Even though the time available until the next Ministerial Conference is short, progress can be made, awareness and networking can be enhanced. Peer groups should aim to reach tangible results in a good number of cases. This will enable the BFUG to verify whether the peer support approach is an effective way of working to implement these and other EHEA commitments in the future.

Practicalities

The Groups are free to decide on the venue, the exact length, and timing of the meetings.

Except in the case of Group activities being covered by a project (such as the above-mentioned Erasmus+ projects), the member countries and organisations cover their own travel and accommodation costs for the meetings. The hosts of meetings are expected to arrange the meeting venue and catering and provide logistical and practical information for the participants.

In order to ensure financial support for the meetings, EHEA Erasmus+ "Programme Countries" are highly encouraged to organise projects on the key commitments in response to the European Commission's call described above, and to include EHEA "Partner Countries" in them.

Annex:

Peer Group A on Key Commitment 1 (a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS)

Specific thematic indications included topics such as:

- self-certification of the national qualification frameworks the overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA,
- complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide,
- short cycle higher education,
- multiple purposes and use of the qualifications frameworks by the stakeholders,
- study programmes outside of the Bologna three-cycle structure,
- relationship between the qualifications frameworks and quality assurance.

Peer Group B on Key Commitment 2 (national legislation and procedures compliant with the Lisbon Recognition Convention [LRC])

Specific thematic orientations indicated include the topics such as:

- establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC,
- establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures,
- achieving automatic recognition,
- recognition of alternative pathways,
- qualifications held by refugees,
- optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement.

Peer Group C on Key Commitment 3 (Quality Assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)

Specific thematic orientations include the topics such as:

- legislative framework in line with the ESG (introducing changes),
- ensuring effectiveness of internal quality assurance arrangements, including the use of QA results in the decision-making process and quality culture as well as links to learning and teaching,
- the role and engagement of stakeholders in internal and external QA (students, teachers, employers) and
- Cross-border QA and European Approach to accreditation of joint programmes.