



Thematic Peer Group A - Qualifications Framework

First Meeting, Hosted by Georgia, Online*,
Monday, June 7, 2021,
14.00-15.30 (Brussels time)

Minutes

List of Participants

	Delegation	First Name	Family Name(s)	
1	Albania	Ermelinda	Durmishi	Member
2	Andorra	Jordi	Llombart	Member
3	Austria	Karin	Riegler	Co-chair
4	Belgium Flemish Community	Nina	Mares	Member
5	Belgium Flemish Community	Frederik	De Decker	Member
6	Council of Europe	Jean-Philippe	Restoueix	Member
7	Croatia	Barbi	Svetec	Member
8	Croatia	Slaven	Zjalić	Member
9	Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous	Member
10	Czech Republic	Veronika	Schmidtova	Member
11	ESU - European Students' Union	Kristel	Jakobson	Member
12	EURASHE	Michal	Karpisek	Member
13	European Commission	Klara	Engels-Perenyi	Member
14	European Commission	Koen	Nomden	Member
15	European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova	Member
16	Georgia	Ketevan	Panchulidze	Member
17	Georgia	Khatia	Tsiramua	Co-chair
18	Italy	Paolo	Cherubini	Member
19	Italy	Maria Antonietta	Ciclista	Member
20	Latvia	Baiba	Ramija	Co-chair
21	Malta	Valerie	Attard	Member
22	Netherlands	Lineke	van Bruggen	Member
23	North Macedonia	Borcho	Aleksov	Member
24	Poland	Jacek	Lewicki	Member
26	San Marino	Maria Elena	D'Amelio	Member
27	San Marino	Monica	Cavalli	Member
28	Spain	Margarita	de Lezcana-Mújica	Member



29	United Kingdom (Scotland)	Sheila	Dunn	Member
30	Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova	Member
31	BFUG Secretariat	Enida	Bezhani	Head, Albania
32	BFUG Secretariat	Enis	Fita	Team
33	BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari	Team

Belarus, Bulgaria, EI-ETUCE, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan and Turkey did not attend the meeting.

***Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online.

Welcome and introduction to the meeting by the Co-chairs

Karin Riegler (Co-chair) opened the meeting by introducing the other TPG A Co-chairs and welcomed everybody to the first meeting of 2021-2024. Baiba Ramina (Co-chair) and Khatia Tsiramua (Co-chair) offered their full support and expertise for the upcoming work and meetings of the TPG A.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without any changes.

For more detailed information, please see *TPG A_PT_AD_1_Draft_Agenda*.

2. Introduction to the meeting and its objectives

Karin Riegler (Co-chair) emphasized the importance of this meeting to:

- Introduce all new and returning members;
- Gather ideas and proposals from the existing materials/documents to determine the starting point of the work of TPG A for this work period;
- Introduce the draft survey that will serve as a guide when drafting the work plan for the 2021-2024 period.

a. Introduction to the guidelines for BFUG Peer Support and its objectives

No comments or adjustments were made on this document.

3. Tour de Table



All members of the TPG A introduced themselves and informed on the roles they hold within the organizations they represent. The Secretariat gave a brief overview of the working structures within the BFUG.

4. Report on activities by TPG A 2018-2020

Baiba Ramina (Co-chair) emphasized the importance of continuous development of the Qualification Framework in the HE system, adding that there should be a clear understanding of the work done in the previous period, to avoid overlaps or (re)introduce a similar work plan. Therefore, experts from the previous work period (Klara Engels-Perenyi, Lucie Trojanova, Koen Nomden and Michal Karpišek) were invited to provide an overview of the work done during 2018-2020.

It was explained that the European Commission introduces a call, to which the group submits a proposal to receive financial support for most of the activities. A similar call is expected to be launched in the next few weeks for the current work period.

During the previous work period, TPG A focused mainly on three major topics:

a. Self-certification of the national QF and the overarching QF of the EHEA

This topic resulted in major success as one member country of the EHEA implemented self-certification for the first time.

- Link between EQF and EHEA QF

It was observed that not all EHEA member countries are part of the EQF. However, there are many references of EQF that relate to the qualification framework of EHEA (i.e., descriptions of level 5-8 correspond to and are fully compatible with the QF of the EHEA, ECTS and QA). It was advised to consider these frameworks as tools with high policy relevance and not as a technicality.

One conclusion reached in the last meeting of the group that took place before Covid-19, was for the QF to reflect long-term societal needs, as it is a vital element to this group's work. A suggestion was made for the member countries to implement both the EHEA QF and the EQF. If this is the case, it was noted that the country should comply with the referencing criteria of both frameworks. This has proven successful for countries that have implemented both frameworks, as it has also aided in the country's self-certification to be up to date. This discussion is equally important for countries that are not part of the EQF. The reason being that all these countries are developing comprehensive national frameworks. In addition, there is a change in the QF landscape, which in turn affects the work done within the group. For instance, micro credentials have been issued by providers to a larger extent this last period, which in turn affects the relevance of the QF. Therefore, there is a great need to update the QF, ensure that lifelong learning is included at all levels, organize activities with member countries to assist in the self-certification process, by making it as practical and concrete as possible.



- Activities of the self-certification process

With more member countries participating in the TPG A, the importance of interconnection among the TPGs was emphasized. Members from the previous work period underlined the vital impact of collaboration and information exchange among all peer groups, as it provides a better perspective on the work being done.

Several activities were organized by the TPG A in the 2018-2020 work period. A discussion of the work plan was held in Helsinki and it was added that the Excel document format containing information on the progress on each country (*[Action Plan of the Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework](#)*) proved to be very beneficial, as it indicated all areas that countries experienced challenges or achieved progress in. Self-certification is a topic that was constantly mentioned in this document, due to difficulties in its implementation process. Member countries expressed the need to look at this topic in more details and develop it more concretely. Therefore, a workshop was conducted in Prague with the focus on self-certification. Eight countries were invited, with different levels of experience, as well as experts to assist in any perplexing areas. The workshop was organized on the basis of peer support, with countries exchanging information, experience and contacts. Many countries asked for international experts to complete an evaluation of the self-certification process and this proved to be very successful and beneficial for the countries.

The overview of the previous work period was introduced with the aim of showcasing 'best practices' and providing past examples that could be reapplied in this work period. It was suggested to countries to look at topics that were of high interest or challenging to incorporate in their national frameworks and introduce them to the group, in order to organize meetings or workshops that focus solely on these topics and build on them.

b. Implementation of the ECTS User's Guide

An international conference was organized within the framework of TPG A on QF, which was established by the BFUG to promote the implementation of the Key Commitment 1: a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching frameworks of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS. A compact overview of the main outcomes of the conference can be found on the EHEA website (<https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/ects-conference-prague-2019>).

Member countries have shown great interest in discussing the implementation and learning outcomes of the ECTS in more detail, but there has not been too much time devoted to this topic in the previous period. Thus, it was suggested that it ought to be tackled more specifically during this work period. Furthermore, certain thematic indications have not been properly implemented in every country. As a result, members have expressed a need to share common challenges and best practices, to assist in a more effective implementation of the respective thematic indications.



It was noted that there is no reference of the ECTS User Guide with respect to legislation, which should be established to better formulate topics of program design, provide indication on learning and teaching and focus on recognition of prior learning. Moreover, with the new development of micro credentials, the ECTS User Guide should provide more sufficient information for stakeholders to implement the micro credentials in line with the ECTS principles. There is also a need for more advising by the ECTS experts, as there is no clear infrastructure for this in the EHEA yet.

Another important aspect to take into consideration is the examination of the ECTS by QA institutions, as this is one of the indicators of the Bologna Implementation Report. A relationship between the QFs and QA should be established, however, this has proven to be challenging for some countries. Exchange of experience and information can be useful as well.

c. Short cycle qualification

It was noted that this topic was received with little interest from the member countries in the first meeting. However, the situation slightly improved in the upcoming meetings with the ministers conclusively accepting the short cycle as a standalone qualification in the Paris Communiqué, 2018. It was stated that this qualification was not mandatory to implement, but all countries should have the tools to recognize it within their national HE system.

For more detailed information, please see the presentation, *EURASHE short cycle HE: mapping the situation*.

The importance of achieving concrete results was emphasized, so that the peer group can show in the Ministerial Conference in 2024 that peer support continues to be effective and beneficial for many countries. In the Yerevan Communiqué (2015), a question was raised whether the cooperation among countries with different levels of implementation, is effective for the Bologna Process and whether it should continue after 2020. Hence, the peer support idea was introduced to maintain the relevance of the Bologna Process for all different countries involved, including those where the implementation process is well advanced, so that these countries can work on supporting other countries with slower progress in implementation. Cooperation should be seen as highly relevant, as HE is constantly changing.

There are many activities that can be organized (i.e., smaller group activities, practical sessions, conferences, peer learning activities, learning seminars) to provide several options for countries, to then indicate which is the best suitable support for their needs. Public seminars and conferences have a greater outreach and need to continue and possibly be reinforced for all peer groups. The outreach is very important at a national level as well. It is vital to see how the representatives of the same country in the different TPGs cooperate at the different national levels, how does the exchange occur in the different peer groups and how can the implementation of the different KCs be furthered in one's country. These peer group meetings to be conducted at regular intervals, will serve as practice for the TPG A participants too.

As previously mentioned, in three years' time, concrete results should be introduced. Although the pilot phase proved to be a success, TPG A is expected to achieve greater progress, and for



this the entire group should rely on the feedback of one-another to present good results at the end of this work period.

5. TPG A workplan and survey

To prepare the workplan for this work period, the Co-chairs have compiled a list of questions, which will be sent out in the form of a survey by mid-June to the TPG A members. This aims to ensure that the work plan is formulated in a way that taken into consideration the interests of all the TPG A members. The survey completion deadline was set for July 31, so that the co-chairs can review and analyze the responses and develop the work plan accordingly, which will be shared with the members in October 2021.

A discussion took place on the survey questions. On the first question "*What are your country's main priorities and goals in terms of your NQF?*", the members asked whether the primary focus of the work plan will be more on the QF and less on the ECTS. It was clarified that the focus of the work plan will be defined based on the answers to be provided by all members.

It was noted by several members that micro-credentials were not mentioned in the survey, despite this topic being present in the thematic indications and in the QF of the countries' HE system. Thus, it was suggested to word the questions in a broader way, not to limit the possibility of answers. Furthermore, it was advised that the work of the group should not rely solely on the countries' priorities, but also on the KCs and tasks that have been assigned to the group.

It was emphasized that the *TPG A Guidelines* document includes tasks on the indicative topics. This can serve as a good starting point for the members to reflect on, when providing answers to the survey questions. Additionally, the topic of micro-credentials is relatively new, but very relevant to the KCs, so it should be reflected in the workplan to some extent. Its inclusion in the work plan is vital also, as results of the incorporation of micro-credentials should be presented in the Ministerial Conference in 2024.

it was observed that ENQA has recently established a working group on micro-credentials, emphasizing its importance even more.

It was concluded that this topic is of special interest and as a priority it should be included in some form in the survey, together with the ECTS. The Co-chairs informed the members that the first question will be formulated in a more general way, by not including the national QF specifically, but rather word the question in a way that includes all topics within the mandate of the BFUG. It was decided that the Co-chairs will finalize the questions in the upcoming week and send out the survey to the rest of the TPG A group.

6. AOB

As no other issue were raised, the first TPG A meeting was concluded with thanks to the Co-chairs and the BFUG Secretariat for the well-organized meeting.