



Thematic Peer Group A on Qualification Framework

Fourth Meeting, Hosted by Riga, Latvia,
21 October 2022

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Albania	Ermelinda	Durmishi
Andorra	Jordi	Llombart
Armenia	Ani	Mkrtchyan
Austria (Co-Chair)	Karin	Riegler
Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova
Belgian Flemish Community	Magalie	Soenen
Bulgaria	Elena	Konsulova-Atanasova
Bulgaria	Elena	Radonova
Bulgaria	Ivana	Radonova
Council of Europe	Jean-Philippe	Restoueix
Croatia	Slaven	Zjalic
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
ESU	Ana	Gvritshvili
Estonia	Janne	Pukk
Georgia (Co-Chair)	Khatia	Tsiramua
Hungary	Zsolt	Danos
Latvia (Co-Chair)	Baiba	Ramina
Latvia	Gunta	Kinta
Latvia	Leine	Zvirbule-Jankova
Malta	Valerie	Attard
Netherlands	Lineke	Van Bruggen
Poland	Jacek	Lewicki
Romania	Antonela	Toma
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
Italy (TPG B Co-Chair)	Chiara	Finocchietti
Belgium Flemish Community (TPG C Co-Chair)	Magalie	Soenen

1. Welcome by the Co-Chairs

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the fourth thematic peer group meeting, and the agenda of the meeting was approved without changes.

The Co-Chairs requested each attendee to introduce themselves and outline their goals for the meeting. Each participant gave a brief introduction, including their name, country, and association. The bulk of attendees stated that they were hoping to gain more knowledge

regarding micro-credentials.

For more information, please see: *Agenda of the Meeting and state-of-play*

2. Reflections from previous meetings and activities. Information from other Thematic Peer Groups

Karin Riegler (Co-Chair) welcomed and introduced the speakers of the session by emphasizing the importance of cooperation among all TPGs. An overview of the submitted Country Action Plans stated that 18 out of 30 countries had been received so far. She stressed that while all involved understood that drafting the Country Action Plan was a difficult and time-consuming task which may involve a lot of national consultations, it was of paramount importance that all TPG_A members submit such a plan.

An outline of the umbrella project 'QUARTA' (Qualification Frameworks for trusts, transparency and diversity) in support of the work of TPG A was presented to the members of the group, focusing on specific thematic directions and core priorities. It was underlined that there is a certain amount of overlap with the TPG B and TPG C, to tackle rather complex questions and topics from different angles.

Khatia Tsiramua (Co-Chair) presented the survey that was sent to the members asking about the interests and priorities, and the formats of the efficient way of working together. Beside the PLAs and the TPG A meetings, most the members named also the discussions on concrete topics in smaller groups to go in deeper in discussion and to cover several topics.

Three of them were the priorities of the TPG A members:

- Micro-credentials,
- Self-certifications,
- Short cycles in higher education.

Karin Riegler asked the Co-Chairs of the TPG B and TPG C to contribute and to give a summary of their activities in the respective TPGs.

2.1 Input from the TPG B

Chiara Finocchietti (TPG B Co-Chair) presented the main features of TPG B including the composition, thematic orientations, and the main activities. The group is to highlight thematic priorities with the most immediate being digitalization, automatic recognition and alternative pathways. The last meeting (June 2022, France) was focused on the recognition of qualifications from Ukraine. There are four working groups created on micro-credentials, digitalization, quality of recognition and the last one on the European Degree (starting at a later date).

Regarding project deliverables, a publication is expected by the end of 2023, which will be targeted at HEIs and address micro-credentials and recognition. The three groups will collaborate to include the topics of QA, QF, ECTS, recognition, mapping digital tools within one single publication, in order to explore micro-credentials from the perspective of the key pillars of the three TPGs.

In relation to the recognition of the non-traditional pathways of learning, it was explained that this issue is one of the priorities of the TPG B, comprising three main subtopics, like the recognition of the prior learning, validation of prior learning and the recognition of micro-credentials, the latter being a kind of umbrella concept. Another question called about the grey area between micro-credentials and online courses, and the digitalization is realized through different angles like: the secured share of student data; the different teaching modes, including online and blended learning; and mostly on the digital certification.

2.2 Input from the TPG C

Magalie Soenen (TPG C Co-Chair) presented the main features of TPG C on Quality Assurance (QA) including the composition, the umbrella project, thematic orientations, and the main activities. The TPG C plans to organize 7 meetings and 3 PLAs, and the group has a large membership as it comprises the ministries and QA agencies. The umbrella project offers staff mobility, and 41 applications of individuals from different QA agencies and ministries were collected. Another call for staff mobility will be open in Spring 2023.

It was clarified that two topics received a huge focus by having specific working groups devoted to them, like the working group on the QA of micro-credentials and the working group of the QA of European Universities Initiative, and the working group on the Digitalization of QA.

Asked about the digitalization of the QA services, the focus should not be strictly of the QA of the online credentials, but mostly on how to improve hybrid QA processes.

3. Feedback from working groups (Micro-credentials, Self-certification, short cycle HE)

It was stated that there will be three meetings for each group, and at least one meeting in person. Moreover, it will be attempted to have the discussions of these working groups during the TPG meetings.

3.1 Micro-credentials working group

It was stated that there are 16 countries involved in this working group. The first meeting saw the adoption of the ToRs and two good presentations, one of which came from the European Training Foundation (ETF). Additionally, it was decided to send a SWOT analysis to the TPG members. It was intended to work with TPG B and TPG C in the common areas of the micro-credential's ecosystem.

For more information, please see: *TPG A working group on micro credentials*

3.2 Self-certification working group

Self-certification working group meeting was organized in the last week of September. The membership of this group comprises of eight countries.

The first topic discussed in the first meeting was the terms of reference. The most of the countries in their feedback emphasized, that they need experience sharing with each other on NQF self-certification. This helps the countries to get more information about how the self-certification procedure looks like and how the country should prepare the self-certification report.

There were two key issues in the terms of reference for discussion. The first issue is the discussion about the support that countries need in terms of self-referencing. Another important issue is the development of some recommendations regarding self-certification that would help the countries that are still behind in the process.

For more information, please see: *TPG A working group on self-certification*

3.3 Short cycles in higher education

It was stated that this is a very small group of only 5 members and the first meeting was held in September. There is a wide variety of short cycles in the group members. There are countries that do not have short cycles. Other countries use the level 5 for VET training and higher education in the same time.

The previous EURASHE Secretary General, Michal Karpisek, was invited in the meeting. He did quite a provocative presentation of what is missing in Europe, and what could be the better way for implementing short cycle qualifications. Another invitee was the Latvian previous minister of education, who presented very interesting responses about short-cycles

and learning outcomes.

The working group agreed on some recommendations, as well as to create a fiche to collect information from all the members of the TPG about the short-cycle level.

For more information, please see: *TPG A working group on short cycle*

4. Discussions in small groups on latest developments on QF

The members were split in four groups to discuss the following questions for about 20 minutes:

- What is the influence of Qualification Framework in different areas of Higher Education?
- What tools have been developed in the national level and what we can learn from each other?
- How are the different stakeholders contributing to the qualification framework? (optional)

4.1 Influence of QF in different areas of HE

In relation to the first question, the discussion was focused mostly on challenging areas of the QF.

The validation of informal and non-formal learning was seen as the most challenging problem. Some countries currently have effective practices for validating prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, but other countries lack experience in these policy areas.

The recognition of the foreign qualifications was another problem area of the QF. In some countries, recognitions are given at the university level for continuing education while they are given at the agency or ministerial level for employment. It was an important remark from the student representative that would like to see the simplification of the recognition of the foreign qualifications.

4.2 Tools developed at national level

There were several tools mentioned in relation to the Qualifications Frameworks. There were practical tools like: the database on qualifications that can help increase the awareness of the stakeholders; a special committee, where you can apply to get some level of qualification; the placement of the level of qualification in the degree, especially in the higher education system; and the establishment of an advisory board comprising all stakeholders, including learners.

There was a long discussion about the usefulness of the guidelines as a practical tool. One idea was that different guidelines are necessary and should be useful even for the students. On the other hand, there was a larger consensus that the guidelines are not used, and there is a need of guidelines and handbooks in the local languages. The higher education jargon of these guidelines was considered as not suitable for the labor market, aka the language of the employers.

4.3 Different stakeholders contributing to the QF

Due to the lack of time, most groups did not have time to discuss this aspect.

5. Introduction of the next PLA in Vienna and AOB

It was confirmed that the following PLA would be held in Vienna, Austria, in the premises of the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien. Learning Outcomes will be the

primary focus of the PLA meeting in Vienna, in an attempt to connect the dots between Learning Outcomes, EQF, NQFs, ECTS, and the Dublin Descriptors.

The PLA is expected to include practical exercises that focus on the module level, while the final PLA will concentrate on the programme level and will be held in Tallin, Estonia in 2024. The use of learning outcomes by the major stakeholders, such as HEIs, as well as the importance of their curriculum design in terms of recognition will also be discussed. The PLA there will also provide national and EHEA examples of best practice. The policy level is another component to be discussed and will address how ministries and quality assurance agencies incorporate learning outcomes into the governance of higher education.

The PLA main speaker will be Dr. Declan Kennedy, senior lecturer at University College Cork, Ireland. He is the co-author of the book on "Writing and Using Learning Outcomes".

For more information, please see: *Introduction to the next PLA in Vienna*

No other business was brought forward and the fourth meeting of the TPG A on QF was concluded.