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benelux  
2009



DGIV/EDU/HE (2009) 2

Orig. Eng.

Strasbourg, January 23, 2009

BFUG (CZ) 15\_4.8a

**BOLOGNA PROCESS**  
**Coordination Group for Qualifications Framework**

# **REPORT ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

Submitted to the BFUG for its meeting on February 12 – 13, 2009

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport  
(Directorate of Education and Languages – Higher Education and Research Division)

Distribution: Coordination Group

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>**

### **Mandate**

In the London Communiqué, the Council of Europe was asked to support the sharing of experience in the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks. The Council of Europe has been assisted in this work by the Bologna Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks, which was appointed in accordance with the decision by the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG).

The EHEA Framework was adopted by Ministers in Bergen in 2005 on the basis of a report by the Bologna Working Group on qualifications frameworks, and the development of national qualifications frameworks is within the competence and responsibility of the competent national authorities. Ministers committed to launching this work by 2007 and to completing it by 2010. Furthermore, the 2007 report by the Bologna Working Group on qualifications frameworks is an important element on which the Coordination Group has drawn in its work.

The role of the Council of Europe and, by extension, the Coordination Group, has therefore been to facilitate the sharing of experience and to help develop good practice so that the competent national authorities could benefit from relevant experience from other countries to the extent that the national authorities wished to do so. The role of the Council of Europe and the Coordination Group was emphatically *not* to elaborate national frameworks or to give directives to the competent national authorities. On the contrary, they have seen their role as that of facilitators.

## **SHARING GOOD PRACTICE**

### **European level**

The Bologna work program 2007 – 2009 has included three conferences on qualifications frameworks (Strasbourg, October 2007; Edinburgh, February 2008 and Tbilisi, November 2008). In addition, three further Bologna conferences have been particularly relevant to qualifications frameworks. Of these, two (Moskva, April 2008 and Porto, June 2008) focused on ECTS, learning outcomes and student workload, while the third (Luxembourg, November 2008) focused on employability.

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<sup>1</sup> For easy reading, no reference to sources, documents or web sites are made in the Executive Summary. All references will be found in the main text of the report.

## **Regional initiatives**

The Council of Europe has in particular sought to encourage regional cooperation in South East Europe and in New Independent States. The reason for this choice is that most countries in both regions joined the Bologna Process in 2003 or later, are going through a process of very extensive reforms and have, in many cases, developed from a common background.

In South East Europe, a regional meeting was held in November 2007 and a regional network on qualifications frameworks was established in July 2008. The Network is open to participation by the competent authorities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey.

A regional conference for countries of the New Independent States was held in September 2008 with the participation of representatives of Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine.

## **DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION**

### **Web site on qualifications frameworks**

In the course of December 2007 and January 2008, a special section on qualifications frameworks was developed as a sub-site of the official Bologna web site:

### **National QF correspondents**

In March 2008, all countries of the Bologna Process were invited to appoint national correspondents for qualifications frameworks, with the intention that the correspondents be the main links between developments concerning qualifications frameworks in their own country and the other partners in the Bologna Process. As of January 22, 2009, 43 countries had appointed correspondents.

### **Self certification**

Self certification is the final step in the development of a national qualifications framework and is an integral part of the process. The purpose of the self certification is to demonstrate that the national qualifications framework is compatible with the EHEA Framework. The self certification process – which should involve international experts – and report are therefore essential to establishing the credibility of a national qualifications framework. The published self certification report may be seen as the “visiting card” of the education system concerned: it is the one document by which a given system will demonstrate to its partners that it is compatible with the EHEA-QF.

At the time of writing, three countries - Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) - have submitted and made public their self certification reports. Several other self certification exercises are under way and some reports may be published before the 2009 Ministerial conference. The self certification process for the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and a joint exercise for the Netherlands and the Flemish Community of Belgium are close to completion. Denmark plans to launch its self certification in early 2009 and to complete it by the end of the year.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING**

Like the EHEA Framework, the EQF-LLL, formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in April 2008, is an overarching framework of qualifications against which national frameworks will be referenced.

Good cooperation has been established between the Council of Europe, as Chair of the Coordination Group, and the European Commission, as the institution providing technical support for the EQF-LLL. The European Commission is a member of the Coordination Group, and the developments with regard to the EQF-LLL have been considered at every meeting of the Coordination Group. At the same time, the Council of Europe is a member of the EQF-LLL Advisory Board. The Council of Europe was also a member of a sub group of the EQF-LLL Advisory Board that looked at referencing of national qualifications levels in relation to the EQF-LLL. The Advisory Board adopted the criteria and procedures, which are compatible with the criteria and procedures for self certification in relation to the EHEA-QF.

In spite of these very positive developments, however, there is a need to continue work on the two frameworks.

### **STATE OF DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

NQF correspondents – or, where they had not been appointed, BFUG members – were asked to provide information on the state of development of their respective national framework.

The results of the enquiry are summarized in the main body of the report, while a more detailed overview is available as a separate document. In brief, the replies show that most countries are making good progress in implementing the first steps in the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks - making the decision to start, setting the agenda, organizing the process and designing the profile (see Appendix 4 for a detailed overview of the steps) - while fewer countries report that they have consulted stakeholders, adopted the framework or decided on the administrative set up of the framework. Very few countries have as yet completed the implementation of the framework, the inclusion of specific

qualifications into the framework or the self certification. Relatively few countries also report that they have established a national web site for qualifications frameworks.

It should also be pointed out that as of January 22, 2009, 7 members<sup>2</sup> of the Bologna Process have not provided information. In addition, some of the answers to the enquiry raise questions of comprehension of some of the steps and of methodology.

## **OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK**

Qualifications frameworks are not static. Rather, they are part of dynamic higher education policies and developments. They need to be developed continuously through constant use as well as constant reflection.

In the course of its work, the Coordination Group has identified a number of issues on which further work is required and which would, in most cases, benefit from further consideration at European level even if the principle of course remains that the competent authorities of each education system are responsible for their own national qualifications framework. A more detailed description will be found in the main body of the report.

### **Developing, describing and implementing learning outcomes**

- Developing and describing learning outcomes is, in the view of the Coordination Group, one of the greatest challenges with which the European Higher Education Area will continue to be confronted over the next few years and will require continued exchange of experience across the EHEA.
- There will need to be a good mix of targeted activities at European level coupled with discussion and development work at national and institutional level and supplemented by regional events and cooperation.
- An important task in the 2 – 4 years ahead will be not only to organize international events on key topics but to ensure that all countries of the EHEA are actually involved.
- The link between describing and implementing learning outcomes is crucial. It is important both to provide adequate descriptions of learning outcomes and to ensure that these be followed by implementation and not be reduced to formalistic administrative exercises without a real impact on the teaching and learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Azerbaijan, Luxembourg, Moldova, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic.

## **Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance**

- The relationship between qualifications frameworks and quality assurance is crucial. Work needs to be continued over the next few years, at national and institutional as well as at European and regional level, to improve the links and interaction between the work done on qualifications frameworks and on quality assurance, involving a broad range of relevant stakeholders.

## **Stakeholder involvement**

- The identification of stakeholders as well as the timing and extent of their involvement should be guided by the fact that the purpose of stakeholder involvement is to give those who may contribute to the development of NQFs, who will use NQFs and/or who are likely to be affected by NQFs a reasonable opportunity to put forward their views and to contribute to the final result. Stakeholders involvement must be included sufficiently early in the process for the views put forward to be given serious consideration.
- Work needs to be continued over the next few years, at national and institutional as well as at European and regional level, to improve the involvement of and dialogue with stakeholders. At European level, more work needs to be done to offer guidance to competent national authorities in this respect.

## **Self certification**

- There is a strong need for continued exchange of experience in preparation of self certification, both through European and regional events and through expanding the pool of potential international experts in self certification exercises. The participation of international experts is an essential part of the self certification

## **Relationship to the EQF-LLL**

- The most important message is that the differences between the two overarching frameworks are far less important than the elements they have in common, that the differences have been minimized and that it is perfectly possible to develop national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with both the EHEA Framework and the EQF-LLL.
- The Coordination Group is pleased with the good cooperation that has now been established between the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL. There is nevertheless a need to clarify further the relationship between the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL, so as to ensure that Europe has a widely understood and accepted approach to lifelong learning that facilitates recognition of all forms of learning

## **Timetable**

- The Coordination Group is aware that the 2010 commitment has played an important role in launching the development of national qualifications frameworks and that any discussion of modifying the deadline could be misread as indicating that a difficult task is less urgent than originally thought. It is also conscious of the value of coordinating deadlines with the EQF-LLL.
- Nevertheless, the Coordination Group feels obliged to question whether the 2010 deadline is realistic, and indeed also whether it is desirable to emphasize this deadline at the possible expense, in some countries, of content or of stakeholder involvement.
- It is the view of the Coordination Group that the 2010 deadline could best be revised not simply by extending the general deadline, but by adopting a staggered deadline. A proposed revised timetable, linked to specific steps in the development of national frameworks and taking into account the holding of ministerial conferences in 2010 and 2012, is included in the main part of the report.
- The Coordination Group further proposes that Ministers in 2009 commit to submitting, in time for their 2010 conference, national road maps – including a realistic timetable - for the development of their national qualifications frameworks.

## **Work program**

- The 2009 – 2010 work program should include one major event focusing on qualifications frameworks. The Irish authorities have indicated that they would like to organize a conference in Dublin in autumn 2009 focusing on bringing together progress internationally in the implementation of the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL. The Coordination Group recommends that this conference be included in the official Bologna work program 2009 – 2010.
- The Coordination Group also believes that there will be a continued need to offer assistance, coordination and exchange of experience in the development of national frameworks compatible with the EHEA-QF (as well as with the EQF-LLL). It therefore recommends that the BFUG consider establishing some kind of body or group for continued coordination, either by extending the mandate of the current Coordination Group or by making some other similar arrangement.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the present report is to provide an overview of the work undertaken at European level to assist countries of the Bologna Process in the development of their national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (hereafter referred to as the EHEA Framework). The report also aims to identify issues that need to be given consideration in the further development of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the EHEA Framework. These issues need to be addressed in the future work program of the Bologna Process (and, beyond 2010, that of the EHEA). The report makes a number of proposals in this regard. In addition to outlining the background and mandate for the work, this report is organized in the following main parts:

- Sharing of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks;
- Dissemination of information;
- Relationship to the EQF-LLL;
- State of development of national qualifications frameworks;
- Outstanding issues and recommendations for further work.

### MANDATE

This work has been led by the Council of Europe under the mandate given in the London Communiqué:

*Qualifications frameworks are important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems. They should also help HEIs to develop modules and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits, and improve the recognition of qualifications as well as all forms of prior learning.*

*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.*

The Council of Europe has been assisted in this work by the Bologna Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks, which was appointed in accordance with the decision by the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) at its meeting in Lisboa on October 2 – 3, 2007. The terms of reference and the membership of the Coordination Group appear in Appendices 1 and 2.

The Coordination Group met on November 26, 2007; February 22, May 21, September 4 and November 17, 2008.

By way of introduction, it is important to emphasize that the EHEA Framework was adopted by Ministers in Bergen in 2005<sup>3</sup> on the basis of a report<sup>4</sup> by the Bologna Working Group on qualifications frameworks, and the development of national qualifications frameworks is within the competence and responsibility of the competent national authorities. It is recalled that Ministers committed to launching this work by 2007 and to completing it by 2010. Furthermore, the 2007 report<sup>5</sup> by the Bologna Working Group on qualifications frameworks is an important element on which the Coordination Group has drawn in its work.

The role of the Council of Europe and, by extension, the Coordination Group, has therefore been to facilitate the sharing of experience and to help develop good practice so that the competent national authorities could benefit from relevant experience from other countries to the extent that the national authorities wished to do so. The role of the Council of Europe and the Coordination Group was emphatically *not* to elaborate national frameworks or to give directives to the competent national authorities. On the contrary, they have seen their role as that of facilitators. Competent national authorities have been free to make use of the services of the Council of Europe and the Coordination Group, but there was no obligation to do so. The Council of Europe and the Coordination Group have also sought to facilitate the sharing of experience through measures at European and regional level. These measures are outlined in the report and include European and regional conferences, an extensive part of the Bologna web site dedicated to qualifications frameworks and a group of national QF correspondents.

The work on qualifications framework has connected to other parts of the Bologna work program, in particular as concerns mobility, recognition, employability and stocktaking.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/BASIC/050520\\_Framework\\_qualifications.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/BASIC/050520_Framework_qualifications.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/050218\\_QF\\_EHEA.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/londonbologna/uploads/documents/WGQF-report-final2.pdf>

## **II. SHARING OF EXPERIENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS 2007 - 2009**

### **DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD PRACTICE**

#### **European events: qualifications frameworks strand**

Three Bologna conferences have been organized under the “qualifications frameworks strand” of the Bologna work program 2007 – 2009.

The ***Council of Europe Forum on Qualifications Frameworks***<sup>6</sup> was held in Strasbourg on October 11 – 12, 2007, as the first Bologna conference in the current work program. The conference provided an overview of the state of affairs with regard to the development of qualifications frameworks. It brought together more than 100 policy makers and practitioners from most States party to the European Cultural Convention. The conference emphasized:

- the relationship between national qualifications frameworks and the overarching framework of the European Higher Education Area;
- the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL), presented by the European Commission;
- the concept of qualifications;
- the role of learning outcomes and credits in developing qualifications frameworks;
- three pertinent national experiences: Hungary, Ireland and New Zealand (the latter because New Zealand, with Australia and South Africa, was a pioneer in the development of qualifications frameworks).

The conference also provided an opportunity for participants to discuss issues related to the development of their national frameworks in smaller discussion groups.

The conference on ***learning outcomes based higher education***<sup>7</sup> was held in Edinburgh on February 21 – 22, 2008 and organized by the Scottish authorities. The reason for the choice of topic was that developing, describing and using learning outcomes is considered the perhaps most difficult aspect of developing and implementing national qualifications frameworks. The conference drew in particular on the Scottish experience in the development of policy and practice in the use of learning outcomes at national, institutional and program level and also included a number of workshops that allowed participants to engage in discussion of highly practical issues. The conference included sessions on:

- quality assurance national, institutional and program level: the design and
- implementation of outcome based programs

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/QF/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/Edinburgh2008.htm>

- learning outcomes and the assessment of learner achievement
- learning outcomes and information for stakeholders – public in general, employers
- the recognition of learning: informal learning; learning from work and the transfer of learning outcomes (credit).

The conference on *self certification of national qualifications frameworks* was held in Tbilisi on November 27 – 28<sup>8</sup>, 2008 and organized by the Georgian authorities. The conference focused on the final stage of the development of qualifications frameworks: the self certification of national frameworks against the EHEA-QF. The main aims of the conference were to reflect on the role and mechanisms of self certification, to exchange practice between countries which have already conducted a self certification process and those who plan to do so in the near future and to share information about the latest developments regarding the EQF-LLL. While progress in preparing self certification has been slower than envisaged when the work program was planned, the conference was highly valuable in preparation of self certification in a group of 5 - 10 countries likely to engage in this exercise within the next 1 - 2 years as well as in offering a platform for sharing experience and for developing specific concerns about self certification and the role of international experts in this process.

### **Other relevant Bologna conferences**

Three further conferences in the 2007 – 2009 work program have been particularly relevant to the development of national qualifications frameworks.

- The conference on ECTS and student workload<sup>9</sup> organized at the Russian University of Peoples' Friendship in Moskva on April 17 – 18, 2008, in cooperation with the National Training Foundation and the Council of Europe.
- The conference on Development of a common understanding of ECTS and learning outcomes held in Porto on June 19 – 20, 2008<sup>10</sup>.
- The conference on employability held in Luxembourg on November 6 - 7, 2008<sup>11</sup>.

### **Recognition**

There is, of course, a strong link between the development of qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications. Within the Bologna Process, the work program on recognition is carried out by the ENIC and NARIC Networks<sup>12</sup>, served by the Council of

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/Tbilisi2008.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/Moscow2008.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://portobologna.up.pt/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/Luxembourg2008.htm>

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.enic-naric.net/>

Europe and UNESCO/CEPES (ENIC Network) and the European Commission (NARIC Network). At the same time, the ENIC Network includes some members that are not current or potential parties to the European Higher Education Area. Some of these (Australia and New Zealand) were among the pioneers in developing national qualifications frameworks, while others – Canada, Israel and the United States – have no current plans to develop national qualifications frameworks, even if they may have descriptions of their degree systems that are not very far removed from QF-like descriptions and at least one province of Canada has a framework. In this context, it may also be worth noting that while what is now referred to as qualifications frameworks – or sometimes “new style qualifications frameworks” – is a relatively new phenomenon, European countries have of course had a framework for their qualifications through their degree systems (sometimes referred to as “old style qualifications frameworks”).

The impact of the development of qualifications frameworks on recognition policy and practice were considered at the annual joint meetings of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in Bucureşti in 2007 and in Malta in 2008 with a view to enhancing the understanding of qualifications frameworks among ENICs and NARICs and developing good practice. The 2008 ENIC/NARIC meeting also considered a draft analysis of the national action plans for recognition submitted to the 2007 London Ministerial conference. The analysis, which was submitted to the BFUG in October 2008, is relevant also for the role of qualifications frameworks in facilitating recognition.

At the 2008 ENIC/NARIC meeting, the Networks completed their consideration of “substantial differences”. This is a key concept of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention but also one for which no legal text can provide a precise definition. The Networks have therefore sought to develop a better common understand of what may constitute a “substantial difference” – and hence a valid reason for non-recognition or partial recognition of a foreign qualification – through workshops and discussions at three successive network meetings. Most of the discussions have been conducted on the basis of case studies aiming to illustrate elements that may be of importance in deciding whether there is a substantial difference or not. The development of qualifications frameworks is highly relevant to the identification of substantial differences, as national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching EHEA-QF should make it easier for credential evaluators to situate a qualification. The discussions in the Network meetings will be the basis for a book in the Council of Europe Higher Education Series, with publication foreseen in the course of 2009.

The impact of qualifications frameworks on recognition is yet to be measured, since there is – for obvious reasons – very limited experience with the recognition of qualifications issued within “new style” qualifications frameworks. The real importance of qualifications frameworks for recognition therefore cannot be assessed until an adequate number of countries issue qualifications within their new qualifications frameworks, and until an adequate number of holders of such qualifications seek recognition across borders. It should nevertheless be safe to assume that the introduction of qualifications frameworks in all countries of the EHEA as well as parallel developments in a number of countries outside of

the EHEA should facilitate recognition by providing a framework that facilitates comparison. At the same time, it is important that credential evaluators at higher education institutions as well as in ENICs/NARICs and other competent authorities gain an adequate understanding of qualifications frameworks as well as of the concept of qualifications, which may be seen to comprise five key elements:

- Level
- Quality
- Workload
- Profile
- Learning outcomes.

Emphasizing learning outcomes more strongly in the recognition of qualifications is a particular challenge. It requires that learning outcomes be well described and attested by higher education institutions but also that they be well understood by credential evaluators and that relevant legislation make it possible for credential evaluators to emphasize learning outcomes.

### **Regional events**

The Council of Europe and the Coordination Group have seen it as one of their priorities to stimulate regional cooperation in the development of national qualifications frameworks. Regional cooperation provides participating countries with excellent opportunities for concrete cooperation on issues of common concern. Even if the development of a national qualifications framework remains a national responsibility, regional cooperation is particularly important in that it allows countries to share experience in a more restricted circle of countries that in many cases have similar backgrounds. Regional cooperation is a complement to and not a substitution for European cooperation.

The Council of Europe has in particular sought to encourage regional cooperation in South East Europe and in New Independent States. The reason for this choice is that most countries in both regions joined the Bologna Process in 2003 or later, are going through a process of very extensive reforms and have, in many cases, developed from a common background.

### ***South East Europe***

A regional conference for South East Europe was held in Beograd on November 1 – 2, 2007<sup>13</sup>, 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, Romania, 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.

One of the main recommendations of his conference was that a regional network on qualifications frameworks should be established. The launching conference for this network was held in Cetinje on July 8 – 9, 2008 and coorganized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Montenegro and the Council of Europe<sup>14</sup>. Eight countries participated in this meeting, which established a regional network to exchange experience and promote good practice among the participating countries in the development and implementation of their national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. Participating countries should offer mutual assistance and support in the development and implementation of their national frameworks and consider issues of regional concern. The Network is open to participation by the competent authorities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey.

The meeting adopted terms of reference for the regional network and elected Ms. Nadežda Uzelac of the Ministry of Education of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” as the first Coordinator of the Network. Ms. Uzelac is also a member of the Coordination Group. The meeting also set up three dedicated teams to address specific issues. One team will plan and conduct a comparative analysis of qualifications frameworks and education systems of the countries participating in the Network. A second team will offer assistance and guidelines in developing national web sites for qualifications frameworks and consider whether it would be useful and feasible to develop a web site for the Network, and the third team will develop project proposals that may be submitted to external sources for support. This team will in particular consider project proposals that may help train higher education policy makers and practitioners in the region in key aspects of qualifications frameworks.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/EHEA2010/Belgrade/default\\_EN.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/HigherEducation/EHEA2010/Belgrade/default_EN.asp#TopOfPage)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/QF/CetinjeEN\\_08.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/QF/CetinjeEN_08.asp#TopOfPage)

### ***New Independent States***

A regional conference for countries of the New Independent States was held in Yerevan on September 8 – 9, 2008 with the participation of representatives of Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. The conference was organized by the Ministry of Education of Armenia and the Council of Europe. The objective of the conference was to take stock of the progress achieved in the participating countries in the development of national qualifications frameworks; provide expert advice for further development of national qualifications frameworks; contribute to the sharing of experience and networking between the countries.

### ***North Western Europe***

The Netherlands and the Flemish Community of Belgium jointly organized the external self certification of their national qualifications frameworks. The joint quality assurance agency for both higher education systems (NVAO) is responsible for the process. The self-certification process took place in approximately the same period as the self-certification process for the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Both processes were informally linked by the involvement of some of the same persons in both processes, including an expert from Ireland whose NQF has already been self certified. Thus experience has been exchanged regarding the process of self-certification, including links with quality assurance.

### **III. DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION**

#### **Web site on qualifications frameworks**

In the course of December 2007 and January 2008, a special section on qualifications frameworks was developed as a sub-site to the official Bologna web site<sup>15</sup>. The site was developed by the Council of Europe and the Bologna Secretariat. The site was validated by the Coordination Group at its meeting on February 22 and was made public shortly thereafter.

The aim of the site is to provide updated information on the main aspects of qualifications frameworks. The target groups are both the general public – at least in the sense of those taking some interest in higher education reforms and in discussions of qualifications without being higher education professionals – as well as policy makers and practitioners.

The site provides information on the EHEA Framework as well as on the EQF-LLL, and it includes a section on national qualifications frameworks with links to country pages. As of January 22, 2009, only 15 systems/countries had provided information on their national QF sites, or sites providing information on their national QFs. The site further provides some information, with links, on qualifications frameworks outside of the EHEA and on conference and other relevant events. Not least, it includes a glossary and it includes a section on “sources and resources” with useful references for those who wish to develop a broader overview and deeper understanding of qualifications and qualifications frameworks.

#### **National QF correspondents**

In March 2008, all countries of the Bologna Process were invited to appoint national correspondents for qualifications frameworks, with the intention that the correspondents be the main links between developments concerning qualifications frameworks in their own country and the other partners in the Bologna Process. As of January 22, 2009, 43 countries/systems had appointed correspondents.

The Coordination Group would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance provided by the majority of QF correspondents in facilitating information on the development of the respective national frameworks. Nevertheless, the Coordination Group must also note with regret that some countries have not appointed national QF correspondents. Even if in some of these cases, the BFUG representative of the country concerned has provided information, this cannot entirely replace the appointment of a QF correspondent. The Coordination Group must also note with regret that the information provided by some of the correspondents appointed has been of limited value. The Coordination Group also notes with regret that as of January 22, 2009, 7 countries<sup>16</sup> had not provided information on the state of development of their national qualifications frameworks.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/qf/qf.asp>

<sup>16</sup> Azerbaijan, Luxembourg, Moldova, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic.

## **Self certification**

Self certification is the final step in the development of a national qualifications framework and is an integral part of the process. The purpose of the self certification is to demonstrate that the national qualifications framework is compatible with the EHEA Framework. The self certification process – which should involve international experts – and report are therefore essential to establishing the credibility of a national qualifications framework.

The Coordination Group has examined an overview of the self certification process building on the report by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks submitted to and accepted by the London Ministerial meeting in 2007. The overview is reproduced in Appendix 3 and is also available on the QF section of the Bologna web page, and the completed self certification reports are also published on this site as well as on the ENIC-NARIC web site. Self certification was also the topic of the third European conference of the QF strand of the work program, held in Tbilisi on November 27 – 28, 2008, cf. above.

It should be underlined that the published self certification report may be seen as the “visiting card” of the education system concerned: it is the one document by which a given system will demonstrate to its partners that it is compatible with the EHEA-QF.

At the time of writing, 3 countries - Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) - have submitted and made public their self certification reports. The replies from national QF correspondents show that some further countries plan to complete the process by 2010, but it also shows that some countries plan to complete it after 2010, and most countries do not report definite plans for their self certification. In some cases, there also seems to be a lack of clarity of what self certification actually means.

It is also worth noting that three further self certification processes are under way or planned. The self certification exercise for the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has been launched. The project group, including foreign experts, met on July 31, October 8 and October 24, 2008. It is expected that the self certification report will be submitted in early 2009, and that it will be made public as soon as it has been accepted by the competent authorities.

The Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands have carried out a joint exercise for their two separate frameworks, and the project group for the self certification had a majority of foreign experts. The on-site verifications by this independent expert panel took place on November 6 – 7, 2008 and it is expected that the self certification reports will be completed in early 2009.

Denmark has started the initial planning of its self certifications process. It will be launched in January 2009 and completed in the course of 2009.

## IV. RELATIONSHIP TO THE EQF-LLL

Whereas the EHEA Framework was adopted by the Ministers of the Bologna Process in Bergen in May 2005, work on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL)<sup>17</sup> was launched by the European Council and the European Commission in 2004 (in the joint report on the Education and Training 2010 process). Following preparations by the European Commission and a Europe-wide consultation process (2005) the EQF-LLL was formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in April 2008.

Like the EHEA Framework, the EQF-LLL is an overarching framework of qualifications against which national frameworks will be referenced. The EQF addresses two main objectives, namely to increase European mobility and to facilitate lifelong learning. There are two significant differences between the two in terms of scope. On the one hand, the EHEA Framework concerns higher education only, and a conscious decision was made not to include levels giving access to higher education, whereas EQF-LLL concerns all levels of education, from primary to higher education, in a lifelong learning perspective. Thus, the EHEA Framework consists of three cycles<sup>18</sup>, whereas the EQF-LLL consists of eight levels. On the other hand, the EHEA Framework concerns all countries of the Bologna Process – currently 46 – whereas the EQF-LLL concerns the countries of the European Union, the European Economic Area and party to relevant EU programs in education – currently 32.

The QF-EHEA is designed only for, and specifically for, *higher education*. It supports mobility and recognition of learners and their learning between different national systems of *higher education*. The EQF-LLL is designed to be inclusive of all types of education and training and is not therefore designed specifically for any individual sector of training or education. EQF-LLL supports mobility and recognition of learners and their learning between different sectors of training or education in different countries.

The element that both frameworks have in common is the part covering higher education. Here, concern has been voiced that whereas the higher education part of the EQF-LLL is not far removed from the EHEA-QF, the EQF-LLL has not adopted the wording of the EHEA-QF. Therefore, Europe has two similar but not identical qualifications frameworks covering higher education.

***The most important message is, however, that the differences between the two overarching frameworks are far less important than the elements they have in common, that the differences have been minimized and that it is perfectly possible to develop national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with both the EHEA Framework and the EQF-LLL.***

Good cooperation has been established between the Council of Europe, as Chair of the Coordination Group, and the European Commission, as the institution providing technical

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<sup>17</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm)

<sup>18</sup> With possibilities to include intermediate qualifications, within national contexts.

support for the EQF-LLL. The European Commission is a member of the Coordination Group, and the developments with regard to the EQF-LLL have been considered at every meeting of the Coordination Group. At the same time, the Council of Europe is a member of the EQF-LLL Advisory Board. The Council of Europe was also a member of a sub group of the EQF-LLL Advisory Board that looked at referencing of national qualifications levels in relation to the EQF-LLL and submitted its report to the EQF Advisory Board, which adopted them in September/October 2008<sup>19</sup>.

In late 2008, the Commission established two further sub groups to consider aspects of the EQF-LLL that are also of concern to the EHEA-QF, and the Bologna Process is represented in both groups: through ENQA in a sub group considering the relationship between the EQF-LLL and quality assurance and through the Council of Europe in a sub group on the relationship between the EQF-LLL and sectoral qualifications.

The activities organized to assist in the implementation of the overarching frameworks have also sought to take account of developments in relation to the other framework. The European Commission presented the EQF-LLL at the first Bologna in the current work program, in Strasbourg in October 2007, and the Council of Europe and several members of the Coordination Group contributed to a large EQF-LLL conference on “implementing the European Qualifications Framework” in Bruxelles on June 3 – 4, 2008.

In spite of these very positive developments, however, there is a need to continue work on the two frameworks. In this context, it is worth noting that the Edinburgh conference on learning outcomes (February 21 – 22, 2008) concluded 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 ECVET to ensure interoperability.*

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<sup>19</sup> The guidelines were adopted at the meeting of the EQF Advisory Board on September 29 - 30, while the explanatory report was adopted following a final written consultation after the meeting, in the course of October 2008.

## **V. STATE OF DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

NQF correspondents – or, where they had not been appointed, BFUG members – were asked to provide information on the state of development of their respective national framework.

In brief, as of January 22, 2009, the state of development of national qualifications frameworks may be shown as follow (the 11 steps are outlined in more detail in Appendix 4):

- **11 steps:**

Action/step	Step completed	Step indicated as planned with an indication of timing	No of answers
1. Decision to start	41 countries;	0	40
2. Setting the agenda	35 countries;	2 in 2010	37
3. Organizing the process	31 countries; 5 countries for which the information is uncertain	1 country, which indicates step to be completed end 2008	37
4. Design Profile	26 countries; plus 5 from which the information is uncertain	2 countries, with various indications of timing	34
5. Consultation	23 countries; plus 4 which say that the process is on going	5 countries, with various indications of timing;	32
6. Approval	14 countries;	11 countries, with various indications of timing, 5 additional countries indicate no timing, and 3 "not foreseen yet"	33
7. Administrative set-up	17 countries; plus 4 under progress, plus 1 uncertain	10 countries, with various indications of timing, 1 additional country indicates "not foreseen yet"	33
8. Implementation	11 countries; plus 4 which indicate under process	18 countries, with various indications of timing, of which 2 indicate partial completion, e.g. through pilot projects;	33
9. Inclusion of qualifications	8 countries; plus 2 uncertain and 1 which indicates under progress	14 countries, with various indications of timing, plus 4 which mention "to be completed"	29
10. Self-certification	8 countries/systems say that they have completed the self certification but for 3 of them it does not seem coherent. 3 self certification reports have been published	19 countries, with various indications of timing between 2009-2012; 4 give no indication of timing ("to be done" or "not foreseen yet")	31
11. NQ web site	15 countries;	16 countries, with various indications of timing; 2 answered "no"; plus 8 which did not answered	33

Note: this table was reviewed in January 2009. Where a country has indicated 2008 for a given step, this has been taken as indicating completion. "Uncertain information" indicates information that the Council of Europe Secretariat has found ambiguous or difficult to interpret.

## DETAILED OVERVIEW OF COUNTRIES AND STEPS

Country	1.Decision to start	2.Setting the agenda	3.Organizing the process	4.Design Profile	5.Consultation	6.Approval	7.Administrative set-up	8.Implementation	9.Inclusion of qualifications	10.Self-certification	11.NQ web site
ALBANIA	07/ 2006	07/2006	Done	Done	09-10/2008	12/2008	06/2008	01/2009	06/2009	To be completed in 09/2009	Under construction
ANDORRA	2007	06/2008	Done	Done	To be completed	09/2008	09/2008	06/2009	To be done	To be done	To be done
ARMENIA	2006	2007	2005	2004 To be completed in 2009	2008	2008 To be completed for 2010	2008	2009	2009-2010	2009	Under construction
AUSTRIA	11/06	12/06-01/07	02-07/2007	03 /2007	01-12/2008	03/2009-05/2009	01/2009-03/2009	05-12/2009	06/2009-04/2010	06/2009-12/2011	Done
AZERBAIJAN											
BELGIUM (FLEMISH COMMUNITY)	2003	Done?	Done?	Done?	done	In progress	Done?	Pilots projects 12/2007, 2009-2010	?	2008	?
BELGIUM (FRENCH COMMUNITY)	2007										
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	2006-2008	2010	2006-2008	To be completed	ongoing	2007	2007-2010	To be completed by 2010	2009/2010	Ongoing By 2010	2010
BULGARIA	2007	2010	2007-2008	1995-2007 to be completed in 2010	2007-11/2008	2010	2007-2010	In progress?	To be done	2007	To be done
CROATIA	03/2006	07/2007	07/2007-09/2007	07/2007	11/2007-05/2009	To be done in 2009	To be done in 2009	To be done in 2011-2012	To be done in 2012	2010-2012	Done
CYPRUS	2008										
CZECH REPUBLIC	2005-2006	2005-2007	2005-2007	In the phase of suggestion which is being discussed	2008 and will continue during the whole preparation 2009-11*/	2006	Done and more structures, in particular for the tertiary sphere will be introduced – e.g. “sectoral expert groups”.*/	2008-2011‡	2008-2011‡– mainly in the second half of the project */	2011	Autumn 2008- This will be the present information on the state of art. It will be on the Bologna web page of the Ministry. The “professional” web will be prepared during the project*/ in 2009

A lot of work has to be done and will be done with the help of the National Project under the Operational Programme “Education for Competitiveness” which will be realised in 2009-11.

DENMARK	Completed in 2002. A revision-process was launched in 2006	Completed in 2003.	Completed in 2002.	Completed in 2003. A revision of the conceptual framework and descriptors were completed in 2008.	Completed in 2003 and again in 2007-2008.	2003 and 2008.	Completed in 2003. The administrative set-up remains after the revision of the framework.	Completed in 2003. Revisions at institutional level as a result of the new framework are ongoing (2009- )	Completed in 2008 and henceforth through cyclical accreditation.	Will be launched in January 2009 and completed in the course of 2009	Completed in 2003.
ESTONIA	done	done	done?	?	?	2007	Done	2009	?	?	Not yet
FINLAND	2004	02/2005	2005	---	08/2008	No decision yet	----	----	----	Not started yet	2009
FRANCE	2002	2002	2002	2002	done	2002	Done	2002	From 2002 to 2008(work still ongoing for HE qualifications	Done	done
GEORGIA	2006	done	2007	2007	2007-10/2008	12 /2009	2009	2008-2010	2011	06 /2009 – 2010	done
GERMANY	09/2003	09 2003	09 2003	2003-2005	2003-2005	04/2005	04/2005	12/2005 (accreditation Council HRK)	04/ 2005	10/ 2008	Self certification report posted
GREECE											
HOLY SEE	2005	2005	2005-2006	Done to be updated	10/2006	To be decided	To be done in 2009	To be done in 2009	In process	To be completed in 2010	To be done in 2009
HUNGARY	06/2008										
ICELAND	2004-2005	2004-2005	2004-2005	2006	2006-2008	2006	2006	Done	done	To be completed in 2009	To be done in 2010
IRELAND	2003	done	Done	Done	Done	Done	Done	done	done	Completed in 2006	Done
ITALY	2007	To be completed in 2008	To be completed in 2008	to be completed in 03/ 2008	to be completed in 2008	To be completed	Partially done in 2008, to be completed in 2010	Partially done in 2008, to be completed in 2010	To be concluded in 2009	To be concluded in 2009	To be concluded in 2010
LATVIA	2004	2004-2006	2004	2004-2005	2005 on QF 2006-2008 on the draft	Starts 2008 For adoption in 2009-2010	Done	2013	done	Not before 2012	To be done in 2009/2010
LIECHTENSTEIN	End 2007	01-02/2008	05/2008	10/2008	05/2009	10/2009	From 09/2009	Ongoing Until 07/2011	08/2009	07/2010	done
LITHUANIA	2005	2005-2008	2007	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	Done
LUXEMBOURG											
MALTA	2005	done?	Done	Done ?	?	06/2007	Done	done	?	?	Done
MOLDOVA											
MONTENEGRO	2006	2008	2006?	Done	2008	?	?	2010?	?	By 2010	?

NETHERLANDS	March 2005	done	Done	done	To be completed	To be completed	To be completed	To be completed	To be completed	07-11/2008	?
NORWAY	12/2005	12/2005	12/2005	04/2007	07 – 11/2007	In progress. To be completed by end of 2009	To be completed by end of 2009	To be fully implemented in all programmes in all HEIS by 2012	To be done 2009-2012	To be completed by 2013	To be set up By 02/2009
POLAND	2006	2006	2006	01/2008	2008-2009-2010	2009-2010	2010	2010	2011	2012	To be developed
PORUGAL											
ROMANIA	2005	done	2005-2006	2007	2007	To be approved by government decision	Done in 2008	2008-2010	2010	2010-2012	Done
RUSSIAN FEDERATION											
SERBIA											
SLOVAK REPUBLIC											
SLOVENIA	2007	2008	2007	?	?	?	Under development	?	?	?	?
SPAIN	2007	2007	2007	To be developed in 2008	To be developed in 2008	Not foreseen yet	not foreseen yet	To be developed in 2008	To be developed in 2008	not foreseen yet	not foreseen yet
SWEDEN	Done	Done?	Done?	2007	To be done	To be done	Done	In 2008?	2008?	?	?
SWITZERLAND	09/2005	2005-2006	2005	2006	2007-10/2008	2009-2010	Autumn 2008	Under progress	2010	2009-2010	done
“THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”	Done	done	Partially completed	To be completed	To be completed	done	To be completed	done	To be completed	To be completed	To be completed
TURKEY	Done 04/2006	Done 2006	Done 2006-2008	To be completed by 11/2008	Partially completed and will be fully completed by 12/2008	To be done by 03/2009	To be done by 05/2009	Pilot implementation in 2010 and full implementation by 12/2012	To be done in 2010-2015	To be done in 2010-2012	To be completed in 2009
UKRAINE	May 2008	July 2008	July 2008								
UNITED KINGDOM ENGLAND/WALES/ NORTHERN IRELAND	2001	done	Done	done	done	2001	?	done	Done?	11/2008	done
UNITED KINGDOM SCOTLAND	1997	done	Done in 1998	Completed in 1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2003-2004	2003	2001	2006-2007	done

## **VI. OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK**

Qualifications frameworks are not static. Rather, they are part of dynamic higher education policies and developments. National qualifications frameworks, once adopted and self certified, are not to be tucked away in a drawer or relegated to irrelevance. They need to be developed continuously through constant use as well as constant reflection. This should be a part of the everyday reality of higher education systems and institutions and it should be done without establishing elaborate administrative procedures. Self certification exercises should be repeated only when the NQF has undergone changes that are so substantial that they significantly change the basis on which the self certification report was developed and submitted. There should therefore be no requirement for periodic renewal of the self certification exercise, but the competent authorities should undertake a new self certification if their national qualifications frameworks undergo substantial modifications. New qualifications may be included within an existing QNF without requiring renewed self certification.

In the course of its work, the Coordination Group has identified a number of issues on which further work is required and which would, in most cases, benefit from further consideration at European level even if the principle of course remains that the competent authorities of each education system are responsible for their own national qualifications framework.

### **Developing, describing and implementing learning outcomes**

Developing and describing learning outcomes is, in the view of the Coordination Group, one of the greatest challenges with which the European Higher Education Area will continue to be confronted over the next few years. On the one hand, the traditions and experiences of actors – whether in public authorities or at different levels within higher education institutions, whether as policy makers, practitioners, students or credential evaluators – varies very considerably across the EHEA. Developing anything near a common understanding of how learning outcomes should be understood, developed, described and implemented in the learning and testing process will require continued exchange of experience across the EHEA. There will need to be a good mix of targeted activities at European level coupled with discussion and development work at national and institutional level. It is clearly not feasible that every institution benefit directly from international advice or participation in conferences and projects organized as a part of the Bologna Process, yet it is crucial that no country in the EHEA not benefit from the experiences of its peers. While the European events organized as a part of the 2007 – 2009 Bologna work program have been successful, the number and range of participants have necessarily been limited and some countries have not sent representatives to any of the three “QF events” in the work program. A process within each country and institution will be required to implement the concept of learning outcomes in curricula as well as in testing/assessment.

An important task in the 2 – 4 years ahead will therefore be not only to organize international events on key topics but to ensure that all countries of the EHEA are actually involved. This is of course primarily the responsibility of each country, since the EHEA builds on the principle that each country is responsible for its own participation in the Bologna Process. Nevertheless, there seems to be a need for, on the one hand, a measure of European coordination of events and, on the other hand, some coordination of participation with a view to ensuring that no country is either disengaged from the work on qualifications frameworks or unable to secure a place at key events.

Events are not necessarily only pan-European. Regional events and cooperation should be seen as a valuable supplement to – but not as a substitute for – participation in European events and projects. In this respect, the 2007 – 2009 work program provides a good example through the regional network established by and for South East Europe.

The link between describing and implementing learning outcomes is also crucial. It is important that each competent authority and each higher education institution provide adequate descriptions of learning outcomes. Yet, it is entirely possible to provide a “formally correct” description of learning outcomes without modifying institutional or pedagogical practice. It is important that the development and description of learning outcomes be followed by implementation and not be reduced to formalistic administrative exercises without a real impact on the teaching and learning. It is important to focus not only on descriptions but also on how the learning outcomes have been achieved as well as on the evidence that demonstrates that the learning has been achieved. This should have a real impact in directing institutions toward more student centered learning.

### **Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance**

The relationship between qualifications frameworks and quality assurance is crucial. On the one hand, qualifications frameworks have little value unless higher education provision in the country concerned is quality assured. The criteria and procedures for self certification, reproduced in Appendix 3, therefore require that “[t]he national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process”.

Conversely, the national qualifications framework and the degree to which a given higher education institutions implements it should be a key factor in quality assurance exercises. This should include an assessment of its description and implementation of learning outcomes.

In the view of the Coordination Group, work needs to be continued over the next few years, at national and institutional as well as at European and regional level, to improve the links and interaction between the work done on qualifications frameworks and on quality assurance. This work should involve public authorities, higher education institutions and student organizations as well as the bodies entrusted with the development and

implementation of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance as well as other relevant stakeholders.

### **Stakeholder involvement**

There is broad agreement on the importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of national qualifications frameworks. Nevertheless, actual practice seems to vary considerably in the extent of stakeholder involvement as well as in the understanding of who may be seen as relevant stakeholders.

While different national contexts may warrant somewhat different practices, as a general rule, the purpose of stakeholder involvement is to give those who may contribute to the development of NQFs, who will use NQFs and/or who are likely to be affected by NQFs, a reasonable opportunity to put forward their views and to contribute to the final result. This means that stakeholder involvement must be included sufficiently early in the process for the views put forward to be given serious consideration. While consultation is identified as step 5 in the suggested stepladder for the development of NQFs (cf. Appendix 4), it is important to underline that stakeholder involvement should not be seen as a “one off” exercise. There are good arguments for consulting stakeholders also in the earlier steps, such as setting the agenda, organizing the process and designing the profile, as well as in later steps. It is, for example, worth noting that the self certification exercise for the NQFs of the Flemish Community of Belgium and the Netherlands included an element of stakeholder consultation.

The need to consult those who may contribute to the development of NQFs, who will use NQFs and/or who are likely to be affected by NQFs should also guide the identification of stakeholders. While higher education institutions, staff and students are obvious stakeholders, public authorities other than those responsible for higher education (including, where appropriate local and regional authorities), private and public employers and professional organizations are other examples of stakeholders that will often be relevant to the development of NQFs.

In the view of the Coordination Group, work needs to be continued over the next few years, at national and institutional as well as at European and regional level, to improve involvement of and dialogue with stakeholders. At European level, more work needs to be done to offer guidance to competent national authorities in this respect.

### **Self certification**

Self certification is a crucial part of the development of national frameworks, since self certification is the exercise that will convince partners in the EHEA and beyond that a given national framework is indeed compatible with the QF-EHEA and that its qualifications should therefore be recognized at the appropriate level. Further details on self certification are provided in Appendix 3.

There is a strong need for continued exchange of experience in the preparation and carrying out of self certification, both through European and regional events and through expanding the pool of potential international experts in self certification exercises. The participation of international experts is an essential part of the self certification – as is the publication of the self certification report – in order to ensure credibility and also because international participants have greater distance to the framework in question and may raise issues that seem obvious to those intimately familiar with the framework in question but far less obvious to those who are not. So far, the pool of potential international experts with sufficient knowledge of and experience with qualifications frameworks is, however, relatively limited. If national frameworks are self certified gradually, the pool of experts will increase gradually. If, however, a high number of countries wish to self certify their frameworks at the same time, such as in 2010, we may well be faced with a shortage of international experts.

### **Relationship to the EQF-LLL**

The Coordination Group is pleased with the good cooperation that has now been established between the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL, including between the Council of Europe as Chair of the Coordination Group and the European Commission as the institution offering technical support for the EQF-LLL. The Coordination Group is of the opinion that the most important message is that the differences between the two overarching frameworks are far less important than the elements they have in common, that the differences have been minimized and that it is perfectly possible to develop national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with both the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL.

Nevertheless, the Coordination Group is also convinced that there is 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 ECVET to ensure interoperability. It is, however, generally understood that EQF levels 6 – 8 correspond to the three levels of the EHEA-QF and that level 5 of the EQF-LLL corresponds to short cycles as intermediary qualifications within the first cycle of the EHEA-QF. It is further understood that ECVET is attached to ECTS.

### **Timetable**

Ministers made an ambitious commitment in Bergen in 2005 when they promised to launch work on their national qualifications frameworks by 2007 and to complete it by 2010. In London in 2007, they recommitted to the ambitious goal of having national frameworks in place by 2010. The tight deadline has undoubtedly had a beneficial effect in that the vast majority of EHEA countries have now launched work on their national frameworks. Information provided by the national correspondents show that most countries are in the

first 5 of the 10 steps in developing a national qualifications frameworks identified in the report by the former QF working group submitted to Ministers in 2007 (cf. Appendix 4). The Coordination Group takes this to indicate that most countries have made a good start in developing their national frameworks but that some time is still required for all countries to complete this task. This is borne out by the fact that some countries indicate that they plan to complete self certification after 2010.

It should be noted that in many countries, the development of a national qualifications framework is one of the more visible manifestations of the Bologna Process. As such, it is far more an enmeshed policy exercise than merely a technical one. Time is required to undertake necessary consultation and to adapt overarching concepts to national practice and traditions, and this will ensure better implementation in the longer run. Inadequate preparatory work can in the worst of cases lead to over-enthusiastic starts followed by slowing down or even reversing reforms. The Coordination Group also notes the parallel work on national lifelong learning frameworks compatible with the EQF-LLL. While it is essential to have these coordinated with the development of the higher education framework – whether done separately or as a joint exercise – this can lead to more protracted processes because wider groups of stakeholders are involved.

The Coordination Group is aware that the 2010 commitment has played an important role in launching the development of national qualifications frameworks and that any discussion of modifying the deadline could be misread as indicating that a difficult task is less urgent than originally thought. It is also conscious of the value of coordinating deadlines with the EQF-LLL, which requires that countries relate their qualifications systems or frameworks to the EQF-LLL by 2010 and to ensure that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to the appropriate EQF-LLL level.

Nevertheless, the Coordination Group feels obliged to question whether the 2010 deadline is realistic, and indeed also whether it is desirable to emphasize this deadline at the possible expense, in some countries, of the content or stakeholder involvement. Ideally, qualifications frameworks should be developed fast and well, but where the two are incompatible, the Coordination Group is of the opinion that it is more important to have well developed national frameworks even if this were to take somewhat longer than originally envisaged. The replies provided by NQF correspondents to the enquiry carried out by the Coordination Group seem to confirm that, for many members of the Bologna Process, it is unrealistic to expect that the 2010 deadline for finalizing and self certifying national frameworks will be met.

It is the view of the Coordination Group that the 2010 deadline could best be revised not simply by extending the general deadline until, say, 2012 or 2013, but by adopting a staggered deadline. The revised deadline should also be compatible with the EQF deadline referred to above. Based on the 10 steps identified by the former working group, the Coordination Group puts forward the following proposal<sup>20</sup>:

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<sup>20</sup> In doing so, it is conscious of the fact that some countries may choose to merge some of the steps.

By the end of 2009, all members of the Bologna Process should have

- *completed* steps 1- 4 (i.e. decision to start, setting the agenda, organizing the process, designing the profile)
- *provided* a national web site on qualifications frameworks providing information on the elaboration of the national framework in the national language(s) with at least a comprehensive summary of the information in English.

In addition,

- step 5 (consultation with stakeholders) should be well under way
- steps 6 (approval) and
- 7 (administrative set up) should be launched by the end of 2009.

Progress – including the completion of steps 1 – 4 - should be reported to the Bologna Secretariat by January 31, 2010<sup>21</sup>, and the reports should specify how consultations have been, are or will be conducted with which stakeholders.

The deadline for both parts of this reporting exercise is essential in view of the preparation of the 2010 ministerial meeting.

By the end of 2010, all members of the Bologna Process should have *completed*

- the consultation with stakeholders (step 5),
- approval (step 6)
- and administrative set up (Step 7)

and should report on this to the Bologna Secretariat by a deadline to be specified.

By the end of 2011, all members of the Bologna Process should have *launched*

- step 8 implementation and
- step 9 inclusion of qualifications

and should report on this to the Bologna Secretariat by a deadline to be specified. Countries should nevertheless encouraged to launch pilot projects with regard to step 8 earlier than the end of 2011.

By the middle of 2012, all members of the Bologna Process should have

- *completed* steps 8 and 9
- *prepare* step 10 self certification

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<sup>21</sup> It is understood that the requirements for reporting do not apply to countries that will have submitted the self certification report prior to the dates indicated for the respective steps.

and should report on this to the Bologna Secretariat by a deadline to be specified<sup>22</sup>.

By the end of 2013, all members of the Bologna Process should have *completed* step 10 self certification and should have made their self certification reports publicly available in English.

The proposed timetable may be summarized as follows:

Action/step	Step launched	Step completed
1. Decision to start	-	End 2009
2. Setting the agenda	-	End 2009
3. Organizing the process	-	End 2009
4. Design Profile	-	End 2009
5. Consultation	End 2009	End 2010
6. Approval	End 2009	End 2010
7. Administrative set-up	End 2009	End 2010
8. Implementation	End 2011 (but countries are encouraged to launch pilot projects earlier )	Mid-2012
9. Inclusion of qualifications	End 2011	Mid-2012
10. Self-certification	Launch preparation by mid-2012	End 2013
11. NQ web site	-	End 2009

The proposed revised timetables specifies the last date by which all members of the European Higher Education Area should complete the respective steps. In many cases, countries may be able to complete some or all steps before this final deadline, and to do so without impinging on the desired quality of the process.

*The Coordination Group proposes that Ministers in 2009 commit to submitting, in time for the 2010 ministerial conference, national road maps for the development of their national qualifications frameworks. These road maps should include information on how the*

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<sup>22</sup> This recommendation implies that the proposed ministerial conference in 2012 (cf. the discussions of “Bologna beyond 2010”) should be held in the last half of the year, preferably not before October, so that the completion of these steps may be adequately reported by and to Ministers.

*country in question intends to complete the different steps and they should outline a realistic timetable for doing so.*

### **2009 – 2010 work program**

Less than a year will separate the 2009 ministerial conference from that of 2010, which will formally declare the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. In the view of the Coordination Group, this means not only that the BFUG will need to have a clear idea of the work program already before the ministerial conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, but also that the official work program is likely to consist of a limited number of events and activities.

The Coordination Group is of the opinion that the 2009 – 2010 work program should include one major event focusing on qualifications frameworks. The Irish authorities have indicated that they would like to organize a conference in Dublin in autumn 2009 focusing on bringing together progress internationally in the implementation of the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL. The Coordination Group recommends that this conference be included in the official Bologna work program 2009 – 2010.

The Coordination Group also believes that there will be a continued need to offer assistance and coordination in the development of national frameworks compatible with the EHEA-QF (as well as with the EQF-LLL), and that there will also be a need for concentration and the exchange of experience at European level over the coming years. It is worth recalling that even when all EHEA countries will have developed and self certified their national frameworks, there is likely to be a need for continuous concentration on the implementation of national frameworks.

The Coordination Group therefore recommends that the BFUG consider establishing some kind of body or group for continued coordination, either by extending the mandate of the current Coordination Group or by making some other similar arrangement.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Terms of reference adopted by the BFUG in October 2007
2. Membership of the Coordination Group
3. Criteria and procedures for self certification
4. Steps in the development of national qualifications frameworks

## APPENDIX 1

### TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE BOLOGNA COORDINATION GROUP ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

<b>Name of the working group</b>
Bologna Coordination Group for Qualifications Frameworks
<b>Contact person (Chair)</b> Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe Mail: <a href="mailto:sjur.bergan@coe.int">sjur.bergan@coe.int</a> Phone: (33) 3 88 41 26 43
<b>Composition</b> (Please ensure the necessary balance with regard to geography, size, old vs. new, countries vs. organisations etc.)  Czech Republic, Germany, Georgia, Ireland, Portugal, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, United Kingdom/Scotland, European Commission, ESU, EURASHE, EUA, President of the ENIC Network, ECTS coordinator, Bologna Secretariat
<b>Purpose and/or outcome</b>  The Bologna Coordination Group for Qualifications Frameworks shall advise the Council of Europe in fulfilling the mandate given to the Council of Europe by Ministers in paragraph 2.8 of the London Communiqué
<b>Reference to the London Communiqué</b>  Paragraph 2.8:  <i>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.</i>
<b>Specific tasks</b>  The Coordination Group shall give act as a forum for debate on qualifications frameworks and advice on:

- activities designed to promote the sharing of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks within the European Higher Education Area or at regional level within the EHEA;
- specific issues relating to the development of national qualifications frameworks, their purposes, relationship to credits, qualifications, learning outcomes and curriculum reform, as well as issues of content, methodology and procedure, as appropriate;
- experts that might assist countries in the development of their national frameworks, in cases where countries request such assistance. In so doing, the Coordination Group shall seek to ensure that experts represent a variety of backgrounds and experience;
- methodology and procedures for the self-certification of completed national frameworks and help identify experts who might participate in self-certification exercises where countries ask for assistance in identifying suitable foreign experts for this purpose;
- the publication of self-certification reports;
- cooperation with the European Commission with a view to ensuring that national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching framework for the EHEA are also compatible with the European Qualifications Framework;
- public information designed to promote the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks;
- activities and material designed to ensure compatibility between the overarching EHEA framework and the EQF;
- the relationship between the development of qualifications frameworks and other key policy areas within the Bologna Process, in particular as concerns the recognition of qualifications.

The Coordination Group shall also assist the Bologna Secretariat and the Stocktaking Group in gaining an overview of the state of developments of national qualifications frameworks in time for the 2009 stocktaking exercise.

### **Reporting**

Minutes of working group meetings will be made available to BFUG on the protected part of the website (by the Bologna Secretariat).

BFUG should also receive regular reports and updates.

To allow for good communication with BFUG as a whole and for the necessary consultations, progress reports should be submitted at least two weeks before each BFUG meeting. In between BFUG meetings, updates can be circulated by the Bologna Secretariat via e-mail.

Deadline for final report (draft version): 15 January 2009  
 Deadline for final version: 1 March 2009

**Meeting schedule**

The first meeting will be held on November 26 – 27, 2007. The exact schedule is to be established. We would foresee one meeting per semester.

**Liaison with other action lines**

Through the Secretariat and the Chair/Vice Chair of the BFUG. For the Coordination Group, the groups on stocktaking, lifelong learning and employment are particularly relevant, but it is not realistic to have cross representation (which would need to be of persons and not only of countries) with all other relevant groups.

**Additional remarks**

We aim to have a European conference focusing on learning outcomes, to be organized by the United Kingdom (Scotland) in February 2008 and one in Georgia in fall 2008.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOLOGNA COORDINATION GROUP ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

#### **Council of Europe**

Sjur Bergan, Chair  
Jean-Philippe Restoueix, Secretary

#### **Bologna Secretariat**

Marlies Leegwater

#### **Czech Republic**

Věra Šťastná, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

#### **ECTS counsellors**

Maria Sticchi Damiani

#### **ENIC / NARIC Network**

Françoise Profit, President of the ENIC Network

#### **European Commission**

Christian Tauch  
Jens Bjørnavold (CEDEFOP)

#### **ESU**

Anne Mikkola until May 2008  
Bruno Carapinha from May 2008  
Mark Sciriha from September 2008

#### **EUA**

Michael Hörig

#### **EURASHE**

Bryan Maguire

#### **Georgia**

Lela Maisuradze, Ministry of Education and Science

#### **Germany**

Birger Hendriks, Ministry of Science, Economic Affairs  
and Transport of Schleswig-Holstein

**Ireland**

Seán Ó Foghlú, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, until July 2008  
John Scattergood, Pro-Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin, from July 2008 (substitute  
Trish O'Brien)

**Portugal**

Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo, Universidade do Porto

**“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”**

Nadežda Uzelac, Ministry of Education and Science

**Turkey**

Professor Şener Oktik, Chair of the Commission for National Qualifications Framework  
until September 2008  
Prof.Mehmet Durman, Member of the Commission for National Qualifications Framework  
from September 2008

**United Kingdom**

Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland (substitute David Bottomley)

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES FOR SELF CERTIFICATION**

#### **A. Criteria & Procedures for Verification of Framework Compatibility (Extract from Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks Report, 2005)**

Criteria for verifying that national frameworks are compatible with the Bologna framework are as follows:

1. The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education
2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework
3. The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits
4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent
5. The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process
6. The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements
7. The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published.

Procedures for verifying that national frameworks are compatible with the Bologna framework are as follows:

1. The competent national body/bodies shall certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework.
2. The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process
3. The self-certification process shall involve international experts

4. The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out
5. The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process [www.enic-naric.net]
6. The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.

**B. Recommendations to be considered by countries in undertaking the verification process**

**(Extract from Qualifications Frameworks Working Group Report, 2007)**

Procedures:

- *In developing their National Frameworks, countries should have a eye on the need to align the National Framework to the Bologna Framework while noting that the Framework development process and the subsequent alignment are separate processes.*
- *countries should ensure that there is some element of testing or implementation of a national framework before the process of aligning it to the Bologna Framework is completed*
- *it might be helpful for small groups of countries to co-operate in undertaking alignment processes*
- *while some countries have qualifications recognition agreements with other countries, sometimes outside of Europe, and the Working Group suggests that consultation be undertaken by a country aligning a national framework to the Bologna Framework with any such country with which it has a qualifications recognition agreement. Furthermore, countries with a tradition of having award holders move to other (perhaps neighbouring) countries may also wish to discuss any alignment process with those countries or perhaps involve peers from such countries in their alignment process.*
- *the small steering group model, together with consultation with stakeholders on a transparent basis is a good model for all countries. At the same time, the Working Group recognises that different models may work well for other countries.*

- *It is important that there is clarity on the arrangements for requiring the stated agreement of certain stakeholders of the verification when a verification process is initiated.*
- *the manner in which Scotland and Ireland have involved international experts in their work through membership of the steering group has been exemplary*
- *there are issues that will need to be addressed in the future about the availability and financing of experts to assist countries in their verification processes. There will be linguistic challenges, particularly where a verification process is undertaken in a national language whose use is not widespread across Europe and, certainly at this stage in the development of national frameworks, there is not a significant number of potential experts available. One option which the working Group suggests could be explored is that the Council of Europe might assist some countries in the identification of potential international experts for national verification processes.*
- *The format of the Scottish and Irish reports can act as exemplars for the formats of the reports of other countries.*
- *there is a need for two outcomes from each self-certification process:*
  - o *The first is the detailed verification document analysing in detail all issues and addressing each of the criteria and procedures*
  - o *The second is a simple summary of the outcomes for communication to the general public*
- *all future alignment processes should take note of any alignment that has been completed.*

Criteria (Note the working group made no recommendations regarding criteria 3, 4, 6 or 7):

- **Criterion 1 – The national framework or higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.**
  - o *that while there were not any particular issues arising for Ireland and Scotland in relation to the designation of the body with responsibility for the Framework in each country, this could be an issue for other countries. For such countries, the national actors who initiate Framework development may not be the same as the body ultimately responsible for the Framework. This is a natural development and does not undermine the ultimate legitimacy of the Framework which will eventually need to be adopted in a formal way in each country.*

- Criterion 2 – There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework
  - o that the work of the ENIC and NARIC networks in examining issues relating to the concept of substantial difference be informed of issues arising in the verification process and that consideration be given to the development of formal linkages to this work.
  - o that in making report all countries should seek to address progression issues.
  - o that there will be issues for many countries in terms of having more than one level in a National Framework relating to a Bologna cycle and of having intermediate qualifications and levels and that the approaches undertaken in the Scottish and Irish Reports, in terms of identifying these can act as examples for other countries which have intermediate qualifications/levels.
  - o The Working Group recommends that countries should identify intermediate qualifications in their verification processes and examine the possibility of aligning any first cycle intermediate qualifications with the Joint Quality Initiative's descriptor for the higher education short cycle.
  - o The concept of 'best fit' is a crucial one. It is not expected, nor is it desirable, that there will be an exact match between descriptors of different frameworks, which will have different purposes and contexts. The pilots showed that many qualifications will have elements which fit to a higher or lower level of the framework than the level at which the qualification as a whole is placed. The purpose of frameworks is to help understand both similarities and differences between different qualifications which do not have exact matches or equivalences.
  - o there is a need to ensure that national verification reports address the issue of labour market relevance of first cycle completion.
  - o The working group notes that it has been very difficult for Scotland and Ireland to address such recognition issues [i.e., recognition by higher education institutions in other countries of Scottish and Irish qualifications and of other country qualifications by Irish and Scottish institutions] given the state-of-play in the implementation of the national frameworks incorporating the Bologna cycles. Nevertheless, the Group considers that given that this is one of the key aims of the Bologna Framework, it is important that all countries endeavour to seek appropriate information in this regard as part of their verification work. The Group considers that this is an area where the ENIC and NARIC networks can be of assistance.

- o that all countries should provide for the review of the verification of the alignment of their National Framework to the Bologna Framework where there have been any major amendments to their National Framework.
    - o that it is important that legacy awards (awards that will no longer be made but which are important as there will continue to be many holders of such awards) are included in, or related to, National Frameworks as they are being developed and implemented and that these are taken into account in the verification of the alignment with the Bologna Framework.
  - Criterion 5 – The national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process
    - o that in the implementation of the verification process countries should demonstrate that their national systems – at institutional and agency level – are deliberately seeking to implement the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and that the state-of-play in relation to reviews in line with the Standards and Guidelines should be set out while at this time such review need not to be undertaken. The working group notes that it is the intention of many countries to implement the standards and guidelines within the next four years and considers that any verification report should be added to and the Council of Europe notified where a review in line with the Standards and Guidelines has been completed. Additionally, the Working Group recommends that for any self-certification process underway after 2010, it should be a requirement that agency reviews in line with the standards and guidelines are completed in a satisfactory way prior to the completion of any self-certification process.

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

(Steps 1 -10 are contained in the 2007 report by the Bologna Working group on qualifications frameworks, while step 11 – establishing a web site for national qualifications frameworks, has been added buy the present Coordination Group)

1. Decision to start: Taken by the national body responsible for higher education (minister?)
2. Setting the agenda: The purpose of our NQF WG-Report nr. 1 (section 2.3)
3. Organising the process: Identifying stakeholders; setting up a committee/WG
4. Design Profile: Level structure, Level descriptors (learning outcomes), Credit ranges
5. Consultation National discussion and acceptance of design by stakeholders
6. Approval According to national tradition by Minister/Government/legislation
7. Administrative set-up Division of tasks of implementation between HEI, QAA and other bodies
8. Implementation at institutional/programme level; Reformulation of individual study programmes to learning outcome based approach
9. Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF; Accreditation or similar (cfr. Berlin Communiqué)
10. Self-certification of compatibility with the EHEA framework (Alignment to Bologna cycles etc.); WG Report nr. 1; Pilot projects
11. Providing a web site for the national qualifications framework. This site may contain new material and/or it may provide, easily accessible through one site, links to relevant existing sites.

The sequence of steps need not be identical in all countries.

Comments by the 2007 Working Group (for step 11 by the Coordination Group). The 2006 workshops refer to four regional workshops organised by the Working Group.

The stepladder was used by the Stocktaking group in a simplified form for the scorecard on progress on qualifications framework.

#### **A. Organising the process**

- Initial decision
- Purposes
- Identifying stakeholders
- Setting up a committee/working group

The point here is how to get the process started: who should take the decision (Parliament, minister or a board concerned). Should the framework be part of a higher education reform agenda or should it just reflect *status quo*? Who should be responsible for and involved in the project and would the project need a staffed project organisation or would a working group be sufficient?

In most countries the decision to start would be taken by the minister in charge of higher education and the framework be part of a higher education reform agenda. There was broad consensus in regional workshops organised in 2006 about having stakeholders from all areas of higher education, including labour market organisations, represented in a working group or steering committee.

#### **B. Design of Framework**

- Cycles and levels
- Profiles
- Award types
- Learning outcome/Output descriptors/Dublin descriptors
- Credits and Workload

The points are the number of levels needed in the participating countries. How profiles could or should be reflected in binary systems. Could award types be the building stones in the framework or would you like to go further down to clusters of subject areas? How could learning outcomes be described in generic terms? Would a translation of the Dublin Descriptors fulfil the purpose? Should the framework at all levels include credits?

Many of the countries participating in the 2006 workshops expressed the opinion that they would need more than three levels first and foremost because they had short cycle programmes within their higher education. Those countries with binary systems intended to have different award types but there were exceptions

#### **C. Consultation and approval**

- Broad consultation to reach all that are later involved
- Formal approval

These points did not give much occasion for discussion in the 2006 workshops. It was generally agreed that the consultation on the proposal for a national qualifications framework should at least involve those stakeholder that would take part in the implementation of the framework. The formal approval would be in accordance with national practice and normally the same that has taken the initial decision.

**D. Administrative set up**

- Which bodies are involved
- Distribution of functions
- Inclusion of qualifications into the framework
- Implementation at institutional level

If an adopted qualifications framework has to be an entity in public life and not just another piece of paper it has to be decided which bodies are going to use the framework and what their specific tasks should be. It is of equal importance to decide how new qualifications are connected to the framework. And of no less importance is the question of how the framework and the learning outcomes approach are implemented at higher education institutions.

The bodies most likely to be involved at the national level, apart from the ministries and related agencies, would be the academic recognition information centre (NARIC) and the quality assurance agency. Some countries would in addition to that have an accreditation body with a role to play. The procedures for inclusion of new awards or award types in the framework is crucial for the trust other countries might have in the right placement of awards on the appropriate level. The procedure must be transparent and documentation available. Implementation of the award type descriptors at institutional level in the programme descriptions is certainly the most challenging part of the process.

**E. Self-certification**

Verifying the compatibility of national frameworks of qualifications with the framework of qualifications of the EHEA

- Criteria
- Procedures

The main lesson from the Irish and Scottish pilot studies in 2006 was that the criteria to be met in the selfcertification process have to be taken into account at the very beginning of the framework developing process.

**F. Providing a web site for the national qualifications framework..**

This site may contain new material and/or it may provide, easily accessible through one site, links to relevant existing sites. The earlier in the process this site is established, the better it will serve a purpose of communication between the competent public authorities and other stakeholders in the development of the QNF. While much of the information will be in the national language(s), the site should also provide information in English aimed at international partners.