



DGII/EDU/CDPPE-HE (2019) 14  
Original: English  
Strasbourg, 2 September 2019

# **National Correspondents for Qualifications Frameworks (QF-EHEA)**

STRASBOURG, 4 September 2018  
Agora building

## **MEETING REPORT**

Prepared by the Directorate General for Democracy (Directorate of Democratic Participation, Education Department)  
of the Council of Europe and the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission

## National correspondents meeting on qualification frameworks in the European Higher Education Area

Strasbourg, 4 September 2018

The agenda was adopted as presented in Appendix I. 37 countries were present.

### **I. Latest developments regarding Higher Education Qualifications Frameworks on national level, Self-referencing process, in 4 working groups**

During the working groups, the following elements were mentioned:

- a. Regarding the self-certification process, especially in the framework of updated versions of national QF EHEA, several questions were raised:
  1. Some countries had already revised their higher education QFs several times. In Malta, it is already the 4th version.
  2. The importance of self-certifying and referencing against the criteria used for both overarching frameworks (QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL), as more and more reports are joint self-certification and referencing reports.
  3. Is it required to include international experts when updating the framework?
  4. Unfortunately, in some countries, the responsibility for the development and implementation of the NQF does not seem to be clearly allocated.
  5. How to include, or not, "pre-Bologna" qualifications within NQFs?
- b. Regarding the inclusion of short cycle (level 5) higher education qualifications, the situation is highly diverse from country to country. In some countries, no higher education qualification is at this level. Some countries aim to create short cycle qualifications. In others, the inclusion of level 5 in the NQF for higher education was made without changing the framework itself.
- c. It is crucial to ensure that qualifications included in NQF are quality assured. This also means having the qualifications described in terms of Learning Outcomes from individual qualifications to study programs.
- d. The link and use of NQFs by the business sector are still challenging even if some countries have developed strong links e.g. (Malta, Ireland).
- e. How to include, if the different partners agree to include them, qualifications provided by international providers?
- f. The question of validation of qualifications acquired within Non-Formal/ informal learning and their integration within the NQF is still a difficult one.

### **II. The role of QF EHEA in the Bologna Process and the inclusion of short cycle qualifications within NQF**

Mr Luca Lantero from the BFUG secretariat presented the Paris Communiqué and the items concerning Qualifications Frameworks. He mentioned the request, for countries providing qualifications on this level, to include the short cycle (level 5) within national Qualifications Frameworks, recognizing the impact that short cycle qualifications can have on Higher Education in some countries.

He also mentioned that in terms of the EHEA Work Plan, 3 thematic working groups will be set up focusing on QF EHEA, on Recognition and on Quality Assurance. The work plan would be finalized at the BFUG meeting in Vienna at the end of September 2018.

Regarding the inclusion of short cycle qualifications, several elements were underlined:

- The fact that qualifications on this level are very diverse. Level 5 is at the junction between VET and HEI: short cycle, post-secondary level, work-based qualifications. This level is a good opportunity to bridge VET and HE
- It is important to acknowledge and promote these qualifications, as they are often well accepted in terms of employability, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises
- This level also plays a role for people who would like to return to work after a period of unemployment or break within their professional life
- How to ensure quality in terms of the learning outcomes of qualifications on this level

In concrete terms for the countries several challenges were highlighted:

- For countries in which short cycle qualifications exist, the difficulty of making universities accept to include these qualifications within their offer
- How much work needs to be done to include the short cycle qualifications within the QF EHEA? Does it require a review of the Dublin descriptors? For most of the correspondents the answer is no.
- It was underlined that there is no obligation for countries to develop short cycle qualifications within their systems.
- The permeability of the different learning paths is one of the challenges faced on national level.
- It was acknowledged that short cycle qualifications provide improved accessibility to Higher Education, especially for underrepresented groups. Therefore, this debate is also related to the democratization of and social inclusion in higher education

In the near future, it will be important to undertake a good mapping of the national situation of short cycle qualifications. For this, the work done by CEDEFOP will be an excellent basis.

### **III. Competences for Democratic Culture and national Qualifications frameworks**

Ms Hilligje van't Land, Secretary General of the International Universities Association (IUA) and a member of the expert group that developed the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, presented this framework. (see her power point presentation in Appendix 2)

During the debate, the following elements were discussed:

- It is important to underline the role of higher education institutions in supporting and developing a culture of democracy
- The use of CDC can play a role in the transformation of HE systems
- The challenge is to know how CDC can be fully integrated in NQFs. One angle is linked to transversal competences.
- To reach higher education, the CDC must be integrated into teacher training by stressing the importance of developing critical knowledge and understanding as a key element of any democracy.
- The CDC must be one of the elements taken into account in the description of Learning Outcomes
- The question of certification is a central one: how and by whom can non formal/informal/ soft skills be certified?

### **IV. Qualifications frameworks from the perspective of higher education institutions, including professional higher education**

Mr Michal Karpišek, from EURASHE, presented the work done by EURASHE on short cycle qualifications and on the mapping of these. Regarding qualifications on level 5, he underlined that some positive elements are related to employability and also to accession to HE for non-traditional groups of students. He stressed the importance of the permeability of the learning paths.

### **V. Evaluation/ Date and place of the next meeting**

During the evaluation, the following items were underlined:

- The meeting offered an important space to understand the consequences of the Paris Communiqué for National Higher Education Qualifications Frameworks.
- For several national correspondents it was important to participate in this meeting to have a better understanding of what exactly the inclusion of short cycle qualifications within the EHEA QF will mean: how is it supposed to work? Does it imply changing criteria?
- the network should support the review of the self-certification process and must try to ensure coherence between the different Bologna Reform Tools.
- on national level, a dialogue between those in charge of the developments of the CDC Framework and those in charge of NQFs must be established as a first step of integration of democratic competences within NQFs.

The group agreed that it is important to have a network of National correspondents. A draft mandate should be presented to the BFUG and endorsed by it. [Note: the draft terms of reference were presented to and accepted by the BFUG on 27 - 28 September 2018]. It will be important to have more regular contact with the network including regular up-date of the development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks.

**APPENDIX I****National Correspondents for Qualifications Frameworks (QF-EHEA)**

STRASBOURG, 4 September 2018 (from 9 am to 5 pm)

**AGENDA**

9.00-9.15

ITEM 1      Opening of the meeting, Sjur Bergan

9.15-9.45

ITEM 2      developments within the Council of Europe Higher Education department and within the European Union EQF

9.45-10.15

ITEM 3 A      Latest developments regarding Bologna Qualifications Frameworks on national level, Self-referencing process, in 4 working groups

10.15-10.30

ITEM 3 B      report of the WG

10.30-10.50

Coffee break

10.50 -12.30

ITEM 4      The role of QF EHEA in the Bologna framework:

- The Paris Communiqué
  - Level 5 within QF EHEA: opportunities and challenges
- Luca Lantero or another representative of the Bologna Secretariat  
Michael Graham, European Training Foundation (ETF)

14.30- 15.45

ITEM 5      Competences for Democratic Culture and national Qualifications frameworks

- Presentation of the CDC
  - How could the CDC be integrated into the QF-EHEA (but also into NQFs)?
- Hilligje van't Land, International Association of Universities (IAU)

15.45-16.05

coffee break

16.05-16.45

ITEM 6      Qualifications frameworks from the perspective of higher education institutions including professional higher education with a focus on qualifications on level 5  
Michal Karpišek, EURASHE

16.45-17.30

ITEM 8      Evaluation/ Date and place of the next meeting

ITEM 9

Any other business