THE EVOLVING BOLOGNA PROCESS: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO THE FULFILLMENT OF KEY COMMITMENTS

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS FOR TRUST, TRANSPARENCY AND DIVERSITY – FINAL CONFERENCE

Rīga, March 20, 2025

Sjur Bergan

Co-funded by
the European Union

"OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO THE FULFILLMENT OF KEY COMMITMENTS"

Could mean:

1. Improving implementation

    Overcoming factors that impede putting goals and policies into practice

2. Examining views on how "fulfillment of key commitments" is and has been perceived in the EHEA

    Overcoming resistance to the notion of commitments

Both notions are relevant to our discussion

REMINDER: ORIGINAL GOAL

► "within the first decade of the third millennium… establish the European area of higher education"

(Bologna Declaration 1999: 3)

HOW DO WE DEFINE GOALS?

- The more specific a goal, the less challenging it is to assess whether it is implemented
    - "We will develop qualifications frameworks" *vs.*
    - "All countries will have adopted national qualifications frameworks and self certified them against the QF-EHEA by 2012"
- Examples:
    - Structural reforms
    - Mobility
    - Fundamental values

STRUCTURAL REFORMS

- Relatively clear standards
    - QF-EHEA, ESG, LRC
- Formal structures relatively easy to assess
    - Self certification, independent quality assurance agencies, ratification of the LRC
- Existing tools offer guidance
    - Self certification reports, ENQA membership/EQAR register, implementation reports LRC (2016, 2022)
- Challenge: to what extent are structures implemented in practice?

MOBILITY

- Goal
  - In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad (2009 Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué: 4)
- What is mobility?
  - Minimum duration?
  - Minimum workload?
  - Physical only or also virtual?
  - Staff *vs.* student mobility
  - 20 per cent of what?

FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

▶ Academic freedom, academic integrity, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in HE governance, public responsibility *for* and *of* HE

▶ Challenges

　▶ What are we measuring?

　　▶ Definitions and statements 2018 – 24

　▶ Political stakes

▶ Draft outline of a monitoring framework 2024

▶ "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" (Tirana Communiqué)

IMPEDIMENTS TO IMPLEMENTATION I

- Unclear goals
- Political will
  - Adhering to the EHEA is a national political decision
    - Developing a national QF can run into political opposition
  - Shifting political priorities
    - but governments are bound by previous commitments unless they are explicitly rescinded
- Legislation
  - A political responsibility
  - Codification of principles, values, goals, priorities

IMPEDIMENTS TO IMPLEMENTATION   II

- National specificities
    - The EHEA is a broad framework
    - National adaptation is possible within limits
    - Are not an excuse for inaction
- Resistance within the system
    - Are stakeholders seen as friends or foes?
    - Dialogue and cooperation between actors
- Finance
    - Real concern
    - Also a question of priorities: reforms and internationalization not only for the "fat years"

HOW DO WE GET WHERE WE WANT TO GO?

- We need to verify progress on our way, not wait until 2010 to see whether we arrive

- 2003: decision to undertake stocktaking

- 2005: first stocktaking report

- 2010: EHEA formally established

- 2012: first "implementation" rather than "stocktaking report"

IMPLEMENTATION REPORT: SOME KEY FEATURES

▶ Ministers accept that outsiders have a say in describing the extent to which each country implements their commitments

▶ Data provided (mainly) by the competent national authorities but interpreted by an EHEA Working Group

▶ Countries given an opportunity to comment on/correct factual mistakes in the draft report but not to change the interpretation.

▶ A new implementation report is published immediately prior to every Ministerial conference

IMPLEMENTATION REPORT: MAIN DEVELOPMENTS

▶ Assesses the state of implementation of goals set and commitments undertaken by Ministers

▶ Increasing complexity and volume

  ▶ 2005: 106 pp, 2018: 330 pp, 2024: 262 pp.

  ▶ Reflects the increasing complexity of the EHEA?

▶ Combination of text and graphics

▶ Overall trends:

  ▶ Improved implementation, but

  ▶ Slower progress than hoped

  ▶ Uneven implementation within and between countries

WHAT IS A COMMITMENT?

▶ The EHEA as a voluntary process

   ▶ It is voluntary to join but once they join, members are bound by adopted goals, policies, and commitments

   ▶ *or*

   ▶ Members decide which commitment they wish to implement, and how

▶ Monitoring of implementation

   ▶ For the information of members and inspiration for national policies

   ▶ *or*

   ▶ Also: consequences for those how lag seriously behind implementation?

IMPLEMENTATION: NON-IMPLEMENTATION DISCUSSION 2015 – 18

▶ "We ask the BFUG to … submit proposals for addressing the issue of non-implementation of key commitments in time for our next meeting" (Yerevan Communiqué 2015: 3).

▶ 2015 – 18: Monitoring WG and WG for fostering implementation of key commitments

▶ Bitter discussion in the BFUG

▶ What are the key commitments?

▶ How is non-implementation identified and addressed?

▶ What consequences of non-implementation?

OUTCOMES

- "Structured peer-based support for the implementation of the Bologna key commitments" (Appendix I to the 2018 Paris Communiqué)

- Agreement on "key commitments"

  - Qualifications frameworks

  - Recognition

  - Quality assurance

- Bologna Implementation Coordination Group

- Peer learning through TPGs for each key commitment

POSSIBLE FUTURE ISSUES

- Assessment of how well the current system of peer learning works
  - How far has implementation advanced since 2018?
  - Are there countries that do not participate (much) or otherwise "lag behind"?
  - How do we address the issue if some countries do not advance in developing NQFs?
- Shall key commitments be limited to structural reforms?
  - Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA?
  - Student and Staff Mobility?
  - Fundamental Values?
- Measure what is important or give importance to what is measurable?
- How important is implementation to the credibility of the EHEA?