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Network of National Qualifications Frameworks Correspondents

Discussion paper for the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)

Context and purpose

The background for this paper is the annual meeting of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks held at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg on September 4, 2018. Whereas the latest annual meetings have gathered representatives of some 20, maximum 25 countries, the 2018 meeting was attended by representatives of 37 countries as well as of the European Commission, the European Training Foundation, EURASHE, ESU, the IAU, and the Bologna Secretariat.

In their final comments, participants underlined the need for the network to continue as a forum of exchange of experience and discussion on developments with regard to qualifications frameworks. The purpose of this brief note is to raise the position of the network within the 2018 - 20 work program of the EHEA.

The Network of QF correspondents

The origin of the Network lies in the need to exchange 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) as well as to ensure 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 role of the Council of Europe as coordinator of the Network stems from its role in helping developing and coordinating the QF-EHEA, including as Chair of EHEA working groups on QFs in 2007 - 09 and 2009 - 12 and co-chair of the Structural Reforms WG in 2012 - 15.

The Council of Europe is a member of the EQF Advisory Group to help ensure coherence between the two overarching frameworks and, among other things, played an important role - with the European Commission and CEDEFOP in ensuring coherence between the criteria and procedures for referencing national frameworks against the EQF and self-certifying national HE frameworks against the QF-EHEA.

The Network was explicitly included in the EHEA work programs until 2015. For the 2015 - 18 work program it was decided to reduce the number of groups and networks, and there was a tacit understanding at the BFUG meeting in Luxembourg in September 2015 that the Council of Europe would continue to coordinate the Network even if it was not explicitly included in the work program.

The 2018 Network meeting

The main topics at this year's meeting were the full integration of short cycle qualifications, mainly found in professional higher education, into the QF-EHEA in follow up to the [Paris Communiqué](#) adopted by Ministers in May 2018 as well as how competences for democratic culture can best be integrated into national qualifications frameworks. During the evaluation of the meeting, participants underlined several elements:

- The Paris Communiqué, especially regarding the full inclusion of short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA, was a central element for many delegations in deciding to participate in the meeting. These delegations feel it is important to have a space for the exchange of practice in the implementation of NQFs, including the question of inclusion of the short cycle.
- The question of updating the QF-EHEA is on the table: what are the modalities of the exercise? What is the role of self-certification reports in case of updating NQFs? This question

is linked to the EQF practice in which the updated referencing reports are presented and discussed by the EQF Advisory Group.

- For the future, several topics could be of common interest:
 - How to include, or not, international qualifications in the HEI NQF?
 - How to deal with “old qualifications” which were “pre-Bologna”, and therefore not expressed in Learning Outcomes terms?
 - The integration and the link between the different tools (QF, QA, recognition ...) is and remains a challenge.

Action

It is proposed that the Network be included in the 2018 - 20 EHEA work program. The Council of Europe is prepared to continue to coordinate the network and to organize an annual meeting. As a member of the Peer Learning Group on Qualifications frameworks - subject to the BFUG's decision, the Council of Europe is also prepared to keep the Peer Learning Group informed of the work of the Network and to bring issues considered in the Peer Learning Group to the attention of the Network, as appropriate.