# The Bologna Process Implementation Report

## Working Group Monitoring Proposal to revise and amend Key Commitment Scorecard Indicators

### Introduction

The BFUG has agreed that, where there is a policy commitment, ideally there should be a scorecard indicator. With regard to the three key commitments, a number of scorecard indicators are in place in the Bologna Process Implementation Report (on ECTS, Diploma Supplement, National Qualifications Frameworks, Stage of development of external Quality Assurance, level of student participation in external quality assurance). However, new and amended indicators could complete the "set". This proposal of the Monitoring Working Group concerns indicators on degree structures, recognition and quality assurance.

## 1 Degree Structures

### 1.1 Rationale for a new scorecard indicator

Given the fundamental importance of the three cycle degrees to the EHEA it would be helpful to establish a single scorecard indicator that assesses progress. A new scorecard indicator can be established on the basis of the following existing indicators. The text in red is a proposal for the different elements/criteria:

1. Share of first-cycle programmes with a workload of 180, 210, 240 or another number of ECTS (most recent year available)

   >90% of programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the first cycle.

2. Share of second-cycle programmes with a workload of 60-75, 90, 120 or another number of ECTS


   >90% of programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the second cycle.

3. Presence of integrated/long programmes leading to a second-cycle degree, plus the percentage of students in these programmes

   <10% of students are enrolled in integrated/long programmes

4. Programmes outside the Bologna degree structure (other than integrated/long programmes

There are no programmes, other than integrated programmes, outside the Bologna degree structure

| | Proposal for degree structures indicator |
|---|---|
| 🟩 | 4  Elements |
| 🟩 | 3 elements |
| 🟨 | 2 elements |
| 🟧 | 1 element |
| 🟥 | 0 element |

## 1.2    Opinion of the Monitoring Working Group

The Monitoring Working Group recommends the inclusion of this new scorecard indicator in the next edition of the BPIR.

## 2 Recognition: Automatic Recognition and the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Implementation Report includes a (composite but not scorecard) indicator on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It also includes a scorecard indicator on automatic recognition. These indicators should be considered in relation to each other, and potentially amended.

## 2.1. Logic underpinning the current indicator on automatic recognition

**Current scoreboard indicator categories:**

| | |
|---|---|
| 🟩 | Automatic recognition is in place, meaning that all higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised at system level on an equal level with comparable ([1]) academic qualifications in the home country and give the right to be considered for entry to a programme of further study at the next level. |
| 🟩 | Automatic recognition is in place for a subset of EHEA countries, meaning that all higher education qualifications issued in these countries are recognised at system level on an equal level with comparable academic qualifications in the home country and give the right to be considered for entry to a programme of further study at the next level. <br><br> All of the following conditions apply to recognition practice: <br> • National legislation has been reviewed and, if necessary, modified to ensure that the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) are respected. <br> • Higher education institutions or recognition bodies receive clear guidance on properly implementing the principles of the LRC. <br> • Recognition decisions are taken within a four month limit. <br> • Appeals procedures are in place, and decided within a clear and reasonable time limit. |

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([1])   The term 'comparable' implies that foreign qualifications are treated in the same way as national degrees (e.g. a first-cycle degree from an EHEA country vs. a national first-cycle degree) for the purpose of further study at the next level without additional recognition procedures.

| | |
|---|---|
| <span style="color:green">■</span> | • Recognition practice in HEIs is monitored by external quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines 2015. |
| <span style="color:yellow">■</span> | Automatic Recognition at system level takes place with a subset of European countries.<br><br>For qualifications from other countries some but not all of the conditions apply to recognition practice. |
| <span style="color:orange">■</span> | There is no automatic recognition.<br><br>At least two of the conditions apply to recognition practice. |
| <span style="color:red">■</span> | There is no automatic recognition.<br><br>Less than two of the conditions apply to recognition practice. |

The current indicator combines the main principles of recognition practice embedded in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and system-level automatic recognition. The idea behind the indicator is that system-level automatic recognition is the end goal that can be reached after the principles of the LRC are fully implemented. The indicator therefore implies that there is a linear process to progress from implementing the LRC principles to establishing system-level automatic recognition.

This logic is based on the text of the 2014 EHEA Pathfinder Group report on Automatic Recognition (2) which concluded that automatic recognition is a necessary pre-condition for large-scale academic mobility, and proposed a number of recommendations to improve the situation. The recommendations focused on the implementation of the key principles of the LRC that are specified in the criteria for this indicator.

## 2.2. Limitations of the current indicator

In recent years, the goal of automatic recognition has been further encouraged by the adoption of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (3). Recent national policy reforms aiming to introduce automatic recognition suggest that the idea that the LRC principles must first be implemented before automatic recognition is introduced may be incorrect. For example, Greece adopted legislation in 2021 which (at least in theory) makes automatic recognition the default practice in the higher education system. Greece also stands out as being the only EU and EHEA country that has failed to sign and ratify the LRC. In other words, if Greece successfully implements automatic recognition in line with its

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(2)  Report by the EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition to present to Ministers of the European Area of Higher Education for the Bologna Ministerial Conference, 14-15 May 2015, Yerevan, Armenia.

(3)  Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, OJ C444/01 10.12.2018.

legislation this will be achieved despite never fully implementing the principles of the LRC.

While Greece is the most clear-cut example to illustrate the potential error of assuming a necessary link between automatic recognition and the prior implementation of LRC principles, several other countries that now exercise automatic recognition (e.g. Finland, France, Italy, Malta, Norway, Poland, Turkey) could also be pointed to as cases where there were no requirements of the external quality assurance system to ensure that all principles of the LRC were fully implemented. The empirical evidence therefore suggests that it is possible to move towards the implementation of system-level automatic recognition without all principles of the LRC having been implemented. This means that it may be more relevant to evaluate the implementation of automatic recognition separately from the evaluation of implementation of the LRC principles.

A second issue that is not captured in the current indicator on automatic recognition is the level at which automatic recognition decisions are taken. Nearly all EU countries have delegated decision-making competence to higher education institutions (HEIs), commonly considering recognition to be an area within the realm of higher education institutional autonomy. However, in systems where decision-making competence rests with higher education institutions, the implications of automatic recognition may not be clear. For example, in the case where a student from another country applies to a specific second-cycle programme with a first-cycle qualification but is not admitted, will the student be informed that the HEI has recognised their qualification but refused their application to the programme? Or is the recognition decision subsumed into the overall admission process and the student is informed only that the request for admission has been unsuccessful? Or if the student applies to 3 or 4 different programmes at different HEIs in the same country, does it make sense to deliver 3 or 4 automatic recognition decisions? Placing responsibility for automatic recognition decisions at system rather than institutional level may therefore be considered preferable and more aligned to the spirit of automatic recognition conveyed in the Pathfinder Group Report and the Council Recommendation.

## 2.3. Proposal for a revised indicator

The first aspect of revising the indicator would be to focus solely on automatic recognition rather than conflating it with the principles of the LRC. Thus the indicator could distinguish between countries where system-level automatic recognition is in place for all EHEA countries, for some countries or not in place at all.

The second issue to be considered in re-thinking the indicator would be whether a system-level body should be favoured for a system level decision. As a system-level decision-making body is likely to more successful in guaranteeing implementation of automatic recognition than higher education institutions, this preference can be expressed in the indicator.

A revised indicator could therefore be constructed as outlined below. The proposal gives more weight to the aspect of geographical scope of automatic recognition (whether it is in place for qualifications from all EHEA countries or a subset of countries) than it does to the issue of decision-making competence. This choice reflects the political commitment that has been made by all countries to move towards system-level automatic recognition of qualifications from all EHEA countries.

**Revised scoreboard indicator categories:**

| | |
|---|---|
| <span style="color:green">■</span> | Automatic recognition is in place, meaning that all Bologna-compliant higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised at system level on an equal level with comparable ([4]) academic qualifications in the home country and give the right to be considered for entry to a programme of further study at the next level. Automatic recognition decisions are taken by a competent system-level body. |
| <span style="color:yellowgreen">■</span> | Automatic recognition is in place, meaning that all Bologna-compliant higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised at system level on an equal level with comparable academic qualifications in the home country and give the right to be considered for entry to a programme of further study at the next level. Automatic recognition decisions are taken by individual higher education institutions. |
| <span style="color:yellow">■</span> | Automatic recognition is in place for Bologna-compliant qualifications from a subset of European countries. Automatic recognition decisions are taken by a competent system-level body. |
| <span style="color:orange">■</span> | Automatic recognition is in place for Bologna-compliant qualifications from a subset of European countries. Automatic recognition decisions are taken by individual higher education institutions. |
| <span style="color:red">■</span> | There is no automatic recognition. |

## 2.4 Opinion of the Working Group on monitoring

The Working Group considers that it is necessary to update the scorecard indicator on automatic recognition. While it considers the above proposal to be logical and complete, the group nevertheless wishes to draw attention to the fact that there is no political agreement that responsibility for system-level automatic recognition decisions is preferable at a system-level body.

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([4])    The term 'comparable' implies that foreign qualifications are treated in the same way as national degrees (e.g. a first-cycle degree from an EHEA country vs. a national first-cycle degree) for the purpose of further study at the next level without additional recognition procedures.

If the BFUG believes that policy agreement would be required before this preference is reflected in an indicator, it could recommend a version of the scorecard proposal with only three categories (green, yellow and red) that focuses only on whether automatic recognition is in place for all Bologna-compliant EHEA qualifications (green), some Bologna-compliant EHEA qualifications (yellow) or no qualifications (red).

## 2.5. Indicator on implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)

For countries where there is no system level recognition, assessing the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention remains relevant.

The Implementation report indicator on the LRC is based on the following 5 key principles of the LRC:

1) applicants have right to fair assessment; 2) there is recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; 3) legislation or guidelines encourage comparing of learning outcomes rather than programme contents; 4) in cases of negative decisions the competent recognition authority demonstrates the existence of substantial difference; 5) applicant's right to appeal of the recognition decision.

These elements could be shown in scorecard format. In this case, countries where system-level automatic recognition is in place for all qualifications from all EHEA countries would be pictured as "not applicable"..

| | Proposal for LRC indicator |
|---|---|
| 🟩 | 5 principles in legislation |
| 🟩 | 4 principles in legislation |
| 🟨 | 3 principles in legislation |
| 🟧 | 2 principles in legislation |
| 🟥 | 0 or 1 principle in legislation |

## 2.6 Opinion of the Monitoring Working Group

The working group fully endorses this new indicator proposal.

# 3      Key Commitment on quality assurance

The Scorecard indicator on the stage of development of external Quality Assurance system is well established in the Implementation Report. For the 2024 edition, the monitoring working group proposal is to remove the light green category, as at this stage of development of the ESG and EQAR, it is now clearly contradictory to state that the system is aligned to the ESG but that the agency performing quality assurance is not registered on EQAR.

## 3.1 Stage of development of external Quality Assurance system, proposed categories

| | Proposal QA |
|---|---|
| 🟩 | A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, in which all higher education institutions are subject regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) through registration on EQAR. |
| 🟨 | A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, but only some higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the ESG through registration on EQAR. |
| 🟧 | A quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, but has not yet been fully aligned to the ESG. |
| 🟥 | No quality assurance system is in operation. |

In addition, the Working Group suggests adding a new indicator that would show empirical information about the number of ESG compliant reviews undertaken, using information in the DEQAR database (see explanatory note[5]).

## 3.2 Opinion of the Monitoring Working Group

The working group endorses the revised scorecard indicator proposal, although EUA expressed some concern that the proposed indicator may give too much weight to EQAR registration.

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[5] **EXPLANATORY NOTE:** DEQAR shows the live coverage of higher education institutions subject to external QA in compliance with the ESG based on reports being uploaded by EQAR-registered QA agencies. This allows for a real time tracking of EHEA members country's alignment with the Key Commitment on QA. The time period to be considered for the validity of external QA is collected from each agency. For agencies that do not have a validity date, a '6 year' average is automatically applied.