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**BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP, LJUBLJANA, MARCH 13 - 14,
2008**

REPORT ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Document by the Council of Europe, as Chair of the Coordination Group on
Qualifications Frameworks

Distribution: BFUG

COORDINATION GROUP

The Bologna Coordination Group was appointed in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the BFUG and the Bologna Secretariat following the BFUG meeting (membership: see Appendix 1). The Coordination Group met in Strasbourg on November 26, 2007 and in Edinburgh on February 22.

EUROPEAN EVENTS

Three European events have been foreseen within the qualifications frameworks strand:

- Council of Europe Forum on Qualifications Frameworks, Strasbourg, October 11 – 12, 2007¹. The Recommendations are reproduced in Appendix 2.
- Learning Outcomes Based Higher Education, Edinburgh, February 21 – 22, 2008, organized by the Scottish Government in cooperation with Universities Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council, University and College Union, QAA Scotland, NUS Scotland and the HE Academy². The Conclusions and Recommendations are reproduced in Appendix 3.
- A conference to be organized in Tbilisi on October 27 – 28, 2008 by the Georgian authorities, and which will focus on self certification of qualifications frameworks.

REGIONAL EVENTS

A regional conference for South East Europe was held in Beograd on November 1 – 2³, as a part of the program of the Serbian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, with the participation of representatives of Albania (including the Minister of Education), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia (including the Minister of Education), “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey as well as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the European Agency for Reconstruction and ERI-SEE. The conclusions are reproduced in Appendix 4.

INFORMATION ON NATIONAL AND REGIONAL EVENTS

As of today, information to the Coordination Group on national and regional developments and events on qualifications frameworks is insufficient. Countries should

¹ <http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/QF>

² <https://www.eventsforce.net/expotel/frontend/reg/thome.csp?pageID=25350&eventID=122&mode=preview&version=future&eventID=122>

³ http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/EHEA2010/Belgrade/default_EN.asp#TopOfPage

be encouraged to organize such events, and it is important that information be made available to Bologna partners through the Bologna web site on qualifications frameworks, see below.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

The EQF was adopted in October 2007 and will be formally signed in February 2008. While there will thus be two similar but distinct and not entirely identical overarching qualifications frameworks for higher education in Europe, it should be underlined that the differences between them are considerably less than what could have been feared some time ago, and that it will be entirely possible to develop national frameworks that are compatible with both overarching frameworks.

The EQF will be overseen by an Advisory Board that will meet for the first time on March 13 – 14, 2008. The Council of Europe will be invited to participate in this Advisory Board as Chair of the Bologna Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks, in the same way that the European Commission participates in the Coordination Group. The Council of Europe was also invited to participate in the second meeting of the EQF Implementation Group (an *ad hoc* group preparing the implementation of the EQF, including the establishment of the EQF Advisory Board) on November 9, 2007.

It is unfortunate that the first meeting of the EQF Advisory Board will coincide with the meeting of the BFUG, but good working contacts have been established between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in this area, and a working meeting was held on January 29.

QF WEB SITE

Work is well advanced on a web site on qualifications frameworks, which will be a part of the Bologna web site (<http://www.bologna2009benelux.org/qf/>). It is intended that this be the reference site for qualifications frameworks in the European Higher Education Area. In addition to information on the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA, it will include links to the EQF as well as to national frameworks, frameworks outside of the EHEA and a “sources and resources” section. National self certification reports will also be posted on or linked to this site.

In addition, the Bologna site on qualifications frameworks should include information on regional and national events as well as links to national pages on qualifications frameworks. This will require that countries provide information and updates to the Coordination Group and/or the Bologna Secretariat so that information items and links are updated.

Countries should also be encouraged to establish national web sites on qualifications frameworks. While the main target groups for national web sites will be within the country concerned and much of the information will therefore be provided in the national language(s), national web sites should also provide information on developments of relevance to international partners, and this information should be in English.

To ensure contacts with and updates on the work on qualifications frameworks at national and regional level, the BFUG may wish to ask members and consultative members to appoint a contact person for qualifications frameworks. The contact person will be the main reference point for the Bologna Secretariat as well as the Coordination Group in this area.

SUGGESTED ACTION

The Bologna Follow Up Group could:

- take note of this report;
- encourage members of the Bologna Process to organize regional and national events on the developments of qualifications frameworks and to keep the Bologna Secretariat and the Council of Europe – as Chair of the Coordination Group – informed of these;
- encourage members to establish national web sites on qualifications frameworks and to include information relevant to international partners on this site, in English;
- ask all members and consultative members to appoint a correspondent for qualifications frameworks, to facilitate the flow of information.

APPENDIX 1

MEMBERS OF THE COORDINATION GROUP

Council of Europe

Sjur Bergan, Chair
Jean-Philippe Restoueix, Secretary

Bologna Secretariat

Marlies Leegwater

Czech Republic

Věra Šťastná, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

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ENIC / NARIC Network

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Lela Maisuradze, Ministry of Education and Science

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Birger Hendriks, Ministry of Science, Economic Affairs
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Ireland

Seán Ó Foghlú, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Portugal

Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo, Universidade do Porto

“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

Nadežda Uzelac, Ministry of Education and Science

Turkey

Şener Oktik, Rector of Muğla University

United Kingdom

Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland

APPENDIX 2

RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE FORUM ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS, STRASBOURG, OCTOBER 11 – 12, 2007

The participants in the Forum made the following recommendations:

to national public authorities

Participants recommend that competent public authorities of members of the Bologna Process:

- seek to develop national qualifications frameworks compatible with both the overarching framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA framework) and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)
- make explicit the roles and responsibilities of various actors in the development of national qualifications frameworks;
- take due account of related developments in areas like ECTS and quality assurance provision;
- in particular, take account of the interface between national qualifications frameworks and all the Bologna action lines;
- engage actively with higher education institutions, students, staff and other stakeholders in the development of their national qualifications frameworks;
- make information on the development of their national qualifications frameworks easily available through dedicated web sites;
- provide the Council of Europe and the Bologna Secretariat with information on the web sites and on significant updates so that relevant information may be easily shared with other members of the Process;
- make clear the scope of the national qualifications framework and its relationship with the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA as well as with the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning;
- appoint a “qualifications frameworks correspondent” (see recommendation to the Council of Europe, below) and ensure that relevant information on the development of qualifications frameworks in other countries as well as on European developments is disseminated and shared within each country.

to higher education institutions, Rectors’ conferences, the European University Association and EURASHE

Participants recommend that higher education institutions:

- be explicit about how they estimate and use workload for curriculum planning;
- involve students in the definition of workloads;

- engage with national authorities and other partners to develop and implement national qualifications frameworks;
- support the proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload, in particular as regards the accumulation function;
- develop and deepen the use of learning outcomes across all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment.

To student unions and to the European Student Union

Participants recommend that student unions and the European Student Union:

- engage with other key players to encourage and support the proper use of learning outcomes and workload in implementing ECTS and qualifications frameworks;
- raise awareness among students of the roles and functions of qualifications frameworks and the importance of learning outcomes.

To quality agencies and their stakeholders:

Participants recommend that quality agencies and their stakeholders:

- when developing/reviewing national quality systems, ensure that these encompass arrangements for review of use of qualifications frameworks, learning outcomes and allocation of credits.

to the Council of Europe, under its mandate to support the sharing of experience

Participants recommend that the Council of Europe:

- develop a specific section of its higher education web site dedicated to the sharing of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks and through this web site make pertinent information available to a wide audience;
- establish a mailing list of “framework correspondents” comprising all Bologna members, upon nomination by the competent public authorities, and seek to disseminate information regularly through this mailing list;
- establish a base of experts that may assist the members of the Bologna Process, upon request, in the development of their national frameworks and that, together, represent a diversity of national and institutional experiences;

to the European Commission, as coordinator of the European Qualifications Framework

Participants recommend that the European Commission, in its support for the development of national frameworks compatible with the EQF,

- ensure sufficient emphasis on compatibility with the overarching framework of the EHEA;

- influence the development of ECVET so that it is compatible with ECTS;
- ensure that the Coordination Group for the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is represented in the coordination structures for the EQF.

to the ENIC and NARIC Networks

Participants recommend that the ENIC and NARIC Networks and their member centres:

- make full use of the potential of qualifications frameworks in facilitating the recognition of qualifications;
- as far as possible base recognition on an assessment of learning outcomes.

APPENDIX 3

BOLOGNA SEMINAR: LEARNING OUTCOMES BASED HIGHER EDUCATION - THE SCOTTISH EXPERIENCE (EDINBURGH, 21-22 FEBRUARY 2008)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Learning outcomes

The seminar endorsed the proposition that “learning outcomes are the basic building blocks of the Bologna package of educational reforms” and that this methodological approach is at the heart of the paradigm shift from teacher to student-centred learning.

2 Implementation

The seminar drew attention to the danger of learning outcomes being implemented in a false or superficial way in response to external pressures and the need to recognise that such a complex and multidimensional reform cannot be easily or rapidly achieved. If it is to be more than a merely cosmetic or bureaucratic exercise and if it is to result in a better learning experience for Europe’s students, the learning outcomes based approach needs time to develop, embed itself and mature in a way that respects and reflects the local priorities, diverse needs and national traditions of the Bologna countries. Training in the writing and implementation of learning outcomes should be given a high priority.

3 Stakeholder engagement

The seminar recognised the need to find effective ways of engaging and supporting staff, students and other stakeholders (such as employers) in the development and implementation of a learning outcomes based approach.

It recommends that the Bologna Follow-Up Group consider what national or international action is needed to bring about the willing and informed cooperation of staff and students in the systematic implementation of learning outcomes (properly understood) at institutional, programme and module level and to support the constructive alignment of learning outcomes with learning, teaching and assessment.

One suggestion is the creation of a special programme to promote trans-national staff and student mobility to share good practice in the development and implementation of learning outcomes – thereby re-engaging with one of the original Bologna concepts.

4 European Qualifications Frameworks

The seminar believed that there was a need to clarify further the relationship between the overarching *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* and the Framework for *Qualifications of the EHEA*, so as to ensure that Europe has a widely understood and accepted approach to lifelong learning that facilitates recognition of all forms of learning and the transition between VET and HE, and that promotes mobility, encourages individual educational ambition and motivates learner achievement. In particular, there is a need to promote dialogue between ECTS and ECVETS to ensure interoperability.

5 Terminology

The seminar noted that there is a perceived lack of clarity and shared understanding about some of the key terms associated with the introduction of learning outcomes in different countries (for example, “competences”, “workload”, “notional learning effort”), which was likely to impede effective implementation. It recommends that consideration be given to developing an agreed terminology based on a shared understanding amongst staff, students and other stakeholders about what the key concepts mean.

6 Levels

The seminar noted that there is uncertainty about whether learning outcomes should be written at “threshold” or “average” or “modal” level. It recommends that outcomes should normally be written at “threshold” level to facilitate recognition and mobility.

7 Learning outcomes and workload

The seminar agreed that it was unhelpful to counterpoise learning outcomes and workload, since both elements were important in the use of ECTS.

8 Learning outcomes, assessment and grading

The seminar agreed that there was value in mutual discussion and exchange of good practice in relation to the use of learning outcomes applied to assessment and their role in assessment and grade criteria.

9 Monitoring progress

The seminar noted that it is difficult to obtain accurate information about the progress of implementation of this fundamental Bologna reform across the EHEA. It therefore recommends that consideration be given to finding an effective way of assessing progress

in the 2009 Stocktaking Exercise, as well as in the next EUA *Trends* exercise and the ESU *Bologna With Student Eyes* report.

10 Evaluation

The seminar noted that there remains a degree of scepticism about the value and appropriateness of the learning outcomes approach in the context of higher education. It recommends that consideration be given to commissioning a longitudinal study which would collect evidence from graduates and employers about its impact and effectiveness.

11 Guidance

The seminar recommends that the report on *Learning Outcomes: Current Developments in Europe*, prepared by Stephen Adam for this event, be widely circulated as an additional source of guidance for the sector. Attention is particularly drawn to chapters 4 and 5, which contain helpful advice about the use and abuse of learning outcomes (including sections on good and bad practice) and identify some of the practical and technical issues that may need to be resolved if problems of interpretation are to be avoided. The report (and other conference documents) can be found on the Bologna website (www.bologna2009benelux.org/BolognaSeminars/Edinburgh2008.htm).

APPENDIX 4**CONCLUSIONS****REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA****Beograd, 1 – 2 November 2007****Organized under the Serbian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe**

Representatives of the Ministries of Education as well as academic representatives of countries of South East Europe⁴ met in Belgrade on 1 – 2 November 2007 to reflect on the implementation of qualifications frameworks, which are essential instruments for higher education reform and a significant step in the development of the European Higher Education Area by 2010.

The conference constituted an important step towards meeting the commitments undertaken by Ministers of Education at the Ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in London on 17 – 18 May 2007 as well as in implementing the mandate given to the Council of Europe:

We note that some initial progress has been made towards the implementation of national qualifications frameworks, but that much more effort is required. We commit ourselves to fully implementing such national qualifications frameworks, certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, by 2010. Recognising that this is a challenging task, we ask the Council of Europe to support the sharing of experience in the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks. We emphasise that qualification frameworks should be designed so as to encourage greater mobility of students and teachers and improve employability.

In this context, delegations recommended that, in the course of developing national qualifications frameworks, public authorities:

1. identify all actors that could contribute to the process of developing national qualifications frameworks and that they clearly define the roles and responsibility of each actor;

⁴ The following countries were represented at the conference: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey.

2. dialogue actively with higher education institutions, students, staff and other stakeholders, as well as between different education sectors, in the course of the process of developing their national qualifications framework;
3. provide information on the development of their national qualifications frameworks through dedicated web sites;
4. appoint a “qualifications frameworks correspondent” who can assist in disseminating pertinent information received through the Council of Europe mailing list;
5. establish a regional network for the development and maintenance of their national qualifications framework.

Delegations recognize the importance of regional cooperation within the overarching framework of the Bologna Process. They underline the need to improve cooperation and the exchange of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks, possibly through a regional forum on qualifications frameworks.

Delegations also stress the need to further develop the expertise on learning outcomes and quality assurance, with the use of foreign expertise if necessary. They agree to seek the support of the Council of Europe in this regional effort.