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**ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME**

**GRANT AGREEMENT FOR AN ACTION**

**AGREEMENT NUMBER – 2014-3619/001-001**

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**PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY PERMEABILITY BETWEEN HIHGER EDUCATION SECTORS**

There are two major issues at stake for this PLA:

1. The transition from short cycle higher education to a the first cycle of higher education;
2. The transition from professionally oriented first cycle qualifications to the second cycle of higher education.

## Transition SCHE to bachelor’s degree courses

From the EHEA implementation report 2015:

*Short cycle programmes have been the subject of discussion since the beginning of the Bologna Process. While a group of countries had neither short cycle programmes nor any plans to introduce them, other countries with such programmes were looking to integrate them in the Bologna three-cycle system. The compromise wording accepted in the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in 2005 in Bergen formulated the concept of 'short cycle within the first cycle'. However, this has not solved all the issues. Hence several ministerial communiqués have since addressed short cycle study programmes with a view to improving their transparency and comparability. The 2014 BFUG survey attempted to clarify several issues related to short cycle studies. The number of educational systems having short cycle programmes has grown from 14 in 2005 to 26 in 2014. As illustrated in Figure 2.9, short cycle programmes are most commonly considered to belong to higher education but in some countries they are attributed to post-secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET). The countries that do not have short cycle provision can also be divided in terms of their attitude to such programmes.*

*The diversity of the short cycle can also be seen from the names attributed to short-cycle qualifications, including: Higher Education Certificate, Undergraduate certificate, Higher Technician, Professional diploma, Advanced Professional Diploma, Interim Qualification, Technological Specialisation Diploma, Higher Education Diploma, Diploma of Higher Education, Undergraduate diploma, University diploma, Associate degree, Degree, Foundation Degree, First Level Professional Higher Education Diploma, Sub-Bachelor, Professional Bachelor (6 ).In addition, some countries including France, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain and the United Kingdom have several short-cycle qualifications at different levels. Furthermore, while the majority of programmes lead to professional qualifications, some are considered as academic qualifications. There is a wide range of practices regarding the credit awarded to short-cycle graduates when continuing to study in a first-cycle programme. In eight systems, full credit may be awarded, although in Ireland and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) this depends on an agreement between the institutions where the two programmes (short cycle and first cycle) are taught. Some countries also mention shorter programmes which either prepare for certain professions or are intermediate qualifications in programmes leading to a first-cycle degree. The length of such programmes can vary between 60 ECTS (one year) to 180 ECTS (three years). The most common length of short-cycle programmes seems to be 120 ECTS credits (two years), as mentioned by Andorra, Belgium (French Community), Croatia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.*

Most EHEA have established short cycle higher education programmes offering an accessible higher education opportunity for students who are academically less prepared for higher education degree programmes. As such it is also an important component of the higher education policy aiming at enhancing the social dimension of higher education (widening participation). Short cycle programmes were introduced to widen access and to ensure entry to HE for non-traditonal learners. In some cases it is also considered as a kind of a second chance. In many areas short cycle higher education programmes are established in order to meet the needs of the society and the labour market for people with a higher vocational training.

Participation in higher education is important for individuals and communities for a range of social and economic outcomes. Achieving widening access needs a diversification of higher education including the development of short cycle study programmes and professionally oriented study programmes. Widening participation requires further progress towards ensuring flexible learning paths. The increasing diversity of the student body demands for diversity of learning provisions and study programmes. But by developing short cycle study programmes we have to avoid that higher education becomes a segregated area and we have to avoid the creation of dead ends in higher education. Therefore we have to enhance the permeability and the articulation between the sectors: short cycle, professionally oriented and academically oriented study programmes. There is a need for clear articulation pathways. Up to now the articulation issue was not much debated within the EHEA. Some countries have made already real progress while in other countries it is still no policy issue. Based on good practices in some countries we would like to fuel the debate on the permeability between the sectors leading to some recommendations. It is a building block of the social dimension in HE.

It is generally agreed that ensuring equal opportunities for access to quality higher education as well as equity in treatment, progression and outcomes that are independent of socio-economic background and others factors that may lead to educational disadvantage has become an important policy issue. Policy makers should work on the systematic development of effective strategies to ensure access to all categories and sectors of higher education for under-represented groups. The development of short cycle study programmes is considered as one of the instruments and ways for better ensuring equal opportunities for access and success. But that is not enough. There is the danger of segregation in higher education and the creation of dead ends. In order to overcome those possible negative effects all policy makers responsible for higher education should work on the development of quality articulation pathways connecting the different categories of higher education. The Bologna Process demonstrates that European cooperation and shared policy reforms make a valuable contribution in confronting common challenges through the exchange of good practices and common policy analysis? The issue of articulation between the different categories of higher education (short cycle, professionally oriented and the academically oriented study programmes) should be given more attention if the social dimension in higher education really matters.

Key to improving the learner journey in a diverse higher education are the qualifications frameworks that have been developed the last decade. Qualifications frameworks are seen as an enabler that opens up the possibility of effective articulation and transition between de sectors. The QF clears the path for making the learner journey more effective and more efficient both for the learners as for the society.

In some countries SCHE has already an important impact. In other countries the impact is growing. And there are still countries opposing to SCHE and are convinced that SCHE could not be considered as being higher education.

## Transition from professionally oriented first cycle qualifications to the second cycle

From the Bologna Implementation report 2015:

*Access between the Bologna cycles has been among the most important issues since the beginning of the Bologna process. The Bologna texts state that 'first-cycle degrees should give access to studies in the second cycle, while the second-cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies'. Access is defined in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as having the right to be considered for admission. However, even if access is provided in the understanding of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there are several reasons why not all first-cycle programmes give direct access to the second-cycle. This is often related to a binary differentiation between 'academic' and 'professional' programmes. This leads to a requirement that holders of professional first-cycle degrees must follow bridging programmes in order to be able to access 'academic' second cycle programmes. Indeed, in several countries, there may be no second-cycle programmes that provide direct continuation from some or all professional first-cycle programmes. Similar reasons may hinder holders of 'professional' second cycle qualifications entering doctoral studies. Consequently, ministers in several of Bologna ministerial communiqués have encouraged efforts to remove barriers to access and progression between cycles..*

*At first sight, it seems that the performance of countries in improving access to the next cycle has decreased over time. However, the country explanations and additional data demonstrate that actually the changes in scores are rather caused because of better data collection and more detailed selfanalysis of the countries concerned. According to country explanations, instead of broad estimates claiming 100 % access (actually, just meaning that the country takes no additional measures to hinder access), in the current data collection countries paid attention not only to the most common case where graduates choose a next cycle programme in the same field. In the 2014 data collection, countries also considered cases where students choose studies in a different field, where students choose to switch between academic and professional programmes (which exists in 23 EHEA countries), or where students choose a different higher education institution). Several countries do not grant direct access to second cycle studies to holders of professional first cycle qualifications. For instance, in Belgium (Flemish Community), Lithuania and the Netherlands graduates from professional programmes must complete bridging programmes. Malta makes use of a 30 ECTS bridging course if the field of study is different, but in Switzerland additional courses usually have to be taken if the applicant comes from a different higher education institution. In Ireland, access is granted for holders of honours degrees rather than the ordinary bachelor.*

*Regulation of progression between first and second cycle*

*Despite the general tendency towards easier access to the next cycle, when it comes to practical measures, access to the next cycle may require sitting additional examinations, taking additional courses or having a mandatory work experience. Only a few countries use additional requirements for all students. In seven countries – Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia and Turkey – all students have to sit entrance exams, and some students will have to sit examinations in another 23 countries. Several countries explained that they chose the answer 'some students' due to additional requirements in the cases of highly specific fields such as the creative arts or sports, and therefore the requirements affect a small share of all students. The same is true in the cases where additional courses are required. No country has a general requirement for prior work experience, but in 16 countries some students need to have prior work experience. In Finland, for holders of a polytechnic first-cycle degree, when applying for further studies, work experience between the two cycles is compulsory. There are two main groups of applicants who have to fulfil additional requirements: those holding a professional first-cycle degree applying for admission to an academic second-cycle programmes, and those who hold a first-cycle qualification in a different study field. In addition, in some countries this compensatory measures required for students coming from another study field will not be counted as 'major transitional problems' may affect applicants who have a degree in the same field but come from a different higher education institution.*

*All applicants holding professional first cycle qualifications have to sit examinations in the seven countries mentioned above, and in 19 countries may have to do so in some cases. Some of these countrie*s *mention that the additional courses are applied on a case by case basis.*

### Intended results of the PLA:

Results include an overview of good practices and recommendations.

Clear articulation pathways will strengthen the social dimension and lifelong

learning in higher education.

#### Objectives:

To get a deeper understanding of the conditions and factors that are favoring the permeability of the different types of higher education; what are the success factors of the various approaches at national and institutional level?

To what extent do the European tools (QF, QA, ECTS and learning outcomes approach) have been helpful to enhance the permeability? What should be changed in order to increase their usefulness?

To enhance our an insight in the role the different actors may play and should play in order to enhance the permeability and articulation;

To exchange good practices and measures between the participants;

To formulate some recommendations to policy makers and HEIs.

The PLA will build on the proceedings and the conclusions of the Irish Presidency Conference on Quality assurance in qualifications frameworks, held in Dublin, 12-13 March 2013. The PLA will also build on the outcomes of the PLA ‘Increasing synergies between the implementation of the learning outcomes approach and quality assurance arrangements (in VET and HE)’, held in Leuven, 28-29 November 2013.

#### Targets groups:

* Higher Education Institutions that offer professionally oriented study programme and HEI that offer academically oriented study programmes and institutions that offer short cycle/level 5 study programmes;
* The directors and the people responsible for the study programmes;
* Officials responsible for policy making with regard to higher education;

#### Methodology and quality control:

With regard to the permeability between the various types of higher education we propose to organize a peer learning activity. We think that a PLA is the best way to achieve our objectives with regard to that issue. A PLA is an appropriate arrangement for having an in depth discussion and for exchanging good practices between engaged participants. We will develop a questionnaire for the participants and on the basis of the answers we will draft a background paper. We expect a contribution from each participant.

We will ask an independent person to attend the meetings as an observer and to report to us his or her findings and if relevant some recommendations for improvement.

Quantitative indicators:

* The PLA has taken place
* The background documents were ready on time

Qualitative indicators:

* The numbers of participants at the PLA
* The active involvement and participation of the participants
* The satisfaction of the participants related to the preparation of the meetings, the content of the meetings and the documents

The overall evaluation of the project results will carried out by an external review team.

#### Intended results and impact of the PLA:

Results include an overview of good practices and recommendations.

Clear articulation pathways will strengthen the social dimension and lifelong

learning in higher education.

An overview of the good practices with regard to the articulations between the different HE sectors;

An insight in what works and what does not and in what are the effects of policy measures in different policy contexts;

A report of the PLA including recommendations for further improvement of the permeability between the sectors.

Impact:

Higher education institutions develop clear articulation pathways.

HEIs undertake actions to improve the quality of articulation pathways.