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Education, Science
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Agency for Education
and Internationalisation

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL
QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Thematic Peer Group A – Qualification Frameworks

Sixth Meeting

29 September 2023, 09:30 – 14:00

Hotel "The Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi" 29 Shota Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi 0108, Georgia

Minutes of meeting

List of participants

Country	Name	Surname
Andorra	Jordi	Llombart
Armenia	Ani	Mkrtchyan
Austria (Co-chair)	Karin	Riegler
Azerbaijan	Samir	Hamidov
Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova
Italy	Chiara	Finocchietti
Italy	Giacinta	Ratto Vaquer
Czech Republic	Teresa	Vengřinová
Croatia	Ana	Tecilazić
Croatia	Slaven	Zjalić
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
Estonia	Janne	Pukk
Georgia	Ketevan	Panchulidze
Georgia (Co-chair)	Khatia	Tsiramua
Greece	Alexandra	Karvouni
Hungary	Andras	Derenyi
Kazakhstan	Amantay	Nurmagambetov
Kazakhstan	Banu	Narbekova
Latvia (Co-chair)	Baiba	Ramiņa
Latvia	Gunta	Kinta
Latvia	Vlada	Djubina
Malta	Valerie	Attard
The Netherlands	Lineke	Van Bruggen
Romania	Antonela	Toma
North Macedonia	Borcho	Aleksov
San Marino	Monica	Cavalli
Slovak Republic	Vladimír	Bilohušǎin
BFUG Secretariat	Edlira	Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Ana	Zhibaj

Albania, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Council of Europe, ESU, EURASHE, European Commission, EI – ETUCE, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom/Scotland and Türkiye didn't attend in the meeting.

1. Welcome and Approval of the Agenda

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the sixth meeting of TPG A. Karin Riegler (Co-chair) presented an update of the agenda meeting, remarking that TPG C update would occur in the next meeting, due to the absence of a representative from TPG C. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

For more detailed information, please see TPG_A_ES_GE_ Agenda.

2. Presentation of Recommendations Developed within the TPG A on QF Working Groups on Micro-Credentials and Short-Cycle HE

2.1. Recommendation of WG on Micro-credentials

Ana Tecilazić (Croatia) provided an update on the state-of-play on recommendations and guidelines on micro-credentials. The stages of the recommendation drafting approach were presented: namely, SWOT analysis, survey on inclusion of micro-credentials on qualification framework, analysing QF development in different systems (with responses from 21 systems), desk research on various publishing guidelines at the European level, and making use of meetings to discuss different proposals from members, as well as affect coordination meetings with the Co-Chairs of TPG B and C.

Regarding the joint publication on HEI-s recommendations and guidelines on micro-credentials, different targets groups and motivations were identified: national authorities (system-level regulations and other policy instruments), HEIs (practical guidelines applied and used by them), and QA agencies (supporting institutions and developing their own frameworks for external evaluations).

It was underlined that the recommendation about the inclusion of micro-credentials on NQF were covered by the recommendations for national authorities and QA agencies, as system-level suggestions. It was decided not to address this particular topic for HEIs, because the development of micro-credentials should not be limited only to the scope of including them into QF.

A strong emphasis was placed on the principles guiding the recommendations, that were as follows: contributing to previously done work, and conducting the work in line with all TPGs to ensure a consistent approach of Key Commitments on application of micro-credentials; drafting recommendations on a case-by-case basis, and acknowledging that recommendations are guidelines and not imperatives, and they should not be too prescriptive so as to avoid overregulation of micro-credentials; and ensuring flexibility is key to keeping the diversity that makes up the richness of EHEA.

It was underlined that the draft recommendations on micro-credentials will be structured according to the three target groups (NA, HEIs and QA agencies). The draft recommendations and guidelines will be integrated in a joint publication involving three TPGs, coordinated by the TPG B. The work will be completed by the end of 2023 and will be included in the results of the work of the BFUG structures 2021 – 2024.

2.2. Recommendation of WG on Short-Cycle HE

Baiba Ramiņa (Co-chair) provided updates on the National Correspondents Meeting held in Strasbourg, where survey results and draft recommendations were presented. It was noted that the structure of the recommendations was informed by the main conclusions from the survey of TPG A countries. In addition, it was emphasised that access to short-cycle studies would be based on the Paris Communique (90 – 120 ECTS and a descriptor).

A specific emphasis was placed on the seven elements to be considered on the development of short-cycle recommendations — access to short-cycle studies should be harmonized with the Paris Communique, the duration and volume of the studies (90 – 120 ECTS); access to pathways to further higher education studies should be enabled; SCQ QF level should correspond to level 5 of qualification (considering that qualifications for level 5 vary in different countries); the level should be specified in the diploma and it should denote that it is a higher education degree; QA principles should comply with ESG principles; there should be clear definitions on SCQ and micro-credentials, particularly with respect to SCQ recognition (both on a national and international level).

In addition, special attention was brought to the definition of the descriptor as discussed in the National Correspondents' Meeting — it was suggested that the descriptor should specify that SCQ "build upon general secondary education" would be adapted to "build upon further education". It was emphasized that the new definition pertains more to recognition issues, i.e.: whether a person has access to higher education qualifications to begin with. In conclusion, it was stated that the final consideration could be a question for further discussions later in the day.

3. Discussion in Small Groups and Reporting the Most Important Points Discussed to the Audience

The Co-Chairs firstly introduced the format of the discussion in small groups: two groups would each address the pertinent issues of the three working groups from TPG A. As the recommendations would be finalized soon, the discussions were an opportunity to provide feedback in person. It was announced that there would be a written follow-up, where members would be encouraged to provide feedback, but there would be no time for discussion.

3.1. Rapporteur's feedback from breakout rooms

Baiba Ramiņa (Co-chair) reported the feedback from one of the group discussions, pertaining to automatic recognition, self-certification, and criteria for LRC implementation. It was suggested that there should be additional recommendations for SCQ that further explore automatic recognition. Regarding Self-certification, it was noted that the criteria should be improved to allow the country to respond on LRC implementation. Finally, it was noted that there should be room to investigate possible changes in Dublin descriptors, as they become obsolete over time.

Karin Riegler (Co-chair) reported the feedback from the other group discussion. The key contribution regarding micro-credentials was that transparency needs to be ensured, particularly for employers who may not be familiar with new micro-credentials. It was emphasized that micro-credentials should not be overregulated, and HEI should be able to describe them briefly. Likewise, it was noted that it is important to keep track of graduates of micro-credentials, to maintain transparency, in case somebody loses their micro-credentials. Regarding self-certification, it was emphasized that the procedural aspects need to be transparent and well-known by all stakeholders — every agency should know who to inform about the final report and conclusions. Regarding short-cycle qualifications, it was noted that group members agreed with the seven principles, and that there were no additional comments. Finally, with respect to nationality criteria for external aspects in the self-certification process, it was emphasized that the countries should be free to choose the experts and their role should be defined clearly.

The importance of close communication between TPGs was noted, as a contributing factor to realizing the Key Commitments.

4. Update from TPG B on LRC

Chiara Finocchietti (TPG B, Co-chair) presented an update on the status of TPG B on LRC, beginning with the group composition (naming countries that joined along the way, like Slovak Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro). A strong emphasis was placed on the broader topic of the group, namely the implementation of LRC through six thematic indications. The main activities were introduced — the survey on the state of play of countries with regard of implementation of LRC,7 TPG B meetings, 3 public seminars and peer support and staff mobility. It was noted that the implementation of the LRC Key Commitment was carried out through monitoring, specifically two surveys — the 1st one was carries out in winter 2022 and the second survey at the end of the working period. Then, an overview of the main topics discussed at the previous TPG B meetings was provided: beginning from work plan definition and overview of state of play, digitalization, recognition of refugees from Ukraine, distribution of tasks and responsibilities, legal framework.

The TPG B Co-Chair introduced the tentative date for the next meetings (online, in February 2024 and last meeting on April 24, 2024) and forthcoming activities: a public seminar on

digitalization and the second call for staff mobility. Additionally, an overview of the topics of the previous PLAs was mentioned: while the first one pertained to digitalization, the second and the third PLAs were throughput and output to the definition in the white paper on digitalization.

Lastly, the umbrella project on supporting activities of the group was presented. It was announced that the project foresaw some WGs and publications with TPG A: WG on macro credential, WG on digitalization and WG on quality of recognition (currently drafting results, led by EUA) and the WG on the European degree (noting that the start date was dependent on developments in the EC about the European Degree).

5. Q&A

Members of the TPG raised questions about the process of managing the staff mobility project, country expression of interests, and the fundamental purpose of the initiative.

The TPG B Co-Chair mentioned that staff mobility was foreseen in the previous term, but that was not managed due to the pandemic. Eventually, it was decided to replicate the idea of staff mobility under this term and project. Compared to the previous term, in this term, the application call was largely simplified and there were improvements (i.e.: the group had matchmaking activities in person to push participation, showcased in the increase of expression of interest. It was stressed that the idea of staff mobility was the spirit of TPGs, where all gather and learn from exchange of practice. In this spirit, it was interesting to give possibility to countries to learn more about each other. The overall idea was to exchange, to learn from the practice of another country on a specific topic that could be useful on another country.

6. Introduction to the next PLA in Tallinn

Janne Pukk (Estonia) presented the next PLA taking place next spring in Talin, Estonia. In the introduction, it was noted that Estonian students ranked first in Europe in PISA 2018. A robust framework for education is provided by the Estonian education system, with a high degree of autonomy and strong emphasis on fostering a growth mindset, and equal opportunities for all students. The education system is designed to be flexible, allowing for the possibility of switching between different educational paths.

The state of play of the implementation of ECTS on learning outcomes was highlighted: outcome-based education has been compulsory in Estonian Higher Education since September 2009, with outcomes remaining the same ever since. This was why it is important to start the process of updating learning outcomes.

In addition, the overview of the draft agenda was provided, with key topics as follows:
- EQF, experts would be invited to present the state of play and new developments in the European level.
- Future skills and future education, as a key topic on learning outcomes linked directly to future skills.
- Updating of learning outcomes to share experience of how the process of optimizing learning outcomes were managed in Estonia.
- Assessment of learning outcomes on program level.

The tentative date for the upcoming TPG A meeting was the end of February/ beginning of March.

Edlira Adi Kahani Subashi (the Head of the Secretariat) provided a logistical reminder to the group, stating that the deadline for the March 2024 BFUG Board meeting was end of February.

7. Conclusion and closing of the event
The Co-Chairs thanked everyone about their contributions to fruitful discussions and announced that the goals of the agenda were achieved. No other business was brought forward, therefore the sixth meeting of the TPG A on QF was concluded.