

WHAT IS A QUALIFICATION?



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WHY IMPORTANT?

- Knowledge society requires qualifications
- Competences important for modern society
- From procedures and formalities toward learning outcomes and contents
- Cannot talk about qualifications frameworks without knowing what a qualification is

A NAME?

- Ph.D
- Doktorsexamen
- Dr. art.
- Doktor nauk
- Kandidat nauk
- Dottore di Laurea
- Doctorandus

A NUMBER OF YEARS AT SCHOOL?



REALLY?



A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

- Quality
- Workload
- Level
- Profile
- Learning outcomes

QUALITY: INDIVIDUAL

- A qualification has little value unless it is good enough
- Individual quality: grades
- Different grading scales
- To what extent are differences in grades meaningful?
- The case of the “ π lawyer”

QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS

- Quality *assurance* and quality *development*
- Institutional quality:
 - Quality assurance (internal and external)
 - European Quality Assurance Standards (Bergen 2005)
- Quality of provision not linked to national systems?
- Minimum standards or “the best”?
- Accept outcomes of national QA exercises (cf. national action plans for recognition)

WORKLOAD

- Time (length of study) as a measure of workload?
- Credits
- Classroom hours?
- All relevant work?
- ECTS

LEVEL

- Part of our everyday speech: primary, secondary, higher
- Levels of higher education:
 - Three tier degree system
 - “Short cycle”? “Intermediary degrees”?
- What does level imply?
 - Generic competences
 - Subject specific competences
- Level and quality: higher level always “better”?
- Link level - workload

HOW MANY LEVELS IN A FRAMEWORK?

- EHEA framework: 3 HE levels
- EQF: 8 levels covering all parts of education
- Irish and NZ QFs: 10 levels covering all parts of education
- Scottish QF: 12 levels covering all parts of education (including one for learners with severe learning disabilities)
- South African QF: 8 levels covering all parts of education

EHEA FIRST CYCLE QUALIFICATION

- Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:
- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;
- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy
- Typically include 180-240 ECTS credits

EHEA SECOND CYCLE QUALIFICATION

- Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:
 - have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
 - can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
 - have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments;
 - can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;
 - have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.
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- Typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle

EHEA THIRD CYCLE QUALIFICATION

- Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:
- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
- have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;
- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.
- Number of ECTS credits not specified

PROFILE

- Institutional or program profile
 - university vs. “non-university”?
 - theoretical vs. applied?
- Individual profile
 - Elements within the learners specialization
 - Elements relevant to specialization
 - Elements unrelated to specialization
- Link workload – level – profile
- Profile: how relevant?

LEARNING OUTCOMES: A DEFINITION

- A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit or qualification. The key aspect ...is the desire for more precision and consideration as to what exactly a learner acquires in terms of knowledge and/or skills when they successfully complete a period of learning.
- *(Stephen Adam, after having reviewed a number of different definitions)*

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- What a learner:
 - knows
 - understands
 - is able to do
- Relation learning outcomes – other elements of the concept of qualifications?

SOME FURTHER ISSUES

- How to develop a better common understanding of the concept of qualifications among almost 50 countries – and beyond?
- How to develop learning outcomes?
- How to avoid overly formalistic descriptions of learning outcomes?
- Balance transparency/diversity?
- Recognition: what is a “substantial difference”? (Lisboa Recognition Convention)