



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

Draft

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1. Executive Summary [*to be completed when the report is finalised*]

2. 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 stakeholders¹ and society at large is not sufficiently informed about the Bologna Process (BP), its structures, accomplishments and impact and that participation in the BP activities is reduced to certain stakeholder groups. To tackle this concern and to take up the Ministers’ commitment, the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) created a Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community (TF). 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 contains a set of recommendations to address the above-mentioned concern and it is based on the knowledge and experience of TF members as well as the following:

- the results of a 2018 survey and 2019 consultations regarding the vision for the EHEA in 2030⁴,
- data collected from three focus groups with higher education (HE) stakeholders,
- the results of the IN-GLOBAL survey focussing on stakeholders’ perception of the BP,
- a review of selected literature about how the BP is perceived and understood and
- consultations with the BFUG members (*to follow*).

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

¹ For the purpose of this report, this term 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>

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.

Participants represented different HE stakeholders, namely 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 and the IN-GLOBAL survey, that was answered by 249 organisations representing various stakeholders and 2176 individuals.

It is hoped that the proposed 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 TF propose the following five main recommendations:

1. Ensure greater engagement of higher education stakeholders with the BFUG work
2. Set up national Bologna expert teams
3. Consider establishing national Bologna hubs
4. Reform the Task Force and set up a Coordination Group within the BFUG
5. Assure sustainable and consistent resources and funding dedicated to knowledge sharing

3. Outline of recommendations and action points

In the following report chapters, the TF presents data, context and action points for each recommendation.

While some action points specifically refer to one category of stakeholders that should take the lead in their implementation, some others are relevant for all categories.

3.1 Recommendation I: Ensure greater engagement of higher education stakeholders with the BFUG work

✓ Role of the BFUG

The BFUG⁸ is the executive structure overseeing the Bologna Process. It has been in place since autumn 1999. The BFUG is entrusted with preparing the Ministerial Conferences, policy forums and with overseeing the Bologna Process between these, including taking forward matters that do not need to be decided by the Ministers or that have been delegated by the Ministers. The BFUG meetings play an essential role in overseeing the implementation of the Ministerial Communiqués, as well as in developing the EHEA).

⁶ European Network of Information Centres in the European Region

⁷ National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

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

More than half of the individual respondents to the IN-GLOBAL survey did not know about the EHEA-level governing structure, and 18% of national and European organisations of the sector were not familiar with it either.

The discussions of the TF members and the results of the 2018 online consultation with BFUG members and consultative members which investigated, among other matters, 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 as well as in the meetings, seminars and consultations should be insured (BFUG, 2019a).

Furthermore, to strengthen the connection with HE practitioners and ensure that they contribute to the BP discussions, the 2018 survey respondents suggested to organise 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 and in this regard to consider creating thematic networks of practitioners for specific issues; and to organize online/virtual meetings to increase opportunities for discussion (BFUG, 2019a).

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

The IN-GLOBAL survey shows that less than half of the respondents (46%) consider that the amount of information available about the BP and the agreed EHEA concepts, policies and tools is at least “about sufficient” or “more than enough”. A large number of respondents (34%) consider the information 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 clearly indicate that there is a need for further efforts to improve the availability and provision of information about the BP and the EHEA to various stakeholders and more so for students and academics.

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

In many EHEA countries the link between the national BFUG members and the national HE stakeholders is not very strong, subsequently, the information on the ongoing discussions and decisions does not reach practitioners. Some of the 2018 survey respondents recommended that BFUG members maintain closer relations with their respective ministers/organisation leaders, and that they 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 the practitioners’ points of view are considered in the BFUG structures and national discussions (BFUG, 2019a).

The focus group discussions revealed yet another challenge: the frequent change of national BFUG members, leading to loss of ‘historical memory’ and sometimes losing link with the respective stakeholders.

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

Also, often, the less experienced member countries' representatives lack enough information about how the BFUG working structures operate, the logic of the whole processes and the decision-making process. These aspects hinder active participation in BFUG discussions as it is not easy to grasp the whole complexity of the process and its dynamics.

A topic discussed in the focus groups and by the TF members, also been mentioned by many of the 2018 survey respondents, relates to the BFUG meeting documents. The BFUG Rules of Procedure 2021-2024 indicates 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 well in advance the BFUG meetings to allow enough time for wider consultations with stakeholders at the national level, at least before the approval of final versions.

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 of them favour organising more Bologna events at EHEA and national levels, as are the TF members today.

According to the IN-GLOBAL survey, "conferences, workshops, trainings" are by a large margin the best-known activity/channel for both individuals and organisational respondents. The suggested formats for these events are primarily: practically oriented workshops, seminars, PLAs, virtual conferences focused on the priorities that emerge from the Ministerial Communiqués and the BFUG workplan (BFUG, 2019a). It has been suggested to organise events labelled as "Bologna" seminars, aimed at facilitating exchange between the BFUG and the HE sector. A possible model for Bologna seminars is to organise them as several one-day activities spread out over a certain period of time. These could be organised thematically and dedicated to various topics and stakeholder groups. Respondents show also a clear interest in both 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 on different topics and challenges and for finding possible solutions. This tool is helpful for policy development purposes and deep discussions on practices employed by different actors. Furthermore, the respondents to the 2018 survey confirmed the usefulness of the peer-learning activities and suggested that there should be space for more peer-learning activities in the work models of the BFUG working structures (BFUG, 2019a). This was also echoed by some responses to the 2019 consultation that indicated that more peer-learning activities and the sharing of best practices among HEIs and academics is needed (BFUG, 2019b).

In the framework of the Thematic Peer Groups (TPG), there is a staff exchange scheme that allows for site visits between the members. This provides a good opportunity to discuss specific topics and exchange information about initiatives and practices developed in different countries. However, in the case of TPG on QA, it was suggested that the application process could be rethought to allow for exchange between agencies that do not know each other as well.

Some respondents to the IN-GLOBAL survey pointed out that there is relatively low participation from certain countries in the PLAs. This may be due to the expensive travel costs. To tackle this issue, it was suggested that there should be more online PLAs, but careful attention should be given to how these are organised.

✓ Role of the E4 group

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, plays a pivotal role in providing information to their members and the public by *translating* policies into practices, 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 practices, participate in projects, working groups and thematic groups. They also consult their members by conducting studies on various HE-related topics which inform and feed into policy discussions. These organisations collaborate and exchange information as well as organise joint events such as the European Quality Assurance Forum. The E4 organisations use various communication channels and tools to reach their members and the wider public, namely newsletters, mailings, websites, and social media. Another organisation that has a similar status to the consultative members in the BFUG and was founded by the E4s is the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). It provides information about the QA agencies listed in the register, conducts studies, organises events, coordinates and participates in projects thus, informing its members¹⁴ about different topics and initiatives.

✓ Role of the ministries

There are various approaches to disseminating information about the BP in the EHEA countries, and the responsibility for this task lies with different actors. For instance, the IN-GLOBAL survey shows that in most countries, the organisations responsible for disseminating information about the BP activities, policies and reforms among different national and local HE stakeholders are the ministry of education (25 countries) or a national agency (6 countries). Similarly, the primary responsibility for the promotion of each HE system internationally is, in most of the cases, also of the ministry of education (17 countries) or a national agency (14 countries). These findings concur with the testimonies of the focus group participants about the ministry of education being the main coordinating body that disseminates information and organises various activities.

Whenever new policies or tools are developed at the international level, 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. In some countries, where the main Bologna reforms were implemented long ago, participants in the focus groups pointed out that there is little attention given to the Bologna Process, which is seen as irrelevant.

According to the data collected, it seems that national meetings with HE stakeholders, where the HE issues including the BP are discussed, are convened either on regular and/or an ad hoc basis depending on the need. In some instances, it was said, that the BP sets the agenda for the HE events at national level.

Focus group participants pointed to larger events organised at national level. For example, in 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.

¹⁰ <https://www.enqa.eu/>

¹¹ <https://eua.eu/>

¹² <https://www.eurashe.eu/>

¹³ <https://esu-online.org/>

¹⁴ EQAR members are ministries, the E4 Group, BUSINESSEUROPE and Education International.

Furthermore, some participants indicated that there is no national and/or regional coordinated approach in the process of implementation of the BP commitments nor in how communication around it is organised, which means that there is no strategy that can involve all HE stakeholders. It was suggested that such a strategy should include periodic monitoring of the impact of certain decisions, laws, tools implemented in HE. This strategy might also include a communication strategy and a plan for organising trainings and support activities for different stakeholders. Having sound data about these aspects would help to understand which further steps are needed and which stakeholders should be involved. In [Austria](#), the National EHEA Implementation Reports are published before the BP Ministerial Conferences. They describe the targets, indicators and current status of implementation in Austria.

Several participants point out that the political instability which results in continuous amendments in the legislative framework and changes in the implementation strategies and priorities presents a big challenge. Also, in cases of federal countries, the implementation of the BP goals involves a complex political landscape where each territorial structure has authority regarding HE. This was reported to be the case in Germany and Bosnia and Herzegovina for example.

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 different stakeholders and provide support in implementing the EHEA priorities.

National consultations regarding the implementation of the BP commitments, the needs of stakeholders, their views on the future of the HE and other important aspects have been conducted in EHEA countries. These are coordinated by various 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 may be conducted using emails, online-questionnaires, in depth interviews, focus groups or other forms of discussions. Some countries conduct regular surveys dedicated to various HE stakeholders to gather information on specific topics and stakeholders' needs.

According to the IN-GLOBAL survey, organisational respondents generally feel adequately consulted in their national structures, while individuals feel less so. It is particularly remarkable that a large number of individual respondents actually are not able to tell whether they are adequately consulted, in the case of students nearly 50% responded in this way.

From the existing data, can be concluded that there is wide consensus that whenever the issue for which a consultation is conducted requires the views of the whole sector, all relevant stakeholders should be involved. That this, seemingly obvious rule is not always followed, is demonstrated by the fact that in the consultation on "The Future of the EHEA" conducted in 2019 and aimed to provide information about the ideas of the HE stakeholders, some countries carried out their consultation only with ministerial personnel (TF, 2023).

✓ Role of a Bologna dedicated body

Besides the work of the ministries responsible for education, in a number of countries there is a dedicated body responsible for coordinating the activities related to the BP policies and reforms and information dissemination and exchange. For example, the National Agency Erasmus+ Education at the [Austrian](#) Exchange Service (OeAD) has as main responsibilities: to offer information tailored to specific target groups and to organise events and consultations for educational institutions interested in the further development and implementation of Bologna targets. In addition, 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 amongst various actors and maintains know-how and organisational expertise related to Bologna initiatives." (Austrian Federal

Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, p. 64). Such bodies exist also in Poland, Sweden, Ukraine and Kazakhstan but operate on a smaller scale and have fewer responsibilities.

According to participants in the focus groups, however, in a number of countries there is no dedicated BP organisation, and while the ministry of education coordinates and organises some events, there is no space to discuss and exchange on specific issues in a deeper and meaningful manner and with the relevant representatives.

✓ Role of QA agencies

The development of the national QA systems has been an extraordinary phenomenon in the BP with HE systems coming to agree that independent QA is necessary to ensure accountability and to support enhancement, and to 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 across the EHEA countries. The focus group participants, especially students and HEI representatives, confirmed that the agencies act as bridges between different stakeholders.

It is very likely that this is due to the fact that agencies are in close and continuous contact with various actors of the HEIs, national student unions, and employers through the mandatory inclusion of different stakeholders in their activities, cyclical external evaluations of HEIs and training of evaluation experts. They also collaborate closely with governments as they normally participate in numerous discussions and initiatives.

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 groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s). The guidelines, further, 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 very useful for institutions, QA agencies and the experts themselves as they learn about new practices and share these in their own systems.

The results of a survey conducted as part of the QA-FIT project¹⁵ show that besides being an external QA body, most agencies fulfil the following functions: provide information and guidance (88%), do research and analyses on higher education (at regional and/or national level) (70%), propose policies and laws for quality assurance of HE (at regional and/or national level) (61%), collect data on HE (at regional and/or national level) (53%) (ENQA forthcoming publication, 2023).

QA agencies organise events gathering various stakeholders. For example, in Armenia, the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation organises the *Education Quality Weeks* every year with events that gather all HE stakeholders, among which students, academic and administrative staff from universities, and international experts. They are given the opportunity to share their views, discuss about new developments, projects, trends and good practices in the field of QA. In these events, topics linked to QA, such as accreditation, recognition, and qualifications frameworks, are addressed. Other agency representatives shared information about the events they organise and the meetings they hold with quality assurance officers from HEIs: in these they discuss various BP-related issues.

¹⁵ <https://www.enqa.eu/projects/quality-assurance-fit-for-the-future-ga-fit/>

However, they agreed that some of these discussions still focus on the theoretical level and that there is a need for academics and administrative staff to be more engaged in discussions about the decisions at meta level and their impact on the practical level.

It is also known that agencies from different countries collaborate closely as well as those from the same country, if there are different QA systems in place. 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. For instance, in Spain, the agencies have diverse competencies, and smaller meetings and focus groups are held among agencies working on the same HE areas/topics.

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

✓ Role of ENIC-NARIC centres

ENIC-NARIC centres have also an important role in providing and disseminating information as per their mandate. According to Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), the National information centre facilitates access to authoritative and 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 Parties; 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 also have a say in policy discussions and national legislation. In Turkey, for example, the centre gathers enquiries from students and stakeholders in a report which reaches the Council for HE and this feeds in the legislative decision-making process regarding HE.

Focus group participants said that the centre cooperates with the national QA agency on some specific topics, but this cooperation is somewhat limited. Therefore, it was suggested that the national QA agencies and the ENIC-NARIC centres communicate and collaborate more to find common ground on topics of mutual interest. This may include inviting each other to events, organising joint events, and conducting joint research and consultations. In addition, it was discussed that information sharing between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres should be improved as this would help to identify common challenges and possible solutions. It is known that in countries where the agency and the centre are under one 'roof' the flow of information is much smoother.

Regarding the communication between ENIC-NARIC centres and recognition practitioners from the HEIs, participants said that in most cases, it is very challenging to identify these practitioners at HEIs as they may not work in a department dedicated to recognition and there is no direct line of connection with them. In addition, the frequent turnover of HEIs' recognition staff makes it challenging to maintain connections. It was agreed, though, that the link between the national centres and the recognition practitioners at the HEIs needs to be stronger. The centres could have an essential role in training HEIs' recognition experts and raising awareness of all recognition-related matters.

The discussions indicated that the ENIC-NARIC centres should be more involved in the national and international HE discussions to ensure that informed decisions are taken at the policy level.

The ENIC-NARIC Networks also use the peer review model. This has been developed as a quality assurance instrument for the ENIC-NARIC networks, and it is based on the criteria of the LRC. This procedure is entirely voluntary and aims to improve their practices towards compliance with the LRC, in areas they find most fitting.

These reviews are conducted as part of a project and, thus, they are funded through the project. To date, more than half of the ENIC-NARIC centres have already participated in these projects (ENIC-NARIC Networks, 2023). The focus group discussions revealed that this activity is seen as a very useful tool allowing to learn about how the other centres are structured, about their qualifications recognition processes and procedures, what the challenges and gaps are and how to tackle them.

✓ Role of National Unions of Students (NUS)

The level of student involvement and consultation regarding BP issues vary from country to country. Due to the ESG and the national QA systems, participation of students in HEIs' governing structures, in internal and external QA, in programme and curriculum development and national policy discussions has become more of a reality. Also, students' input and feedback are viewed as essential for further development of programmes and education in general. However, in some countries, students are not systematically involved in discussions related to the implementation of BP.

The focus group participants said that the national student representative bodies take the initiative and make proposals, consult students on various issues and report on the results.

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

National student unions also organise events and working groups, participate in international projects and debates with students and other actors, thus, engaging the student body in activities related to the BP. They also facilitate conversations with students within HEIs, involving both members and non-members to explain reforms and gather input.

✓ Role of HEIs and NRC

HEI representatives are involved in various policy discussions at national and international levels. However, the level of involvement and the HEIs' actors that participate in these activities differ greatly from one fora to the other. Some respondents to the 2019 consultations reported that the current structures rely greatly on top-down approaches with HEIs' involvement varying from country to country. Better communication between governments and institutions is needed as HEIs 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 the ministries' and HEIs' perceptions of the EHEA tools and policies. The latter, often, perceive them as an imposition rather than added value. This is, in large part, due to the lack of participation of HEI stakeholders in the policy discussions. An important question is also which HEI actors are usually involved in these activities as in many cases only the HEI management is involved.

Ensuring smooth and direct communication between the ministry and different levels of the institutions' hierarchy is not always straightforward and largely 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 important role in information dissemination among institutions. For example, in Ireland, the Irish Universities Association (IUA) represents 8 universities and plays an important role in the dissemination of information about the BP. It coordinates and participates in projects on different topics (not always, however, related directly to the BP).

Some participants in the focus groups pointed to the challenge of motivating HEI staff to participate in national debates, activities and trainings.

They said that it is equally challenging to motivate them to apply changes in line with the BP priorities. It was suggested that practitioners' participation in discussions, events, projects and peer learning activities (at national and international level) would be helpful in motivating them. Furthermore, some participants said that the internal and external QA procedures are helpful in leading colleagues and international peers to discuss good practices, challenges and solutions. Moreover, it was mentioned that internal quality assurance evaluations play a significant role in knowledge sharing within the institutions and help to assess the progress and ensure alignment with the BP goals.

HEIs are known to employ a variety of successful actions and practices related to knowledge and information sharing within the institution, particularly 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 quality assurance and updates from the ministry.

Participants testified that HEIs act as information and knowledge hubs in local/regional/national development. They organise various 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 certain areas, like mobility or accreditation.

Institutions also organise practice-oriented meetings involving academic staff and other HE representatives but these are not held regularly, and 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 Association¹⁶, International Association of Universities¹⁷, and the Global University Associations Forum¹⁸; projects; internationalisation activities; mobility programmes; and university alliances also contribute to information exchange and peer learning.

Key action points

Based on the above data, the TF proposes the following action points that would support the implementation of Recommendation I.

- ✓ BFUG
- Organise online information sessions about the main messages of the Ministerial Communiqué.
- Organise parallel sessions in the BFUG meetings with practitioners to discuss specific thematic issues in depth.
- Include regular expert consultations with practitioners in the BFUG working methods.
- Consider creating thematic networks of practitioners for specific issues.
- Organise online/virtual meetings / PLAs to increase opportunities for discussion and enhance participation of different countries.

¹⁶ <https://eua.eu/>

¹⁷ <https://www.iau-aiu.net/>

¹⁸ <https://eua.eu/resources/projects/838-the-global-university-associations-forum-%E2%80%93-guaf.html>

- Ensure that the final versions of policy documents are made available well in advance the BFUG meetings were these will be approved, to allow enough time for wider consultations with stakeholders at national level.
- Create more space for peer learning activities in the work models of the BFUG working structures.
- Organise events labelled as Bologna events or seminars aiming at facilitating exchange between BFUG and the HE sector.
- ✓ Ministry
- Consider establishing a dedicated body or unit at the ministry or mandate an existing organisation to coordinate and organise activities related to BP and ensure continuous dissemination of information.
- Develop a national strategy dedicated to the BP implementation in collaboration with HE stakeholders. Include periodic monitoring of the impact of certain decisions, laws, tools implemented in HE, a communication strategy and a plan for organising trainings and support activities for different stakeholders.
- Develop a National Bologna Process Implementation Report.
- Ensure that the national BFUG members communicate/report about the discussions at the BFUG level to their respective stakeholder representatives and ministry.
- Empower the national BFUG members with clear mandate to take positions.
- Consider appointing two national BFUG members: ministry representative and national HE expert guaranteeing that practitioners' view is captured in the BFUG and national discussions.
- Ensure communication and a good flow of information among the national representatives engaged in BFUG working structures to synchronise efforts and exchange updates from their respective structures.
- Ensure more and continuous communication between governments and HEIs, including universities of applied sciences and institutes, or expand direct communication channels between the ministry and different levels of HEIs' hierarchy, thus using all HEIs' valuable experience.
- ✓ QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC centres
- QA agencies and the ENIC-NARIC centres should continue to be valuable knowledge resources related to the BP.
- 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.

✓ HEIs

- Ensure good information sharing within the institution towards all institutional actors.
- HEIs should continue initiating and organising actions and activities related to knowledge and information sharing within the institution, particularly in the context of the BP.
- HEIs should organise regular practice-oriented meetings involving academic staff and other HE representatives.

✓ NUS

- National Unions of Students should continue organising events, working groups, conducting studies and consultations related to students' perceptions of the BP, participating in international projects and debates with students and other actors, and engaging the student body in activities related to the BP.

✓ 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.
- Involve practitioners from HEIs in the policy discussions, which set direction and priorities for HE.
- Consider organising more practically oriented Bologna events at EHEA and national levels.
- Ensure more significant involvement of stakeholders, researchers and practitioners in the BP-related events organised at the EHEA or national/regional level.
- The national coordinating body(ies) to organise regular and ad hoc meetings, events and consultations with all the HE stakeholders, including practitioners, thus creating space for more profound and meaningful discussions.
- National HE stakeholders to:
 - participate in the events and activities organised and advertised by the EHEA umbrella organisations,
 - participate in consultations organised by the EHEA umbrella organisations via surveys, focus groups and other tools,
 - subscribe to umbrella organisations' Newsletters and follow closely their websites for news and publications.
- Conduct consultations whenever relevant, using various tools such as emails, online-questionnaires, in depth interviews, focus groups or other forms of discussions.
- 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.

3.2 Recommendation II: Set up national Bologna expert teams

In 2004, the European Commission set up the 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 and the focus groups participants agreed that the Bologna experts' networks 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 felt in many countries. These findings are echoed by the 2019 survey, which showed that this initiative was widely approved. Some countries and organisations suggested that the experience of the Bologna expert teams should be re-activated to ensure the dissemination of information about the BP and its work and peer-learning activities at the regional and national levels (BFUG, 2019b). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the work of the national Bologna experts could be financed through Erasmus+ projects and that guidance for re-activating this initiative and collaboration with existing HEREs would be beneficial.

The Bologna experts worked at national, EU levels and also collaborated with experts from non-Erasmus countries, such as the Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs).

This exchange contributed greatly to the HE reforms and development in the respective countries and offered opportunities for trainings and peer-learning. It also gave notable experience and knowledge of different HE systems to the experts themselves.

Some countries such as the Netherlands retained the model of Bologna experts and continue it. In Austria, there is a Bologna coordinator in each HEI. They meet once or twice a year and report back to the national BFUG, thus, ensuring the link between HEIs, ministry and BFUG. There are also 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 as they are funded by a project. In the course of a visit, the experts provide informational assistance in the implementation and further development of the HEI's own prioritised Bologna goals (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2020, p. 71). This represents a good practice peer-to-peer activity that allows for practice-oriented discussions regarding the BP implementation.

The objectives of the Bologna experts should inter alia be:

- ✓ to spread knowledge, understanding of the EHEA objectives,
- ✓ to assist, monitor, enhance, high quality implementation,
- ✓ to position higher education for the future,
- ✓ to support stakeholders,
- ✓ to ensure full understanding and implementation of micro credentials, credit recognition, access to comparative information, student-centred learning,
- ✓ to train trainers,
- ✓ to provide mentoring support,
- ✓ to establish working relations with Bologna Hubs,
- ✓ to promote best practice,
- ✓ to engage in peer-to-peer learning,
- ✓ to establish networks for: subjects, curriculum reform, staff development.

Key action points

- Provide guidance and financing for re-activating the Bologna expert teams and for collaboration with existing Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE).
- Ensure that the Bologna expert team comprises experts representing various HE stakeholders, including students.
- The number in each team will be determined on the size of the country, but a diversity of disciplines and types of institution should be provided.
- The teams should be provided with international training and see themselves as part of an international (EHEA) network.
- Organise regular meetings for the experts, at the national but also EHEA level.
- The teams should be provided with resources (short videos, training materials, information notes etc.) and make use of resources generated by themselves.
- Experts should provide direct support for institutions online and through in person visits.

3.3 Recommendation III: Consider establishing national Bologna hubs

The TF suggests that so called 'Bologna hubs' be established. These should be a framework including students, academics, researchers, HEI management and administrative staff, national authorities, Bologna experts and HEREs. Through the activities of this hub, information could be shared, and participants could debate the objectives of the BP, the implementation of its key commitments at the national and HEIs levels, determine common actions and propose recommendations for the respective EHEA member country. This would empower the national-level stakeholders through support and guidance from the HE education authority and other relevant experts, institutions and organisations.

According to the IN-GLOBAL 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 various HE stakeholders. For instance, in Norway, before each BFUG meeting, the Ministry of Education and Research convenes what could be considered a national board of the BFUG consisting 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, while 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. We find similar structures in Sweden - the Swedish National Bologna Reference Group and the UK - the UK's Bologna Stakeholders Group, which comprise different stakeholders.

Key action points

- Ensure communication and good flow of information among the national representatives engaged in BFUG working structures to synchronise efforts and exchange updates from their respective structures.
- Consult national stakeholders regarding the most appropriate composition and at which level such structure should function.
- Organise reoccurring meetings of the Bologna hub in the year. For the meetings to be more efficient, determine the discussion topics in advance.

3.4 Recommendation IV: Reform the Task Force and set up a Coordination Group within the BFUG

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

- 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 Bologna process.
- Developing the concept and 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 there is a need now to continue create specific ones on different BP relevant topics. These activities were welcomed and proved their usefulness for different HE stakeholders.

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

- to further develop resources and tools adapted to an evolving Bologna Process,
- to assemble a team specialised in creating content about the BP and its work – audio, video and text;
- to support the national Bologna expert teams and hubs and other national and EHEA level initiatives;
- to become an international platform for peer exchange for the national Bologna experts.

3.5 Recommendation V: Assure sustainable and continuous resources and funding dedicated to knowledge sharing

There is a need for more systematic and structured mechanisms to support and promote knowledge-sharing initiatives and practices across various organisations at the national and EHEA levels.

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

Another reported challenge is frequent staff turnover at the coordinating body and loss of historical memory related to the BP policy implementation and activities. In many cases, 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 important to build on existing structures and networks and that there is a need for synergy between projects, initiatives, and organisations to maximise the impact of Bologna-related activities.

It has been suggested that easy-to-read materials comprising information about the history of the process, what it is about and what it strives for and stories in the form of short articles written by people who have been involved in the BP may be of help to inform and involve HE stakeholders.

It has also been suggested that to improve and ensure a better understanding of the BP policies, commitments and reforms comprised in the Ministerial Communiqués by the HE community and society at large, these should be translated, after adoption, by the respective BFUG member countries. Translation should be accurate mainly regarding the specific terminology and concepts and consider the terms used in the context of each HE system. These official translations could then be made available on the EHEA website for further dissemination. Furthermore, to ensure that the main messages of the Ministerial Communiqués are understood by a wider audience, organising online information sessions could be considered. The recordings of these could then be also posted on the EHEA website.

Projects have been proven to be a very good tool for work on BP topics. They provide a good platform for debates, research and consultations, information sharing, and organisation of events that aim to gather different stakeholders and advance the implementation of the BP key commitments.

Projects can be organised at national and EHEA levels, allowing for peer learning and exchange of information among different stakeholders and HE systems. In addition, projects represent a model for securing funding for such activities during the project period. For the above-mentioned 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 the lack of staff trained to apply for projects, which frequently resulted in missing opportunities to apply or rejected applications. Stakeholder organisations need to offer training opportunities on project applications.

Both focus group participants and IN-GLOBAL survey respondents mentioned the following projects that have considerable impact on information and knowledge exchange, peer-to-peer learning, and in advancing the understanding of the BP commitments and policies and their implementation: PROFORMANCE and PROFORMANCE+ projects¹⁹, Bologna Hub Peer Support projects²⁰, Twinning projects²¹, Tempus projects, HERE and SPHERE²². Most of these projects represent a continuation of earlier projects. Considering these examples it becomes evident that projects should build on each other's findings and results to have long-lasting impact and use resources wisely.

Some focus group participants said that there is lack of synergy and cooperation between different groups working on similar projects. To tackle this issue, in Poland, initiatives are being taken to streamline and optimise activities and efforts are underway to create a comprehensive mapping of the ongoing initiatives to identify areas of overlap and ensure coordination.

¹⁹ [Home | Proformance](#)

²⁰ <https://eu.daad.de/programme-und-hochschulpolitik/bologna/bologna-hub-peer-support/de/>

²¹ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/twinning_en

²² <https://eua.eu/resources/projects/584-here.html>

The TF suggests that whenever there are projects on the same or related topics, create opportunities for exchange of information and findings to optimise the project results. In this regard, some countries continue to draw on the expertise of Bologna experts in their projects. For example, in the Netherlands, the Bologna experts participate and collaborate in different international projects ensuring the information about these and their results are disseminated within the whole system.

The IN-GLOBAL survey, however, showed that projects do not always seem to be very widely known : only 15% of the individual respondents have engaged in EHEA-related projects themselves, while 44% of organisational respondents indicated participation. Yet, 40% of organisations have only “heard of” EHEA-related projects, and 16% are not even 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 be informed about these initiatives and the possibilities to participate while also giving free and open access to the project resources.

Key action points

- Schemes for financing Bologna Process knowledge sharing should be available to fund activities at EHEA and national level.
- 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 the national 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 stakeholders and the public.
- Projects to build on each other’s findings and results in order to have a long-lasting impact and use resources wisely.
- Create easy-to-read materials explaining the history of the BP, what it is about and what it strives for.
- Create materials containing core information about the BP, the BFUG working structures, the decision-making process and explanation of the relevant acronyms.
- BFUG member countries to translate the Ministerial Communiqués, after adoption, in their respective languages to improve the understanding of commitments.
- Streamline and optimise activities and create a comprehensive mapping of the ongoing initiatives to identify areas of overlap and ensure coordination.

4. Communication channels and tools

In order to support the engagement of the academic community with the BP policies and goals, to enhance knowledge and understating among all higher education stakeholder different communication channels and tools need to be employed.

4.1 Websites and other platforms

Websites and digital platforms allowing for online debates are an important source of information about the BP. The EHEA website 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 IN-GLOBAL survey, 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 useful.

Some respondents to the 2019 consultations suggested to have a 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, 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.

4.2 Newsletters and mailing lists

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

Some ENIC-NARIC centres reported that communication with HEIs takes place mainly by phone and email. Also, applicants and students can address their inquiries by phone or email to the ENIC-NARIC centre. Some centres 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 at all with newsletters covering EHEA topics

To ensure good communication between the various BFUG working structures, newsletters and other kinds of information bulletins sent through mailing lists are a good tool.

4.3 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.

4.4 Other dissemination tools

Dissemination tools such as videos and messages with EHEA visual identity, to be presented at the national/regional level and used for awareness-raising campaigns have proved effective in different dissemination campaigns. TV/radio reportages, as well as podcasts on topics related to the Bologna process can also address other target audiences and provide more in depth information on different matters.

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 (using acquired mailing lists makes the emails prone to end up in the spam folder); for this, it is important to create a sign-up button on the website.
- Consider using all the 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.

5. Best practice examples

5.1. Country example

5.2. Innovative approach example

5.3. Successful projects example

6. Conclusions *[to be completed when the report is finalised]*

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