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## **BOLOGNA CONFERENCE ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation

København, January 13 – 14, 2005

### **REPORT BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR**

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## **A PRELIMINARY NOTE**

I am reminded of the student newspaper at my home university<sup>1</sup>, which many years ago presented the typical thank you's and caveats included in academic publications and provided translations into the vernacular. One of these generic statements was "Thanks are due to Smith for assistance and Jones for valuable discussions", which was translated as "Smith did the work and Jones explained to me what it was all about". I will certainly not try to play the role of Jones, but I will seek to adopt an analytical approach that will hopefully clarify the major issues and also outline any points on which there may be important differences of opinion. I also do not pretend to give anything like a complete overview of the presentations and the discussions at this conference, which gathered some 140 participants from 14 countries. Notwithstanding, a set of recommendations from the conference will also be proposed.

The report, then, will not enable readers who were unable to attend the conference to know all that happened there. It is, however, hoped that it will present the main outcomes of the conference in such a way that these readers will get a good understanding of the main issues, that they will want to explore the background documents and maybe that they will even regret not being present<sup>2</sup>.

## **WHY WE ARE HERE**

Like so many things in modern life, this all began with a conference. Nearly two years ago, on March 27 – 28, 2003, many actors in the Bologna Process gathered in København for a conference on Qualifications Structures in Europe.

That conference was, of course, not the first mention of the concept of qualifications frameworks<sup>3</sup>. As Stephen Adam's excellent background report for that conference showed, qualifications frameworks were already operational in Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. In the latter case, there were even two separate frameworks: one for Scotland and one for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

For many participants, however, the "first København conference" was their introduction to qualifications frameworks, and it set a lot in motion. It must certainly have convinced many participants that qualifications frameworks are a fruitful

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<sup>1</sup> *Universitas*, the student newspaper at the University of Oslo.

<sup>2</sup> Two editorial notes may also be in order. The present report adopts the US standard, as the variety with which the Rapporteur feels most comfortable. It is, of course, a personal choice and not a value judgment, any more than the choice of any other variety of English would be. Quotes are given in their original spelling. Secondly, in the belief that proper names translate no better than the names of individual qualifications, all place names are given in their original form.

<sup>3</sup> This report will use the term "qualifications framework". Some of the participants in the conference expressed a preference for the term "framework of qualifications", whereas others, including the present author, believe there is no real difference between the two terms and prefer the shorter version.

concept, because within a year of the conference, other countries like Germany, Hungary and Finland had set out to establish their own national qualifications frameworks. Indeed, European higher education gained a new acronym, as QF became almost as commonly referred to as QA, often on the assumption that neither requires further explanation.

Secondly, the “first København conference” set things moving at the level of the European Higher Education Area. The recommendations from the conference were well received by the Bologna Follow Up Group, and they gave rise to the following statement by Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué:

*“Ministers encourage the member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.*

*Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.*

*Ministers invite the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area”.*

In other words, the Ministers committed to two distinct but interlinked tasks: to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and to set up frameworks in each of their own countries.

Their first commitment is the main reason why we again find ourselves in København to discuss qualifications frameworks. As René Bugge Bertramsen reminded us in his opening remarks, delivered on behalf of the Danish Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Helge Sander, this conference also fulfills a promise made at the Berlin Conference in 2003. At this meeting, which was a great step forward in giving the Bologna Process more focused content, the Danish Minister promised his colleagues that Denmark would, to use the Minister’s words, “offer a special effort to bring forward developments in the theory and practice of qualifications frameworks”. The present conference and the report elaborated under the leadership of Mogens Berg certainly fulfill the promise the Danish Minister made to his colleagues.

The Bologna Follow Up Group, which is the faithful interpreter and executor of the Ministerial will, appointed a working group to elaborate a proposal for an overarching framework of qualifications. The group was chaired by Mogens Berg of the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, who presented the report as the main document for this conference. This gets us into the heart of the matter.

While underlining the fundamental importance of the “first København conference”, it is also important to emphasize that the development of qualifications frameworks is entirely in line with and contributes to the realization of several of the action lines of the Bologna Process, and that it also builds on the outcomes of a number of other “Bologna seminars” held before and after the March 2003 conference. These include:

- the two Helsinki seminars on Bachelor and Masters degrees, organized by the Finnish authorities in 2001 and 2003, respectively;
- the seminar on recognition issues in the Bologna Process, organized by the Council of Europe and the Portuguese authorities in Lisboa in 2002;
- the seminar on ECTS- a Challenge for Institutions, organized by the European University Association and the Swiss authorities in Zürich in 2002;
- the seminar on Recognition and Credit Systems in the Context of Lifelong Learning, organized by the Czech authorities in Praha in 2003;
- the two seminars on joint degrees, organized by the Swedish authorities in Stockholm in 2002 and 2004, as well as the seminar on integrated programs organized by the Italian authorities in Mantova in 2003;
- the seminar on learning outcomes, organized in Edinburgh in 2004;
- the Russian seminar on “Bachelor’s Degree: What Is It?”, organized in Sankt Peterburg in November 2004;
- the seminar on Improving the Recognition System of Degrees and Periods of Studies, organized by the Latvian authorities and the Council of Europe in Riga in 2004;
- the seminar on the Public Responsibility for Higher Education and Research, organized by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 2004.

It is further important to acknowledge the contribution of a series of other conferences and initiatives, including the Joint Quality Initiative and TUNING, as well as of the countries that have already elaborated a national qualifications framework or that are in the process of doing so.

## ON FRAMEWORKS AND FRAMEWORK

One cannot easily discuss an overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area without reference to national frameworks, and it is worth making the point here. National frameworks are in many ways those closest to the operational reality, and they are “owned” by the national systems responsible for them. They are the frameworks that will ultimately determine what qualifications learners will earn and how they will move between the different qualifications within a system. Incidentally, I deliberately use the term “move” rather than “progress” since the latter tends to be associated with “upward movement” only. Within a qualifications framework, however, learners may increase their competence by earning another qualification at the same level or even at a lower level as well as by earning one at a higher level.

The Working Group defines a national framework of qualifications (higher education) as follows:

*The single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between higher education qualifications<sup>4</sup>.*

National frameworks therefore describe the qualifications within a given education system and how they interlink. As described in the report by the working party and mentioned already at the “first København conference”, they will include considerations of:

- Learning outcomes, including competences
- Level
- Workload and credits
- Profile
- Quality and quality assurance

The overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area may be less immediately operational for most learners than the national frameworks, but it is not less important. It is the second layer in what Mogens Berg in his presentation of the Report of the Working Group described as a two-tier architecture. This is the framework that will facilitate movement not only between different qualifications within a single system, but also between systems<sup>5</sup>. As Per Nyborg,

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<sup>4</sup> Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks: *Report on a Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area* (December 2004), chapter 2.1., p. 14. References in this report will be to the “seminar version” of the report, which contains paragraph numbers. A version without paragraph numbers has also been published.

<sup>5</sup> On the recognition of qualifications and the impact of qualifications frameworks on recognition, see Stephen Adam’s report from the Bologna seminar on Improving the Recognition System of Degrees

Head of the Bologna Secretariat, pointed out in the plenary discussion, students will not move from a national education system to a European one, but between national systems. Not least, the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is likely to be the “face” of “Bologna qualifications” to the rest of the world. This aspect was, alas, somewhat underdeveloped at the conference, as it is in the Bologna Process in general.

At this point, it may be worth quoting the definition of the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area given by the Working Group:

*An overarching framework that makes transparent the relationship between European national higher education frameworks of qualifications and the qualifications they contain. It is an articulation mechanism between national frameworks<sup>6</sup>.*

Not least, the overarching EHEA framework provides the broad structure within which future “new style” national qualifications frameworks will be built up<sup>7</sup>. It is, of course, perfectly possible to elaborate a national framework that makes no reference to credits, uses years of study as the only reference to workload, is vague on learning outcomes and stipulates one long university degrees that requires ten years of study, five of which are spent in self-study. It would, however, be a far cry from the EHEA framework, and any country establishing such a framework would be unlikely to be accepted into the “Bologna family”.

It is equally possible to design a less caricatured qualifications framework that is still vague on learning outcomes, that still expresses workload in terms of years of study rather than credits, and that stipulates five years of study for a first degree. That, until quite recently, was indeed the dominant model in what is to become the European Higher Education Area, even if the term “qualifications framework” was rarely if ever used to describe such a construct. It is, however, no more in line with “Bologna policies” than the caricature we outlined in the preceding paragraph.

The working group makes the point that the overarching framework is descriptive rather than prescriptive, and this is to a large extent true. The EHEA framework will not oblige countries - or rather education systems - to follow a certain set model.

Nevertheless, as was argued by Jürgen Kohler in the plenary debate, a framework cannot be entirely devoid of norms. The overarching framework sketches the broad outlines within which an informed observer would reasonably expect to find all the national frameworks of the 40 or more members of the European Higher Education

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and periods of Studies, organized by the Latvian authorities and the Council of Europe in Riga on December 3 – 4, 2004, cf. <http://www.aic.lv/rigaseminar/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.1., p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> It appears that at least the existing “new style” frameworks that have been published so far would not need to be amended as a consequence of the overarching framework.

Area. In a sense, it draws the broad outlines of qualifications frameworks within the EHEA, while allowing for considerable variations within those outlines, with flexible learning paths and various entry and exit points, something that was also underlined by Nina Arnhold in the stakeholders debate on behalf of the EUA. It also includes the use of common tools, techniques and methodologies for describing qualifications, levels and learning outcomes.

The EHEA framework, therefore, will not tell Ministers exactly what to do, but it will tell them quite a lot about what *not* to do. Diversity is one of the great strengths of Europe, and one of the key functions of the overarching framework of the EHEA is to make sense of that diversity.

It may also be worth bearing in mind the recommendation of one of the working groups to the effect that at whatever level, frameworks should be as simple as possible to fulfill their purposes.

## **WHY QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS?**

Another question that will probably pop up in many people's minds is "what is all the fuss about"? Needless to say, it will often be phrased in much more academic terms, and it will probably often be implied that qualifications frameworks add more in terms of bureaucracy than in terms of knowledge. Academics, after all, know best the requirements of their own disciplines.

This is undoubtedly true, but academics also know that the value of knowledge is considerably enhanced if it is analyzed and given explanatory force through a coherent framework.

A qualifications framework helps in the analysis, presentation and understanding of what constitutes a qualification. This is important, because it helps shift the focus from procedures to content. In this, it supports a movement that has been underway for some time, and it provides an invaluable tool. Qualifications frameworks are perhaps a logical consequence of a number of developments. One of these is mass education, which has not only dramatically increased participation in education and higher education but also considerably broadened the scope and purpose of higher education. Another is the rapid development of knowledge and hence the rapid outdateding of knowledge. If higher education was ever a once in a lifetime experience, this time is past. Other developments include globalization, the very creation of the EHEA, and the increasing understanding of the need for precision concerning the nature and function of qualifications.

Qualifications frameworks, then, provide the tools that make it easier for people to earn qualifications in a variety of ways, at different ages, and often in alternation between work and study – as learners become earners and *vice versa* - and to have these qualifications recognized for what they are worth. To hark back to the Bologna

seminar on Recognition and Credit Systems in the Context of Lifelong Learning held in Praha in June 2003, qualifications frameworks provide the tools for taking account of the different learning paths that may all lead to similar qualifications. For higher education to further social cohesion it is important that qualifications be recognized regardless of the learning paths through which they have been earned. As Seámus Puirseil phrased it in the plenary discussion, our task is not to guard the gates of access, but to test what people have when they leave.

Qualifications frameworks are, ultimately, an expression and systematization of the aims and purposes of higher education, or at least of what higher education seeks to convey to those individuals who benefit from it. They should become a fundamental part of the structures of the European Higher Education Area, but higher education does not live from structures alone. As the Working Group reminds us<sup>8</sup>, a successful qualifications framework should encompass and contribute to the four main purposes of higher education:

- Preparation for the labor market;
- Preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society;
- Personal development;
- The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

René Bugge Bertramsen, in his opening remarks on behalf of the Danish Minister, particularly underlined the importance of qualifications frameworks in preparing students for employment; in bridging the world of higher education and the world of work. As René Bugge Bertramsen rightly said, a study program should no longer just be a collection of academic disciplines but rather a coherent program leading to an agreed purpose for the program and the qualification it confers. The planning process should start with defining the purpose of the program before it enters into the details of disciplines. To use the words of the Danish Director General, if graduates do not know what they can do when they leave higher education, they will have problems presenting themselves to employers. He also underlined the importance of the other purposes of higher education.

Germain Dondelinger, Chair of the Bologna Follow Up group, in his opening remarks also underlined the need to take adequate account of dimensions like personal development and the social dimension of higher education in addition to the employment aspects. On behalf of ESIB, Bastian Baumann strongly underlined that qualifications frameworks are not just about employment, and he in particular underlined the role of higher education in promoting social cohesion. This was further echoed by Roland Vermeesch, speaking in the stakeholder panel on behalf of EURASHE, who emphasized the goal of creating an open, inclusive EHEA.

In the stakeholder panel, Helle Otte of the Danish ENIC/NARIC speaking on behalf of the ENIC and NARIC Networks, emphasized that new needs for recognition have

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 1.2, p. 11

already developed, and that they focus in large part on recognition for the non-regulated part of the labor market. The focus on outcomes rather than procedures is particularly important in this respect, and, as Helle Otte also reminded us, these principles are already embodied in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention as well as in the EU Directives on professional recognition, which state as their basic rule that foreign qualifications should be recognized unless the competent recognition authority can demonstrate a basic difference between the qualification for which recognition is sought and similar qualifications in their own country.

Yet, it may also be worth emphasizing that even though qualifications frameworks should greatly facilitate the recognition of qualifications within the European Higher Education Area, such recognition is unlikely to be automatic. Someone will still have to ascertain that the qualification actually fits into the framework where it is claimed that it fits in.

## **NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS**

As was already underlined at the “first København conference”, all education systems have qualifications frameworks; otherwise they would not be able to function or at least to certify the achievements of their learners. However, most education systems have not been explicit about their frameworks, and to the extent that they have, they have tended to:

- describe individual qualifications in isolation rather than within a coherent system, including the interaction between qualifications;
- conceive of movement from one qualification to another overwhelmingly as progress from a lower to a higher level with little consideration of possibilities for movement between qualifications at similar level;
- and, perhaps most importantly, characterize qualifications more in terms of procedures and formal requirements than in terms of outcomes.

What will be described as qualifications frameworks in this report – and what is sometimes referred to as “new style qualifications frameworks” – represent a significant shift in focus. They:

- describe individual qualifications *as well as* the interaction and articulation between them;
- describe possibilities for movement among qualifications in all directions – upward, sideways or even downward – and recognize that a qualification may be obtained in more ways than one through different learning paths;
- focus on outcomes and describe what a learner may be expected to know, understand and be able to do with a given qualification;

- recognize that qualifications are complex and encompass subject specific as well as generic skills and competences or, in the words of the TUNING project: “knowing and understanding”, “knowing how to act” and “knowing how to be”;
- have implications for the relationship between institutions and public authorities in that institutions will take on increased autonomy as well as increased responsibilities, whereas the role of the Ministry will also change with the use of external reference points and independent external and internal quality assurance arrangements;
- have implications for recognition, in that considerations of “substantial differences”, in the words of the Lisboa Recognition Convention, should refer to qualifications frameworks and in particular to learning outcomes and achievements rather than to education structures and procedures.

To quote the report of the Working Group again:

*Such frameworks employ clear external reference points (learning outcomes, subject reference points/benchmark statements, levels/cycle descriptors, workload, qualifications descriptors, etc.) and provide a context for qualifications that are themselves expressed with greater clarity and precision with regard to their nature, function and skills that they certify<sup>9</sup>.*

And further:

*The award of a qualification indicates that the student has completed a range of studies to a given standard and/or indicates a level of achievement by an individual who is deemed fit to perform a particular role, set of tasks or job<sup>10</sup>.*

As referred to above, national qualifications frameworks consist of a number of elements. These are described in detail in the report of the working group, and I will therefore only give a brief summary here.

### ***Learning outcomes***

Learning outcomes have been defined as

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.3., p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.4., p. 18.

*statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning*<sup>11</sup>.

In referring to this definition, the working group makes the point – as did the background report for the Edinburgh seminar on Learning Outcomes, from which the definition is taken – that the use of the verb “do” in the definition underlines the aspect of competence or ability rather than the way in which this ability is demonstrated. Nevertheless, it is also important that learning outcomes, once and in whatever way achieved, must be described and attested in such a way that they may be considered for recognition. A clear description of learning outcomes is particularly important in recognizing prior and/or non-formal learning.

Germain Dondelinger in his introductory remarks rightly said that he was looking forward to a conference that would focus on “sense and meaning rather than structure”. It may, however, be worth noting that in spite of the emphasis the Working Group has put on assessing outcomes rather than procedures, Christoph Anz of UNICE, speaking on behalf of European employers, still found that the report focuses too much on the type of institutions at which qualifications are earned and too little on the competences of learners. He also felt that there was insufficient emphasis on the practice-oriented parts of higher education. On behalf of EURASHE, Roland Vermeesch, on the other hand, welcomed what he saw as a paradigm shift from a focus on education systems to individual learners. Helle Otte, for her part, emphasized that qualifications frameworks described in terms of learning outcomes should greatly facilitate the recognition of transnational education and prior learning.

### ***Level***

The report defines levels as

*representing a series of sequential steps (a developmental continuum), expressed in terms of a range of generic outcomes, against which typical qualifications can be positioned*<sup>12</sup>.

There is little uniformity among even the limited number of existing “new style” frameworks in the number and description of levels, as each national framework uses its own system of levels. However, national frameworks may also relate their levels to what the report of the Working Group refers to as typical or generic types of qualifications, which will facilitate comparison between national frameworks.

For higher education, it may be expected that the three cycles outlined in the overarching framework of the EHEA – with the inclusion of short cycle higher education within the first cycle where such education exists - will become the generic

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.4.1, p. 18. This definition is, however, taken from the United Kingdom “Using Learning Outcomes” background report for the Bologna seminar on Learning Outcomes (Edinburgh, July 1 – 2, 2004), section 1.2.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.4.2, p. 121

qualification descriptors to which national frameworks will relate. It is important that the description of all national qualifications be explicit about

- the further qualification(s) to which that particular qualification gives access;
- the relationship of the qualification in question to the three main levels of the overarching framework.

As Mogens Berg rightly pointed out in his presentation, not all national qualifications will correspond to the completion of all of the generic cycles. Where they do not, it is particularly important that the competent national authorities describe what graduates can do with this qualification, how they can move within the national qualifications framework and how the qualification relates to the generic cycles.

In other words, the description of a first degree within a national framework should explicitly state that this is a first degree, as well as whether it gives access to a program leading to a second level qualification and whether this access is given to all second degree programs or only to certain strands. This is important for all national frameworks, but it is particularly important where a country has several qualifications at or within the same level, e.g. several different second degrees, or degrees situated between the generic levels, e.g. a degree situated between the first and the second degree.

### ***Credits and workload***

The shift away from considering the rather imprecise concept “years of study” or even “time of study” as the basic unit for measuring learning has been underway for quite some time and is, if not completed, at least well advanced. This is fully acknowledged in the report, which considers workload as the relevant element and defines this as

*a quantitative measure of all learning activities that may be feasibly required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (e.g. lectures, seminars, practical work, private study, information retrieval, research, examinations)<sup>13</sup>.*

Workload is now most commonly expressed in terms of credits, which is, in the words of the report,

*a quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workload<sup>14</sup>.*

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.4.3, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.4.3, p. 22.

Time is of course not absent from considerations of workload, in that the definition of workload and credits rests on an assumption of the amount of work an average full time student will be able to do in an academic year. However, a credit system takes account of the fact that students work at unequal speed and intensity, and that different learners will complete a similar workload in different time.

The report recognizes that the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is the only widely accepted system for credit transfer within the EHEA, and that the ECTS is now developing into a credit transfer *and* accumulation system of potential use to many more than the mobile student. As underlined in the discussion, the ECTS is entering a period of rapid evolution in which institutions will have to express courses and modules in terms of levels and learning outcomes.

### ***Profile***

The Working Group defines profile as

*either the specific (subject) field(s) of learning of a qualification or the broader aggregation of clusters of qualifications or programmes from different fields that share a common emphasis or purpose (e.g. an applied vocational as opposed to more theoretical academic studies)<sup>15</sup>.*

The profile of a qualification will often be a consideration in assessing it for the purpose of access to further study as well as for employment. For instance, while a given qualification may be given recognition as a second degree, there may be additional, more specific requirements as to the profile of a qualification for access to a specific doctoral program, for example in history or mathematics. Likewise, an employer looking to hire a linguist is unlikely to hire someone with a doctoral qualification in organic chemistry. Not least, to really qualify as a higher education degree, a qualification must have a minimum of depth – an eclectic selection of 10 credits from each of a variety of subject areas will not qualify.

Therefore, profile may be an important consideration also in the elaboration of national qualifications framework. This is indeed the case in some national frameworks, whereas it is absent from others. In either case, it is important to take account of the fact that academic disciplines may be defined somewhat differently in different countries as well as over time, and that the boundaries between disciplines are less than crystal clear. In many cases, a learner's attractiveness in the labor market as well as his or her personal development may be enhanced by combining a concentration within one field with lesser learning achievements in other fields, such as a degree with a concentration in economics supplemented by a working knowledge of one or more foreign languages and an introductory course in ecology.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 2.1, p. 14.

The issue of quality and quality assurance in the context of qualifications frameworks is considered separately, please see “Qualifications frameworks and quality”, below.

## **THE OVERARCHING FRAMEWORK**

The overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area will have much in common with national frameworks. Like national frameworks it will describe – at least in broad terms – typical higher education qualifications and the articulation between them, and it will focus on outcomes rather than procedures.

In the same way that national frameworks are the building blocks of individual education systems, the overarching framework will be one of the most important factors in establishing a coherent European Higher Education Area by 2010. As Nina Arnhold of the EUA reminded us in the stakeholder debate, the overarching framework builds on existing elements and patterns, but it also allows for significant new developments. She referred to the preliminary results of Trends IV, which show that European universities are implementing the Bologna Process, even if their practice and also the speed with which they implement the Bologna policies show significant variations.

This function also determines some of the distinctive features of the overarching framework. In the words of the report by the Working Group:

*The framework for the EHEA derives its distinctive purposes from the objectives expressed through the Bologna Process. The most directly relevant of these objectives are international transparency, recognition and mobility.*

and further:

*An overarching European framework has some distinctive objectives which differ from those of national frameworks. As a meta-framework, it is intended to assist in the identification of points of articulation between national frameworks. It also serves as a point of reference for those developing national frameworks of qualification[s]<sup>16</sup>.*

The overarching framework will have the same components as national frameworks, with one exception: while acknowledging that the concept of profile may be important in national frameworks, the Working Group does not propose to include a description of profile in the overarching framework. For the other elements that make up a qualifications framework, the description will be less detailed for the overarching framework. The national and overarching frameworks will, however, have different functions, and the responsibility for quality assurance and qualifications will remain at

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<sup>16</sup> Both quotations *ibid.*, chapter 3.1, p. 29.

national level. As Nina Arnhold very usefully reminded us on behalf of the EUA, any qualifications framework will ultimately have to be implemented by individual higher education institutions.

Two points of terminology should also be clarified. The term “level”, as used above, is most commonly used in the context of national frameworks. However, since the term “cycle” has been used both in the Bologna Declaration and subsequently in discussions within the Bologna Process, the working group uses this term for the overarching framework. One could also see “cycle” as describing a structure and “level” as describing the content of that structure. Secondly, while terms like “bachelor” and “masters” are commonly used also in the international discussion, the Working Group makes the point that the overarching framework should avoid terms that are specific to some – but far from all – national frameworks, and it therefore suggests that generic terms be used in the overarching framework.

While much discussion within the Bologna Process has come to focus on three cycles<sup>17</sup> – which is also one of the three areas identified for the stock taking process prior to the Bergen Conference of Ministers in 2005 – an overarching qualifications framework requires a more detailed consideration, and the working group suggests that the Dublin Descriptors developed by the Joint Quality Initiative be used. The discussion at the conference showed broad support for this solution, and some participants reported that these had been successfully implemented in their countries. These, in the words of the report,

*offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each Bologna cycle. They are not meant to be descriptive; they do not represent threshold or minimum requirements and they are not exhaustive; similar or equivalent characteristics may be added or substituted. The descriptors seek to identify the nature of the whole qualification*<sup>18</sup>.

In view of the importance, in many countries, of short higher education qualifications, the Working Group asked the Joint Quality Initiative to develop a similar Dublin Descriptor for short higher education, which it suggests be included in the overarching framework, within the first cycle.

A complete overview of the descriptors for each cycle within the overarching framework is provided in chapter 3 of the report by the Working Group. At the risk of oversimplification, it may be summarized as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> As of the Berlin Conference in 2003 with the inclusion of doctoral qualifications; the emphasis in the Bologna Declaration was on the first and second cycles which, strictly speaking, are the focus of the current stock taking.

<sup>18</sup> The report of the working group, chapter 3.3, p. 33.

The overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area will consist of three cycles, for which the association of credits with qualifications are offered as guidelines for national frameworks:

- first cycle (higher education) qualifications, typically including or represented by 180 – 240 ECTS credits;
- within the first cycle, short cycle higher education qualifications typically including or represented by approximately 120 ECTS credits (but see the paragraph below for the discussion around this proposal);
- second cycle (higher education) qualifications, typically including or represented by 90 – 120 ECTS credits beyond the first cycle, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the second cycle;
- third cycle (higher education) qualifications. No proposal has been made for associating credits with third cycle qualifications, but proposals for a description of such qualifications – in terms of credits or otherwise – may be made by the Bologna seminar on “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society”, to be organized by the Austrian and German authorities and the European University Association in Salzburg on February 3 – 5, 2005. In the stakeholder panel, Christoph Anz stated that ECTS credits should be assigned to the third cycle as well as to other learning achievements, and one of the discussion groups made the same point.

The discussions showed broad overall agreement with these genetic cycles. While all discussions underlined the need to endorse the concept of shorter higher education programs, there were, however, discussions of whether the short cycle within the first cycle should indeed be termed a “cycle”. The Working Group may wish to consider the issue of terminology in this sense. The main argument in favor of referring to short cycle higher education is perhaps that short higher education qualifications will enable their holder either to enter the labor market with a valued qualification or to continue their education, whereas the main argument against is that referring to a short cycle within the first cycle could cloud the view of an overall EHEA structure consisting of three main cycles. Whatever solution is in the end preferred, we must not lose sight of the fact that the conference strongly supported the reality of short higher education as an option chosen by at least 2 million students in Europe and one that corresponds to the needs of learners as well as of employers.

Some participants also felt that the description of the second cycle proposed by the Working Group goes beyond the recommendation of the Helsinki seminar on Masters’ Degrees. While that recommendation may be open to some interpretation, the majority of conference participants seemed to be comfortable with the proposal by the Working Group.

In summarizing the proposal for an overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, it would be difficult to improve upon Mogens Berg’s elegant summary in his presentation:

- the EHEA framework should consist of three main cycles, with additional provision for a short cycle – or short higher education - within the first cycle;
- the Dublin Descriptors are adopted as the cycle descriptors;
- there are guidelines for the range of ECTS credits associated with the completion of each cycle,
- responsibility for the maintenance and development of the framework rests with the Bologna Follow Up Group.

## QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND QUALITY

To become a reality, the European Higher Education Area will need national qualifications frameworks that articulate well with each other within an overarching framework as outlined in the report by the Working Group. In addition to structures that are sufficiently coherent to be compatible, the EHEA will also require that all parties trust each other's qualifications. Not least for this reason, quality and quality assurance are key elements of national qualifications frameworks as well as of the overarching framework for the EHEA. The need for transparent and reliable quality assurance was also emphasized by Christoh Anz in the stakeholder panel.

The Working Group has not gone into great detail as concerns quality assurance, in large part because another working group made up of representatives of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB are elaborating a proposal for “an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, [and] ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies.”<sup>19</sup> This work is being carried out in parallel to the report of the working group, and the final report by ENQA and partners is expected in late February.

It therefore seems premature to go into great detail on the quality assurance component of qualifications frameworks, but on the other hand, it is important to clearly make the point that there must be such a component. An education system that would not have provision for transparent external quality assurance, as well as provision for internal quality development and assurance at its higher education institutions, would most likely face severe problems in having its qualifications framework valued by other partners within the EHEA.

The Working Group makes it clear that provisions for quality assurance will differ at national level and implies that this situation is likely to continue also after the Ministerial conference in Bergen. Nevertheless, it makes the point that, in the context of building trust in a qualifications framework, provision for some form of external quality assurance seems especially important. In the words of the report:

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<sup>19</sup> Berlin Communiqué

*All systems include an element of “externality”, whether by external inspectors or by academic peers. There is also a general trend towards increasing the input of students and other stakeholders within quality assurance.*

And further:

*“Externality” is increasingly recognized as an essential part of quality assurance, and so it should be within the development and application of new national qualifications frameworks. For such frameworks to be of benefit to stakeholders, including intending and current students, and their employers, the frameworks need to be expressed in terms that are understandable and relevant. These may not always sit comfortably with the precise and detailed languages often used or thought to be necessary for regulation<sup>20</sup>.*

In the discussion, the point was made that national frameworks as well as the overarching framework of the EHEA will have implications for how quality assurance is carried out as well as for the tools it uses.

## **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FRAMEWORK?**

At first sight, determining responsibility for a qualifications framework should not be difficult. If a qualifications framework is an essential element of an education system, it would seem obvious that responsibility for the framework rests with the public authority responsible for the education system in question. This is certainly true in a legal sense, and it is also true as concerns the ultimate *de facto* responsibility.

However, reality is often more complex than what can be expressed in a single sentence, and qualifications frameworks are no exception. In particular, four issues need to be addressed:

- What is the involvement of stakeholders in developing and maintaining qualifications frameworks?
- How are qualifications frameworks adopted or implemented?
- In the absence of a “European education system” and hence of public authority responsible for it, how is the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area adopted, developed and maintained?
- Who decides whether a given national framework is compatible with the policies of the EHEA (i.e. with the overarching framework), and how?

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<sup>20</sup> Both quotes from the report of the Working Group, chapter 2.5, pp. 24 – 25.

## *Stakeholders*

Answering the first question requires clarifying who the main stakeholders in higher education are. Mogens Berg referred to stakeholders in his presentation of the report, and some of them were represented in the stakeholder panel at this conference: the students (or, in more general terms, the learners), the higher education institutions, the employers and those who work with recognition and quality assurance issues on a professional basis. In addition, stakeholders include employees and those who seek employment as well as their organizations, higher education staff, professional organizations and community and voluntary organizations. Not least – and the point is worth making – the stakeholders include public authorities, and in particular those responsible for education.

Mogens Berg also made the very valid point that the responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national qualifications framework should be clearly determined and published. Of course, some stakeholders may be “more equal than others”, and views on who these are will of course differ. It is hardly surprising that Bastian Bauman in the stakeholders’ panel made the point that ESIB supports qualifications frameworks as long as they are student centered. That, however, is not “just” a student view – it is at the core of the work on qualifications frameworks.

Qualifications frameworks, then, should be elaborated in cooperation between at least the most important groups of stakeholders, and this seems to be a lesson from all the different national frameworks that have been developed so far. This requires a measure of consensus building as well as a balance between a top down approach and a bottom up approach. Exactly which stakeholders will be involved in what way, and what is seen as the proper balance of top down and bottom up will vary from one country to another, on the background of cultural, educational and civic traditions as well as the current involvement of different stakeholders in the education system. However, no successful qualifications framework has been elaborated by one group in isolation or been implemented only by decree.

## *Adoption/implementation*

The second question, then, is how a qualifications framework, once elaborated, is actually put into practice. Again, practice varies from one country to another. In some systems, a legally binding decision by a competent authority – Ministry or even the national assembly – may be required, whereas in others, such as the two frameworks of the United Kingdom, the qualifications framework has no legal status but is efficiently implemented by the main stakeholders.

Whatever the form and legal status of the individual national framework, it may also be worth bearing in mind the words of Christian Thune, speaking on behalf of ENQA in the stakeholder debate: realism is at least as important as excessive idealism and enthusiasm in implementing qualifications frameworks.

### ***Adopting and implementing the EHEA framework***

The third question has to do with the nature of the European Higher Education Area, which is based on close cooperation and interaction between the member states and their higher education systems. Currently there are 40 member states, but a further five<sup>21</sup> have applied for accession, and these applications will be decided by the Ministers in Bergen. There is no provision for one common education system, and there is no authority that can enforce a common qualifications framework. As described in the report by the Working Group and discussed at the conference, the overarching framework will provide guidance for the elaboration of national frameworks and will not constitute a legally binding framework nor be a regulatory instrument. Nevertheless, the overarching framework will need to be validated and maintained, and at some time in the future, it may need to be revised.

If it is to be effective, the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area must be accepted by the parties to the Bologna Process, and they must take ownership of the framework. Therefore, the Working Group suggests that the framework be adopted by the Ministers in Bergen and the Ministers take responsibility for maintaining and – as needed – updating the framework. As a practical measure, the Working Group suggests that the Ministers delegate this task to the Bologna Follow Up Group and to whatever structure might replace it once the EHEA is in place. As needed, the Bologna Follow Up Group might wish to associate other stakeholders with the process of building, maintaining and updating the framework.

At this stage, it may be useful to keep in mind what Helle Otte said in the stakeholder panel: paradise is not created out of conference reports and Ministerial communiqués. Nor can qualifications frameworks be all things to all people or, as Bastian Baumann formulated it, “*eierlegende Wollmilchsau*” – an egg laying pig that produces wool and milk. Like conventions and laws, qualifications frameworks are only as their implementation. This conference is an important milestone, but the end goal is that what we have discussed here is actually put into practice.

### ***Validating national frameworks as “EHEA compatible”***

Even if the EHEA framework is not regulatory or binding, it does outline what is required for national frameworks to be considered as falling within the broad policies of the European Higher Education Area. It therefore seems necessary to establish a way to verify whether individual national frameworks are in fact compatible with the overarching framework. The Working Group proposes that this be done through self-certification by the country concerned rather than by peer review or a European body or agency, for which there is no mandate and that does not seem necessary<sup>22</sup>. Since

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<sup>21</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

<sup>22</sup> Report by the Working Group, para. 4.2, pp. 39 – 40.

the effective acceptance of national frameworks within the EHEA will require mutual trust, it is, however, essential that:

- the self-certification be transparent and that it address the criteria proposed by the Working Group;
- that the self-certification and the evidence supporting it be public, and that an easily accessible public listing of the countries that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process be maintained. The Working Group suggests this be done by the ENIC and NARIC Networks;
- the self-certification be completed by the time the EHEA is to be established, i.e. by 2010;
- that adequate links be established to provisions for quality assurance, to the Council of Europe/UNESCO (Lisboa) Recognition Convention and EU Directives on professional recognition and to transparency instruments for recognition, such as the Diploma Supplement, ECTS, Europass, the ENIC and NARIC Networks and individual recognition centers.

In general, there was agreement on the principle of self-certification. However, several participants expressed doubts as to whether the process as outlined in the report was sufficient and would want to see this strengthened with regards to criteria, procedures and the link to quality assurance. Thus, in the plenary discussion, Jan S. Levy, Vice Chair for the Bologna a Follow Up Group, also raised the issue of a possible link to quality assurance, through a requirement that the self certification rest on an accepted quality assurance system in the country in question. Not surprisingly, Christian Thune echoed this view in the stakeholders' panel on behalf of ENQA. He also hinted that self-certification would require a level of trust within the EHEA that may in some cases be excessively optimistic. One of the working groups made many of the same points, and in particular underlined the need to involve foreign experts in the elaboration and implementation of national qualifications frameworks, to include an element of peer review already in the development of frameworks, to describe learning outcomes at module and unit level as well as at generic level and to reflect further on the link between quality assurance and qualifications frameworks.

Ministers in Bergen could therefore ask the Bologna Follow Up Group to submit a proposal for criteria and procedures for a self-certification system for national qualifications frameworks where quality assurance is included in time for the Ministerial meeting in 2007. The Working Group, meeting after the conference to assess whether further work on the report is required in the light of the outcomes of the conference, felt, however, that postponing the decision on the self-certification for another two years would be unfortunate and resolved to elaborate a more detailed proposal for inclusion in the final version of the report. This model should, in keeping with the recommendations of the conference, contain further considerations of criteria and procedures for a self-certification system for national qualifications frameworks where quality assurance is included. The Working Group is aware that this must be done by mid-February, and that, were there to be no agreement in the Bologna Follow

Up Group on the proposal put forward, continued work would require a new mandate by Ministers in Bergen.

One working group suggested that the transparency instruments be reviewed to verify whether they are compatible with the development of qualifications frameworks.

## **THE EHEA FRAMEWORK AND OTHER FRAMEWORKS**

The Bologna Process encompasses all kinds of higher education, as does the mandate of the Working Group. It is, however, clear that, on the one hand, the need for transparent qualifications frameworks extends to all parts of the education system and, on the other hand, that it would be highly unfortunate and counterproductive if each part of the education system – at national or European level – would develop their own qualifications frameworks in isolation and without taking adequate account of each others' concerns.

One issue is of course that of entrance qualifications to higher education, but as Mogens Berg pointed out, the current labor market as well as other developments challenge the traditional boundaries of education, as well as those between education and the world of work. The issue of whether entrance qualifications should be a part of the overarching framework for the EHEA was, incidentally, one on which participants expressed quite divergent views, ranging from those who very strongly in favor of including entrance qualifications in this framework to those who were vehemently opposed. On behalf of the employers, Christoph Anz also emphasized the need to develop a common credit system – and, presumably, by extension a common qualifications framework – for higher education and vocational education and training.

The national frameworks that have been developed so far may serve as examples of good practice, since they encompass all parts of the education system of the country concerned. As an example, the Scottish framework comprises 12 levels from achievements by learners with severe learning disabilities through the various parts of primary and secondary education, vocational education and training and the first and second higher education degrees to doctoral qualifications. National frameworks will also reflect the different priorities of countries and will be designed accordingly. As is the case of national legislation, national frameworks may also be of different complexity because of different national traditions as to how much needs to be explicitly regulated and what can be assumed on the basis of shorter, more general provisions<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Three higher education laws adopted in Western European countries between 1995 and 2001 encompass between 5 and 13 chapters, whereas in two recent draft laws from South East Europe, provisions for staff alone ran to 26 and 27 paragraphs respectively. See Sjur Bergan: "A Tale of Two Cultures in Higher Education Policies: the Rule of Law or a Excess of Legalism?" *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Volume 8, Issue 2, Summer 2004.

The wider context has also been underlined by the Ministers of the Bologna Process, who in the Praha and Berlin Communiqués emphasized the important contribution of higher education in making lifelong learning a reality<sup>24</sup>.

At European level, cooperation has, it would seem, advanced further in higher education than in other parts of the education system, and the geographical context is resolutely pan-European in that the Bologna Process currently encompasses 40 countries, whereas cooperation within vocational education and training (VET) is more closely tied to the EU/EEA framework<sup>25</sup>. One of the working groups noted the need to broaden understanding of all ongoing processes, and it also suggested the proposed overarching framework for qualifications of the EHEA is an excellent starting point that should be taken into account in a broader context.

David Coyne reminded us that the European Union has placed lifelong learning squarely on the political agenda through its Lisboa Strategy (Education and Training 2010), and it has launched the København Process comprising vocational education and training. In particular, the Commission has recently established an expert group on a European Framework for Qualifications (EQF), with a mandate to build on the Bologna Process for higher education and the København Process for VET. The most developed mandate, however, comes from the recent EU Ministerial meeting in Maastricht, where Ministers gave a mandate for developing a European Qualifications Framework. The mandate is remarkably similar to the mandate given to the BFUG Working Group, except for the specific reference to higher education. David Coyne also underlined the need for cross-reference between the various processes.

The reasons for the need for cross-reference is found in the very rationale for an overall framework, as presented by David Coyne: a single coherent framework is best for the users – learners and employers - and this was well illustrated by the discussion at the conference as to whether access qualifications should be apart of the overarching EHEA framework. Another reason is that it is impossible to say where advanced vocational education and training ends and higher education begins.

In fulfilling the mandate given by the EU Ministers in Maastricht, David Coyne envisaged a framework that covers all levels of education and training through 7 or 8 levels ranging from learning normally acquired through basic education and emphasizing general knowledge and skills to doctoral qualifications. The framework should focus on competences rather than structures. One could even question whether the term “qualifications framework” is the appropriate term, or whether “competence framework” would not be more suitable.

A European Qualifications Framework will and should change the way we look at learners’ qualifications. In many ways, an EQF will do this in the same ways as the EHEA framework: by enabling learners to navigate between qualifications and systems, by providing links to quality assurance, by facilitating recognition in general

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<sup>24</sup> The wording is from the Berlin Communiqué, but similar wording is found in the Praha Communiqué.

<sup>25</sup> These developments are covered by Chapter 5 of the Report by the Working Group.

and recognition of prior and experiential learning in particular. Not least, it will help providers describe and situate their programs, in particular outside of the classic higher education programs. In this sense, a qualifications framework may for example help higher education institutions design programs that are particularly adapted to their role in the region in which they are located. David Coyne, however, made an important additional point: an EQF framework will hopefully also help develop a culture of evaluation and quality in all sectors of education, in the way we have come to take it for granted in higher education.

The decision by EU Ministers in Maastricht includes a mandate to elaborate a VET credit system, and David Coyne strongly emphasized that this should not be a separate credit system. One overarching qualifications framework would require one credit system: two separate systems would be one too many. There are still tensions between various traditions, so there is need for further consultation. One issue is the relationship between competences and notional learning time, while recognizing that the notion of competence must be expressed through proxies that can be measured. Another issue is the link between levels and credits, which has already been raised by the Helsinki definition of a second cycle (“Masters”) qualification.

David Coyne outlined a timetable in which the Commission will present two recommendations to the European Parliament and Council in spring 2006, one of which will address the EQF and the other credit systems. To arrive there, the Commission will aim to present consultation documents in spring 2005, hopefully in April or May, to be followed by a substantive consultation period of 6 months, until October/November 2005. This consultation will include an active effort to seek advice from a wide variety of actors and stakeholders within the EU as well as beyond. The consultation is important also in reducing the time required for the political co-decision process involving the European Parliament and Council.

The initiative to create coherence between the various parts of the education system and between overarching qualifications frameworks at European level is laudable and necessary. It is nonetheless important to underline, as was done in the plenary discussion, that this work must be carried out in full transparency, and that it must involve all members of the Bologna Process. This is an obvious requirement for the higher education part of the framework, but it is also important for other parts of a future overarching European Qualifications Framework to the extent that these other parts feed into and interact with higher education.

As noted, the considerable disagreement on whether it would be appropriate to include a description of qualifications giving access to higher education in the overarching framework for qualifications of the EHEA could possibly best be resolved within the context of a broader framework encompassing all or at least more kinds of education, as this is done within national frameworks. This further underscores the need to involve all parties to the Bologna Process in the development of such a broader framework. As David Coyne said in response to comments from

the plenary, while the legal basis of the Bologna, København and Lisboa Processes are different, they all rest on the political will of the countries involved.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

My first “final thought” is to echo the thanks expressed by Germain Dondelinger, as Chair of the Bologna Follow Up Group, to the Danish authorities for hosting this important seminar and to Mogens Berg in particular for all the excellent work he has both done and inspired to develop the concept of qualifications framework and win acceptance for it at European level.

Qualifications frameworks constitute a cornerstone of higher education policies in Europe, whether at national level or in the European Higher Education Area. They are an important concern of structural reform, and their impact is far reaching: by shifting the focus from procedures to learning achievements, qualifications frameworks have the potential to become building blocks in enhancing the social dimension of higher education. This aspect was particularly emphasized by ESIB, but it is the concern of all, and the social dimension will be the topic of a Bologna seminar to be organized by the French authorities in Paris at the end of January 2005.

We now have a proposal for an overarching framework, the conference supported this proposal and hopefully the Ministers will adopt it. Some countries have elaborated national frameworks, and many more will do so in the next few years. This is very positive, and it is in fact an amazing development in such a short time. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that once a framework is in place, it must be implemented. I would like to echo several working groups that underlined the need for cooperation in the implementation of frameworks: cooperation among stakeholders at both national and European level, and also cooperation between countries. Those countries that feel a need for advice or even participation by foreign experts in the elaboration and implementation of their own frameworks should be assured of the support of their fellow EHEA partners, and this could be done through the appropriate international institutions, organizations and bodies.

By opening new learning paths and facilitating the recognition of non-traditional qualifications, frameworks will help opening higher education opportunities for new learners who may never have seen such possibilities before. If Europe is, in the words of the EU Lisboa Strategy, to become the world’s most competitive economy by 2010, we can afford to do no less. If, in keeping with Europe’s humanist tradition and social concern, even if these have at times at times been honored only in the breaking, we are also to see beyond the economic dimension, we also can afford to do no less.

France has over the past decade or two developed a very strong tradition of musicals, and one of my favorites is *Notre Dame de Paris*, based on the Victor Hugo classic from 1831. In many ways, this musical is about qualifications frameworks and recognition, even if one might suspect the public is not always aware of the fact. But just take a closer look: *Notre Dame de Paris* is about structures and frameworks,

represented by the cathedral that still draws thousands and thousands of visitors even centuries after its construction. It is about recognizing the non-traditional, represented by Quasimodo the Hunchback and Esmeralda the Gypsy. It is about rejecting dogmatism and formalism, represented by Frolon. It is about making an old cultural gem more attractive to new audiences, represented by those who prefer listening to the melodic modern version to reading the original text as well as by those who move between the two as if they were components of a single, coherent framework. It is about the European dimension, represented by the composer Richard Coccinante, who is French but obviously has Italian roots. Not least, it is about the “external dimension”, represented by the singer Garou, who is now one of the main stars of the French-speaking world - and who hails from Québec.

The last point underscores the fact that qualifications frameworks and their focus on learning achievements are vital to making “Bologna qualifications” recognized in other parts of the world – what is, for want of a better word, commonly referred to as the “external dimension”<sup>26</sup>. If all the rest of the world retains of “Bologna” is that “Europe” is reducing the “bachelor” degree from 4 to 3 years, European students will have serious problems by the time the EHEA is established. These problems can only be avoided if we succeed in conveying both the contents and the methodology of our qualifications frameworks - and if we apply the same methodology of recognizing learning achievements rather than procedures when assessing qualifications from other parts of the world.

Like Europe itself, the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area balances diversity and unity. The aim is to make it flexible and diverse enough to be interesting, yet sufficiently coherent to be comprehensible. Our aspiration for the European Higher Education Area and its qualifications frameworks can perhaps best be expressed by a slogan borrowed from our US friends, which they in turn express in a language borrowed from “old Europe”:

*e pluribus unum.*

Out of many, one.

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<sup>26</sup> The “external dimension” of the Bologna Process was the topic of a major conference organized by the Academic Cooperation Organization in Hamburg on October 18 – 19, 2004, cf. <http://www.aca-secretariat.be/08events/Hamburg/HamburgConferenceOverview.htm>. A publication on the basis of the conference is forthcoming.