

Discussion Paper - Adoption of the Work Programme 2024-2027

I. Introduction

It is expected that the BFUG will adopt the 2024-2027 Work Plan in the XCIII BFUG meeting in Budapest, as the first BFUG meeting after the Tirana Ministerial Conference.

In some cases, in the past, the BFUG had already discussed a draft Work Plan and the working structures to be created in meetings before the Ministerial Conference. For the current working period, the EHEA priorities were discussed in the XC BFUG meeting in Brussels in April 2024 without going further into discussing a draft Work Programme.

When establishing the timeline for adopting the Work Programme, the need to start as soon as possible the implementation of the Tirana Communiqué commitments should be considered. Moreover, the upcoming Erasmus+ call for supporting Bologna reforms is expected to be launched in September. Consequently, to give the opportunity to BFUG working structures to apply for Erasmus+ projects that would support their work, the BFUG would need to agree on the working structures and their co-chairs in September, with a timeline proposed below.

II. Proposed Timeline

The proposed timeline should ensure that by the 22nd of November the working structures for the next Work Programme are able to initiate their work.

1. BFUG Board meeting in Reykjavik (3rd of September 2024)

The Board agrees on a draft Work Programme to be submitted to the BFUG. The document will also refer to commitments in the Tirana Communiqué in the remit of the proposed working structures and the main expected outcomes. Concurrently with sending the draft Work Programme, the Secretariat sends a call for interest in co-chairing the working structures proposed in the draft Work Programme.

BFUG members are invited to send input in writing (especially if new working structures are proposed), so the contributions from the BFUG members can be compiled by the EHEA Secretariat and shared before the meeting.

2. BFUG meeting in Budapest (26th-27th of September 2024)

The BFUG agrees on the Work Programme, including the working structures, co-chairing arrangements, the reference to the Tirana Communiqué in the remit of the proposed working structures and the main expected outcomes.

As opposed to a decision not to establish a working structure proposed in the draft Work Programme, particular challenges can arise if the BFUG members agree on new working structures than those proposed in the draft Work Programme which was circulated ahead the meeting (and, as such, no call for interest in co-chairing was launched). In this case, it is expected that the BFUG would have to decide whether the co-chairing arrangements are determined on the spot, if possible, or allow for a subsequent online procedure.

3. Call for interest – membership of the working structures: two weeks after the BFUG meeting in Budapest (by 13th of October 2024)

Based on the agreed Work Programme, the EHEA Secretariat launches a call for interest for the membership in the working structures, to be open for two weeks. As has been the case in the past, usually members can also join working structures anytime during their operation by sending a request to the EHEA Secretariat, which is then validated by the BFUG via online ‘silence’ procedure.

4. Draft ToRs written by the co-chairs - three weeks after the BFUG meeting in Budapest (by the 20th of October 2024)

The co-chairs draft the Terms of Reference for the respective working structures in three weeks after the BFUG meeting in Budapest, by 20th of October, based on a template provided by the Secretariat. The basis of the ToRs are the specific commitments in the Tirana Communiqué in the remit of the respective working structure and the main expected outcomes already agreed by the BFUG.

5. Consultation of the members of the working structure – two weeks after the finalisation of the draft ToRs (by the 3rd of November 2024)

The co-chairs of the working structures will have two weeks to consult the members of the group on the draft terms of reference, by the 3rd of November. They can decide to either call for a short online meeting or to conduct the consultation in writing.

Depending on the agreement of the BFUG, a meeting of the co-chairs of the new working structures could be organised in this period. Such a meeting was organised in the 2015-2018 working period when the working groups were also not agreed upon before the 2015 Ministerial Conference. The meeting could discuss common approaches of co-chairing, fine-tuning ToRs and identifying points of collaboration and convergence.

6. Adoption of the Terms of Reference, including the membership of the working structures

After the 3rd of November, the BFUG members receive the draft Terms of Reference, including membership in the working structures.

A period of ten days of online consultation is given, followed by adapting the Terms of Reference by the co-chairs of working structures, if the case.

Once a consensus is reached, the Terms of Reference are sent to adoption by the BFUG via electronic procedure. If consensus cannot be reached, an online BFUG meeting could be considered to discuss the matters.

The proposed timeline is summarised in the table below:

Nr.	Activity	Responsibility	Deadline
1.	Agreeing on a draft work programme in the BFUG Board	BFUG Board	3 rd of September 2024
2.	Sending the draft work programme to the BFUG and the call for co-chairs	BFUG co-chairs, Secretariat	6 th of September 2024
3.	Sending written input for the draft work plan and expressing the intention to co-chair a working structure	BFUG members	22 nd of September 2024
4.	EHEA Secretariat collecting the input and sending the consolidated version of the Work Programme (with comments) and the interested co-chairs to the BFUG	EHEA Secretariat	23rd of September 2024
5.	BFUG adopts the Work Plan and the list of co-chairs	BFUG	26th-27 th of September 2024
5bis	Agreeing on the co-chairs of new working structures at a later stage, if needed	BFUG	TBD
6.	Launching the call for interest – membership in working structures and sending the format for ToRs to co-chairs	EHEA Secretariat	30 th of September 2024
7.	Filling in the call for interest for membership in working structures	BFUG members	13 th of October 2024
8.	Preparing draft ToRs	Co-chairs of the working structures	20 th of October 2024
9.	Discussing the draft ToRs with the working structures	Co-chairs of the working structures, members of the working structures	3 rd of November 2024
10.	Sending the draft ToRs to the BFUG	EHEA Secretariat	4 th of November 2024
11.	Agreeing on the draft ToRs in the BFUG, after a 10-day consultation period	BFUG	22 nd of November 2024

III. Possible working structures

In the 2021-2024 cycle, the BFUG had in total 13 working structures. This implies 1.5 working structures more than the average for the last 6 cycles of the EHEA, which is 11.5 working structures. The cycle with the most working structures has been the 2007-2009 cycle, with 15 working structures.

Nevertheless, the BFUG identified an overburdened Work Plan, which from a historical comparative perspective can be attributed to the increasing number of meetings/working group and number of sub-groups/working group, at least for some of the working structures.

Potential working structures, corresponding references to the Tirana Communiqué and related outcomes, as well as explanatory comments, are presented in the table below:

Nr.	Working Structure	Tirana Communiqué	Outcomes/Comments
1.	WG on Monitoring implementation	<p><i>'We mandate the BFUG to ensure that policy commitments aiming at creating by 2030 an inclusive, innovative, and interconnected EHEA, mindful of the fundamental values, are properly monitored, including through a Bologna Process Implementation Report that assesses key developments.'</i></p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p><i>'We commit to measuring progress in the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA and ask the BFUG to report back on this in 2027.'</i></p> <p>+ and potentially (if a WG on FV is not created):</p> <p><i>We welcome the work on creating a technical monitoring framework, and we ask the BFUG to report back to us at our 2027 Ministerial Conference.</i></p>	Monitoring report A decision regarding the monitoring approach should be made based on the discussion initiated in the previous semester.
2.	WG on Future of Bologna	<i>'We also ask the BFUG to submit to us in 2027 proposals for the main priorities for the next decade, in close</i>	A similar WG on New Goals was included in the 2015-2018 Working Plan.

		<p><i>cooperation with higher education institutions, staff and students.'</i></p>	<p>The WG can also take up other relevant topics after the consultation with the BFUG, such as the synergies with the European Education Area and European Research Area, ethical considerations etc.</p>
3.	WG on Fundamental Values	<p><i>'We welcome the work on creating a technical monitoring framework, and we ask the BFUG to report back to us at our 2027 Ministerial Conference.'</i></p>	<p>Finalisation of the technical monitoring framework, through developing indicators to cover the dimensions included in the fundamental values statements.</p> <p><u>If this WG not established</u>, the BFUG could discuss potential mainstreaming via WG on monitoring, having the monitoring outsourced, and/or promotion of FV under the TF on outreach (if created).</p>
4.	WG on Internationalisation and Mobility	<p><i>'We mandate the BFUG to prepare an action plan to stimulate mobility and internationalisation of higher education and to support measures for achieving a greener, more inclusive, and more balanced mobility'</i> and <i>'We will support higher education institutions in their exploration of practices and benefits of blended mobility and virtual exchanges, and in fostering the internationalisation of the curricula. We commit to supporting transnational cooperation, including for joint programmes and joint degrees, through better implementation of the key commitments and by removing undue'</i></p>	<p>A WG on Mobility was included in the 2007-2015 Action Plan, which developed an Action plan on mobility in 2012.</p> <p>The WG could also look into the area of TNE, (automatic) credit recognition as a particularisation of recognition for mobility, in cooperation with TPG B etc</p>

		<i>administrative and legal barriers'</i>	
5.	Work on the Social Dimension	<p><i>'We endorse the document Indicators and Descriptors for the Principles of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA15 as the first comprehensive and consolidated framework for the social dimension in the EHEA. Simultaneously, we promote the improvement of data collection, through participation in related initiatives, such as Eurostudent'</i></p>	<p>The previous WG on the SD mentioned in its report the following potential elements for a future working structure on SD: peer-learning activities, support and monitoring for PAGs, impact assessment and data collection, transversal view of the social dimension policies.</p> <p>Since a specific policy task is not defined in the area of SD, the SD work already done could be used by other structures, for example through the TF on outreach or through a TPG (as the WG also proposed).</p> <p>Social dimension and Learning and teaching policy areas could be tackled by a TPG together.</p>
6.	Work on the Learning and Teaching	<p><i>We commit to fostering flexible learning paths, which need to be flexible, properly delivered, quality assured, and recognised, in all higher education programmes. This also includes the recognition of prior learning, and new forms of education provision, such as micro-credentials. We need to ensure student-centred learning is a reality for all students.</i></p>	<p>The previous WG suggested a TPG on student-centred learning, that could include the development of a strategic approach to transformative learning and teaching.</p> <p>See also considerations at the Social Dimension.</p>
7.	CG GPD	<p><i>We ask the BFUG and its working structures to continue to develop and strengthen dialogue and collaboration with macro regions on various levels and with appropriate interlocutors.</i></p> <p><i>and from the Statement</i></p>	<p>The CG GPD would prepare the statement for the Iași & Chișinău Bologna Policy Forum.</p>

		<p><i>'We invite all participants in the EHEA Global Policy Forum to continue to engage in global policy dialogue and to identify the themes where synergies can be found between regions, and with global organizations such as UNESCO and OECD, be it at the intergovernmental level, or in transnational exchange and collaboration between higher education institutions and organisations.'</i></p>	
8.	BICG and TPGs	<p><i>'(acknowledging) the important contribution of the Thematic Peer Groups under the guidance of the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group in improving the situation. Therefore, we commit to ensuring that we have, or will devise, and will publish appropriate action plans to address any remaining implementation gaps (...). As the Bologna Process tools have developed throughout the last decade, we mandate the BFUG to work on their future-proof development, dissemination and possible expansion'</i></p>	<p>Implying the continuation of BICG and the three TPGs on QF (A), Recognition (B) and QA (C).</p> <p>The group could also have a policy focus in its work, to fulfil the commitment related to the future-proof development, dissemination and possible expansion of KC. Alternatively, the last part could be taken by the WG on the Future of Bologna.</p>
9.	TF longer-term secretariat	<p><i>We mandate the BFUG to continue working on the possibility of establishing a long-term, independent, internationally staffed Secretariat to create effective support for the BFUG, and to evaluate the feasibility and sustainability of the related proposals, models, and terms of reference in Spring 2026, to be presented for adoption and implementation at our 2027 Ministerial Conference</i></p>	<p>Working based on the Roadmap developed by the Task Force on Rules and Regulations, with the possible support of the Secretariat in relation to assessing regulations and conditions, drafting procedures etc.</p>
10.	TF outreach and dissemination	<p><i>Therefore, we commit to ensuring that we have, or will devise, and will publish appropriate action plans (...)</i></p>	<p>The tools for dissemination were created by the previous TF. As such, the focus of the TF</p>

		<p><i>to promoting knowledge-sharing activities related to the EHEA'</i></p> <p>and</p> <p><i>'We recognise the need for all EHEA countries to disseminate knowledge and engage in dialogue and collaboration on ongoing work, in order to ensure a more effective linkage between the policy level and the higher education community. This may also include the establishment of international and national expert networks, supporting their implementation and cooperation across borders and with the BFUG'.</i></p>	<p>could be on outreach (supporting the elaboration of national action plans on enhancing knowledge sharing, Bologna national committees, Bologna expert networks) while the dissemination could be steered by the Secretariat (social media, newsletter, communications) with support from the TF.</p>
11.	Drafting Committee of the Iași – Chișinău Communique		To be set up in January 2026.
Additional structures			
12.	Advisory Group ECTS	<p><i>To support the implementation of the ECTS, including learning outcomes, we invite the BFUG to review the ECTS Users' Guide 2015 by 2027, to strengthen its key features and adapt it to current developments, including micro credentials.</i></p>	Based on the previous practice (see former Ad-hoc group page), it is a smaller-scale technical group, chaired by the European Commission.
13.	Dedicated structures for the revision of the ESG	<p><i>We invite the authors of the ESG to propose a revised version by 2026 to the BFUG, to be adopted by us at our 2027 Ministerial conference, as well as an adjustment, where required, of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.</i></p>	Process coordinated by the authors of the ESG (E4). The revised version should be finalised by 2026.
14.	Network of national correspondents on QF	<p>Can take the following commitment:</p> <p><i>'We are committed to countering diploma and accreditation mills, fraudulent qualifications and academic</i></p>	With the support of the Council of Europe.

		<i>cheating services, made more accessible through developments in the digital field. We ask the BFUG to make good use of the work of the ETINED platform and the ENIC-NARIC networks to address these challenges and protect academic integrity'</i>	
--	--	---	--

Other commitments from the Tirana Communiqué can be tackled either transversally or can be best addressed at the national level. Examples are provided below:

- ✓ Commitments that could be addressed transversally:
 - *We ask the BFUG to consider in its work the wider and longer-term impact of the digital transition on higher education in the EHEA, including AI, and in particular with regard to the key commitments and the use of Bologna Process tools.*
 - *Reciprocal referencing of qualifications frameworks and credit systems, ratification and implementation of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, as well as the second generation regional recognition conventions, and alignment and mutual understanding of quality assurance principles.*
- ✓ Commitments that could be tackled at the national level:
 - *We, together with stakeholders and communities, commit to tackling the socio-economic challenges, such as the rising cost of living and difficulty to access student housing, that have impacted access to higher education and student life as a whole. We will intensify our efforts to ensure the recognition of qualifications held by refugees and to remove barriers to their enrolment in higher education.*
 - *We will support higher education institutions in strengthening their contribution to society and their local communities, responding to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the green transition in the area of higher education, to the ongoing digitalisation and the combination of physical and online learning and teaching.*
 - *We will also promote more robust and transparent quality assurance of transnational education delivered worldwide, in line with the ESG, to protect the interests of students.*
 - *We are committed to countering diploma and accreditation mills, fraudulent qualifications and academic cheating services, made more accessible through developments in the digital field.*

The BFUG should consider and decide upon the way to best follow on the commitment related to "appropriate action plans to address any remaining implementation gaps..." .

In the annex to this paper are proposed two options for the Work Programme, one that is similar to the 2021 – 2024 one, with a total of 13 working structures, and a lighter one, with 11.



IV. General Guidelines for ToRs

The template for the ToRs will be provided by the Secretariat.

The ToRs should include:

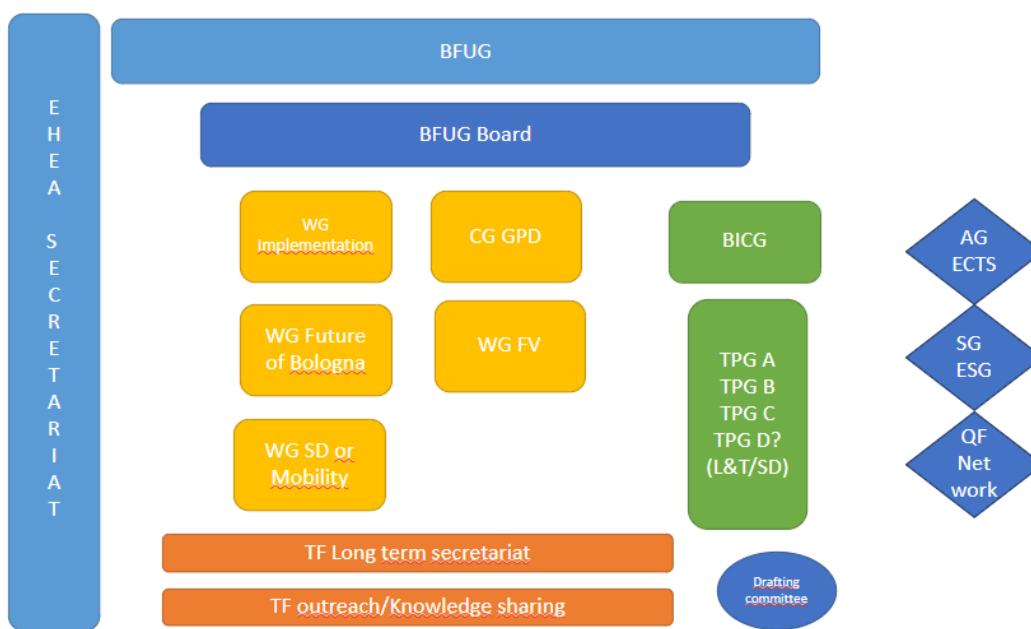
- Name of the working structure
- Period of work (for the whole cycle or other timings)
- Co-chairs
- Members of the working structure
- Reference to the Communiqué
- Purpose and goals/outcomes
- Specific tasks
- Meeting schedule
- Liaison with other working structures or external structures, if the case
- Number and scope of sub-groups, if the case

Working structures should usually foresee one meeting per semester unless the work format calls for other arrangements (e.g., in short-term taskforces). In case more meetings are needed, the BFUG should endorse the change.

Sub-groups created by BFUG working structures are not entitled to secretarial support from the EHEA Secretariat.

Annex 1

Model 1: Structure similar to the 2021-2024 cycle (minimal change)



Model 2: Leaner structure by number of WGs

