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NETWORK OF NATIONAL CORRESPONDENTS FOR QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Background document by the Council of Europe

Distribution: BFUG

Background

The Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks was established in 2008 and gathers, in principle, one representative of each member of the EHEA.

The Network provides a platform for the exchange of experience in the development and self-certification of national qualifications frameworks within and against the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). It also aims to further coherence between the QF-EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), overseen by the European Commission. The Network has a counterpart in a similar network of EQF Contact Points, and for several years the two networks held an annual joint meeting. The members of the Network should have responsibility for the development and maintenance of national qualifications framework within their respective higher education systems.

The BFUG approved the [terms of reference](#) of the Network at its meeting in Wien on September 27 – 28, 2018. As will be seen, the Network should:

- Exchange experience and offer advice in the development, implementation, and review of national qualifications frameworks
- Further coherence between national QFs and the Overarching Frameworks of Qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA)
- Further coherence between the QF-EHEA and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)
- Advise EHEA members and the BFUG on issues related to the QF-EHEA.

The Network is coordinated by the Council of Europe, which has prepared this document. The European Commission (DG EAC and DG EMPL, responsible for the EQF) as well as the Czech and Finnish co-chairs of the peer group on qualifications frameworks were consulted in the process.

Plans for 2019

The Network meets once a year, normally in September. The Council of Europe intends to organize a meeting in late August or early September 2019, at a date to be determined to avoid overlap with other activities, as far as possible. Unlike in previous years, the Council of Europe may, because of its difficult overall budget situation, be unable to cover travel and subsistence for participants.

Three issues stand out for consideration at the September meeting, two of which were identified by participants in the September 2018 meeting.

Short cycle qualifications

On the one hand, the Network should consider the situation of short cycle qualifications within the QF-EHEA following the decision by Ministers in Paris in May 2018 to “include[e]

short-cycle qualifications as a stand-alone qualification within the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA)", with the proviso that "Each country can decide whether and how to integrate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework".

The Network could provide a forum for an exchange of experience among countries having adopted short cycle qualifications and advise those who may consider doing so, while remaining clear that this is an option rather than an obligation. EURASHE, which has carried out important work on short cycle qualifications and is currently coordinating a work in this area, could play an important role.

Self-certification

On the other hand, there is a need to review the state of self-certification of national frameworks against the QF-EHEA. This issue has several aspects.

38 countries are parties to both the QF-EHEA and the EQF¹, which has a referencing procedure that is similar in content (referencing criteria) , but different in process to self-certification. Of the 34 EQF countries that have referenced to the EQF and are party to the QF-EHEA, 21 have done so through a single report. Another 8 countries have self-certified separately from EQF referencing; in all cases self-certification took place before EQF referencing. The revised EQF Recommendation of May 22, 2017² stipulates in referencing criterion 8³ that the same report can be used for EQF referencing to the EQF (addressing each of the 10 EQF referencing criteria) and self-certification to the QF-EHEA, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.

Joint self-certification and referencing does, however, imply, that it is in many cases difficult for higher education policy makers and practitioners to identify the referencing reports that also include self-certification against the QF-EHEA. As a consequence, there is as of today no good overview of completed self-certification reports and consideration should be given to providing a single web site with easy access to all referencing and self-certification reports, with specific indication of the self-certification reports contained within broader referencing report. This work will require some resources and will be the subject of discussion between the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Self-certification is an important step in the development and maintenance of national higher education qualification frameworks, but – like referencing – it does not mark the end of this work. QFs must be maintained and will develop further to take account of developments in education systems, in learning and teaching and, more broadly, in society and the way it views education. Reviews of QFs may require renewed self-certification and referencing; major review of QFs certainly will require such reviews. It should be noted that the revised

¹ Kosovo* is part of the EQF but not of the Bologna Process. Kosovo* is used without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

² See <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ceead970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

³ See in Annex III

EQF Recommendation invites Member States to “Review and update, when relevant, the referencing” (recommendation nr 2).

On the other hand, some countries – mainly outside of the EQF – have not yet completed their national higher education frameworks and have therefore not published their first self-certification reports. According to the [2018 EHEA Monitoring Report](#)⁴, the QFs of 17 EHEA member states were between stages 3 and 9 of the 11 stages in the development of national QFs outlined by the previous Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks⁵.

While the peer group on Qualifications Frameworks under the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) will be in a position to provide support for countries that decide they require such peer support, there is an overall issue with self-certification that the Network could address. Within the EQF, there is a system of peer review of referencing reports by the EQF Advisory Group. Each report is presented to the EQF Advisory Group by the country concerned, and CEDEFOP comments on the basis of a review of the report, with input from the Council of Europe on the higher education aspect of the referencing. The report is then normally adjusted on the basis of the comments and published on the Portal for the EQF⁶. If the EQF AG considers that all referencing criteria are not met, a country has to revise and resubmit its referencing report. EQF referencing is resource intensive, which is an important reason why a similar system has not been considered for the QF-EHEA. The Network could, however, consider whether an element of peer review could be introduced into the self-certification procedure, either in cooperation with the EQF AG or separately from it.

Web site

The current QF section of the EHEA web site needs review, and it would seem natural to consider whether a better link could be established between the web sites for the QF-EHEA and the EQF, or even whether the two sites could somehow be merged. Most readers would presumably want to find as much information on both overarching frameworks as possible on a single site and would at the very least want to be able to navigate between the two quite easily. Would it be possible to envisage a single web site with specific sections for the QF-EHEA and the EQF and easy links between the two sections? How could this be accomplished, and how could the specificities to the QF-EHEA be taken account of, including the fact that 10 EHEA member states are not currently in the EQF framework?

Interaction with the peer group on qualification frameworks

The 2018 – 20 work program includes a [peer group on qualification frameworks](#), working under the auspices of the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG). The purpose of the per group is to further implementation of Key Commitment 1: a three-cycle system

⁴ See pp. 120 – 122.

⁵ Stage 10 is self-certification of compatibility with the EHEA framework; stage 11 the setting up of a web site on the national qualification framework.

⁶ Currently the LOQ portal (<https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/>), in the future the Europass online platform (currently under construction).

compatible with the overarching of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS. It held its first meeting in Helsinki in January 2019 and will meet again in Praha in June.

While the peer group was set up with a specific view to furthering implementation of commitments already undertaken, the Network and the peer group should be informed of each other's work. The Council of Europe is represented in the peer group, and the co-chairs of the peer group would normally participate in the meetings of the Network as representatives of their countries. It is suggested that the meetings of the Network include updates on the work of the peer group, and the Council of Europe and the co-chairs may consider to what extent there should be more extensive consultations between the two frameworks. It may also be considered whether one meeting of the peer group may be held end-on with a meeting of the Network.

Participation

As mentioned initially, the Network is made up of representatives of all EHEA members and consultative members. In practice, only approximately half of the EHEA members have participated in meetings recently, with the exception of the latest meeting, in 2018, which saw the participation of 37 countries. Members and consultative members are requested to provide the Bologna Secretariat with updated information on their representative(s) in the Network and also to ensure participation in the Network meetings.

Action

The BFUG is invited to:

- advise the Network on its work related to short cycle qualifications, self-certification, and a revision of the website;
- advise the Network on any other topic the BFUG would like the Network to address;
- provide the Secretariat with updated contact details for the members of the Network and ensure participation in the meetings of the Network.