



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI NAȚIONALE



Last update: 28/06/2019

BFUG WORK ON VISION AND THEMATIC PRIORITIES AFTER 2020

Summary of the current state of affairs (June 2019)

I. Background:

1. Working Group 3 Policy Development for new EHEA goals (2015-2018):

During the preparation of the Paris Ministerial Conference, the Working Group 3, taking into account the Yerevan Communiqué and “The Bologna Process revisited”, proposed focussing in the future on six topics:

1. Promoting active and responsible citizens,
2. Linking EHEA and ERA,
3. Using digital technologies,
4. Supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds,
5. Enhancing teacher support,
6. Improving professional recognition.

Reference: [Working Group 3 Policy Development for new EHEA goals \(2015-2018\)](#)

2. The Paris Communiqué (2018):

In Paris, the Ministers agreed that the EHEA should become more important, not less so, in the future, and specifically invited the BFUG to prepare proposals for 2020 which can facilitate the EHEA's commitment to pursue the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which are set for 2030:

"Beyond 2020: a more ambitious EHEA

The EHEA has proved its role as a unique framework for higher education co-operation in Europe. To develop the EHEA further, we will intensify cross-disciplinary and cross-border cooperation as well as develop an inclusive and innovative approach to learning and teaching.

We call on the BFUG to submit proposals in time for our 2020 meeting in order to enable higher education to fully play its role in meeting the challenges faced by our societies.

We will foster and extend integrated transnational cooperation in higher education, research and innovation, for increased mobility of staff, students and researchers, and for more joint study programmes throughout the whole EHEA. We take note with interest of the recent EU initiative on ‘European Universities’ and we will encourage all our higher education institutions to work in such new settings.

We commit to developing the role of higher education in securing a sustainable future for our planet and our societies and to finding ways in which we, as EHEA Ministers, can contribute



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to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at global, European and national levels."

Reference: [Paris Communiqué](#)

II. Work until now by the BFUG (2018-2019)

Taking up the task outlined in the Paris Communiqué, the present BFUG began work by carrying out an on-line survey of its own members, and then drafted and approved a "Roadmap" which outlines the steps to be taken up to the next Ministerial Conference (Rome, June 2020). The general objective is to delineate proposals for "Governance and Thematic Priorities after 2020" through broad consultation and reflection.

1. The online survey and its results

The online survey was carried out in October 2018 under the aegis of the BFUG Co-chairs Austria and Switzerland.

The six priorities suggested in the questionnaire were those proposed by the previous Working Group 3:

1. Promoting active and responsible citizenship
2. Linking the EHEA and the ERA
3. Using digital technologies
4. Supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds
5. Enhancing teacher support
6. Improving professional recognition

According to the opinions expressed, the first five of the six were confirmed as being priorities, whereas topic 6, "Improving professional recognition", received fewer mentions (only about 10). There were also a number of further suggestions, which can be grouped under the following headings:

- **innovation in L&T**
- **fundamental/core values**
- **mobility.**

It was emphasized that "**implementation of key commitments**" should always be a priority, and that if new 'key commitments are identified in the future, this will not mean that the present key commitments can be ignored.

References:

- [The online survey](#)
- [The online survey results](#)



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2. The Bucharest BFUG meeting conclusions (April 2019)

Building on the results of the survey, but also hoping to stimulate innovative reflection on what the future needs of learners and society will be, the organizers of the BFUG meeting in Bucharest presented a '[concept note](#)'; distributed all participants in 4 breakout groups to make discussion more fruitful, and asked each of the four groups to discuss the following points and report on their findings:

1. What **major changes/improvements in the Higher Education world will be necessary in order to enable the Universities of 2030 to play their fundamental societal role?**
2. Which of these **changes/improvements can be implemented** or supported by a loosely organised framework such as the EHEA?
3. How many of these **changes** are already included, in some way or to some degree, **in the existing EHEA commitments? What might be the future key priorities?**

We summarize the findings, grouped under 7 general themes, as follows:

The societal role of higher education

- One of HEIs' fundamental societal roles is as **protectors of freedom of speech and thought** and **promoters / guardians of valuable ideas and core values**. In a world pervaded by fake and misleading news and information universities must continue to show how to evaluate information critically, and to find the truth.
- Universities should act as **motors for community or regional development**, by enhancing links with their communities and hinterlands, and promoting such values as **civic engagement and democracy**. They promote debate and, as they train future generations of leaders and researchers, should become more agile and more responsive to the ecosystem.
- HEIs should become **regional hubs, centers of excellence**, because they can provide expertise in many fields. Universities also have the duty to contribute to **foreseeing the competences needed in the future**, and not only, by combining education and research.
- Knowledge should be seen in a context which includes **ethical dimensions**. The broader role of education should always be present, that is **to shape character and transmit values**, not only content.
- A **public good model** should be implemented, meaning that universities should embrace a broader agenda, ensuring public involvement in teaching, innovation, and in all sectors of higher education activities. **Universities should work to increase public understanding of their role and importance and should ensure that they actually deliver benefit to the public.**
- **Sustainable education** can help us prepare for the future and contribute to increased **environmental awareness and responsibility**.



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- Foresight and planning by HEIs will be necessary to address the **challenges of the 4th Industrial Revolution**: on the technical side this will involve the knowledge and skills needed in a world which depends more and more on robotics and Artificial Intelligence, but also those needed for facing the risk of dehumanization. HE should ensure that the new developments in technology fulfil their potential of meeting the basic needs of all human beings on the planet.
- Universities' **alumni** are important: since they represent higher education institutions in society, they should be valued by and involved in the academic community.
- A priority for **research activities should be creating a positive impact on society**.

Inclusiveness of higher education

- The social dimension of higher education has been included in Bologna communiqués since 2001, but concrete progress has proved elusive. Full accessibility has not yet been achieved and in this area Bologna must play a crucial role. Developing guidelines on the social dimension should facilitate positive change.
- If Universities are to carry out their fundamental societal role, they must be able to provide the **needed opportunities** for learners of all sorts (ages, educational levels, needs), while continuing to guarantee **quality** and be **trusted** by society.
- Inclusion has not to be seen only as referring to socio-economic, ethnic groups, differently able people and minorities, but also with respect to diverse age groups and across borders. Universities must support **social and gender equality**. This means not only equal access for men and women, but also a less 'gendered' balance in choice of subject area: i.e. access of women to scientific and technological fields should be encouraged. A more accessible education system for **non-traditional learners** and **underrepresented groups** should be built.
- Universities should focus on the needs of all learners, providing -- for example -- **more flexible and diversified programs and methodologies**.
- New thinking about the social dimension – **holistic thinking** – is needed. To look at the future needs for **inclusion** and **equity** in a **holistic way**, we cannot limit ourselves to higher education: selection is already being made at the **primary and secondary school level**, if not earlier, and those who wish to and are allowed to enter higher education are not representative of the social, economic or ethnic composition of our societies. We can no longer afford any longer to keep young people away from higher education for socio-economic reasons: all talents need to be harnessed to help solve the many problems our societies are facing these days! At the same time, we must take into consideration not only the academic aspects, but also the other aspects of the student life, such as medical care or social assistance.
- Not only immigrants and refugees, but **all international students**, should receive special attention.



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Innovative, flexible and relevant learning and teaching

- The **teaching role** of universities -- that is, their role as organizers and facilitators of learning -- should be reinforced, and the value and importance of teaching and teachers recognized as deserved, while preparing them for their role in learner-centered HE. **Research based learning** has to be a priority.
- In order for universities to improve their capabilities, it is necessary to **enhance the capabilities of professors** as facilitators of learning – there could be a **common framework** for teacher training in a learner-centered system, or an online platform for their training. Teaching should be adequately recognized as part of the academic career, and teaching taken into appropriate consideration in career progression.
- **Academic programs for the preparation of school teachers are of major importance, as they have the potential to influence the entire education system.** In order to improve HE systems, in terms of quality and inclusiveness, we have to pay more attention to what is happening at pre-university level.
- **Flexibility** will be a key word and it must be seen in different ways: programmes need to be more flexible in order to adapt to societal changes, and to a greater diversity of students. Since the precise skills needed in the future are uncertain, HE will need to be able to adapt rapidly, and to form broad competences (such as critical and analytical thinking, creativity, and ability to organize one's own learning) which will be necessary in any future world.
- It is likely that in the future people will have numerous different employments, and that they will require many '**smaller pieces**' of learning: specific modules or short programmes to update or enhance their existing knowledge and competences. Thus flexible, individualized, tailor-made learning paths will be called for in the future. Short-cycle programmes will form an important (new) link in this education chain, and not only in the initial stage of higher education.
- **Curricula will need to be revised and updated frequently**, with the involvement of all stakeholders, including students but also employers and local communities, to **prepare students for future jobs**. Study programs in line with the requirements of the **labor market** need to be developed, with more emphasis on **short cycle studies**.
- Emphasis must be placed on forming **soft skills**: graduates will need such competences as creativity, critical thinking and the capacity for autonomous learning based on evidence and verified facts, resilience, team working abilities and leadership, communication and digital skills. The students should be more ready for a quickly changing world.
- There are many **alternative education providers**, ever more in evidence and available: this means that universities must adapt to this new reality by improving the relevance of their own programs. In the meantime this puts pressure on both learners and the authorities to detect, avoid and prohibit any fraud or trickery.
- **Quality of learning & teaching** is a major goal.



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- **QA mechanisms can limit flexibility in programme design/be a barrier to innovation in programme design.** This contradiction must be addressed, analyzing present rules, standards, guidelines, and ensure that QA mechanisms are compatible with and helpful in meeting new and different kinds of requirements.

Lifelong learning

- What is very likely in a time of **rapid change** is that learning will indeed become 'lifelong', that is people will not normally go through a single degree programme and expect to be employed for life in a single career path.
- We cannot specify **now the knowledge, skills and competences that will be needed in the future**, so universities should be prepared to form them in different stages of a person's life; it is foreseeable that shorter courses at many levels may be needed for different kinds and ages of students, and that new different and more flexible strategies for learning and teaching will be required.
- There is a need to **raise learners' awareness** that once they graduate, they will not have completed their learning: they must be equipped to become **autonomous self-guided learners**. They should understand the importance of continuous learning and training instead of one-time learning/training followed by employment.
- Bologna created a common framework to compare systems, and since lifelong learning and continuous learning are now high on the agenda everywhere, whether and how the existing tools can be used or adapted as a common frameworks in these fields needs to be explored urgently. If they are not suitable new tools must be created.
- Higher Education is not just about universities, but also other institutions that provide lifelong learning. Teaching and learning is changing: blended, online courses etc. are now widespread. Digitalization has an increasingly important role. The **EHEA should reflect carefully on how to maintain high quality in all forms of education and training**.
- As the HE landscape changes, recognition and qualifications will change. What qualification will we recognize? **Adaptation or innovation with respect to current Bologna tools is likely to be needed.**

Digitalization

- Digitalization is a reality and should be used not solely to enhance L&T, but also for administration and for student mobility.
- We need to pay attention to new approaches for learning and teaching, and how to use the benefits of digitalization without risking standardization.
- Digitalization must **not change the essential core of higher education, which is its human dimension**. We are in the digital revolution. Bologna has not been very bold so far, in this field. Connected campuses could be our opportunity to make a difference on the global



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market, but **the quality assurance policies and practices will need to be updated to accommodate the potential offered by digitalization.**

Internationalization and mobility

- In this area the EHEA should continue to set quantitative targets, and even increase the **target for mobility** above 20%. **Policies** for encouraging and facilitating incoming mobility should be developed.
- **Funding the mobility of students** should also be increased. A large number of students do not participate in mobility because their economic background does not permit it. For the future, we should elaborate a solution for them, as this is a problem at both EU and EHEA level.
- Internationalization of the curricula (especially at EHEA level) - the promotion of joint degrees and common scholar curricula might be a priority. **In many countries it is still difficult to accredit EU joint degrees and a proposed solution was to create an agency to evaluate the joint degrees and common scholar curricula.** The European Universities initiative should help take these issues further. In this context, innovation in learning and teaching should still be a goal.
- **Joint supervision of doctoral theses** must be reinforced. It is already in place at some level but should be increased because exposure to different ways of looking of problems and finding solutions is a major advantage.

Governance and autonomy

- Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA (Paris Communiqué).
- There is a need to bring the **funding** issue into the Bologna process. The problem has been raised before without success. Although funding is a national issue, it is also a crucial element of higher education so it cannot be left out. If we want to improve the accessibility, we need to talk about funding. Ensuring the long-term adequacy and diversity of sources of funding for universities, is a priority.
- **Following the successful implementation of the ESG, guidelines for academic freedom and institutional autonomy should be devised at EHEA level, thus supporting universities in maintaining their core role.**

III. Future work (the Roadmap)

As can be seen from the above, the discussion at the Bucharest BFUG meeting was lively and provocative. Many themes and many specific questions were discussed and brought to the attention of all. This provides a good foundation for the future work.



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According the roadmap, the coming months should be devoted to broadening the discussion to stakeholders at national and international level, with a view to reporting on findings and beginning to prioritize by the autumn BFUG meeting to be held in Helsinki.

When	What	By whom
4-5 April 2019	BFUG meeting: presentation of survey results; decision on roadmap and methodology	BFUG, prepared by Board and Secretariat
April – October 2019	Consultations at national level	BFUG members
April – October 2019	Stakeholders consult their members	BFUG consultative members
24-25 June 2019	Bologna Anniversary Conference, with the involvement of BFUG	BFUG and Secretariat, in cooperation with Bologna University
24 September 2019	BFUG Board meeting with update on the consultation	BFUG Board and Secretariat
12-13 November 2019	BFUG meeting, with longer thematic discussion on the vision and the topics	BFUG and Secretariat
Early 2020	European Commission conference (tbc)	European Commission
24 – 25 January 2020	Bologna Researchers’ Conference	Romania
December 2019 – January 2020	Board will prepare a proposal for discussion in 1 st BFUG meeting in 2020	BFUG Board and Secretariat
4-5 March 2020	1 st BFUG meeting 2020: discussion on concrete proposals	BFUG, Secretariat and Drafting Committee
February-April 2020	Board will prepare a proposal for discussion in 2 nd BFUG meeting in 2020	BFUG Board, Secretariat and Drafting Committee
4-5 May 2020	2 nd BFUG meeting 2020: endorsement of proposals, to be taken on board for the Communiqué	BFUG, Secretariat and Drafting Committee