

Questions to the BFUG re the long-term Secretariat proposed in the

- 1) **Do you agree or disagree with the decision in principle, as proposed in the draft suggestion for the Tirana** Communiqué. If endorsed by Ministers the BFUG-
- a. would continue to explore the long-term secretariat, as proposed in the roadmap
 - b. launch a call for identification of possible hosting countries or organisations based on the principles and the roadmap
 - c. discuss and decide the details and steps in the next work period, e.g. whether NGO or foundation, where to locate it (subject to the results of the call), its detailed TOR, its budget and how this will be financed, organisation and staffing.
 - d. may set up a Task Force responsible for supervising the process, contact with the potential hosting countries and organisations, necessary review of rules, all within the limits set by - and reporting to - the BFUG would take the decision on these issues, as the BFUG delegates represent their ministries, with due time to consult with their administrations.

To be considered:

- If the BFUG agrees on this, this would be submitted to the Ministers in Tirana to take this decision of principle. If not, the discussion on the long-term Secretariat would end here.
- This decision in principle has to be taken now, as postponing it would only prolong the discussion, but is unlikely to bring further insights. Moreover, exploring locations and arrangements will require additional efforts by the BFUG, its working structures and possible location countries/organisations. Hence, this decision in principle is needed as a basis for committing such time and resources.
- Ideally, and as usual, the BFUG would take this decision by consensus, whether in favour or against and avoid, if possible, a vote.
- It should be noted that even if the decision in principle is taken now by the BFUG, and in Tirana by the Ministers, there is always the possibility to return to the approach of a rotating Secretariat, either after the evaluation to be launched in 2033, or even during already during the next work period, if the BFUG comes to the conclusion that there are unsurmountable hurdles, or benefits do not justify the effort. There is a milestone foreseen by spring 2026 in the roadmap.

2) **Do you agree or disagree that the Secretariat should be fully accountable to the BFUG?**

- a. As proposed, the Secretariat would operate under the authority of the BFUG. It would report to it, require BFUG agreement on its annual budgets and financial reports. The head of the Secretariat would be selected and appointed by the BFUG, and could also be dismissed (subject to the employment contract and national employment rules).
- b. How the BFUG will exercise this role, is still to be discussed and decided. This could be an additional task for the Board, or for a standing committee to be established.

3) Do you agree or disagree that all EHEA members contribute to the costs of the Secretariat?

- a. This should be about a fair sharing of the costs, which so far have been shouldered by the EC and one member.
- b. How this would be done, is a matter of further discussion and decisions during the 2024-2027 work period.
- c. A budget estimate has been provided, which could vary slightly depending on the location, the number of staff, tasks and workload. For example, if working structures would be responsible for organisation of meetings and draw-up of minutes, this could reduce work and costs. Again, these issues can be discussed in the next work period, but also to experienced in practice, once the Secretariat has been established.
- d. The EQAR approach has been used as an example and for illustration, on how costs could be shared, based on country income. For the BFUG to discuss and agree during the next work period, how concretely it wants to share the costs.
- e. There is agreement that inability to contribute fully to the costs would not be a reason to restrict or exclude members.
- f. While individual members may experience difficulties in providing a contribution (for legal, or budgetary reasons), it is difficult to imagine that a member values the Bologna Process and EHEA, but is by principal against contributing to its cost.
- g. Some members signalled already that they may face difficulties, e.g. in joining an NGO, and paying fees. This will need search for flexible solution, e.g. fees can be transferred by entities other than the ministry, e.g. HE agency, whereas the power regarding the BFUG secretariat would remain with the BFUG delegate.
- h. Again, addressing and solving these issues, would need a concrete situation, and therefore a decision on how to implement the Secretariat to be developed in the next work period.
- i. Not everything will and has to be achieved by 1 July 2027. The period 2027-2030 should be seen as period of fine-tuning and transition, in which solutions would be found for those individual members who face difficulties, be it for legal or budgetary reasons. The fact that the Secretariat will already be in operation, and is supported by most EHEA members, would also be strong argument towards sceptics at some home administration.