

BFUGQFWG minutes
26 February 2006

Minutes of the Qualifications Frameworks Working Group Meeting, Budapest - 26 February 2006

The meeting was held at the Danubius Thermal Hotel Margitzigit, Budapest on Sunday 26 February 2006 from 19:00 to 22:00.

Those present:

Members (Elected): Mogens Berg (Chair, Denmark); Nadezda Uzelac ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"); Marlies E. Leegwater (Netherlands); Laureano González-Vega (Spain); Gottfried Bacher (Austria); Eva Gönczi (Hungary).

Experts - Organisations: Nina Arnhold (European Universities Association, EUA); Colin Tuck (The National Union of Students in Europe ESIB); Christoph Anz (UNICE); Peter Van Der Hijden (European Commission).

Experts - Countries: Seán Ó Foghlú (Ireland); David Bottomley (Scotland); Gerard Madill (Scotland).

Bologna Secretariat: Louis Ripley (Notes).

Apologies:

Vadim B Kasevitch (Russian Federation); Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe); Andrejs Rauhvargers WG Chair Stocktaking (Latvia).

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

Documents: Draft Agenda

The Chair welcomed members of the group to the meeting, in particular Dr Christoph Anz (UNICE) who was attending for the first time.

There were no comments and the Agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of the last meeting 21 November 2005, Copenhagen

Documents: Minutes of 21 November 2005 meeting

It was pointed out that the first line of text on page 2 of the previous meeting's minutes should have said with legislation rather than without.

Action: to be amended.

Louis reported that he had made some enquiries about setting up a discussion forum for the group but a cost would be incurred. The Chair said that he would liaise with Louis on this at a later date.

There were no other comments and the Minutes were adopted.

3. Complimentarity between the Bologna QF and EQF- LLL

Documents: BFUG –letter to European Commission of 21 Dec 2005.
EQF Information Note
EQF Summary of Responses

The Chair introduced this item. He referred to the BFUG letter written by Rachel Green to the Commission explaining that the letter reiterated the views expressed by the Working Group in that the two frameworks were different but not incompatible.

Referring to the Commission's paper on the summary of responses to the consultation exercise the Chair said that it was important that the Working Group clarified what points they wished to take forward for discussion at the EQF Conference the following day.

In discussion the following points were made:

It was suggested that the proposals from the Commission needed a lot of clarification. However, it was generally agreed that:

- the Bologna framework needed to be kept
- focus needed to be maintained upon the translation function (which was the purpose of the meta-framework)
- alignments needed to be tested

Referring to ECTS, Nina asked how the overlap between the frameworks will work for different countries. The Chair said that this problem should be solved by the time the testing stage is reached.

Colin said that it was clear that the descriptors cannot be identical and further discussion was needed before national frameworks can be set up.

On the issue of whether to strive for 'best fit' or 'complete fit' between the frameworks the Chair suggested that the group should return to this later in the meeting.

Marlies asked what it was exactly that we wanted to test. The Commission was of the view that the framework could test individual competencies, but the framework needed to be able to compare levels of education not just individual competencies. She would like to have seen more discussion around levels 7 and 8 -which the group had cross

referenced and asked if these should have been the same for both frameworks. There were also difficulties around level 6.

Marlies thought that descriptors should be tested first. Christoph agreed but thought that the descriptors were not clearly described.

David asked how many countries were ready to test descriptors. There was a need to clarify what was meant by national frameworks in both the EHEA and the EQF –LLL.

The Chair suggested that the group's pilot testing could be carried out against the EQF framework. This would emphasise the linkage with the EQF framework. The descriptors also needed to be tested, as most countries had agreed that they needed to be looked at again.

David said that while descriptors do need to be all embracing they don't need to be too detailed. At the top level the descriptors were too academic and at the bottom they were too vocational.

Nina was concerned that not all HE descriptors from EQF level 5 apply. Colin said that it was not clear whether comparative categories should be exact fit or best fit and this needed to be clarified for all levels not just HE.

Gerard felt that the best fit approach was the best way forward as this allowed a generic framework which encompassed all learning. Scotland had broad descriptors which allowed for this. The Chair thought that this approach might make national frameworks too complex.

Seán said that Ireland had changed its view somewhat and thought it was better to have typical cycle descriptors at levels 6, 7 and 8 which would be more in alignment with the EQF. People understood the concept of having Dublin descriptors within the EQF. David agreed saying that for a framework to work properly with the EQF you needed to have a similar system to Dublin descriptors.

On Austria's response to the consultation Gottfried said that he thought that levels 6-8 leaned too much on the academic side and should have included more of a vocational element. The EU had a mandate from Ministers to build vocational training into EQF-LLL.

The Chair said that with the differing nature of types of descriptors there were some problems with understanding how Dublin/Bologna would fit in. Seán suggested that it might be helpful to look at the end of each cycle of the HE descriptors and start from there.

David said that if the EQF descriptors were required to cover all levels of learning then they will consequently have to be extensive, so in his view they were not unnecessarily complex. The Chair asked if the descriptors should be more general and less descriptive. David said that as long as

they were not made too general this should not matter as long as all levels were included.

Gerard tabled the SCQF descriptors explaining that whilst they were generic they also encompassed all levels in terms of best fit. Gerard said that the SCQF had to be generic as it covered LLL, similarly to EQF.

Colin thought that descriptors should be seen in a selective way. There was a danger that if descriptors were too general they would become meaningless.

Nina said that there was a danger that the individual learner may find themselves in a situation where they had to link their qualification to about 5 different frameworks. The aim may have been to make these processes simpler but they were becoming more complex.

Seán said that administrative complexities did not need to affect teachers or students. The Diploma Supplement would provide all the information needed for all users.

On Seán's last point David said that in Scotland at level 7 there were school qualifications and work related qualifications. The students were unaware of the levels of descriptors as they worked to qualifications descriptors. The descriptors in this sense were purely a translation device.

On technocrats and behind the scenes complexities, Peter said that when the EQF goes public and additional professional groups learn about these technicalities the situation could lead to numerous enquiries. Such a situation was something of a potential Pandora's Box.

The Chair said that there were two different scenarios:

- countries that had a national framework, and
- countries that were constructing a national framework.

Referring to the systems in place in Scotland and Ireland the Chair said that although they had frameworks and descriptors the group needed to be careful when explaining to new countries that descriptors can be of a different kind. The Chair felt that this needed to be included in the Diploma Supplement.

On experts it was reiterated that this would be up to individual countries to choose.

Marlies was concerned about the EQF descriptors where the wording was broader. David said that this had been written for a different audience and suggested that this did not need to be a cause for major concern.

Referring to page 4 of the EQF summary document the Chair said that he was concerned that some countries have indicated that they do not have a

national qualifications framework and asked how these countries' systems could possibly link to anything.

Seán said that for some countries there was an explanation for this, for example whilst England did not have a single framework they did have one for schools and one for higher education which would link to the EQF.

On the EQF Information Note handout where 'systems' were defined as being different to 'frameworks' the Chair said that whilst this did not cause any problems for him it might for others and asked the group if they had any views.

David questioned why a definition of a 'system' was needed at all.

The Chair said that he did not understand why the term 'Benchmark' was used in the table on page 3 of the handout and he would raise this at the EQF conference.

Nina pointed out that the term Bologna framework was not mentioned in either the Summary paper or the Information Note.

Reference the 2nd right hand box in the table on page 3 of the Information Note, Marlies pointed out that EQF levels were developed on the request of Member States not by them as stated in the paper.

It was agreed that:

The discussion around complementarity had been useful and had produced a number of points which would be fed back to the EQF conference. It was also agreed within the group as to who would attend the various conference workshops to ensure effective representation.

4. Pilot projects on self certification of national qualifications

Documents: Verification of Compatibility of Irish Framework of Qualifications with the Framework of Qualifications Of the EHEA (Second Report) 26 Feb 2006
Process for self-certification of the framework for qualifications of HEIs in Scotland against the framework for the EHEA (discussed at 14 Feb 2006 SACCA meeting).
Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit & Access (SACCA) 14 Feb 2006.

The Chair introduced this item and asked for feedback from the national experts.

The pilot in Ireland

Seán said that there had been a number of developments since the meeting in Copenhagen. The steering group had met on several occasions and aimed to draft a document verifying the compatibility of the Irish National Framework with the EHEA framework. However, there were a number of complex issues to consider, including the descriptors around the ordinary degree and the honours degree.

The Chair suggested that setting out the elements around 'criteria' and 'procedure' might be helpful. The problems experienced and lessons learned from the Irish Pilot could help inform future practice, perhaps in the form of a basic handbook for others. Seán agreed to this.

Marlies thought that such examples of good practice should not be too prescriptive. The Chair in reply said that the descriptors from the previous report had been quite short and it would be helpful if the points could be elaborated upon. Gerard said that whilst there were examples of good practice this was not necessarily the only way of approaching this task.

The pilot in Scotland

David said that the Scottish pilot was fortunate in that there were existing frameworks in use to be drawn upon. Many new countries did not have this facility. With this point in mind he asked if Scotland should do the very minimum necessary to give other countries a more realistic model to work from. David asked the group if Scotland should recommend how others mapped their descriptors. If this was not done it could be very difficult to implement Dublin descriptors later.

In discussion the following points were made:

Marlies thought the Tuning Project could have related more to an integrated subject benchmark. The Chair said that this depended very much upon how detailed countries wanted their frameworks to be. Nina thought that the Tuning Project was too detailed for national frameworks.

Laureano said that Spain were trying to define goals and were looking at a competencies framework for domain specific degrees to see how everything would fit.

David said that Scotland would be happy to explore different issues and provide a commentary. National descriptors could be mapped against Bologna descriptors. In addition, subject communities could be asked how the Dublin descriptors fit in with what they are trying to do. Such an exercise could commence with a quite simple model and then more specific reference points could be added as appropriate.

David explained that Scotland were considering working with an international expert from South Africa. The Chair suggested that it might be helpful to also enlist the participation of an expert from Europe. As Ireland had two experts, Sjur Bergan and Robert Wagenaar.

On cycles, David said that there were grey areas around the end of the first cycle to the start of the second cycle due to the combinations of courses they have.

5. ECTS - Survey

Documents: Note from Sweden
Draft letter from the Chair

The Chair said that because of the way ECTS are defined in different countries the results from the Swedish survey may be of limited use. The Chair asked the group for comments to help inform any reply he might make.

In discussion the following points were made:

Gerard said that there appeared to be a great deal of divergence either in the student workload or in the way it was measured. There had been discussion and disagreement on this issue at the Turkey conference. Gerard thought that it would be better to have a number of hours per credit as a measure.

The Chair said that if this issue only had importance in terms of the mobility of students it could perhaps have been tolerated but it was also relevant in terms of accumulation which complicated matters further.

Colin thought that it was not inappropriate to have some diversity in terms of hours/credits but not too much. However it was not up to the working group to resolve this issue. This could only be decided by the appropriate body.

Gottfried felt that a pragmatic approach was needed. The group should not try to interfere with diverse national systems and could only make suggestions on how countries should approach this issue. He suggested that perhaps some countries just need time and evidence of good working examples. Outputs were what really counts.

On national variances the Chair said that in England a BA was the equivalent of 60 credits and a MSc 90. On the discussions that took place about 18 months ago on MScs in the UK Nina said that the system used in the UK was linked to outcomes and to time (with some variation on the latter). The Swedish paper on credits however did not

talk about learning outcomes. Also students on certain BA courses in Sweden were getting their degree in 2.5 years.

Marlies said that we needed to try to solve comparability through learning outcomes (which was the first criterion). Credit counting was confusing the issue. The Chair said that credits were a feature of a system not an individual.

David said that in Scotland there was an increase in the number of part time students. In time it may be necessary to have a more standard definition of credit.

Gerard agreed with the Chair's earlier comment about accumulation adding a complexity to the issue. It was important to have a constant value of what constituted a credit. However, the SCQF could never have been developed if everything had had to fit exactly.

Peter said that there was some flexibility within ECTS in most cases (but not all) 60 credits were the equivalent of between 1,500 to 1,800 hours of work. However the Swedish paper on credits had broken this down further to a weekly rate of one credit equalling 25-30 hours of work a week. On providing guidance on the application of ECTS Peter said that the Commission's user guide will include a section on frequently asked questions to help clarify issues and a list of national academic contact points. However, the management of ECTS in individual countries was the responsibility of their qualifications providers.

Marlies questioned whether the group should take any action on this and advised that in her opinion the group should not send any letters. The Chair said that it was only because of the huge variation in credits that he had raised this issue.

Colin thought it would be better to talk to Swedish colleagues informally.

It was agreed that:

The group would take no action. Peter Van Der Hijden would give further consideration to the points raised.

6. Assistance to member countries working to introduce NQF

Documents: Note from the Chair.

The Chair said that he had raised this issue at the Board meeting in Vienna and the proposals had been well received. The Chair suggested 3 meetings in the following areas and asked the group for their comments:

- Southwest Europe

- Southeast Europe
- Central Europe

In discussion the following points were made:

Colin thought that there should be a principle meeting for all Bologna participants to help foster a common understanding. It was important that no countries were omitted and that a balance in terms of numbers at the meetings was maintained. The Chair said that if need be, a 4th meeting could be added to the list for northwest Europe to help address these points.

Nina asked if there were enough experts to attend all the meetings. The Chair thought that careful planning - including in terms of time - might help to address this and proposed that 1 or 2 of the meetings should take place before the summer vacation and the remainder afterwards.

Seán that in his view, providing this support for member countries was the most important part of the group's work. Eva said that she too was in favour of the workshops.

Marlies asked if aspects of this exercise could be combined with the work on stocktaking. The Chair felt that as the stocktaking exercise was a quite separate piece of work it would only detract from what the group were trying to do.

Nadezda pointed out that the Balkan countries were not part of the Black Sea network of countries and suggested that it might be helpful if a questionnaire on the development of qualifications frameworks could be distributed to these countries. The Chair pointed out that such an activity already formed part of the stocktaking exercise although it could be used as part of the preparation for the workshops.

It was agreed that:

A 4th workshop will be added for northwest Europe. The Chair will make contact with colleagues in the member countries with a view to setting up the workshops. In addition, contact will be made with the Black Sea Network.

Laureano said that Spain would be happy to host the event in southwest Europe.

Member countries will be asked what they would consider helpful for discussion in the workshops

7. Work programme for the group

The Chair said that he had included this on the Agenda as he wanted to update it as appropriate. Many of the items however had been discussed within the other Agenda items.

A member of the group asked whether there needed to be any discussions about supporting the work of the Stocktaking Group. The Chair said that this had been discussed and agreed at the last meeting in Copenhagen.

It was agreed that:

The Chair would update the plan taking into account the comments made during the meeting. The plan would then be distributed - along with the minutes from the meeting - in the near future.

8. AOB

It was suggested that perhaps one of the regional meetings could be combined with the next meeting of the working group.

It was agreed that:

Although members of the group might meet earlier at regional meetings the next official meeting of the working group would be in Madrid in September, date to be arranged.