[[1]](#footnote-1)We, the Ministers responsible for higher education in the member countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), have convened in Tirana on XX-XX May 2024, marking the 25th anniversary of the Bologna Process. The past decades brought 49 countries with different political, cultural and academic traditions together to cooperate within a voluntary intergovernmental process, jointly with important stakeholders representing students, academic staff and higher education institutions. Within the EHEA, we have reiterated our will to make the vision which inspired our predecessors a reality, and we aspire to realise key commitments around higher education, on the basis of open dialogue, shared goals and fostered by a closer collaboration in various sub-structures of the Bologna Process Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

To facilitate mobility of students and staff, we promote comparability and permeability of our higher education systems, we are implementing a **three-cycle system** of programmes and degrees, compatible with the overarching framework of the EHEA (QF-EHEA), organised based on learning outcomes and quantified according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), we support the recognition of qualifications throughout the EHEA by implementing the **Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)** and its principles, and we are committed to a **Quality Culture** in Higher education, fostered by fit for purpose Quality assurance processes in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Higher education plays a pivotal role for thriving and resilient democratic societies, and social cohesion. By producing and disseminating **education as a fundamental public good** through upholding and developing rigorous standards for the benefit of society, promoting democratic citizenship for students, tackling disinformation and promoting critical thinking in a Quality European higher education system, the academic community is to consistently inform public discourse and offer expertise in addressing and resolving societal challenges. The positive force that higher education is expected to play in facing global and European challenges cannot be overstated.

The EHEA builds on our shared fundamental values - **academic freedom, academic integrity, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in higher education governance, public responsibility *for* and *of* higher education - which are** a basis and precondition for thriving higher education communities and for achieving higher education’s role in society.

Developments since our previous conference, including the unprovoked Russian invasion of/attack on[[3]](#footnote-3) Ukraine, have underlined the importance of the values upon which we base the EHEA. The fundamental values of higher education are now more threatened than they were a decade ago.

We **reaffirm** our understanding of **academic freedom** as defined in the Rome Communiqué. We understand **academic integrity** as a set of behaviours and attitudes in the academic community internalizing and furthering compliance with ethical and professional principles and standards in learning, teaching, research, governance, outreach and any other tasks related to the missions of higher education. We further understand **institutional autonomy** as the will and ability of higher education institutions to fulfil their missions without undue interference and to set and implement their own priorities and policies as concerns organisation, finance, staffing and academic affairs. The **participation of students and staff in higher education governance** encompasses their right to organise autonomously, in accordance with the principle of partnership and collegiality, without pressure or undue interference; elect and be elected in open, free and fair elections; have their views represented and taken into account; initiate and participate in all debates in all governing bodies; and through their representative organisations, be duly consulted on issues concerning the governance and further development of the relevant higher education institutions and system. **Public responsibility *for* higher education** denotes a set of duties that public authorities must fulfil as part of their overall responsibility for the education sector and society as a whole. It is mainly exercised at the level of the national higher education *system*. **Public responsibility *of* higher education** denotes the obligations of the higher education community to the broader society of which the higher education community is a part. Our understanding of these values is further outlined in **ANNEX 1.**

We underscore that while each value is essential, all six values need to be implemented as a coherent whole. The way any single value is put into practice impacts the way in which other values are realised.

The goal of making the fundamental academic values a cornerstone of the EHEA requires

* reliable monitoring of the implementation of the fundamental values of higher education within all our education systems,
* peer learning enabling us to learn from each other’s experience and
* action to address instances in which fundamental values are threatened.

We therefore ask the BFUG to continue its work to protect and further our fundamental values along all these three lines of action. We further endorse the proposed technical monitoring framework outlined in the appendix to the report by the Fundamental Values Working Group, ask the BFUG to pilot the implementation of this framework and report back to us at our 2027 conference.

We reiterate our commitment and pursuit of an **inclusive** EHEA for all, where students are fully supported, at all stages of life, through tailored policies for accessing and completing higher education irrespective of any background or starting point. We are recognising **progress** **in** **the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA,** after their approval through the 2020 Rome Communique, as a game-changer in the development of social dimension in EHEA, with yet significant steps needed to ensure adequate implementation. We are dedicated to implement the enhanced definition of social dimension in EHEA that we agreed upon, understanding that social dimension also encompasses the desired inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity and is responsive to the needs of local communities.

To further foster diversity, equity and inclusion of both students and staff, **we adopt the EHEA Policy Framework for Social Dimension (*Principles, Guidelines and Indicators on Strengthening the Social Dimension in EHEA,* ANNEX 2),** which represents the first comprehensive and consolidated framework for social dimension in EHEA. The framework consists of principles, guidelines, indicators and descriptors for social dimension and will enable public authorities and higher education institutions to create system and institutional level policies, strategies and action plans for strengthening social dimension, methodologies for monitoring and evaluating their implementation as well as assessing their impact. The indicators and descriptors will enable customised implementation based on specific requirements of higher education systems, by flexibly adapting them for creating tailored policies.

We commit to integrate the framework transversally in our policies and allocate resources for inclusion and equity in higher education. We intention to measure progress in the implementation of the framework and ask the BFUG to report back in 2027. Simultaneously, we will promote the improvement of data collection practices and European monitoring on social dimension, with full support to initiatives such as Eurostudent, and request from the BFUG to explore further links between social dimension and other tools and commitments in higher education.

We acknowledge the stark and prolonged impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences the Russian invasion of/attack on Ukraine had and are still having, not only on higher education systems, but also on rising inequality, student poverty and cost of living. This has also disproportionately affected students’ mental health, as they experience uncertainty, as well as personal and professional hurdles. We commit to tackle these challenges together with stakeholders by promoting accessible student support services and inclusive access to the digital environment, measures to support covering indirect costs of study (housing, transportation, meals and others) through grants and access to psychological counselling. We are devoted to creating policies for fostering inclusive learning environments, irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, disability, caring responsibilities, gender identity or sexual orientation. We will also pay attention to the gender dimension, by further supporting women in STEM.

In a fast-paced post-pandemic society, our commitment to build an **innovative** EHEA by 2030 is more important and timely than ever. To train active citizens in a resilient interconnected society and to adapt to future challenges, students need to be delivered with high-quality, learner-centred and innovative teaching and learning, a cornerstone of EHEA policy. Amidst these developments, we reiterate that we will make our commitment to **ensure student-centred learning (SCL)**, a reality for all students, which requires additional focus from authorities and higher education institutions. We reaffirm our commitment to include student-centred learning in legislation and/or national strategies, ensuring adequate funding and proper support structures for implementation. We encourage higher education institutions to take a proactive approach for adapting to the changing environment through stakeholder participation in curriculum design, flexible learning and cross-disciplinary approaches, ensuring that students are empowered to have autonomy and responsibility for their learning experience including assessment, including at doctoral level. We commit to support policies that bridge the disparity in educational backgrounds, including from migration experiences.

We call upon the BFUG to establish a working structure on Student-Centred Learning to bring together institutions from across the EHEA to exchange and learn from each other, to work towards creating a commonly shared, explicit and operational definition of student-centred learning, and to propose concrete actions of how to enhance the implementation. We also emphasise the importance of strengthening teacher support, acknowledging teaching’s significance, while respecting professional autonomy and ensuring ample time for effective educational practices and collaboration, fair and transparent career assessments, and we commit to incorporating teacher pedagogical training, integrating equality and inclusion, into the curriculum for doctoral students and early career researchers. We intend to ensure that continuous professional development is accessible to all professionals engaged in education and ensure cooperation with them in defining their development related needs. Measures such as establishing teaching and learning centres are important to offer training and expertise, and mentorship programs can also aid early career educators. We highlight that frameworks should be established to outline educators’ development and career paths. Teaching should be as valued as research and its recognition can be manifested through promotions based on teaching quality, incentives for innovative teaching, and support for research on teaching practices, while ensuring stable employment and reasonable teaching loads.

We, furthermore, reiterate our commitment to create a more **interconnected** EHEA. Following the holistic view on the institutions of higher education and on the academic community, we see that exchanges and international cooperation need to lead to the creation of the conditions to realise more internationalised research and education. We call upon the BFUG to develop a transversal approach to internationalised research and education, that takes into account the transversal character of existing and developing transnational initiatives, such as alliances of universities or joint degrees, bridging all dimensions of higher education, recognition, quality assurance, or learning, teaching and research. In this regard, we advocate for the ratification of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (Global Convention), and we support and see with interest the developments of the European Universities Initiatives and intend to further facilitate transnational education wherever possible.

In this respect, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG 2015) have been one of the most successful initiatives of the Bologna Process, promoting trust and transparency between higher education systems, facilitating not only degree recognition but also serving as a basis for the accountability of higher education towards the public and the enhancement of quality through quality assurance processes across EHEA. In order to keep the document in line with developments, challenges and expectations, we invite the primary authors of the ESG (ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE - the E4 Group), together with Business Europe, EI and EQAR, to propose a revised version by 2026, together with a revised version of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. While keeping already established principles, the revised ESG should promote increased support to international cooperation in higher education, put a stronger emphasis on the links with the social dimension and the fundamental values, and highlight innovative practices and emerging trends such as digitalisation and lifelong learning.

[Insert section on] LIFE-LONG-LEARNING?

We acknowledge and commit to strengthening the role of professional and applied higher education and its relevance for sustainable regional development and providing educational opportunities for diverse learners. Considering the strong need for skilled citizens and the existing skill shortages in Europe, we shall support European higher education institutions in creating stimulating learning environments to develop skills and knowledge for the unforeseeable future.

We recognize that regulated professions and professional recognition are an important factor in every national education system, and intend to extend our efforts for facilitating mobility also in this regard.

We recognise the urgent need, highlighted by the consultations regarding the perception of the Bologna Process, to disseminate knowledge and strengthen the dialogue about the ongoing work and new perspectives developed by the BFUG and its working structures, in order to ensure a more effective linkage between the policy level and the higher education community. We indicate as a priority for all EHEA countries the support of national experts, well informed and able to disseminate knowledge about the Bologna Process, and to underpin the implementation of higher education policies and reforms.

Teaching and learning policies should respect the diversity of learners, and ensure the acquisition of transversal and future-proof skills. In order to live up to the ambitions of the symbiotical environmental, **green transition and the technological-digital transition (twin transition)**, we are determined to speed our efforts in our commitment to a greener and more sustainable future for generations to come, which can afford no delay. We will bring together all the higher education stakeholders in our countries to promote and enhance the academic sector's focus on the production of knowledge and solutions on the topic of **climate change and sustainability**, while embedding education for sustainable development transversally in the curricula. We commit to further support the transitions towards sustainability of higher education institutions and to work globally towards achieving the sustainable development goals. We ask the BFUG to address in the next work plan how to identify and multiply best practices for supporting higher education’s role in the green transition as well as in the technological-digital transition.

Acknowledging the transformative and innovative power of digitalization and AI in higher education, we emphasise the importance of analysing the repercussions and the imperative of ethical considerations in their deployment. The use of AI can support personalised learning activities and resources and increase experiential learning. We affirm our commitment to encourage development of policies by HEIs promoting the ethical use of AI in teaching and learning and in research practice. We encourage and will support institutions to provide AI literacy for students and staff and integrate ethical principles into digitalization efforts, ensuring transparency, fairness and inclusivity, and student and staff well-being. This includes engaging with students as partners and with staff on responsible AI use, avoiding biases created by AI by ensuring human decision-making, maintaining data ethics and privacy in learning analytics and in teaching and learning in general, and adapting assessment methods to protect academic integrity. Considering ethics in digitalization and AI adoption in teaching and learning, we commit to engaging in peer learning processes and to addressing the use of AI in order to enhance educational quality, inclusivity, and uphold human rights, while harnessing the potential of digitalization and of AI for positive impact on our societies.

We note with satisfaction that San Marino has successfully/at sufficient level implemented the agreed roadmap. Accessing the EHEA with an agreed Roadmap and with the support of a working group of the BFUG has proven to be useful practice. A roadmap gives a new member country a clear indication of the next steps and sets a clear timeline for the reforms. A small working group appointed by the BFUG can cooperate and assist a new member in reforms. Therefore, any new member accessing the EHEA will be supported in the implementation of its commitments with an agreed roadmap and a working group of the BFUG.

We recognize that notable progress has been made to foster inter-regional mobility, among others by building more frequent contact and constant productive dialogue with countries beyond the EHEA and with other higher education macro-regions all over the world.

We welcome the adoption of the Global Policy Forum Statement and ask the BFUG to continue the outreach beyond the EHEA on various levels, including but not restricted to reciprocal referencing of Qualifications Frameworks and credit systems, ratification and implementation of the UNESCO Global and Regional conventions on recognition of higher education qualifications, and increasing convergence of Quality assurance principles.

We ask the CG GPD to continue and extend its work of promoting dialogue between appropriate international interlocutors and BFUG working structures, and to develop appropriate procedures for acknowledging the countries and regions that evidence their desire to become “EHEA Global Dialogue Partners”.

For our 2027 Ministerial Conference, we mandate the BFUG to develop a Bologna Process Implementation Report assessing the main developments, including \_\_\_ [special reporting focus, FV/SD?] . We also ask the BFUG to submit proposals for the main priorities for the next decade, in close cooperation with higher education institutions, staff and students, and for the governance of the EHEA.

We gratefully accept the offer by \_\_\_\_ to host the next EHEA Ministerial conference of the EHEA and the EHEA Global Policy Forum in 2027.

**ANNEXES**

1. Fundamental Values

2. EHEA Policy Framework for Social Dimension (*Principles, Guidelines and Indicators on Strengthening the Social Dimension in EHEA)*

1. *N.B.: This is a concatenation of contributions of the BFUG sub-structures, and some contributions haven’t been submitted yet and others are yet to be developed. While attending the contribution of the WGs, the Drafting Committee laid out some ideas in text form that could serve as support for a structured discussion process. The text will, obviously, undergo further revisions for coherence and synergy and be revised after WGs and Board and BFUG feedback.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Highlighting in green indicates changes in this version 0.1, requested by WGs, in comparison to the version submitted to the Board as Draft 0.0.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Highlighting in yellow in general indicates need for discussion and a decision on how to proceed of the BFUG.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)