Strasbourg, Brussels, Vatican City, Warsaw, December 8, 2014

STRUCTURAL REFORMS WORKING GROUP

REPORT BY THE STRUCTURAL REFORMS WORKING GROUP TO THE BFUG

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and vision

Structural reforms have been at the core of the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) from the very beginning. The EHEA aims to allow students, staff, and graduates to move as freely as possible between all the countries and education systems making up the EHEA and to do so while preserving the full value of their qualifications for access to further studies, to the European labor market and, more broadly, in the context of lifelong learning. The EHEA aims to facilitate cooperation between systems, institutions, and individual staff and students throughout the EHEA and to make European higher education known and appreciated throughout the world. The EHEA is a European framework and not only the sum of individual higher education systems. The EHEA builds on what we have in common as Europeans while also allowing individual systems and institutions to draw on their particular strengths and traditions. The EHEA, therefore, provides for variation within an overall framework that ensures coherence. It is a framework for the development of common policies as well as for mutual learning.

An important reason why the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) decided to establish a single Structural Reforms Working Group (SRWG) was a desire to see structural reforms as a coherent whole as well as a concern that structural reforms had so far been developed piecemeal and possibly even at cross purposes.

The SRWG shares this view of structural reforms, which leads it to propose that the EHEA should, among other things, be an area of transparency in which recognition is easy and often automatic[1]. It is our vision that the EHEA increase the capacity of national higher education systems[2] and their higher education institutions to provide their graduates with the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to face our global challenges. Only by implementing coherent structural reforms properly will the advantages of the EHEA be realized. A minimum degree of convergence is needed in order to maintain the diversity of institutions and programs.

The core is the quality and the relevance of the learning experience of the student. The ultimate aim is to equip graduates with the knowledge and understanding and the essential skills and competences for personal, societal, and professional success in today's world. Therefore the curriculum and learning outcomes are at the center of structural reforms.

While developing, describing, using and assessing learning outcomes are objectively a difficult exercise, meeting this challenge is of fundamental importance to the further development of the EHEA. For learning outcomes to become a key feature of the EHEA, as is clearly the intention,

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[1] Cf. the Bucharest Communiqué (2012): "We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA".

[2] In the context of the EHEA any reference to national higher education systems encompasses sub-national systems in federal states in case the competences and responsibilities for higher education have been devolved to the regional entities concerned.

higher education policy makers and practitioners will have reliable and readily accessible information on:

➢ the quality of a given program and its associated qualification at least in terms of whether it meets quality standards;

➢ the level of the qualification, as defined in the national QF and in relation to the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF;

➢ the workload of the qualification, expressed in ECTS units (or, theoretically, ECTS compatible units, but ECTS is *de facto* the European credit unit for describing workload);

➢ the profile of the qualification.

Higher education should serve its full range of purposes, described in the London Communiqué as preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation[3]. While structural reforms have taken on great importance in the development of the EHEA, and while there has been an implicit understanding that structural reforms are necessary to make European higher education better, more attractive and more "fit for purpose", there has been little explicit discussion of what purposes higher education reforms should seek to further or of the full implication and significance of the EHEA. Education structures have no independent merit and are useful to the extent they support the purposes for which they have been developed. The structural reforms of the EHEA, therefore, should be developed with a view to serving all purposes of higher education.

The ToRs of the SRWG nevertheless include a specific reference to one such purpose: developing the employability of higher education graduates. A distinction needs to be made between employment and employability. Employment means exercising a remunerated professional activity. Employability means having the potential to be employed, which includes the potential for self-employment. Higher education cannot guarantee employment but it can significantly improve an individual's employability. Employability comprises subject-specific, methodological, social and individual competences which enable a graduate to successfully take up and pursue a profession or an employment and empower him or her to life-long learning. It implies providing graduates with the competences needed to get a meaningful employment as well as to develop further professionally in the course of their career. Employability is a process of learning and not a final product to be delivered by education institutions. Improving employability is an important aspect of the social dimension of higher education. While higher education should – and does – improve the social capital and employment possibilities for all graduates, this is particularly important from those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have little or no social capital from other sources.

Implementation of structural reforms

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[3] London Communiqué (2007), paragraph 1.4.

Structural reforms have been the hallmark of the EHEA and have gained considerable visibility. Even if structural reforms have been unevenly developed among policy areas and countries, the "Bologna structural reforms" have overall been a success. The success is clear in terms of establishing and amending structures such as quality assurance arrangements and guidelines, qualifications frameworks, and ratifications of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It is less clear in terms of implementing structures, and the EHEA will not be brought about unless its structural reforms are implemented in practice.

Implementation of structural reforms requires cooperation and coordination between the European level, the competent national public authorities and higher education institutions, staff, and students. It requires that members of the EHEA be open about successful as well as less successful experiences within their own systems as well as about the reasons for success or failures. If structural reforms are not implemented coherently throughout the EHEA, what looks like common structures on paper could very well end up being too diverse for the EHEA to be a living reality.

The implementation of structural reforms, including degree structures, is therefore one of the main challenges the EHEA will face in the coming years. Rising to the challenge requires cooperation across the EHEA and it requires that the competent authorities as well as institutions and the academic community in countries that experience difficulties in implementing particular reforms request assistance from other EHEA members so that they can draw on other experiences within the EHEA to ensure implementation. The BFUG co-chairs and the Bologna Secretariat should also work with the competent authorities of EHEA members on the basis of the 2015 EHEA Implementation with offers of a policy dialogue. Such a policy dialogue will contribute to a better understanding of the policy context and of the factors that determine the national adaptation to the Bologna principles.

Composition, structure, and terms of reference

As noted, the main reason why the BFUG decided to appoint only four working groups in the 2012 – 15 program, and to give each one a broad mandate, was a desire to provide a more coherent context and framework for the further development of the EHEA. This was not least the case for structural reforms and it gave rise to a broad mandate and a broad membership of the group, with four co-chairs (Council of Europe (coordinator), Belgium (Flemish Community), Holy See and Poland), and a membership of some 40 EHEA members and consultative members. The report as submitted should therefore reflect the concerns of a majority of EHEA members.

Four sub-structures have worked under the authority of the SRWG as a part of its broad mandate:
➢ The *ad hoc* working group on third cycle qualifications
➢ The *ad hoc* working group on revising the ECTS users' Guide
➢ The network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks
➢ The network on the recognition of prior learning.

With the exception of the network on prior learning, all have contributed to the present report. The report by the *ad hoc* working group on third cycle qualifications is particularly substantial and the SRWG recommends that it be given separate consideration by the BFUG, as will also be the case with the revised ECTS Users' Guide. On the other hand, the network on the recognition of prior learning has, in spite of repeated requests, provided no substantial input to the report and little information on its activities, and the SRWG recommends that the BFUG consider how the recognition of prior learning could best be dealt with in the 2015 – 18 BFUG work program. Although the network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks should play an important role in the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks , the SRWG points to the consistent non-participation of almost one half of EHEA members as a persistent problem that needs to be solved.

About this report

True to its mandate, the SRWG in this report emphasizes the overarching issues of structural reforms, which are detailed in part III of this report, preceded by an outline of the background and mandate of the SRWG (part I) and a consideration of the political and policy context of structural reforms (part II). The overarching issues discussed in this report are, in addition to making the case for the need to develop a coherent approach to structural reforms and developing a European infrastructure for transparency and recognition (introduction to part III):

- ➢ Learning outcomes (III.1)
- ➢ Employability (III.2)
- ➢ The use of qualifications frameworks to improve fair recognition (III.3)
- ➢ Diversity and transparency (III.4)
- ➢ The global dimension of structural reforms (III.5)

In addition to considering the coherence of structural reforms, the SRWG has in its terms of reference been asked to consider specific policy areas, which it does in part IV of the report:

Quality assurance

- ➢ Common principles of quality assurance to be applied across higher education and vocational education and training (IV.1.1)
- ➢ EQAR-registered agencies operating in countries other than their countries of origin (IV.1.2)

Qualifications frameworks

- ➢ The place of short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA (IV.2.1)
- ➢ Referencing of access qualifications (IV.2.2)
- ➢ Third cycle qualifications (IV.2.3)
- ➢ Implementation of qualifications frameworks (IV.2.4)

Recognition

➢ Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR manual to advance recognition practices (IV.3.1)

➢ Recognition of prior learning (IV.3.2)

Transparency

➢ Diploma Supplement (IV.4.1)

➢ Review of the ECTS Users' Guide (IV.4.2)

Recommendations

The SRWG puts forward a considerable number of recommendations in the different parts of the report. For easy reference, an overview all recommendations is provided immediately after the Executive summary.

The SRWG suggest that in Yerevan the Ministers:

➢ commit to communicating the vision and mission of the EHEA, with reference to the full range of purposes of higher education, and to taking account of the linkage between the different areas of structural reforms as well as the link between these and other policy objectives, such as internationalization and the social dimension, in their policies and communication.

➢ commit to drawing on the experience of other EHEA partners in implementing structural reforms, e.g. through peer learning activities or targeted advice, also with a view to build the capacity to implement EHEA reforms at grass roots level, and ask the BFUG co-chairs and the Bologna Secretariat to work with the competent authorities of EHEA members on the basis of the 2015 EHEA Implementation with offers of a policy dialogue and to report on this exercise in time for the 2018 ministerial conference. Such a policy dialogue will contribute to a better understanding of the policy context and of the factors that determine the national adaptation to the Bologna principles.

➢ make efforts, together with institutions, to build capacity to implement a learning outcomes and student centered learning approach at grass roots level, i.e. at department and faculty level within institutions, e.g. through professional training in the development and assessment of learning outcomes. This should be included in the pedagogical training for new higher education teaching staff and also offered to all staff currently employed.

➢ ensure, together with institutions, reliable and meaningful information on graduates' career patterns in order to improve institutional self-knowledge and to obtain reliable and comparable data on graduates' progression to the labor market which should be provided to potential students, their parents and society at large. Commit to developing a coherent EHEA approach to tracking graduates which would enhance reliability and comparability of data across Europe.

➢ decide to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) based on the Dublin descriptor for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG.

➢ adopt the revised ECTS Users' Guide and make it an official EHEA document;

➢ fulfil their previous commitment to issue the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language in time for this commitment to be verified in the 2018 Implementation report.

➢ ask that the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO review the Diploma Supplement, in cooperation with stakeholders and taking account of developments in other regions of the world, with a view to ensuring it reflects recent developments in higher education, including the development of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks, is relevant and up to date for the purposes of mobility and the recognition of qualifications as well as promoting employability and that it takes into account the possibilities for providing up to date information offered by modern information technology, including the digitalization of the Diploma Supplement itself;

➢ agree that, as one of the key purposes of higher education, employability should be addressed by external and internal quality assurance.

➢ commit to ensuring that their competence requirements ensure fair access to public employment for holders of first degrees and encourage employers to make appropriate use of higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle.

➢ encourage institutions to make full use of the opportunities offered by the establishment of the EHEA for continuously improving the quality and the relevance of the curricula in order to equip graduates with 21st century skills;

➢ commit to engaging in further developing activities for all dimensions of institutional and programmatic quality and diversity contributing to an increased evidence-based transparency;

➢ commit to reviewing their national legislation with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, report to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016, and ask the Convention Committee in cooperation with the ENIC and NARIC Networks to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017, taking due account of the monitoring of the Convention carried out by the Convention Committee;

➢ commit to reviewing current legislation with a view to removing any obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning;

➢ encourage higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning;

➢ commit to reviewing their national qualifications frameworks with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;

➢ ask the *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* to consider whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed on the recognition of prior learning and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by 2018;

➢ take note of the report by the Structural Reforms Working group and ask the BFUG to take account of its recommendations in developing its 2015 – 18 work program.

AN OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

For easy reference, all recommendations made in this report are reproduced with a reference to the part of the report in which they are made.

I.2 Structure and emphasis

➢ Countries are encouraged to draw on the experience of other EHEA partners in implementing structural reforms, e.g. through peer learning activities or targeted advice, also with a view to build the capacity to implement EHEA reforms at grass roots level. The BFUG co-chairs and the Bologna Secretariat are asked to contact the competent authorities of EHEA members by the end of 2015 with offers of a policy dialogue and to report back on this exercise in time for the 2018 ministerial conference. Such a policy dialogue will contribute to a better understanding of the policy context and of the factors that determine the national adaptation to the Bologna principles.

III. Overarching issues – developing a coherent approach to structural reforms

➢ Public authorities should communicate the vision and mission of the EHEA;

➢ In their policies and communication, public authorities should take account of the linkage between the different areas of structural reforms as well as the link between these and other policy objectives, such as employability, internationalization and the social dimension.

➢ EHEA members should communicate clearly how the different tools and instruments that constitute the EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition interrelate and work together.

➢ EHEA members should encourage communication and cooperation between different actors/organizations that bear main responsibility for the different tools/instruments.

➢ Template leaflets/presentations should be developed explaining the EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition and how its components work hand-in-hand, not only at European level but also how it should be at national level

III.1 Learning outcomes

➢ EHEA members should increase their effort to build capacity at grass roots level, i.e. at department and faculty level within institutions, e.g. through professional training in the development and assessment of learning outcomes. This could be an integral part of pedagogical training for new higher education teaching staff and as such could be mandatory for all new staff and also offered to all staff currently employed.

➢ Training efforts at European level should focus on training the trainers, *inter alia* with a view to ensuring coherence in national training and implementation.

➢ The BFUG should undertake, within its 2015 – 18 program, work on the further development of assessment of learning outcomes in relation to new forms of learning and provision, including on line, through the ENIC and NARIC Networks and/or any other appropriate bodies and funding schemes.

➢ Public authorities should commit to making full use of the opportunities offered by the establishment of the EHEA for continuously improving the quality and the relevance of the curricula in order to equip graduates with 21st century skills;

III.2 Employability

In order to enhance the employability of higher education graduates

a) *Public authorities and higher education institutions* should develop and implement qualifications frameworks and study programs that:

➢ with due regard to institutional autonomy, embed employability as an integral part of higher education programs and curricula;

➢ within an environment of student centered learning provide students with knowledge and understanding of the theories and methods of their chosen academic discipline and enable them to apply their knowledge on the job in order to assess and solve problems as well as to develop new knowledge, skills and competences.

➢ enable students to acquire relevant soft skills.

➢ regardless of their level or cycle, as a general rule comprise practical components such as practice-related/-based teaching and learning, internships or practice periods, practice-oriented papers or theses, and entrepreneurship education.

➢ are supported by tracking the career patterns of graduates of all levels and cycles.

➢ are supported by career guidance as well as reliable information on career prospects, including regulated professions, and situation of graduates on the labor market.

➢ enhance an outcomes orientation and turn students into critical lifelong learners.

➢ describe students' competences in transparent ways, by using transparency tools like the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS.

➢ Draw on employers as a source of information about new career developments and future skills.

b) Public authorities should:

➢ commit to developing a coherent EHEA approach for tracking graduates;

➢ ensure that their competence requirements ensure fair access to employment in the public sector for holders of first degrees.

➢ provide incentives for institutions to promote lifelong learning.

c) *Quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions* should   address the employability of graduates in the framework of internal and external quality assurance.

d) Higher education institutions should:

➢ monitor and periodically review their programs to ensure that they respond to the needs of students, employers and society.
➢ continue to develop cooperation with employers and ensure that the views of students are included in this cooperation.
➢ fully integrate lifelong learning into institutional strategies.

➢ actively engage employers in their activities, as appropriate and in line with the profile and mission of institutions and programs, in research, teaching and work placement, as well as in the design of programs.

e) *Higher education institutions, employers' organizations, student organizations, employees' organizations, alumni associations and public authorities* should work together, as appropriate, to increase awareness among employers of the broad range of competences held by higher education graduates.

f) *Employers* should:

➢ make appropriate use of higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle.
➢ develop sustainable relationships with higher education institutions, for mutual benefit, including through work placements.
➢ contribute to the design of programs, teaching, research, and quality assurance processes.

III.3   The use of qualifications frameworks to improve fair recognition

Public authorities should:

➢ make full use of qualifications frameworks to further fair recognition, in particular by acknowledging that national qualifications frameworks that have been self-certified against the QF-EHEA and/or referenced against the EQF provide the required information on the quality, level and workload of any given qualification in the relevant framework.
➢ ensure good cooperation among the competent authorities for recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance and, where needed, review the structure and organization of these bodies at national level.
➢ better incorporate ENICs and NARICs into the national higher education policy environment.
➢ ensure that qualifications in the NQFs are self-certified and referenced to the overarching frameworks in transparent ways and not use the QF-EHEA and EQF to inflate the level or value of qualifications in their national systems.

➢ ensure that self-certification and referencing reports be made easily available and that they be updated when (higher) education systems and frameworks undergo reforms.

➢ provide clear information, for recognition purposes, on all qualifications belonging to the system for which they are responsible.

➢ In the process of NQF implementation, attention should be paid to proper definition, implementation and assessment of intended outcomes for all cycles, including the third cycle.

➢ clarify the status of doctoral and post-doctoral qualifications used in most countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Ukraine (e.g. the *kandidat nauk/dr nauk* system) in relation to the QF-EHEA and the EQF. In case specific NQFs choose to include post-doctoral qualifications at a higher level than the third cycle, this should not limit the access and employability of foreign academic staff from countries without such qualifications, as these are not offered in most systems of the EHEA.

➢ promote the use by employers of qualifications frameworks for the recognition of qualifications for employment purposes.

Higher education institutions should make good use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of qualifications.

III.4 Diversity and transparency: improve transparency instruments for describing individual qualifications as well as higher education systems

Public authorities should ensure that information on their higher education systems and qualification frameworks, and on study programs and qualifications belonging to their national systems, be transparent, understandable, reliable, and accurate.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should:

➢ ensure that reliable and meaningful information is available for prospective students and their parents, employers and others who may want or need reliable information on higher education institutions and programs, including on the value, rights, and possibilities associated with their qualifications, e.g. through its ENIC/NARIC center;

➢ ensure reliable and meaningful information on graduates' career patterns in order to improve institutional self-knowledge and to obtain data on graduates' progression to the labor market which should be provided to potential students, their parents and society at large.

➢ commit to engaging in further developing activities for all dimensions of institutional and program quality and diversity contributing to an increased evidence-based transparency;

➢ have published arrangements for addressing academic fraud;

➢ provide information on student support arrangements;

➢ have published procedures for dealing with student complaints.

The BFUG should:

➢ work on developing a coherent EHEA approach to tracking graduates which would enhance reliability and comparability of data across Europe.
➢ continue to promote the transparency of higher education systems, institutions , and programs and monitor transparency tools developed by different actors, also outside of the framework of the EHEA.

III.5   Global dimension of structural reforms

The EHEA should include structural reforms in its cooperation with other parts of the world. To this end:

➢   *The BFUG* should initiate work with one or more regions on structural reforms and present the results to the 2018 ministerial meeting.

➢   The dialogue(s) could use a variety of working methods (conferences, seminars, working groups, studies, pilot projects, peer learning activities, others) and the BFUG and/or any substructure dealing with structural reforms should be kept duly informed of, and as appropriate be involved in, the conversation(s).

➢   The dialogue(s) should take an EHEA perspective rather than the perspective of one or more specific EHEA members and should, as far as possible, cover all areas of structural reform.

➢   *EHEA members involved in dialogue on higher education with other regions, such as the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) cooperation,* should explore how structural reform could best be included in this cooperation.

➢   *UNESCO* should relaunch its participation in the EHEA by active participation in the BFUG and its working structures.

➢   *Stakeholder organizations should be invited to participate in activities organized in the framework of EHEA cooperation with other regions of the world.*

IV.1.1 Common principles of quality assurance to be applied across HE and VET

The frameworks for quality assurance in higher education and in vocational education and training need to be compatible, with due regard to the specificities of each sector, and this basic principle should guide all further work on both frameworks.

Taking due account of the revised ESG as well as of EU recommendations, *ENQA, in cooperation with the other stakeholder organizations having developed the ESG, and EQAVET*

are encouraged to review the common principles of quality assurance in higher education in vocational education and training. ENQA is requested to ensure that the BFUG and/or any substructure dealing with structural reforms are duly informed of this work and to report back in due time before the 2018 Ministerial conference.

IV.1.2 EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies operating in countries other than their countries of origin

➢   *EHEA members* should undertake further action, within their respective education systems, to implement the commitments made in the Bucharest Communiqué, in particular:

➢   Provide clear and transparent information (in English) on the requirements under which EQAR-registered agencies may operate, the criteria to be used and the responsibilities vis-à-vis national bodies.

➢   Irrespective of the arrangements for the decision-making on QA outcomes and in line with their national requirements, EHEA members should allow all EQAR registered agencies to operate without undergoing additional scrutiny or having to obtain a license beforehand.

➢   QA agencies that seek to offer accreditation, evaluation or audit to higher education institutions in different countries should establish clear and transparent processes and criteria for their cross-border work.

IV.2.1 The place of short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA

At their 2015 meeting, Ministers should decide to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) based on the Dublin descriptor[4] for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG in order to give explicit recognition to the fact that many national frameworks now include short cycle qualifications but without an obligation on countries to include such qualifications in their NQF.

IV.2.2 Referencing of access qualifications

In view of the ongoing discussions at national level in some EHEA members, the SRWG has chosen to reserve judgment but recommends that the issue be on the structural reforms agenda of the EHEA also beyond 2015.

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http://paginas.fe.up.pt/~sfeyo/Docs_SFA_Bologna/120_Ref%20Doc_20041018%20%5BJQIG%20Dublin%20Descriptors%5D.pdf.

IV.2.3 Third cycle qualifications

Higher education institutions are encouraged to:

➢ design and conduct third cycle programs and provision which ensure that they develop competences that qualify third cycle graduates for a broad range of employment, within as well as outside of academia and research more broadly;

➢ describe both subject specific and generic competences doctoral candidates are expected to acquire through third cycle programs and provision clearly and understandably and in such a way that the competences specific to third cycle qualifications are clearly demonstrated in the research[5]. Third cycle programs and provision should, as appropriate, include the development of entrepreneurial competences and provide good career guidance.

Employers, both public and private, should consider the competences and skills acquired as well as the time spent to achieve them as doctoral candidates and/or postdoctoral fellows as a part of applicants' professional experience and could also take this period of time into account for the purpose of calculating seniority, in particular as concerns pension and social security arrangements.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should:

➢ provide doctoral candidates with the possibility to include a stay abroad and/or a traineeship, work placement or similar experience by adapting them to the research-based approach of their studies, *inter alia* by providing adequate mobility opportunities for doctoral candidates;

➢ provide doctoral candidates and those considering applying for third cycle programs with information about opportunities to cover the costs of their education and training (scholarships, loans, charity funds etc.), in cases where doctoral candidates are not employed as early stage researchers;

➢ provide transparent and understandable information on the competences and skills achieved by doctoral graduates to a wide academic and non-academic audience;

➢ public authorities should provide incentives to higher education institutions to establish organizational frameworks (e.g. doctoral schools) aiming at upgrading the generic/transferable skills of doctoral candidates, stimulating interdisciplinarity, enhancing international cooperation and cooperation with businesses and non-profit and public organizations.

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[5] Research is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge and understanding. It includes the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts and design where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.

IV.2.4 Implementation of qualifications frameworks

➢ Public authorities should ensure and lead the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes in a way that fully values and draws on the contribution of higher education institutions and other stakeholders and that furthers and promotes a learning outcomes approach.

➢ Public authorities should promote and raise awareness of their respective national qualifications frameworks. They should ensure publication of their self-certification reports and provide the BFUG Secretariat with the official information needed to publish the self-certification through the EHEA web site.

➢ Student participation in the development, revision, and implementation of qualifications frameworks is important to furthering student centered learning.

➢ Cooperation with ENICs and NARICs in the development and implementation of QFs is essential to fostering fair and transparent recognition of qualifications.

➢ To further the comparability and compatibility of self-certified national higher education frameworks, pan-European peer learning activities, exchange of experience and advice, and comparative studies should be promoted.

➢ Cooperation between the competent authorities for quality assurance, qualification frameworks and recognition should be reinforced in order to ensure that qualifications frameworks are used as a tool for modernization of higher education systems.

➢ All EHEA members should reinforce the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks by appointing their national correspondent for qualifications frameworks and ensuring active participation in the network of national correspondents.

➢ The Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks should provide guidance, based on good practice from member states, on the inclusion of short cycle qualifications in national qualifications frameworks for countries that wish to do so.

IV.3.1 Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR-manual to advance recognition practices

➢ At their 2015 meeting, *Ministers* should commit to reviewing their national legislation with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, taking due account of the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention by the Convention Committee, and report to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016. The Convention Committee could, in cooperation with ENIC and NARIC Networks be asked to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017.

> *Higher education institutions* should make adequate use of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual in their own work on recognition. They should review their own institutional procedures with a view to affording applicants adequate opportunities to appeal against recognition decisions made by the institution and include the principle of fair recognition in their codes of ethical behavior.

IV.3.2 Recognition of prior learning

Public authorities should

> Review current legislation with a view to removing any remaining obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning;
> Review their national qualifications frameworks with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;
> Encourage higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning.

Higher education institutions should:

> Develop a coordinated approach to the recognition of prior learning, if and where such an approach has not yet been adopted;

> Further commit to the recognition of prior learning by developing institutional policies and guidelines;

> Develop and design flexible curricula that provide and take account of opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and that allow flexible learning paths with flexible modes of entry, progression and delivery;

> Ensure that possibilities for the recognition of prior learning are included in the development and design of curricula, study programs, and flexible learning paths.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should systematically collect data on the practice of RPL by higher education institutions to improve the visibility of these processes and to inform further policy development at national and European levels.

Employers and higher education institutions, with the support of public authorities as appropriate, should develop policies and practice for work based learning that provide sufficient grounds, *inter alia* through the clear definition and attestation of learning outcomes, for the recognition of work based learning not a part of formal education for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and awarding qualifications.

The *ENIC and NARIC Networks and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should develop proposals for coherent policy and practice for the recognition of prior learning

throughout the EHEA, taking due account of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012[6]. The *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should consider whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by the Committee by 2019.

When developing its work program for the 2015 – 18 period, the *BFUG should* assess what the appropriate instruments for furthering the recognition of prior learning within the EHEA would be.

IV.4.1 Diploma Supplement

At their 2015 meeting, Ministers should commit to fulfilling their previous commitment to issue the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language in time for this commitment to be verified in the 2018 Implementation report.

The Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO should:

➢ review the Diploma Supplement with a view to ensuring it reflects recent developments in higher education, including the development of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks, is relevant and up to date for the purposes of mobility and the recognition of qualifications as well as promoting employability and that it takes into account the possibilities for providing up to date information offered by modern information technology, including the digitalization of the Diploma Supplement itself;

➢ ensure the adoption of any revised version of the Diploma Supplement, in identical versions, within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as that of the European Union (Europass) and taking account of relevant developments in other parts of the world;

➢ ensure coherence between a review of the Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a "Doctoral Supplement" within the European Research Area.

Higher education institutions should provide students who leave the institution without completing their degree with a certified statement of the learning outcomes achieved.

IV.4.2 Review of the ECTS Users' Guide

The ministers of the EHEA should adopt the ECTS Users' Guide and make it an official EHEA document.

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[6] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF

I. ABOUT THE REPORT

I. 1 MANDATE AND MEMBERSHIP

The EHEA Working Group on Structural Reforms (Structural Reforms Working Group - SWRG) was appointed by the BFUG at its meeting in Nicosia on August 28 – 29, 2012. The SRWG is one of four working groups appointed for the 2012 – 15 work program. While each working group – perhaps with the exception of the Implementation WG - has had a broader mandate than previous working groups, it is fair to say that the SRWG has had the broadest mandate of all groups.   This is reflected in the four policy areas - quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, the recognition of qualifications, and transparency instruments – included in its mandate as well as in the fact that all except one of the sub-structures appointed for the 2012 – 15 work program came under the responsibility of the SRWG. The substructures

➢ The *ad hoc* working group on third cycle qualifications

➢ The *ad hoc* working group on revising the ECTS users' Guide

➢ The network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks

➢ The network on the recognition of prior learning

have reported to the SRWG and have, with the exception of the network on prior learning, contributed to the present report. The terms of reference of the SRWG and its substructures are reproduced in Appendices 1 – 5.

The main reason why the BFUG decided to appoint only four working groups in the 2012 – 15 program, and to give each one a broad mandate, was a desire to provide a more coherent context and framework for the further development of the EHEA. This was not least the case for structural reforms, which have been one of the hallmarks of the EHEA.

While important reforms have been devised and implemented – at least to a considerable extent - in each of the four policy areas covered by the SRWG there was also a feeling that these reforms had been developed with insufficient attention to the overall effects of structural reforms.

The BFUG therefore decided to appoint a single working group for all areas of structural reforms rather than separate groups for each policy area, as in previous work programs. This is reflected in a very broad and detailed mandate as well as in the overwhelming interest expressed by BFUG members and consultative members in the SRWG.

The SRWG has been co-chaired by Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe – coordinator), Bartłomiej Banaszak (Poland), Fr. Friedrich Bechina, FSO (Holy See) and Noël Vercruysse (Flemish Community of Belgium). The co-chairs have also drafted the report, with contributions by some members of the SRWG for specific points. Three of the four sub-structures – the *ad hoc* working group on the third cycle, the *ad hoc* group on the ECTS Users' Guide, and the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks – have also contributed to the report. Regrettably, no substantial contribution has been received from the Network on the recognition

of prior learning. The BFUG Secretariat, represented by its Head, Gayane Harutyunyan, and by Ani Hakobyan, has provided the secretariat for the Group. Some 40 BFUG members and consultative members have participated in the work of the SRWG and the full list of members is provided in Appendix 6. The extensive membership of the group means that the SRWG has been broadly representative of both the members and the consultative members of the BFUG even if, for some members, the need to cover the cost of their own participation may have been an obstacle. The sub-structures have in part been represented in the SRWG. In addition, the Co-Chairs of the SRWG have met with the co-chairs of the sub-structures on several occasions.

I.2   STRUCTURE AND EMPHASIS

In line with the desire to see the four policy areas covered by the SRWG in context, this report emphasizes overarching issues of structural reforms. It covers all elements specified in its terms of reference (ToR) but not in the order listed in the ToR. Since many of the elements of the ToR are specific to a single policy area, this report also seeks to deal with several elements in context. Readers should therefore not expect to find specific chapters or sub-chapters for each item of the ToR. The report underlines that, even if a broad diversity will continue to exist with regard to qualifications frameworks and quality assurance, structural reforms have to be coherent and they need to be implemented properly and timely. This is why the SRWG puts forward a proposal, in chapter III, for a European infrastructure for transparency and recognition. The SRWG believes the proposals it puts forward to the BFUG – and through the BFUG to the Yerevan ministerial conference – will help further this essential goal and will contribute to a better common understanding of the importance of those structural reforms.

There was some discussion in the SRWG on whether the report should mainly focus on policy recommendations or also include an overview of the implementation of adopted policy measures in EHEA countries. While there is inevitably a measure of both in the report, the emphasis is on policy recommendations. The main reason for this is that the BFUG appointed a separate working group to report on the implementation of the EHEA (hereafter: the Implementation WG). Should the SRWG have made the implementation of structural reforms a mainstay of its report, this would have implied either a repetition of information provided by the Implementation WG or requiring EHEA countries to undertake a supplementary reporting exercise to provide information on structural reforms in addition to the quite extensive information requested by the Implementation WG. Neither option seemed advisable, and this was further underscored by the fact that whereas the SRWG was required to submit its draft report in fall 2014, as were two other working groups, the Implementation WG was given a deadline in early 2015 to ensure that the Implementation report a far as possible be based on updated information. A separate reporting exercise by the SRWG would therefore also have been based on less updated information than that of the Implementation WG and the risk of unintended discrepancies between the two would have been very real.

Ideally, the information provided by the Implementation WG would have provided a basis on which the SRWG could consider measures to improve implementation in areas where implementation is unsatisfactory. However, given the timetable, this was not possible.

However, the SRWG wishes to underline that all available evidence indicates that the implementation of structural reforms is uneven throughout the EHEA and according to policy area. For example, not all countries of the EHEA have yet developed their national qualifications frameworks and self-certified them against the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Not all quality assurance agencies operating in the EHEA do so in full accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is therefore essential that the BFUG co-chairs and the Bologna Secretariat work with the competent authorities of EHEA members on the bass of the 2015 EHEA Implementation report with offers of a policy dialogue and report on this exercise in time for the 2018 ministerial conference. Such a policy dialogue will contribute to a better understanding of the policy context and of the factors that determine the national adaptation to the Bologna principles.

The report, then, aims to develop policy recommendations for how structural reforms should develop as a key part of the EHEA over the next few years, at least until 2020.   The point should perhaps be made that, in the same way that building a European Higher Education Area by 2010 once seemed like a long term, distant goal but shortly thereafter seemed like "only tomorrow", 2020 will by the time Ministers meet in Yerevan at most be a medium term goal. It may be worth recalling that the Yerevan ministerial conference in 2015 will mark the midterm of the second period of the EHEA, as the Bergen ministerial conference in 2005 marked the mid-term of the first period (1999 – 2010). It is recalled that in Bergen, Ministers adopted the QF-EHEA as well as the ESG. As mentioned, the SRWG now puts forward a proposal for a European infrastructure for transparency and recognition.

The report seeks to balance very extensive ToR with the need to focus attention on a limited set of politically pertinent recommendations. It seeks to square this particular circle by highlighting its main political recommendation in the executive summary, which will also give readers a fair idea of the main thrust of the report, and then by supporting the main recommendations by more developed treatment of main issues as well as by putting forward a set of more technical recommendations in the main body of the report, which the SRWG assumes will have a narrower but more specialist readership. The report will not give separate consideration to each and every element of its terms of Reference but will seek to cross reference to the ToR whenever possible and meaningful.

For each of the issues addressed in this report, the SRWG aims to cover:

Concept
What is the concept covered? Is the concept clear or is there a need for the EHEA, at the competent level (Ministers, BFUG, Working Group, as the case may be) to clarify the concept?

Description
A brief description of the issue and how it relates to structural reform, as well as of the level(s) (EHEA, regional, national, institutional) concerned.

Issue
What is the direct issue that needs to be addressed? What is the problem and why is
it a part of the report?

Solution(s)/Recommendation(s)
What does the SRWG recommend in response to the issue? This may not only be an issue
of "what?" but also of "who?", "how?" and "by when?"

Recommendation

➢ Countries are encouraged to draw on the experience of other EHEA partners in
implementing structural reforms, e.g. through peer learning activities or targeted advice,
also with a view to build the capacity to implement EHEA reforms at grass roots level.
The BFUG co-chairs and the Bologna Secretariat are asked to work with the competent
authorities of EHEA members on the basis of the 2015 EHEA Implementation report
with offers of a policy dialogue and to report back on this exercise in time for the 2018
ministerial conference. Such a policy dialogue will contribute to a better understanding of
the policy context and of the factors that determine the national adaptation to the Bologna
principles.

I.3   TARGET GROUPS FOR THIS REPORT

The main target group for this report is higher education policy makers in public authorities,
institutions, and stakeholder organizations. Since structural reforms mainly concern education
systems, most recommendations are directed at the public authorities responsible for those
systems. Nevertheless, as we underline strongly in the report, structures will not work unless
they are implemented and uneven implementation of seemingly coherent structures could even
undo important aspects of the EHEA. Therefore, leaders and policy makers at higher education
institutions and in higher education organizations, including those of students and staff, are also
important target groups for this report. While the SRWG is not in the first place intended for a
broad public, we feel confident that its main recommendations will reach practitioners in various
fields covered by the report, through implementation activities and related initiatives in EHEA
member states.

I.4   RELATIONSHIP TO THE OTHER EHEA WORKING GROUPS AND ACTIVITIES

In keeping with its ToR, the SRWG and its co-chairs have cooperated with the other EHEA
working groups. They have in particular consulted with the co-chairs of the Implementation WG
but have also maintained contacts with the co-chairs of the WGs on internationalization and
mobility and the social dimension and lifelong learning.

At the proposal of the SRWG and the WG on internationalization and mobility, the BFUG appointed an *ad hoc* group[7] to make proposals concerning the quality assurance of joint programs and degrees. The SRWG discussed the proposal by this *ad hoc* group at two of its meetings and, with the WG on Internationalization and Mobility, recommended that the BFUG considers adoption of the proposal. The report by this *ad hoc* group was considered by the BFUG at its meeting on April 9 – 10, 2014 and was finally adopted by the BFUG at its meeting on September 16 – 17, 2014. Two important activities of structural reforms were explicitly *not* included in the ToR of the SRWG. The revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) was conducted by a steering group appointed by the E 4 Group organizations (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) and Business Europe, Education International and EQAR. Members of the SRWG who are also members of the BFUG contributed to the thematic session on the ESG organized at the BFUG meeting in Vilnius in November 2013 and the SRWG held an in-depth discussion of the revised ESG at its meeting in December 2013.

Proposals for the automatic recognition of qualifications have, as stipulated in the Bucharest Communiqué, been developed by a "pathfinder group" appointed and chaired by the European Commission. The SRWG has received oral information on the work of this group.

I.5   STRUCTURAL REFORMS IN THE EHEA: BASIS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Structural reforms have been a – perhaps *the* – main feature of the development of the EHEA and the EHEA has adopted important standards:

➢   For *quality assurance*, the ESG[8] were adopted by Ministers in 2005, used as criteria by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)[9] established in 2008;

➢   For qualifications frameworks, the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)10 was adopted by Ministers in 2005 and Ministers at the same time made a commitment to developing their respective national frameworks and to self-certify them against the QF-EHEA – originally by 2010 and later by 2012. While not formally part of the EHEA, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)11, adopted by the European Union in 2008, is clearly highly relevant and excellent cooperation has been established between the QF-EHEA and the EQF.

➢   For *recognition*, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition

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[7] Mark Fredericks, Achim Hopbach, Andrejs Rauhvargers, Colin Tück.

[8] http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Documents/ESG_3rdedition.pdf

[9] http://www.eqar.eu/index.php?id=32

[10] http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/qualification/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf

[11] http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/QF/EQF_EN.pdf

Convention)[12] was adopted in 1997, came into force in 1999 and is the only legally binding standard of the EHEA;

➢ For *transparency instruments*, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS; a European Commission instrument) and the Diploma Supplement[13] (DS; developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO and a part of both the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Europass) were developed in other contexts but have become an integrated part of the EHEA. The commitment made by Ministers in 2003 to deliver the DS automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken European language sadly remains one of the unfulfilled commitments of the EHEA. The BFUG has been also given a mandate to continue monitoring a number of other transparency tools which have been developed by different actors, also outside the realm of the Bologna Process.

All four policy areas have also been the subject of reports and suggestions presented to Ministerial conferences. For the 2012 ministerial conferences, these were:

➢ On qualifications frameworks, a report by the working group.
➢ On recognition, a report by the working group as well as a report by the network on the recognition of prior learning.
➢ On transparency instruments, a report by the working group.
➢ Quality assurance was not the subject of a specific working group but the report by ENQA and the message by EQAR focused on the topic.

The SRWG is well aware of the fact that higher education worldwide is undergoing many changes and that many of those changes will have a (structural) impact on European higher education systems. On line education provision such as MOOCs may be the most obvious example, even if there are differing opinions on the impact and sustainability of MOOCs. The present report cannot explore the impact of these changes, in part because the SRWG terms of reference are both extensive and specific and in part because many of these developments are still in the making. However, the EHEA needs to follow developments closely also in the 2015 – 18 work period and Ministers or the BFUG may wish to reflect on what the impact of some of the developments may be on the very concept of an education system.

Analysis of and recommendations on structural reforms in higher education are also influenced by and influence developments in the field of research. As will be shown by the sections concerning the third cycle, the attention paid to the most advanced level of educationis steadily increasing. We should improve the structural reforms in the EHEA while taking into account the parallel reinforcement of a European Research Area (ERA). The ERA is formally not a part of the Bologna Process, but is nevertheless of great importance to European higher education, which encompasses research as well as teaching and learning and service to society. For the 28 members of the EHEA that are also members of the European Union, the development of the ERA is particularly important as they are formally a part of the ERA framework. The ERA is, however, of great importance also the EHEA members that are not EU countries.

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[12] http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm (text of the Convention) and http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/reports/Html/165.htm (Explanatory Report)
[13] http://www.enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=ena&d=ds

Finally, it should be noted that the BFUG at its meeting on April 9 – 10, 2014 decided to launch a broad ranging discussion on the future orientation and priorities of the EHEA. The major part of the BFUG meeting on September 18 – 19 was devoted to this discussion, which is essential to drafting the Yerevan Communiqué and which will, hopefully, be decisive for the future development of the EHEA. For obvious reasons of timing, the present report could not incorporate elements of this discussion but the SRWG and individual members of the group have made strong contributions to the debate.

II.   POLITICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

II.1   STRUCTURES FOR WHAT PURPOSES?

Higher education in Europe as well as each higher education systems face the challenges of:

➢ making the most of the skills and abilities of all members of societies throughout their lives as well as of providing all individuals with the opportunity to develop their abilities and aspirations to the full;

➢ sustaining excellent teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and community service and engagement: quality, efficiency, effectiveness and equity;

➢ creating environments in which skills and knowledge are translated into innovative solutions to the complex problems our societies face (e.g. health, poverty, energy, food, migration, cities, sustainable employment, commitment to public space);

➢ building and maintaining trust and confidence: in public authorities, between higher education and members of society, between countries and cultures, and between individuals and societal institutions.

The EHEA was established through implementation of the principles[14] of the Bologna Process. By drawing on their common strengths, values, and their diverse experiences as well as by acknowledging each other's specificities, the EHEA offers a unique opportunity for European countries[15] to develop an attractive higher education that enable all students and citizens to acquire international experience and intercultural knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes through high-quality education. Within this framework a distinction could be made between:

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[14] See e.g. Pavel Zgaga (2012): "Reconsidering the EHEA principles: Is there a "Bologna Philosophy"?", in A. Curaj, P. Scott, L. Vlasceanu & L. Wilson (eds.) *European higher education at the crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and national reforms (pp17-38).* Dordrecht Springer. Pavel Zgaga identifies the following "Bologna principles":
-   Democracy and democratic values,
-   Academic values,
-   International cooperation in education and research and broadening mobility,
-   Higher education is a public good: it requires public responsibility but,
-   Also the responsibility of higher education,
-   The full range of purposes of higher education may not be forgotten,
-   Comparability and compatibility of degrees structures, quality assurance, recognition of degrees,
-   The social dimension,
-   The global dimension,
-   The European dimension,
-   Partnership between all stakeholders.

[15] The terms "country" and national" is understood as referring to education system, without prejudice to the constitutional arrangements of the country in question. Thus, one state may have two education systems, both of which are considered "national" for the purposes of this report.

- subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills;
- generic skills and attitudes: personal skills and attitudes; intercultural understanding, skills and attitudes; linguistic skills and responsible world citizenship.

The EHEA increases the capacity of higher education institutions and national higher education systems provide their graduates with the competences and attitudes needed to face the global challenges.

The EHEA should enable higher education institutions, staff and students to make their full contribution to preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation[16], through:

➢ a reinforcement of European cooperation: joint study programs, joint research projects, joint cross-border community engagement projects, joint exchange projects, international work placements and internships;
➢ mobility of students and staff;
➢ a reinforcement of international cooperation;
➢ easy recognition of qualifications across the EHEA.

Given the globalization of our social, cultural, economic, technological and political environment, the quality and the performance of each higher education system depend not only of its own intrinsic strengths but also on the strengths and vitality of the institutions and higher education systems elsewhere. Our institutions and our systems continue to be enriched by the flow of talents and ideas from abroad.

Structural reforms have been the hallmark of the EHEA and have gained considerable visibility. Even if structural reforms have been unevenly developed among policy areas and countries, the "Bologna structural reforms" have been a relative success. The success is clear in terms of establishing and amending structures such as quality assurance arrangements and guidelines and qualifications frameworks and ratifications of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It is less clear in terms of implementing structures, and the EHEA will not be brought about unless its structural reforms are implemented in practice.

The EHEA has, however, perhaps been less successful in spelling out the rationale for its structural reform and in making clear the values on which they rest and that they seek to further. The SRWG therefore feels it is important to put its report and recommendations within a broader political and policy context.

This report, then, articulates the view that structural reforms are means to achieve political and policy goals even if structural reforms themselves are insufficient to bring about the EHEA. Structures cannot be ends in themselves. The political and policy goals of the EHEA have been spelled out in the Declarations and Communiqués adopted by Ministers from 1999 through 2012.

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[16] London Communiqué, para. 1.4.

The EHEA aims to allow students, staff, and graduates to move as freely as possible between all the countries and education systems making up the EHEA and to do so while maintaining the full value of their qualifications for access to further studies, on the European labor market and, more broadly, in the context of lifelong learning. The EHEA aims to facilitate cooperation between systems, institutions, and individual staff and students throughout the EHEA and to make European higher education known and appreciated throughout the world as a European framework and not only as the sum of individual higher education systems. The EHEA is a framework that underlines what we have in common as Europeans while also providing individual systems and institutions to draw on their particular strengths and traditions. The EHEA, therefore, provides for variation within an overall framework that ensures coherence.

The EHEA is a framework for the development of common policies as well as for mutual learning. Members of the EHEA should be open about successful as well as less successful experiences within their own systems as well as about the reasons for success or failures

The need for a coherent view of structural reform as well as to place structural reforms in a broader policy context was also underlined in the SRWG mandate:

> "The Working Group should consider structural reforms in relation to the major purposes of higher education:
>
> ➢ Preparing for employment;
> ➢ Preparing for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
> ➢ Personal development;
> ➢ The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base;
>
> as well as the three missions:
>
> ➢ teaching and learning;
> ➢ research;
> ➢ service to society.
>
> It should further be guided by the following policy considerations:
>
> ➢ Students, employers and society at large want more objective, reliable and high quality information about higher education;
> ➢ There is an increasing societal expectation of Higher Education Institutions that they enhance the employability of graduates and provide students with skills relevant to the labour market;
> ➢ There is a need to adapt the Bologna goals and instruments for structural reforms to the ever changing context of higher education and of our societies and to the evolving needs within the EHEA;
> ➢ There is a need to build trust and confidence in higher education;

> ➢   The relationship between the structural reforms developed within the EHEA and their impact on other regions needs to be considered;
> ➢   There is a need for a more supportive environment for academic staff and students;
> ➢   Higher Education needs to contribute to Lifelong Learning."

II.2   FUNDING AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The fact that the EHEA is a framework for voluntary cooperation also has financial consequences. The EHEA is organized on the principle that overall policy goals are agreed at European level and implemented within the framework of national higher education systems, in which higher education institutions, organizations, and stakeholders of course play a key role.

There is, therefore, no "Bologna budget" at the level of the EHEA. Even if the European Commission provides substantial funding for EHEA-related projects and activities, the implementation of the structural reforms of the EHEA depends essentially on national funding as well as on the funding of each institution, including through the contributions of countries and organizations to the EHEA work program. Both are vulnerable to the financial crisis that many EHEA countries have been experiencing over the past few years and are in many cases still experiencing.

The SRWG does not believe that establishing a "Bologna budget" would be a realistic option in the current circumstances and any such initiative would at any rate be well beyond the SRWG mandate. The SRWG nevertheless feels compelled to point out that the implementation of structural reform, and hence the development of the EHEA, is constrained by limitations on public finances and that these are unevenly spread across the EHEA.

III. OVERARCHING ISSUES - DEVELOPING A COHERENT APPROACH TO STRUCTURAL REFORMS

An important reason why the SRWG was established was, as mentioned, a desire on the part of the BFUG to see the structural reforms at the heart of the development of the EHEA as a coherent whole as well as a concern that structural reforms had so far been developed piecemeal and possibly even at cross purposes. In the view of the SRWG, the EHEA should, among other things, be an area of transparency in which recognition is easy and often automatic[17]. This is the reason why the SRWG now puts forward a proposal for an EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition. The proposal is developed further in this part of the report.

It is our vision that the EHEA increases the capacity of national higher education systems and their higher education institutions to provide their graduates with the knowledge, understanding, competences, and skills needed to face the global challenges. The chart demonstrates the interconnectedness and the inter-linkages between the various areas of structural reforms. Only by implementing those structural reforms properly will the advantages of the EHEA be realized. A minimum degree of convergence is needed in order to maintain the diversity of institutions and programs.

The core is the quality and the relevance of the learning experience of the student. The ultimate aim is to equip graduates with the knowledge and understanding and the essential skills for personal, societal, and professional success in today's world. Therefore the curriculum is at the center of the implementation of structural reforms.

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[17] Cf. the Bucharest Communiqué (2012): "We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA".

QF
National QF, self-certified against the
QF-EHEA

ensuring that the standards are met in the qualifications awarded

quality of the learning opportunities available to the students enabling them to achieve their qualifications

quality enhancement:: improving th quality of the learning opportunities

HE providers have the responsibility to produce appropriate information

Curriculum; LO aligned to the relevant descriptors in the NQF;

The learning opportunities

Embedding ed for democratic society, ed for employability, ed for sustainability, professional ed in the curriculum

inclusive HE, equality and diversity

inclusive LLL

IQA
EQA, external reviews
in compliance with the ESG, EQAR

RECOGNITION
Recognition of foreign diplomas, degrees and periods of study (certified learning)
Recognition of prior learning including informal and non-formal learning

Transparency,
quality information
program specifications
DS
ECTS
quality review reports
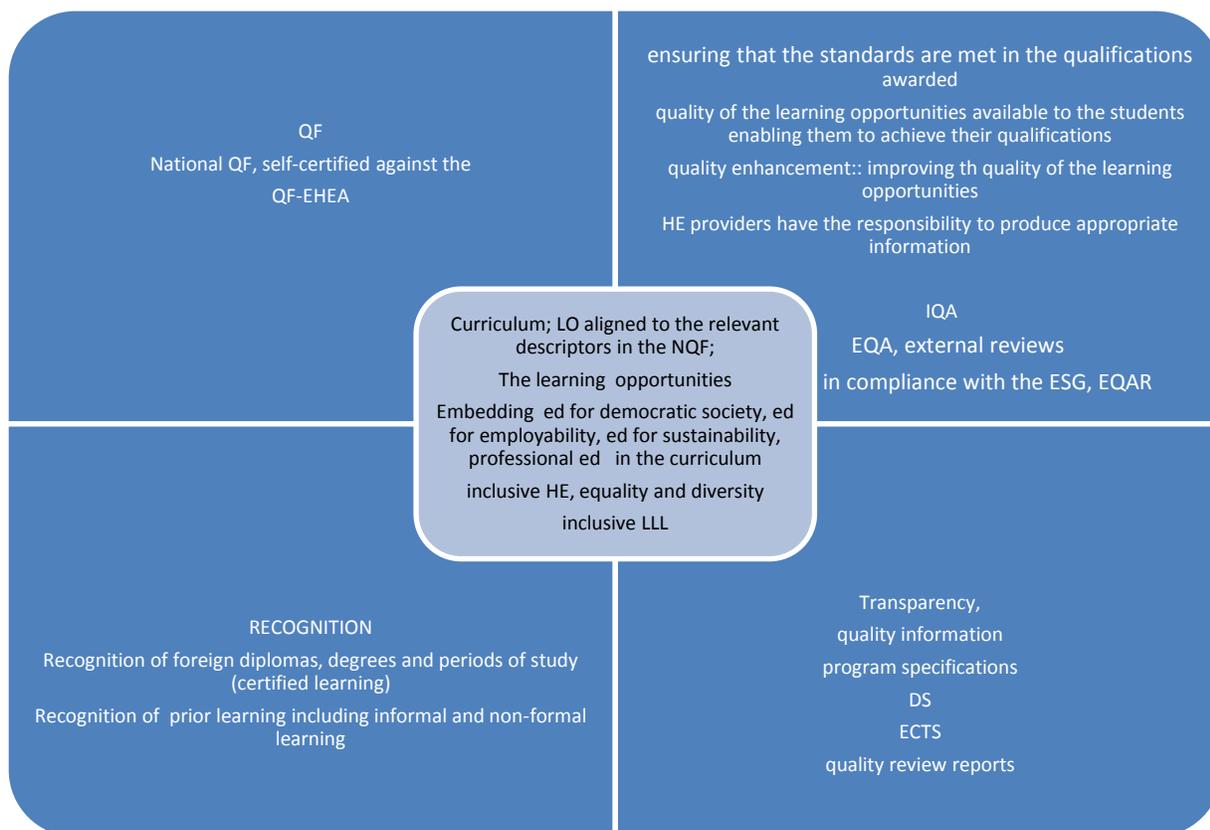
While structural reforms have taken on great importance in the development of the EHEA, and while there has been an implicit understanding that structural reforms are necessary to make European higher education better, more attractive and more "fit for purpose", there has been little explicit discussion of what purposes higher education reforms should seek to further even if some reference to the multiple purposes of higher education can be found in successive communiqués, at least from the 2007 London Communiqué: "Our aim is to ensure that our HEIs have the necessary resources to continue to fulfil their full range of purposes. Those purposes include: preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation." (para. 1.4). Higher education in Europe needs structures that enable it to contribute in the best possible way to all its major purposes.

As pointed out in the terms of reference of the SRWG (ToR no. 6), higher education structures also have an impact on other policy areas. As two obvious examples, education systems may, through their structures and regulations, make it easier for students to move within and between systems and to access various levels of higher education entirely or partly on the basis of non-formal qualifications – or they may impede such movement and access. Juxtaposing information from different parts of the 2012 Implementation report, for example, we see that the countries in

which alternative learning paths are the least developed within the respective national systems are also the countries most likely to experience a sharp drop in the number of people of "classical student age" and whose institutions will hence face the most difficulties in recruiting students from within their own countries in the years to come unless alternative learning paths are developed and recognize that facilitate access to and completion of higher education for people from groups that are today underrepresented in higher education[18]. These include, but are not limited to, mature students; students who need to combine study and work, often also family obligations; students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds; students from certain immigrant groups; students from socio-cultural backgrounds in which education is not valued; and various combinations of these. Likewise, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition and transparency instruments all have the potential of making mobility easier – or more difficult.

One of the key overarching challenges is communication about the mission and vision of higher education within the EHEA as well as about the structures of the EHEA and their role in realizing the vision and mission of higher education as developed within the EHEA. The authorities responsible for coordinating communication must be identified and communication about structural reforms must be coherent. Many instruments of the EHEA presently have a communications function and/or were created for that purpose. Recognition is in part about communicating to respective authorities responsible for the recognition; quality assurance is in part about reassuring certain stakeholders, including the general public, that higher education is of the required quality and that quality is being assured. For qualifications frameworks to be accepted and used, their functions and advantages must be communicated and understood. In order to be coherent, public authorities need an overarching communication strategy as much as technical strategy.

Both coherence and communication would be helped by a common 'academic'/'transparency' infrastructure that would make it clear how the structures of higher education in Europe interact and fit together. Such an infrastructure – which could be labeled an "EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition" – would help policy makers ensure that their own education system is in tune with those of their EHEA partners. It would support institutions in embedding core elements of EHEA in the curricula. It would help students understand how they could move around more freely within the EHEA and have their qualifications recognized without losing the real value of those qualifications when crossing national borders. It would help employers ensure that they recruit people with the requisite qualifications of the requisite quality regardless of where, within the EHEA, those qualifications have been earned. Not least, it would help reassure the general public that higher education in their own countries are equivalent to that of their partner countries and that qualification earned in one country may be used in others. It would help public authorities and institutions manage what may be termed the reputational range of systems, institutions, and programs.

A European infrastructure for transparency and recognition is built on the commitments made by the EHEA Ministers but it is consistent also with developments in other areas of education, *i.a.* the European Commission's intention to develop a European Area of Skills and Qualifications.

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[18] This point was made by David Crosier in his presentation to the annual conference of the European Access Network in Strasbourg on June 3 - 5, 2013.

An EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition would be composed of the following core elements, which make up its underlying academic infrastructure connecting:

1. A common understanding of the purposes of higher education (cf. part II.1).

2. Qualifications

    a. A common European qualifications framework for higher education
    b. The part of national qualifications framework covering higher education self-certified against the QF-EHEA and, as appropriate, also referenced against the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning
    c. Subject specific learning outcomes for qualifications included in the national qualifications framework
    d. The higher education institutions have designed appropriate curricula giving due considerations to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders and embedding employability, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, democratic citizenship
    e. Program specifications (a program is an approved curriculum constructed of individual modules or units and include at least the following items):
- The units or modules
- ECTS: work load expressed in credits
- The modes of delivery: i.a. contact hours, full time/part time education, distance education, blended learning, e-learning, work based learning
- The assessment methods that enable the achievement of the learning outcomes to be demonstrated
- Language(s) of instruction
- Student learning support and facilities
- Equal opportunities for disabled students
- Opportunities for mobility and/or work placements
- The profile of the program: more professionally oriented or more academically oriented
- Information about the employability of the graduates in particular the situation of the graduates on the labor market and their professional career based on a tracking systems of graduates
- Information about the rights associated to the qualification in particular in terms of access to regulated professions
- Opportunities for recognition of prior learning

    f. The Diploma Supplement issued upon graduation

3. Quality assurance

    a. A common European model for quality assurance of higher education: the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
    b. A national system for quality assurance of higher education in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area ensuring that the standards are met in the qualifications awarded.

4.   Recognition

    a. A common European framework for recognition of prior formal and non-formal and informal learning based on the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and compatible with the Recommendation by the Council of the European Union on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 20 December 2014.

    b. A national regulatory framework for recognition of prior formal and non-formal and informal learning ensuring a fair and equal treatment of every application (full implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and in particular easy access to the system, timely decisions, a minimal administrative burden) and ensuring easy acceptance of all qualifications awarded in the EHEA provided that the structural reforms have been implemented properly.

Furthermore we need a common understanding of learning outcomes:

    ➢   Knowledge and understanding
    ➢   Generic competences
    ➢   Subject specific competences
    ➢   Indication of level

The European infrastructure for transparency and recognition as described in the previous paragraphs will enhance our understanding of the diversity of higher education systems, higher education institutions and programs.

The European infrastructure for transparency and recognition is also essential to developing the social dimension of higher education in practice: the social dimension understood as including all provisions needed to have equitable access into, progress in, and completion of higher education.
Goals like the social dimension and employability can only be reached if they are set in the perspective of lifelong learning. The concept of lifelong learning is a broad one where learning takes place through an education that is diverse, flexible and available at different times and places and that is pursued throughout the life course.

All national regulatory frameworks implementing the structural reforms of the EHEA should provide a space for easily developing joint study programs and joint degrees.

Recommendations

    ➢   Public authorities should communicate the vision and mission of the EHEA;
    ➢   In their policies and communication, public authorities should take account of the linkage between the different areas of structural reforms as well as the link between these and other policy objectives, such as employability, internationalization and the social dimension.

> ➢ EHEA members should communicate clearly how the different tools and instruments that constitute the EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition interrelate and work together.
> ➢ EHEA members should encourage communication and cooperation between different actors/organizations that bear main responsibility for the different tools/instruments.
> ➢ Template leaflets/presentations should be developed explaining the EHEA infrastructure for transparency and recognition and how its components work hand-in-hand, not only at European level but also how it should be at national level.

III.1 Learning outcomes (ToR no. 2)

Learning outcomes are commonly understood as describing what learners know, understand and are able to do on the background of a given qualification. The SRWG believes that attitudes – i.e. ethical standards; not only what a learner is able to do but also what (s)he is willing to do – should be a part of our understanding of learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are an important transversal element for the four main policy areas. They represent a shift in focus from procedural considerations to considerations of what learners know, understand and are able to do on the basis of a qualification as well as of the attitudes they have developed in the course of their education[19]. They also support implementation of the student-centered learning approach in teaching and learning processes, in which teachers, students and institutions need to continuously reflect on their teaching, learning and infrastructural systems in order to improve the learning experience of students and ensure that the intended learning outcomes of a given course or educational component are achieved in a way that stimulates critical thinking and transferable skills.

Ideally, learning outcomes should be linked to qualifications frameworks. They should be obtained in programs that have been quality assured, and these programs should in themselves be an important part of the internal quality development in higher education institutions. Learning outcomes that are described and assessed in transparent ways should be a key building block of the EHEA. At the same time, it is clear that – like automatic recognition - this is very much a goal for the future and that much work is still required for learning outcomes to become a key element of policy and practice in all parts of the EHEA.

Learning outcomes are an element of all cycles of education, including doctoral qualifications[20]. Holders of doctoral qualifications possess specific knowledge, understanding, abilities and

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[19] Learning outcomes may also be formulated as goals for what students should know, understand, and be able to do – and of the attitudes they should develop – at the end of a learning module, course or study program, on the model "by the end of this learning module/course/study program, students will…". For the purposes of this report, no distinction will be made between achieved and aspirational learning outcomes.

[20] For the purpose of the report, the terms "doctoral qualifications" and "doctoral candidates" will generally be preferred to "doctoral education" or "doctoral training". The situation of doctoral candidates varies greatly throughout the EHEA, and this extends to their formal status, which in some countries is that of early stage researchers employed by higher education institutions and in others that of doctoral students.

attitudes that were developed and strengthened during the research training, mainly but not only related to the conduct of original research.

While some countries have come far in developing, describing, using and assessing learning outcomes and have made them a feature of all or most higher education programs and degrees, in other countries, the concept of learning outcomes is still insufficiently understood by most members of the higher education community. Although learning outcomes have become key in qualifications frameworks, ECTS, the Tuning project and other contexts, they are not yet at the core of the teaching community, at least not in all parts of the community. Differences are not only between countries: there may also be differences between academic disciplines in the extent to which learning outcomes have been developed and implemented. The issue is particularly difficult because it touches on fundamental aspects of higher education culture and practice and a change of description does not automatically entail change of practice. Progress in implementation is most visible where learning outcomes are used to define a study program, but less when it comes to designing new curricula, using them as principles to decide on appropriate didactics and assessment forms, and maybe the least when applying them in internal and external quality assurance. Nevertheless, proper development and implementation of learning outcomes should entail changes in and rethinking of learning, teaching and assessment methods. The assessment of learning outcomes is gaining in importance, also in relation to new forms of learning and provision, including on line.

Gaining broad acceptance of learning outcomes will require time, which is also to say that the work needs to start immediately where it has not already been launched. It may be advisable to start from quite generic learning outcomes in the European and national qualifications frameworks and then develop more specific learning outcomes for study fields/academic disciplines, study programs, and course units. The involvement of the external stakeholders, which is clearly a mark of the social and societal relevance of learning outcomes, is needed throughout and may be easier when it comes to the more concrete learning outcomes at program and course unit.

The relation of learning outcomes and quality assurance is complex, which is shown by the fact that there are various interpretations of what quality assurance can assess, to what extent quality assurance can assess the intended learning outcomes, the way the learning outcomes are achieved and whether they are actually achieved by the graduates. In this discussion it should be kept in mind that trust in systems and among the different parties and stakeholders is an equally valuable tool that has proven its merits in the past, for the ESG.

If, as is clearly the intention, learning outcomes become a key feature of the EHEA as an important component of higher education programs and qualifications that are a part of national qualifications frameworks and that have been quality assured in accordance with the ESG, and that are also described through transparency instruments such as the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS, higher education policy makers and practitioners will have reliable and readily accessible information on:

➢ the quality of a given program and its associated qualification at least in terms of whether it meets quality standards;

➢ the level of the qualification, as defined in the national QF and in relation to the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF;

➢ the workload of the qualification, expressed in ECTS units (or, theoretically, ECTS compatible units, but ECTS is *de facto* the European credit unit for describing workload).

In addition, learning outcomes should provide information on the profile of the qualification.

There are different approaches to describing the learning outcomes of a study program. The full potential of the learning outcomes approach in European higher education can only be realized if there is at least a common understanding of learning outcomes and an agreement on the core elements for describing them.

While developing, describing, using and assessing learning outcomes is objectively a difficult exercise, meeting this challenge is of fundamental importance to the further development of the EHEA. There is good reason to expect that within a few years, all members of the EHEA will have structures that, if judged on the sole basis of their formal design, will be compatible. Structures are, however, useful only if they are put into practice and this is where the real challenge lies. There is, thus, also good reason to fear that unless a common understanding of learning outcomes is developed, what will look like compatible structures will evolve into incompatible realities through uneven practice and diverse understandings of basic concepts.

It may be a stimulus for institutions to know that programs that have been developed on the basis of learning outcomes that are both generic and discipline or subject specific enable them to develop a clear profile toward both students and external stakeholders (e.g. employers), who can only benefit from such visibility.

A major challenge to the EHEA is that, while structures may be developed by working groups and adopted by public authorities, practice is developed and implemented by higher education institutions and individual members of the academic community. Individual institutions will need to take the main responsibility for the development of learning outcomes within their own institution and for the training of their own staff and students. Nevertheless, establishing appropriate ways of exchanging experience across institutional boundaries and national borders is essential. Current training practice, organized by, among others the European Commission, the EUA, and EURASHE as well as national actors, will need to be expanded and the European dimension of such training will need to be ensured also where the training is national.

Recommendations

➢ EHEA members should increase their effort to build capacity to develop learning outcomes at grass roots level, i.e. at department and faculty level within institutions, e.g. through professional training in the development and assessment of learning outcomes.

This could be an integral part of pedagogical training for new higher education teaching staff and as such could be mandatory for all new staff and also offered to all staff currently employed.

➢ Training efforts at European level should focus on training the trainers, *inter alia* with a view to ensuring coherence in national training and implementation.

➢ The BFUG should undertake, within its 2015 – 18 program, work on the further development of assessment of learning outcomes in relation to new forms of learning and provision, including on line, through the ENIC and NARIC Networks and/or any other appropriate bodies and funding schemes.

➢ Public authorities should commit to making full use of the opportunities offered by the establishment of the EHEA for continuously improving the quality and the relevance of the curricula in order to equip graduates with 21st century skills;

III.2 Employability (ToR no. 7)

Employment and employability are among the key concerns of European governments as well as of most citizens. Both governments and citizens expect education, including higher education, to play a lead role in addressing Europe's employment needs. As the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué makes clear:

> With labour markets increasingly relying on higher skill levels and transversal competences, higher education should equip students with the advanced knowledge, skills and competences they need throughout their professional lives. Employability empowers the individual to fully seize the opportunities in changing labour markets.

A distinction needs to be made between employment and employability. Employment means exercising a remunerated professional activity. Employability means having the potential to be employed (which includes the potential for self-employment) or. Higher education cannot guarantee employment. It can, however, significantly improve an individual's employability, understood as capacity for employment, including self-employment/entrepreneurship. Also for third cycle graduates, employability must be assessed in terms of both the academic and non-academic labor market.

Employability, then, may be understood as the competences and personal characteristics that will make an individual sustainably successful on the labor market. It comprises subject-specific, methodological, social and individual competences which enable a graduate to successfully take up and pursue a profession or an employment and empower him or her to life-long learning. It implies providing graduates with the competences needed to get a meaningful first employment as well as to develop further professionally in the course of their career. It is also important to underline that employability is a process of learning and not a final product to be delivered by

education institutions. Someone who is employable on graduation may not be so a decade or two later if he or she has not continued to learn and to develop professionally and personally.

It is an underlying assumption, supported by evidence, that a higher education degree overall makes it easier for the holder to be meaningfully employed. A quote from the 2012 Bologna Implementation report may illustrate the point:

> On average, the higher the level of education, the lower the unemployment ratio of young people. In half of the EHEA countries, the unemployment ratio of young people with low educational attainment (at most lower secondary education, ISCED 0-2) is higher than 19 %. The median ratio is 10.6 % for the medium educated (at most post-secondary non-tertiary education, ISCED 3-4) and only 6.4 % for young people with a tertiary qualification (ISCED 5-6)[21].

At the same time, it must be recognized that no qualification will make an individual suitable for all kinds of employment and some highly qualified individuals may, by the nature of their qualifications, be qualified for employment only in highly specialized occupations. The great majority of higher education graduates should, however, be prepared, through their higher education studies, for employment in broad sectors of what is likely to be a fast-moving labor market where many higher education graduates will change career track several times in the course of their working lives and also return to higher education to update, further, and complement their qualifications. Such returns shall be stimulated by well implemented structural reform.

Like learning outcomes and the global dimension, employability is one of the overarching dimensions of structural reform – as well as of the agenda of the other working groups. In increasingly complex societies, advanced competences will be a prerequisite for most kinds of employment. In the further development of Europe's economy – and beyond that, of European societies – on the ability of higher education to provide a basis for meaningful employment will therefore be an important factor. Hence, the structures of the EHEA must further this goal, with implications for the quality of education, the framework and structures of qualifications, recognition and transparency.

In many countries, there is clearly a perception among political decision makers, employers, graduates and a considerable part of the general public that higher education today is insufficiently geared to making its graduates employable. It is therefore important to be clear about what employability means as well as what it does not mean. Employability does *not* mean that employers should determine the contents and teaching methods of study programs, that there could or should be a perfect match between education programs and labor markets, or that higher education institutions should train their students in the routines of everyday work. Employers should, however, contribute to the development of programs. It *does* mean that higher education institutions should provide their students with knowledge and understanding of the theories and methods of their chosen academic discipline and enable them to apply their knowledge on the job in order to assess and solve problems as well as to develop new knowledge, skills and

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[21] EACEA; Eurydice; Eurostat; Eurostudent: *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report* (Brussels 2012: Eurydice), p. 114

competences. In the case of doctoral qualifications, competence in the theory and methods for the chosen academic discipline are accompanied by the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity and, consequently, by a substantial contribution through original research to the advancement of knowledge. Higher education graduates should also have acquired relevant soft skills and be able to identify their own training needs. Study programs, regardless of their level or cycle, should generally comprise practical components such as practice-related/-based teaching and learning, mandatory internships or practice periods, practice-oriented papers or theses, career guidance, information about the situation of graduates on the labor market. They should enhance an outcomes orientation and turn students into critical lifelong-learners. Institutions should describe students' competences in transparent ways, e.g. by using transparency tools like the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS.

Enhancing the employability of graduates has consequences for quality assurance, the governance of higher education institutions and cooperation with stakeholders. The employability of graduates needs to be addressed by quality assurance. Quality assessment should comprise the practice-oriented aspects of the study program and ensure that the views of external experts (professional practitioners) and students are taken into account. Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programs to ensure that they respond to the needs of students, employers and society. Tracking the career patterns of graduates in coherence with a European approach is essential to this exercise.

Improving employability is an important aspect of the social dimension of higher education. While higher education should – and does – improve the social capital and employment possibilities for all graduates, this is particularly important from those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have little or no social or cultural capital from other sources. While many higher education institutions are making great efforts to improve the employability of its graduates, in cooperation with employers, public authorities, and others, many institutions still need to improve their efforts in this area. Higher education institutions should continue to develop cooperation with employers. Students as well as alumni need to be included in this cooperation and dialogue so they feel part of it and to ensure that the student perspective is included. Dialogue is also essential to creating confidence.

Lifelong learning is essential to ensuring lifelong employability and should be fully integrated into institutional strategies. Institutions should promote permeability: they should be more open to new target groups like working students and students with vocational qualifications, they should increase possibilities for part time studies and for alternating periods of study and of work, and they should improve recognition of qualifications obtained through alternative learning paths, including those gained on the job. Public authorities should develop policies that provide incentives for institutions to promote lifelong learning.

The employability problem concerns graduates of the first cycle (or Bachelor) in a particular way. One can assume that the comparatively low employability value of the first degree concerns above all those countries in which the majority of the first degree holders continue with a second degree (Masters) program immediately after graduation from the first cycle. In countries that have long experience with first cycle qualifications, these seem to have found their place also in

the labor market and are not seen simply as preparation for further studies. The quality of cooperation between employers and institutions on the development, delivery and evaluation of study programs, including quality work placements, is also perceived as insufficient. The SRWG acknowledges the fact that enhancing the employability of graduates and providing students with skills relevant to the labor market is often among the national priorities in higher education policies. Therefore, it is essential to demonstrate that furthering this goal depends to large extent on an improved understanding of learning outcomes and proper implementation of EHEA structures with implications for quality assurance, the framework and structures of qualifications, recognition and transparency.

From the perspective of doctoral candidates, the issue of employability is also at stake, even if from a different point of view. Only a small number of future doctorate holders can expect a career in academia, while the majority should be equipped to be employable in research–intensive labor market fields or to be self-employed[22]. This is even more of a challenge for economic systems where small and medium sized enterprises, often not based on research and innovation, are the prevailing actors in the market. It is not enough to ensure that doctorate holders have adequate resources to be employable. In some countries, there is a problem of awareness in society of how doctoral candidates can contribute to social progress, to the advancement of the knowledge, and to innovation and productivity across sectors. As the SRWG will recommend under IV.2.3 of this report, employers, both public and private, should consider the competences and skills acquired as well as the time spent to achieve them as doctoral candidates and/or in postdoctoral fellowships as a part of applicants' professional experience and could also take this period of time into account for the purpose of calculating seniority.

Today, many employers seem insufficiently aware of what competences higher education graduates actually have. Higher education institutions, employers' organizations, student organizations, employees' organizations, alumni associations and public authorities should therefore work together, as appropriate, to increase awareness among employers of the broad range of competences held by higher education graduates.

Recommendations

In order to enhance the employability of higher education graduates

   a) *Public authorities and higher education institutions* should develop and implement qualifications frameworks and study programs that:

   ➢ with due regard to institutional autonomy, embed employability as an integral part of higher education programs and curricula;
   ➢ within an environment of student centered learning provide students with knowledge and understanding of the theories and methods of their chosen academic discipline and enable

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[22] The European Research Area mentioned in the opening section is concentrating a many policy development efforts on developing guidance to policy makers, institutions and research institutes and young researchers on the quality of young researchers' careers.

them to apply their knowledge on the job in order to assess and solve problems as well as to develop new knowledge, skills and competences.

- ➢ enable students to acquire relevant soft skills.
- ➢ regardless of their level or cycle, as a general rule comprise practical components such as practice-related/-based teaching and learning, internships or practice periods, practice-oriented papers or theses, and entrepreneurship education.
- ➢ are supported by tracking the career patterns of graduates of all levels and cycles.
- ➢ are supported by career guidance as well as reliable information on career prospects, including regulated professions, and situation of graduates on the labor market.
- ➢ enhance an outcomes orientation and turn students into critical lifelong-learners.
- ➢ describe students' competences in transparent ways, by using transparency tools like the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS.
- ➢ Draw on employers as a source of information about new career developments and future skills.

b) Public authorities should:

- ➢ commit to developing a coherent EHEA approach for tracking graduates;
- ➢ ensure that their competence requirements ensure fair access to employment in the public sector for holders of first degrees.
- ➢ provide incentives for institutions to promote lifelong learning.

c) *Quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions* should address the employability of graduates in the framework of internal and external quality assurance.

d) Higher education institutions should:
- ➢ monitor and periodically review their programs to ensure that they respond to the needs of students, employers and society.
- ➢ continue to develop cooperation with employers and ensure that the views of students are included in this cooperation.
- ➢ fully integrate lifelong learning into institutional strategies.
- ➢ actively engage employers in their activities, as appropriate and in line with the profile and mission of institutions and programs, in research, teaching and work placement, as well as in the design of programs.

e) *Higher education institutions, employers' organizations, student organizations, employees' organizations, alumni associations and public authorities* should work together, as appropriate, to increase awareness among employers of the broad range of competences held by higher education graduates.

f) *Employers* should:
- ➢ make appropriate use of higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle.
- ➢ develop sustainable relationships with higher education institutions, for mutual benefit, including through work placements.

> ➢ Contribute to the design of programs, teaching, research, and quality assurance processes.

III.3   The use of qualifications frameworks to improve fair recognition (ToR, no. 3)

Qualifications frameworks describe all qualifications in a given (higher) education system as well as how these qualifications relate to each other and how learners can move between qualifications within the framework.   The self-certification and referencing of national frameworks to overarching qualifications frameworks (QF-EHEA and EQF) establish the relationship between qualifications from different national frameworks. Qualifications frameworks incorporate the dimension of quality assurance and the competent authorities responsible for quality assurance need to subscribe to the self-certification/referencing of national frameworks against the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF for this to be considered complete. The Lisbon Recognition Convention postulates that foreign qualifications be recognized unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is sought and a similar or corresponding qualification in the host country.   This is exemplified by paragraph VI.1 on recognition of higher education qualifications; similar wording is found in Articles IV.1 on recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education and V.I on recognition of periods of study:

> To the extent that a recognition decision is based on the knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification, each Party shall recognize the higher education qualifications conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the Party in which recognition is sought.

Qualifications frameworks should provide clear answers to some of the questions credentials evaluators would normally ask about a foreign qualification, notably about quality, level and workload, and should also be helpful in assessing profile and learning outcomes. They should help make it clear what similarities exist between qualifications from different national frameworks and therefore help avoid an overly narrow interpretation of what differences between qualifications may be considered substantial and which may therefore constitute valid grounds for non-recognition, including partial recognition of foreign qualifications. The published self-certification and referencing reports play a key role in this respect and it is therefore imperative that these be made easily available and that they be updated when (higher) education systems and frameworks undergo reforms. The competent public authorities need to provide clear information, for recognition purposes, on all qualifications belonging to the system for which they are responsible.

It is also worth noting that the Lisbon Recognition Convention is in a legal sense restricted to academic recognition.   However, the need for fair recognition is equally strong in the case of professional recognition. The principles and provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are also applicable, as a guide to good practice, to recognition of the purpose of access to the labor market.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee adopted a new subsidiary text to the Convention on this topic in June 2013[23]. This is the only international standard setting text that stipulates how qualifications frameworks could be used as instruments to further the recognition of qualifications – and hence the Recommendation addresses the coherence and links between two of the policy areas covered by the ToR of the SRWG.

The Recommendation underlines the need for better links and more direct interaction between the bodies responsible for recognition and those responsible for qualifications frameworks. At least indirectly, it also makes the case for better cooperation between these bodies and those responsible for quality assurance since satisfactory quality assurance provision is a precondition for self-certification and referencing of national qualifications frameworks[24].

In many countries, contacts and cooperation between the bodies responsible for different areas of structural reform is still insufficient. Even though contacts at European level between the different groups and networks working on specific policy areas – such as ENQA and EQAR for quality assurance, the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks of the QF-EHEA and the EQF Advisory Group for qualifications frameworks and the ENIC and NARIC Networks for recognition – have improved significantly over the past few years, there is still scope for considerable improvement. In many countries, further efforts are also required to better incorporate ENICs and NARICs into the national higher education policy environment so that the concerns and expertise of national recognition experts are adequately taken account of.

One important purpose of the self-certification and referencing process is to build trust. This is done in part through the report, which – if done convincingly – will not only state that the national framework in question is compatible with the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF but also demonstrate why this is the case in such a way that readers will reach the same conclusion. In part it is done through the procedure, which should involve the main national stakeholders as well as well reputed international experts. Such trust is essential in facilitating recognition and, conversely, if trust is absent, recognition will become more laborious. It is essential to ensure that while individual qualifications in the NQFs are self-certified and referenced to the overarching frameworks, national authorities do so transparently and do not use the QF-EHEA and EQF to inflate the level or value of individual qualifications in their national systems. The European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual, welcomed by Ministers in the Bucharest Communiqué, is an example of good practice in this is respect.

Recommendations

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[23] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/DGIIEDUHE(2012)14%20Rev09%20FINAL%20-%20LRC%20Supplementary%20Text%20on%20the%20Use%20of%20QFs%20ENGLISH.asp#TopOfPage

[24] Cf. criterion no. 5 (The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process) and procedure no. 2 (The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process) of the criteria and procedures for the self-certification of national frameworks against the QF-EHEA, http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/QF/Bologna_Framework_and_Certification_revised_29_02_08.pdf. The criteria for referencing national frameworks against the EQF include similar provisions.

Public authorities should:

➢ make full use of qualifications frameworks to further fair recognition, in particular by acknowledging that national qualifications frameworks that have been self-certified against the QF-EHEA and/or referenced against the EQF provide the required information on the quality, level and workload of any given qualification in the relevant framework.

➢ ensure good cooperation among the competent authorities for recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance and, where needed, review the structure and organization of these bodies at national level.

➢ better incorporate ENICs and NARICs into the national higher education policy environment.

➢ ensure that qualifications in the NQFs are self-certified and referenced to the overarching frameworks in transparent ways and not use the QF-EHEA and EQF to inflate the level or value of qualifications in their national systems.

➢ ensure that self-certification and referencing reports be made easily available and that they be updated when (higher) education systems and frameworks undergo reforms.

➢ provide clear information, for recognition purposes, on all qualifications belonging to the system for which they are responsible.

➢ In the process of NQF implementation, attention should be paid to proper definition, implementation and assessment of intended outcomes for all cycles, including the third cycle.

➢ clarify the status of doctoral and post-doctoral qualifications used in most countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Ukraine (e.g. the *kandidat nauk/dr nauk* system) in relation to the QF-EHEA and the EQF. In case specific NQFs choose to include post-doctoral qualifications at a higher level than the third cycle, this should not limit the access and employability of foreign academic staff from countries without such qualifications, as these are not offered in most systems of the EHEA.

➢ promote the use by employers of qualifications frameworks for the recognition of qualifications for employment purposes.

Higher education institutions should make good use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of qualifications.

III.4 Diversity and transparency: improve transparency instruments for describing individual qualifications as well as higher education systems (ToR no. 5)

The considerable diversity of structures and provision within the European Higher Education Area, which is one of its strengths, makes transparency a particularly important issue. It is important to present higher education in Europe, including its structures, qualifications

frameworks, and quality assurance arrangements, in such a way that those who do not have specialized knowledge of higher education – or of a specific country and its system – can understand it. A part of the challenge is explaining what is often a complex reality in comprehensible ways, without over-simplifying, and another part of the challenge is to explain the relationship between national and European structures.

It is important to underline that it is the responsibility of each EHEA member country to help other countries understand its education system, qualifications frameworks and arrangements for quality assurance. The most authoritative information on any education system is provided by the competent authorities responsible for the system in question, through the ENIC/NARIC center in most of the EHEA countries . It is essential to the development of the EHEA that all such information be transparent, understandable, reliable, and accurate.

One important challenge is how public authorities could make the information provided on their education systems and their relationship to the EHEA more transparent. How can 47 countries with at least as many education systems make up a coherent EHEA?

Some instruments have already been developed with the promotion of transparency as an important or even the main objective, such as the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance instruments are also important in promoting transparency. The terms of reference make specific reference to the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS, the latter of which will at least in part be covered by the sub-group on the ECTS Users' Guide. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the basis on which information on quality and quality assurance should be provided. The SRWG notes that the revised ESG submitted for adoption by Ministers at their Yerevan conference includes the provision that institutional evaluation reports be made public.

Quality can only be ensured if higher education and research build on and observe principles of ethics and good conduct. Quality is endangered by fraud and corruption. Even if many higher education systems and institutions make laudable efforts to prevent fraud and have published arrangements for addressing academic fraud, others do not yet have such arrangements and need to develop them as a matter of urgency. The Guidelines for an Institutional Code of Ethics in Higher Education developed by the International Association of Universities and the Magna Charta Observatory[25] provide a good starting point for institutions that wish to develop their own guidelines.

Another important issue is the responsibility of public authorities for ensuring that higher education institutions provide reliable and meaningful information to prospective students and their parents, to employers and to others who may want or need reliable information on higher education institutions and programs, including on the value and rights associated with their qualifications. The importance of reliable and sometimes comparable information on graduates' employment outcomes as a factor determining decisions on choosing certain study programs is growing.

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[25] http://www.iau-aiu.net/sites/all/files/Ethics_Guidelines_FinalDef_08.02.13.pdf

The latter corresponds directly to the issue of tracking of graduates. Tracking graduates' career patterns can contribute significantly to implementing Bologna reforms. It improves institutional self-knowledge and in this sense it is an important aspect of internal quality assurance. The ESG already mention "employability of graduates" in this context in ESG 1.6 "Information systems". Tracking of graduates should also be considered in the context of public information for potential students, their parents and society at large. Objective, reliable, often comparable but at same time meaningful data on the progression of graduates into the labor market are clearly demanded by public opinion (ESG 1.7 also refers to "public information"). The report from the EUA Project "TRACKIT! – Tracking Learners' and Graduates' Progression Paths"[26] presents an overview of tracking initiatives undertaken at the institutional and national level. It shows i.a. trends in the tracking of graduates at national level, which is the main source of reliable and comparable data on graduates' employment, pointing out that, next to surveying, which is still the predominant method, tracking based on administrative data (e.g. social security data) is more and more used. However, the first edition of U-Multirank clearly shows that a shortage of reliable data on graduates' career paths is still a big challenge. It means that many institutions still lack information which serves the two purposes mentioned above: institutional self-knowledge as an element of internal QA and reliable and meaningful information for potential students, their parents and society at large. This shows the need for political initiatives in this area to be taken at the European level. Examples of good practice and possible new schemes which can enhance reliability and comparability of data should be further explored.

Indisputably untruthful information – such as claiming an institution is accredited if it is not – is most likely covered by national legislation, but there is a considerable "gray" zone in which information provided is incomplete rather than openly untruthful and in which information is phrased in such a way as to give a positive impression of the provider while avoiding untruthful claims. Those who are not higher education specialists will often not understand the "fine print" in the information provided, and they will not have the background needed to ask the right questions about the kind of information that is not provided. For example, even if an institution claims that its qualifications are good value on the labor market, this may apply only to a *specific sector* of the labor market. If the institutions and its qualifications are not recognized by the competent authority as part of the national education system, its graduates may find that their qualifications do not enable them to enroll in study programs at other institutions or transfer to other parts of the labor market, including regulated professions. Making students, parents, employers, and others aware of the kind of issues with which they may well be confronted and the kind of question they should ask of potential education providers is a major challenge.

There are no reliable figures on the extent to which incomplete, misleading, or fraudulent information is an issue in the EHEA. Even if the issue concerns a minority of higher education providers, it is nevertheless very real. In some countries, public authorities seem reluctant to play an active, and proactive, role in providing information on individual institutions and programs and to warn against fraudulent or non-serious providers, possibly because the concept of institutional autonomy is misunderstood to mean that public authorities cannot sound the alarm even in cases of non-serious programs and/or because public authorities are afraid of being taken to court by aggressive if non-serious providers.

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[26] See http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/projects/tracking-learners-and-graduates-progression-paths.aspx.

Both institutions and countries should have published procedures for dealing with student complaints.

A further argument for public authorities to play a role in ensuring that information given by institutions and providers is accurate and reliable, and for drawing public attention to blatant violations, is that the accuracy and reliability of such information also reflects on the countries and education systems concerned, and even on systems to which providers may wrongly claim to belong. If the public perception is that many providers in a given country give untruthful, inaccurate or unreliable information, the reputation of the country and system will suffer. Building trust takes a long time but what has been built up can be undone very rapidly.

Higher education institutions also have an important responsibility for providing up to date, understandable, and complete information on their own programs, qualifications, and practices. This extends to providing information on past performance, e.g. on qualifications obtained quite some time ago and to provide attestations to holders of such qualifications.

The SRWG is also aware of rapid developments concerning various transparency tools aiming at making international comparisons of institutions and national higher education systems. The EUA studies on "Global University Rankings and Their Impact[27]" shows that certain countries might use global rankings in recognition and internationalization policies, i.e. for purposes for which the Bologna tools were designed and are much better suited, such as the recognition of qualifications, the award of scholarships, and the setting up of cooperation agreements. Using rankings, which tend to focus on research performance in a limited number of academic disciplines, as an indication of the quality of the teaching and learning of a given program or institution is misleading. This is another challenge related to the decreasing political focus of and on the EHEA.

The SRWG notes with interest the launching of U-Multirank, which contrary to certain global rankings is based on the concepts of user-drivenness and multidimensionality and which appears to attract considerable attention. The EHEA should follow developments in this regard.

Recommendations

Public authorities should ensure that information on their higher education systems and qualification frameworks, and on study programs and qualifications belonging to their national systems, be transparent, understandable, reliable, and accurate.

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[27] Andrejs Rauhvargers: *Global University Rankings and Their Impact* (Brussels 2011: European University Association), available at http://www.eua.be/pubs/global_university_rankings_and_their_impact.pdf   and Andrejs Rauhvargers: *Global University Rankings and Their Impact – Report II* (Brussels 2013): European University Association),   available   at http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/EUA_Global_University_Rankings_and_Their_Impact_-_Report_II.sflb.ashx.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should:

➢ ensure that reliable and meaningful information is available for prospective students and their parents, employers and others who may want or need reliable information on higher education institutions and programs, including on the value, rights, and possibilities associated with their qualifications, e.g. through its ENIC/NARIC center;

➢ ensure reliable and meaningful information on graduates' career patterns in order to improve institutional self-knowledge and to obtain data on graduates' progression to the labor market which should be provided to potential students, their parents and society at large.

➢ commit to engaging in further developing activities for all dimensions of institutional and program quality and diversity contributing to an increased evidence-based transparency;

➢ have published arrangements for addressing academic fraud;

➢ provide information on student support arrangements;

➢ have published procedures for dealing with student complaints.

The BFUG should:

➢ work on developing a coherent EHEA approach to tracking graduates which would enhance reliability and comparability of data across Europe.

➢ continue to promote the transparency of higher education systems, institutions , and programs and monitor transparency tools developed by different actors, also outside of the framework of the EHEA.

III.5 **The global dimension of structural reforms** (ToR no. 7)

While the structural reforms are developed for the EHEA and its member countries, they have global implications both because EHEA members interact with countries outside of the EHEA and because the EHEA has given rise to very considerable interest in other parts of the world. This interest has given rise to the Bologna Policy Fora held end-on with the ministerial conferences in 2009, 2010 and 2012 as well as the suggestion in the 2012 Policy Forum Statement that

> Regional exchanges and peer learning should strengthen the political commitments agreed at the Bologna Policy Fora, while also involving practitioners and representatives of the academic communities in a long term policy exchange. We agree that this policy cooperation should focus on specific topics and that it may in particular involve countries or regions which have expressed a particular interest in the topic at hand.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the adoption of the strategy "The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting"[28] by Ministers in London in 2007, work on the global dimension of the EHEA has focused on the Policy Fora linked to the Ministerial conferences. So far, a more coherent plan for developing the different aspects of the global dimension of the EHEA in

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[28] http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Global%20context/Strategy-for-EHEA-in-global-setting.pdf

cooperation not only at political level but also between policy makers and possibly focusing on specific policy issues with specific regions has not been developed. Regardless of the policy area(s) addressed, it is important that this work take due account of the underlying values of the EHEA, including academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and democratic participation.

As concerns the remit of the SRWG, it is important for the EHEA that our structural reforms and the reasons that led to their development be understood in other parts of the world and it is equally important that EHEA members and consultative members be informed about and understand structural issues in other parts of the world. However, in the absence of any specific EHEA funding (although, again, some institutions, in particular the European Commission, do fund EHEA-related projects) and that many countries may be more interested in funding the promotion of their own higher education systems, programs and institutions rather than those of the EHEA as a whole, it has so far been very difficult to make structural reform an effective part of the global dimension of the EHEA.

There are, however, some examples. For the past few years, the annual meetings of the ENIC and NARIC Networks have systematically included discussion with representatives of other UNESCO Regions or of specific countries from outside of the UNESCO Europe Region, engaging in a dialogue with other regions. In quality assurance, ENQA, EQAR, the EUA, ESU, and other stakeholders at European level as well as national quality assurance agencies have presented the ESG in international contexts. The overarching qualifications frameworks of Europe have been met with very great interest in other parts of the world, and the European Training Foundation, the EUA and others have run projects in which the European experiences of qualifications frameworks have been presented in other parts of the world. The EQF Advisory Group is currently exploring possibilities for alignment with the Australian Qualifications Framework, the New Zealand Qualifications Framework and the Hong Kong Qualifications framework. ASEM, the Asia-Europe Meeting, which has a ministerial strand as well as a strand for leaders of higher education institutions, has made structural reform one of its topics.

Without pretending to present a complete overview, these examples demonstrate the pertinence of the structural reforms of the EHEA in a global context. They also underline the need to continue to develop structural reforms as a part of the global dimension of the EHEA. It is in the interest of the EHEA and its members that our structural reforms and our approaches to and methodology in structural reforms, and we owe it other regions to consider their higher education according to the standards and methods on the basis of which we would like our own higher education to be assessed.

Recommendations

The EHEA should include structural reforms in its cooperation with other parts of the world. To this end:

  ➢ *The BFUG* should initiate work with one or more regions on structural reforms and present the results to the 2018 ministerial meeting.
  ➢ The dialogue(s) could use a variety of working methods (conferences, seminars, working groups, studies, pilot projects, peer learning activities, others) and the BFUG and/or any

substructure dealing with structural reforms should be kept duly informed of, and as appropriate be involved in, the conversation(s).

➢ The dialogue(s) should take an EHEA perspective rather than the perspective of one or more specific EHEA members and should, as far as possible, cover all areas of structural reform.

➢ *EHEA members involved in dialogue on higher education with other regions, such as the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) cooperation* should explore how structural reform could best be included in this cooperation.

➢ *UNESCO* should relaunch its participation in the EHEA by active participation in the BFUG and its working structures.

➢ *Stakeholder organizations* should be invited to participate in activities organized in the framework of EHEA cooperation with other regions of the world.

IV.   SPECIFIC POLICY AREAS

In addition to considering the coherence of structural reforms, the SRWG has in its terms of reference been asked to consider specific policy areas. Cross reference to the specific tasks listed in the ToR is provided where relevant.   The first of these tasks (Consider and make recommendations on specific issues of policy and practice related to quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition of qualifications and transparency instruments and their mutual interaction) as well as tasks 14 - 17[29] are relatively general and are therefore covered by the report as a whole.

The SRWG considered and commented on a draft version of the revised Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (ToR no. 10) amendments at its meeting on December 9 – 10, 2013. The comments were transmitted to the E 4 Group. This point in the terms of reference will therefore not be commented on further in this report. The SRWG has also been kept informed of and has commented on the work of the pathfinder group on academic recognition.

With the Working Group on Mobility and Internationalization, the SRWG commented on the proposed European Approach to quality assurance of joint degrees and programs developed by an *ad hoc* group appointed by the BFUG on the joint proposal of the SRWG and the WG on Mobility and Internationalization (ToR no. 9). This point in the terms of reference will therefore not be commented on further in this report.

In the following, the issues are listed according to policy area and within each area according to the number of the specific task as listed in the ToR. The order should therefore *not* be read as an indication of relative importance or preference.

IV.1   QUALITY ASSURANCE

IV.1.1 Common principles of quality assurance to be applied across HE and VET (ToR no. 4)
Quality assurance is well developed in higher education, where the ESG – adopted in 2005 and now under revision – provide guidelines for recognized quality assurance agencies.   The European Register for Quality Assurance in higher education (EQAR) includes agencies that operate according to the ESG, and membership of ENQA is also based on compliance with the ESG. Formal cooperation on quality assurance at European level has also developed in the case of vocational education and training (VET) under the Copenhagen Process. A common reference framework for quality assurance in VET has been established by a 2009 recommendation of the

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[29] These are:

14. As appropriate, commission research to support its work;
15. Maintain contact with and, as needed, oversee the work of any sub groups established to address specific aspects of structural reforms;
16. Advice the BFUG on any issues referred to it by the BFUG;
17. Submit proposals to the 2015 Ministerial conference, through the BFUG, aiming to improve the coherence of the structural reforms within the EHEA.

European Parliament and Council.[30] The implementation of this recommendation is promoted through the EQAVET (European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training[31]) network. Across the different sub-sectors, quality assurance is intended to support student-centered learning leading to qualifications based on learning outcomes. There is, however, a need to establish closer cooperation between the bodies responsible for quality assurance in higher education and VET in order to further a more coherent approach across sub-sectors. Compatibility may be sought in the first place on EQF level 5, which is at the level against which short cycle qualifications are referenced, at the interface of higher education and VET.

One of the recommendations by the Irish Presidency conference held in Dublin on March 12 – 13, 2013 was that the EQF Advisory Group and the BFUG working group on Structural Reforms, in cooperation with ENQA and EQAVET, review and make proposals to strengthen the common principles of quality assurance to be applied across higher education and vocational education and training.[32] The issue was considered at the joint meeting of the SRWG and the EQF Advisory Group on September 25, 2013 and was also addressed at an EQF Peer learning activity organized by the European Commission in Leuven in November 2013. The SRWG also takes note of conclusions by the Council of the European Union of May 2014, agreed on by the 28 EHEA members that are also members of the European Union[33]. These urge members to continue to promote transparency and complementarity between sectoral approaches to quality assurance by building on European principles for quality assurance in a lifelong learning perspective.

Both VET and HE, as distinct education sectors, make use of QF, for the same purpose, namely to make it easier for individual graduates and students to use qualifications across institutional and national borders in pursuit of further study or employment, and both use learning outcomes to describe qualifications. From a transparency point of view it is then quite logical that convergence be sought between these sectors.

Stakeholders in higher education, including employers, are becoming increasingly aware of the existence of two qualification frameworks, the QF-EHEA and the EQF, to which national QFs are being aligned. Their importance for national education systems is well established, but more guidance is needed to increase the permeability of national systems across sectors, and quality assurance tools can be helpful in this.

The Irish Presidency Conference on Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks (Dublin, March, 2013) had also concluded that there was a need for increasing trust in qualifications frameworks in the EHEA, and that quality assurance systems, could more strongly contribute to this. It was found that improved dialogue is therefore needed among the main actors in QA in both Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education. As a follow-up to this, the international seminar held in Biograd na moru, Croatia on June 27, 2013 under the Croatian Co-

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30 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF

31 http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/home.aspx

32 http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/Ireland-s-Presidency-of-the-EU/Conference-12-13-March-2013/Conclusions.pdf

33 Published in the Council of the European Union website
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/142694.pdf (accessed 25 June, 2014)

Chairmanship of the BFUG, offered opportunities for an exchange of good practice and mutual learning about different and similar quality assurance (QA) arrangements, in order to promote their greater compatibility.

Similarly, the peer learning activity organized in Leuven in November 2013 by the Euroeapn Commission, CEDFOP, and the EQF Advisory Group, under the impulse of the BFUG Secretariat, gathered a mixed audience of practitioners and educationalists from VET and higher education, and it appeared from the interactive sessions how different approaches are to quality assurance, notably in the involvement of stakeholders, including students.

There is therefore a need to consider further congruence between VET and higher education, in order to enhance transparency in national (higher) education systems. A conclusive agreement on common principles for quality assurance would contribute to this. Such an agreement could build on the EQF Recommendation of 2008, which in its Annex III[34] spells out certain Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework[35] and building on the conclusions of the Council of the European Union of May 2014. The SRWG considers that these principles are compatible with the ESG, both in their current version and in the revised version submitted to the Yerevan Ministerial conference.

In its 2014 report to the European Parliament and Council on the implementation of the EQF the Commission referred to these principles as follows: "The EQF's common principles on quality assurance are broadly compatible with European standards and guidelines (ESG), and with the EQAVET. However, the principles of all three tools refer to quality assurance in education and training in general only, and do not provide specific guidance for ensuring the quality of the learning outcomes approach, qualifications and qualifications frameworks. The on-going evaluations of the EQF, EQAVET and the revision of the ESG should be used to identify where

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[34] Published in the Official journal of the European Union on May 6, 2008, C 111/7.

[35] When implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance — which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement of higher education and vocational education and training — should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:
-quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework,
-quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions,
-quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies,
-external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review,
-quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes,
-quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
  o clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement, appropriate resources,
  o consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review,
  o feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement,
  o widely accessible evaluation results,
-quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis,
-quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member States and across the Community,
-quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

further synergies between European qualifications frameworks and quality assurance arrangements can be achieved."[36]

The SRWG agrees that developing even closer cooperation in quality assurance between the higher education and VET should be encouraged and that common principles should be reviewed. It also recognizes that some aspects of quality assurance may be different for the two sub-sectors. Work to revise the common principles should ensure that compatibility with the ESG be maintained. It should also take cognizance of global developments in quality assurance in different sectors of education and training, such as the work conducted by UNESCO in higher education[37] and VET[38]. Strong stakeholder involvement is essential to the further development of external quality assurance within the EHEA, as has already been showed through the development, implementation and revision of the ESG. Due account needs to be taken of this stakeholder involvement also in the development of cooperation in quality assurance between the higher education and the VET sectors.

Initial exploration of this topic across sectors took place at an October 2013 CEDEFOP Joint Expert Seminar on Quality Assurance in vocational education and training (VET) and higher education for improving their permeability[39] and in an EQF peer learning activity on learning outcomes and quality assurance in Leuven on November 27-28, 2013. Some starting points for future collaborative work were identified. ENQA, in cooperation with the other stakeholder organizations having developed the ESG, and EQAVET, supported as required by the European Commission and others, are encouraged to clarify the points on which current principles are compatible as well as points that require further joint consideration, to identify areas of potential concern, and to publish a timetable for address any outstanding issues.

Recommendations

> ➤ The frameworks for quality assurance in higher education and in vocational education and training need to be compatible, with due regard to the specificities of each sector, and this basic principle should guide all further work on both frameworks.

> ➤ Taking due account of the revised ESG as well as of EU recommendations, *ENQA*, in cooperation with the other stakeholder organizations having developed the ESG, *and the governance structures of EQAVET are encouraged* to review the common principles of quality assurance in higher education in vocational education and training. ENQA is requested to ensure that the BFUG and/or any substructure dealing with structural reforms are duly informed of this work and to report back in due time before the 2018 Ministerial conference.

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36 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF
37 http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/higher-education/quality-assurance/
38 http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/technical-vocational-education-and-training-tvet/third-international-congress-on-tvet/thematic-areas/transformative-perspective/
39 http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/download-manager.aspx?id=22401&lang=en

IV.1.2 EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies operating in countries other than their countries of origin (ToR no. 13)

An overarching goal is that quality assurance agencies throughout the EHEA work in accordance with the ESG.

In the Bucharest Communiqué (2012), ministers agreed to "allow EQAR registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements" and, in particular, "to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes". The Council conclusions of the Council of the European Union May 2014 underlined the need to open up opportunities for cross-border quality assurance by EQAR-registered agencies in order to stimulate a European dimension in quality assurance.

EQAR has collected and analyzed information on the extent to which different EHEA countries allow (foreign) EQAR-registered agencies to operate within their jurisdiction. This work is part of the project Recognizing International Quality Assurance Activity (RIQAA), which is co-funded by the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme.

As of June 2014, 14 EHEA countries (see Table 1, row A) allow their higher education institutions to be reviewed by a suitable EQAR-registered QA agencies *to discharge their external quality assurance obligations required by their country's legislation*[40].

Some additional countries (see Table 1, row B) use other, specific national requirements for allowing QA agencies from other countries to operate. Most of these frameworks predate the establishment of EQAR and the agreements of the Bucharest Communiqué.

The *existing legal frameworks* differ significantly in detail: some countries allow all higher education institutions to choose a suitable EQAR-registered agency for all types of external quality assurance obligations. In some countries, this is limited to certain types of higher education institutions (e.g. public universities), certain types of external quality assurance (e.g. only program accreditation, but not institutional accreditation), or to joint programs. These limitations are described in the notes to Table 1.

One major difference is whether the formal outcome or (accreditation) decision is made by the foreign QA agency independently (Table 1, column 1), or the final decision lies with a national QA body, based on a review report which may be produced by another agency (Table 1, column 2).

In general, countries seem to impose fewer restrictions in allowing their institutions to be reviewed by a foreign QA agency if the review does not bear direct legal or financial consequences.

In most cases, countries require foreign agencies to use a specific set of criteria or cover at least a specific list of issues in their evaluation, accreditation or audit, while the ESG serve as the main reference point.

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[40]   Presumably, in no country will higher education institutions be forbidden to undergo voluntary reviews *in addition to the legally required audit, accreditation or evaluation*.

Table 1 Countries allowing higher education institutions belonging to their national education system to undergo quality assurance by foreign EQAR-registered agencies

	(1) Outcome/decision is directly recognized	(2) Final decision or approval by national QA body
(A) EQAR-registered agencies are allowed[41] to operate	**AM**, **AT** (only PubU), **AZ**, **DK** (only JD), *KAZ*[42] (only PrAc), **LI** (only programme), **MD**, **PL** (only TNE+Doc), **RO**	**AL**, **BE-fl**, **BG**, **DE** (only JD), **LT**, **PL** (general)
(B) Specific national requirements[43] for allowing foreign QAAs to operate	**CH** (only UAS), **DE** (general), **FI**, **ME**	**CH**, **EE**, **FI**, **ME**, **NL**, **PT**

Country-specific limitations are in parenthesis ("only …"):
Doc: only for doctoral programs
JD: only applicable for accreditation of joint programs or joint degrees
PrAc: only for program accreditation, but not for institutional accreditation
PubU: only for public universities (and universities of applied sciences after initial accreditation)
TNE: only for branch campuses or franchised provision of foreign HEIs
UAS: only for universities of applied sciences

Benefits

Higher education institutions have pointed[44] to two main advantages in being able to have their audit, evaluation or accreditation carried out by an EQAR-registered quality assurance agency of their choice: firstly, it allows them to identify an agency that best suits their own mission and profile, and from which they believe to receive the most valuable feedback. This, in turn, increases the commitment of their internal and external stakeholders, and help to develop their own quality culture.

Some institutions welcomed the possibility of a review that would not have been available in that form in their country (e.g. award of an additional international label that is not available nationally).

Secondly, in some countries, institutions felt that a review by a foreign/international agency was a more genuinely international experience, even if the national QA agency would include

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[41]   While there might be additional requirements, all suitable EQAR-registered agencies are allowed to operate without major additional restrictions.
[42]   Agencies have to be admitted to a national register of quality assurance agencies, whereas for EHEA agencies EQAR registration is a pre-condition for national registration.
[43]   Country has own, specific requirements or licensing processes for allowing foreign agencies to operate, while EQAR registration is neither necessary nor sufficient condition.
[44]   Based on case-study interviews conducted as part of the RIQAA project, as well as statements or presentations by higher education institution representatives

international peers on its panels. This is mainly based on the perception that the agency chosen has a broad pool of international peers and would clearly be considered international by their stakeholders.

Institutions (especially small or regional ones) thus consider the review to strengthen their international profile and international partnerships. Related to this, the reputation and image of the agency chosen plays a certain role.

Quality assurance agencies have described[45] the possibility to operate in other countries as an opportunity to improve their own processes and methodologies, by reflecting on how well they can be deployed in a different system and using observations from their cross-border work to improve their methodologies "at home".

Challenges

The key challenge quality assurance agencies have experienced when operating in a different country is to familiarize themselves with the regulatory framework, context and customs of the "target" country. This requires considerable effort before operating in a country for the first time. Agencies have described this as particularly difficult for cases where regulations on the work of foreign agencies were unclear or not transparent. Not very surprisingly, a language barrier amplifies this challenge, and not all countries have regulations or criteria to be used available in English.

Higher education institutions observe a similar challenge in turn: they have to explain "their" system and context to a foreign agency and peers. Generally, a review by a foreign QA agency requires more time and effort than a review by the national QA agency.

As referred to in the communiqués of the Bologna Process, higher education is considered a public good and public responsibility and is of significant importance to individuals. Similarly, external quality assurance is a public responsibility, is to a large extent arranged as public service, and supported by public funding. National authorities have the ultimate responsibility in externally assuring the quality of higher education in the relevant system and in supporting necessary reforms both on country and institutional level. It is widely accepted that quality assurance should be fit for purpose including in fulfilling the purposes identified by policy makers on national/regional level and those formulated by higher education institutions, taking into account the legitimate expectations by stakeholders as well.

In the Bucharest Communiqué ministers committed to allowing agencies that are registered in EQAR and thus have demonstrated that they work in line with the ESG to operate throughout the EHEA, in compliance with the respective national requirements. Therefore it is important to guarantee that quality assurance agencies acting cross borders adhere to high professional standards preserving the integrity of external QA procedures and results. In the view of the public responsibility for higher education and its importance to societies and economies, it would be unacceptable to turn quality assurance into a business with profit as its sole purpose, thus

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[45]   Based on surveys organized by EQAR in 2013 and 2014 as part of the RIQAA project, a seminar for QA agencies held in April 2014, as well as publications by QA agencies and on statements in various seminars.

undermining the core values of higher education and in this way putting trust in it at risk. Thus it is welcomed that EQAR initiates appropriate monitoring of activities by QA agencies cross-border for the purpose of their listing as trustworthy agencies.

The issue of costs can be an inhibiting factor where a review by the national QA agency is free of charge, while a review by another EQAR-registered agency might be at the higher education institution's own expense. Unless there are external requirements (i.e. procurement rules), however, the price of a review does not seem to be a determining factor for choosing an agency. There is also an issue of agencies facing legal obstacles to charging fees while operating abroad.

The choice of a suitable agency usually involves considerable desk research for higher education institutions, for which institutions have used information provided on the EQAR website (e.g. expertise in different methodologies of external quality assurance, countries where agencies have worked) and on the agencies' own websites. Institutions often find themselves in the situation that only a small number of the (currently) 32 EQAR-registered agencies would at all be suitable to undertake the review that is needed.

Conclusions

A clear and transparent legal framework for the operation of EQAR-registered QA agencies is crucial in order to allow higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to make full use of the existing opportunities for cross-border external quality assurance.

The ESG have served as a reference framework for agencies' cross-border work, and are considered suitable for that purpose by most.

The revised ESG are expected to reflect and continue to serve that purpose, while also reflecting the additional, important responsibilities for both higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies that arise from working together across borders. The revised ESG thus underline agencies' responsibility for assuring the quality and integrity of their activities[46].

Likewise, robust arrangements by EQAR to continuously monitor registered agencies' activities across borders are crucial as a basis for trust.

The future European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes will be an additional, specific reference framework for that specific case, and thus contributes to strengthening the EHEA framework for cross-border quality assurance.

Easily-accessible information on quality assurance agencies, their expertise and methodologies is crucial to allow higher education institutions to make an informed choice of a suitable agency.

Recommendations

- *EHEA members should undertake further action, within their respective education systems, to implement the commitments made in the Bucharest Communiqué, in particular:*

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[46]   See standard 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

- *Provide clear and transparent information (in English) on the requirements under which EQAR-registered agencies may operate, the criteria to be used and the responsibilities vis-à-vis national bodies.*

- *Irrespective of the arrangements for the decision-making on QA outcomes and in line with their national requirements, EHEA members should allow all EQAR registered agencies to operate without undergoing additional scrutiny or having to obtain a license beforehand.*

- *QA agencies that seek to offer accreditation, evaluation or audit to higher education institutions in different countries should establish clear and transparent processes and criteria for their cross-border work.*

IV.2 QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

IV.2.1 The place of short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA (ToR no. 1 and the 2012 report by the Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks)

When Ministers adopted the QF-EHEA in Bergen in 2005, they acknowledged that countries may include short cycle qualifications within the first cycle in their national frameworks but declined to make specific provision for short cycle qualifications within the QF-EHEA:

> We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. (Bergen Communiqué)

This was reiterated as late as in 2009:

> Within national contexts, intermediate qualifications within the first cycle can be a means of widening access to higher education. (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué)

In 2012, Ministers recognized that the diversity of qualifications had evolved in relation to the situation in 2005 by stating:

> We further commit to referencing first, second and third cycle qualifications against EQF levels 6, 7 and 8 respectively, or against equivalent levels for countries not bound by the EQF. We will explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications (EQF level 5) and encourage countries to use the QF-EHEA for referencing these qualifications in national contexts where they exist. (Bucharest Communiqué)

One important development since 2005 is that short cycle programs have gained prominence in many countries and the EQF, adopted in 2008, includes a level 5, which is normally the level to

which short cycle qualifications, whether in higher education or VET, are referenced[47]. While some qualifications referenced against EQF level 5 are not higher education qualifications, many are, and it is worth noting that there are also qualifications at first and second degree level (EQF levels 6 and 7) that are not considered higher education qualifications in the systems to which they belong. It therefore seems incongruent that the QF-EHEA does not acknowledge the widespread existence of short cycle degrees in national systems.

It is also worth underlining that national education systems may include levels other than those included in the overarching frameworks as long as national frameworks are self-certified and referenced against the QF-EHEA and the EQF. For example, while the EQF comprises 8 levels, the number of levels in national frameworks currently ranges from 7 to 12. Therefore, including short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA will in no way oblige countries to include such qualifications in their national frameworks but it would give explicit recognition to the fact that many national frameworks do include short cycle qualifications.

Regardless of whether the short cycle qualifications are included in the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA, the qualifications framework should provide for clear articulation pathways connecting the short cycle qualifications to the first cycle (bachelor) qualifications. Public authorities should encourage higher education institutions in cooperation with the other providers of short cycle study programs to develop those articulation pathways.

Recommendations

At their 2015 meeting, Ministers should decide to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) based on the Dublin descriptor[48] for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG in order to give explicit recognition to the fact that many national frameworks now include short cycle qualifications but without an obligation on countries to include such qualifications in their NQF.

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[47] See the CEDEFOP Briefing Note "The hidden potential of level 5 qualifications" (June 2014), available at http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/9089_en.pdf.

[48]

http://paginas.fe.up.pt/~sfeyo/Docs_SFA_Bologna/120_Ref%20Doc_20041018%20%5BJQIG%20Dublin%20Descriptors%5D.pdf.

IV.2.2 Referencing of access qualifications (ToR no. 11 and the 2012 report by the Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks)

The referencing of school leaving qualifications giving access to higher education has been identified as a major challenge to the usefulness of the overarching frameworks. This is recognized in the Bucharest Communiqué:

> A common understanding of the levels of our qualifications frameworks is essential to recognition for both academic and professional purposes. School leaving qualifications giving access to higher education will be considered as being of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 4, or equivalent levels for countries not bound by the EQF, where they are included in National Qualifications Frameworks.

This statement was made in the light of discussions in some countries about whether secondary school leaving qualifications giving access to higher education should be referenced against EQF levels 4 or 5. This is an issue of great importance to the future development of the overarching qualifications frameworks. As pointed out in the 2012 report by the Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, if some school leaving qualifications are referenced against EQF level 5, and hence as being within the first cycle qualifications of the QF-EHEA, the logical implications would be that school leaving qualifications from countries in which they are referenced against level 4 would not be fully recognized for access and, conversely, that countries referencing their access qualifications against EQF level 5 would expect these to be recognized for credits toward a first degree as they would *de facto* be considered to be at the level of short cycle qualifications.

The SRWG considered making a recommendation on the referencing of access qualifications, since this referencing has clear implications for the QF-EHEA and, beyond that, for facilitating – or not – access to higher education throughout the EHEA. However, there now seems to be a constructive dialogue on the issue within the EQF as well as the countries in which the issue is salient in the domestic debate and it is important not to make recommendations that might upset this dialogue.

Recommendation

In view of the ongoing discussions at national level in some EHEA members, the SRWG has chosen to reserve judgment but recommends that the issue be on the structural reforms agenda of the EHEA also beyond 2015.

IV.2.3 Third cycle qualifications (ToR no. 8)

In 2003, EHEA Ministers agreed that "The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research" (Berlin Communiqué). Thus, the third cycle rests firmly on the original research of the doctoral candidate; this is the main difference between the third and the other cycles. The Salzburg Principles (2005, revised in 2010) have laid down the principles for doctorates in the EHEA and set out the generally accepted framework for doctoral candidates in Europe.

Recent reforms in doctoral programs and provision are intended to bring innovative features to research training while underlining the fact that graduates should be competent and skilled researchers qualified for careers in, as well as outside of, academia. This implies, among other things, the expansion of the training dimension of the third cycle to interdisciplinary issues and the acquisition of transversal skills, not only through specific training activities but also through research work.

At their Bucharest meeting in 2012, Ministers of the EHEA asked for policy recommendations on how to improve transparency, quality, employability, internationalization and mobility in the third cycle. The BFUG decided to develop the policy recommendations by establishing an *ad hoc* working group on the third cycle as a sub-structure of the SRWG.

Another important consideration is that the organization of third cycle degree programs and the status of doctoral candidates vary greatly from one country to another. The third cycle, with its strong component of research, is an area for which academic freedom and institutional autonomy are particularly important. In some countries, doctoral candidates are considered as junior researchers, whereas in others they are considered as advanced students. Among other things, this means that the experience of doctoral candidates – and sometimes even post-doctoral fellows - are not considered as directly relevant labor market experience when they apply for jobs on the strength of their third cycle degrees. It is important that doctoral programs and provision include improved mobility opportunities that enable most doctoral candidates to include a stay aboard and/or a traineeship, work placement or similar experience by adapting them to the research-based approach of their degree. At the same time, a narrow view of the employability of third cycle graduates as well as a refusal to recognize third cycle qualifications and/or postgraduate fellowships as relevant work experience may easily lead to brain drain at a level most European countries can ill afford

The *ad hoc* working group on third cycle qualifications is, then, one of four sub-groups under the responsibility of the SRWG. This *ad hoc* group has submitted a particularly substantial report and its mandate and proposals to some extent go beyond the issue of structural reforms. Examples are its proposals concerning the funding of doctoral candidates, internationalization and mobility, and data collection. The SRWG therefore suggests that the BFUG give separate consideration to the full report by the *ad hoc* working group on third cycle qualifications. In the present report, the SRWG puts forward considerations on third cycle qualifications, based on input by the *ad hoc* working group, to the extent that these fall within the remit of the SRWG.

The starting point for the SRWG's consideration of third cycle qualifications is that the holders of these qualifications – and in particular of doctoral qualifications – are often perceived as being highly qualified but within a very narrow field. Holders of doctoral qualifications are also often perceived as being qualified only for a research career, and sometimes there is even a perception that research careers are limited to higher education institutions and specialized research institutes. In many cases, the degree holders themselves have a restricted view of their career options. This perception leads to an underutilization of the advanced subject specific knowledge and the higher generic skills and competences holders of third cycle qualifications have acquired through conducting research and taught courses. Utilizing the capabilities of holders of third cycle qualifications in a more appropriate way could enhance the innovative capacity of businesses, non-profit, public and governmental organizations.

It is therefore important to broaden the perception of the employability and real competences of holders of third cycle qualifications. On the one hand, research is carried out not only within universities and research institutes but also in several other kinds of organizations, such as industry, financial organizations, and other businesses as well as in a number of non-profit NGOs. To take only two examples, both Amnesty International and Transparency International have well developed research departments. A successful research project can also lead to self-employment. It is important that higher education institutions provide good career guidance adapted to third cycle graduates or support services to encourage the set-up of new businesses managed by third cycle graduates and provide adequate protection of intellectual property rights for third cycle candidates.

On the other hand, and perhaps even more importantly, higher education institutions need to provide clear and understandable descriptions not only of the subject specific competences doctoral candidates are expected to acquire but also of the generic competences that will be developed in doctoral programs and provision. If the generic competences acquired through a third cycle qualification are different from and/or more advanced than those obtained through a second cycle degree, these need to be described and communicated clearly to an academic and, more importantly, a non-academic audience. For example, since conducting research is a key component of third cycle programs and provision, it is reasonable to assume that those who successfully complete such programs will have problem solving and analytical skills as well as competences in critical thinking beyond those acquired through second cycle programs. If the recommendation made elsewhere in the SRWG report to review the Diploma Supplement is taken up, it is important that the review take into account the need for transparency in doctoral qualifications and to reflect its specificities compared with first and second cycle degrees. The BFUG and, as appropriate, the European Commission should encourage coordination with the possible development of a "Doctoral Supplement" within the European Research Area.

A broader view of the range of competences doctoral candidates should acquire and what kinds of employment they may qualify for, including in a research career, also has impacts on program design. Third cycle programs and provision must be designed in such a way that they complement the research dimension with the subject specific and generic competences that are particularly important to holders of doctorates and that strengthen their employability and entrepreneurship as well as their ability and desire to engage with society as active citizens.

In addition to ensuring the high quality of research in the programs and units in which doctoral candidates undertake their research training, quality assurance in third cycle programs and provision should pay special attention to the existence of a supportive and inclusive research environment based on good supervision; to the involvement of doctoral candidates in improving the overall quality of the program; to the existence of an independent and external peer review (where possible, international) to assess outcomes such as originality, rigor, creativity and independence through defense of the thesis; and to provisions to support the development of the supervisors' competencies in carrying out their role in the candidates' training.

Although the capabilities of doctoral candidates have been assessed *ex ante* and although the quality of research is assessed by panels of peers reviewing the quality of research projects, we recommend that the universities pay due attention to the quality of the research training.

Recommendations

Higher education institutions are encouraged to:

➢ design and conduct third cycle programs and provision to ensure that they develop competences that qualify third cycle graduates for a broad range of employment, within as well as outside of academia and research more broadly;
➢ describe both subject specific and generic competences doctoral candidates are expected to acquire through third cycle programs and provision clearly and understandably and in such a way that the competences specific to third cycle qualifications are clearly demonstrated in the research[49]. Third cycle programs and provision should, as appropriate, include the development of entrepreneurial competences and provide good career guidance;

Employers, both public and private, should consider the competences and skills acquired as well as the time spent to achieve them as doctoral candidates and/or postdoctoral fellows as a part of applicants' professional experience and could also take this period of time into account for the purpose of calculating seniority, in particular as concerns pension and social security arrangements.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should:

➢ provide doctoral candidates with the possibility to include a stay abroad and/or a traineeship, work placement or similar experience by adapting them to the research-based approach of their studies, *inter alia* by providing adequate mobility opportunities for doctoral candidates:
➢ provide doctoral candidates and those considering applying for third cycle programs with information about opportunities to cover the costs of their education and training

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[49] Research is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge and understanding. It includes the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts and design where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.

(scholarships, loans, charity funds etc.), in cases where doctoral candidates are not employed as early stage researchers.

➢ provide transparent and understandable information on the competences and skills achieved by doctoral graduates to a wide academic and non-academic audience.

➢ public authorities should provide incentives to higher education institutions to establish organizational frameworks (e.g. doctoral schools) aiming at upgrading the generic/transferable skills of doctoral candidates, stimulating interdisciplinarity, enhancing international cooperation and cooperation with businesses and non-profit and public organizations.

IV.2.4 Implementation of qualifications frameworks (ToR no. 8)

In April 2014, the Network of National Correspondents for Qualifications Frameworks conducted a small survey among its members on the development of national qualifications frameworks for higher education. 25 countries completed the questionnaire, of which 10 stated that they do not (yet) have a national framework. This means that the commitment made by Ministers to develop national frameworks and prepare them for self-certification by 2012 remains unfulfilled for many countries. In explaining this situation, it should be underlined that developing national higher education frameworks requires a development process within each system and that this development takes time. The development of NQFs are in fact a mirror of the implementation of the structural reforms in higher education and it should be noted that the 10 countries that reported not having their NQFs in place also reported that they plan to develop and self-certify their national frameworks by 2016.

The majority of the 15 countries that reported they had self-certified their national qualifications frameworks for higher education had translated this into legal terms. Countries with longer standing national frameworks (NQFs developed more than10 years ago) reported that the NQF is now an integrated part of study programs, especially through the use of learning outcomes.

Cooperation with and involvement of stakeholders is key to the successful implementation of NQFs even if difficulties remain. Higher education institutions accept and acknowledge the existence of their NQF even if many are not strongly committed to it and the business sector is not yet very familiar with it. From a stakeholder's perspective, the differences and specificities of the two overarching frameworks are not always clear.

Most of the countries that report having an NQF declare that their framework is related to both overarching frameworks. From other sources, it is known that a majority of EU countries have opted for self-certifying their national QF against the QF-EHEA and referencing it against the EQF in a single operation. Some express concerns that the EQF perspective can overshadow the specificity of higher education, including in terms of the role of stakeholders (especially higher education institutions) in their implementation. The extent to which national higher education frameworks are open to non-higher education qualifications in a lifelong learning perspective (levels 6, 7 and 8 of the EQF) varies considerably. For half of the responding countries, these levels are only for higher education qualifications; for the other half, they are open to VET

qualification either directly within the higher education framework or via a double entry system. In a majority of countries still face challenges in including non-formal qualifications within national higher education frameworks self-certified against the QF-EHEA.

It should be noted that the number of responses to the survey – 25 – mirrors the relatively low participation in the Network. Whereas every member of the EHEA should appoint a national correspondent for qualifications frameworks, only slightly more than one half of EHEA members regularly participate in the work of the Network, in spite of the fact that the survey shows that there is a continued need for mutual support and exchange of experience in order to make the development and implementation of national frameworks a reality throughout the EHEA. There is little reason to assume that the 25 or so active members of the network are the least advanced among EHEA members in the implementation of their national frameworks. The Network needs to be strengthened if it is to play a strong role in the further development and implementation of qualifications frameworks within the EHEA. All EHEA members must appoint their national correspondents and participate in the work.

Recommendations

> ➢ Public authorities should ensure and lead the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks based on learning outcomes in a way that fully values and draws on the contribution of higher education institutions and other stakeholders and that furthers and promotes a learning outcomes approach.

> ➢ Public authorities should promote and raise awareness of their respective national qualifications frameworks. They should ensure publication of their self-certification reports and provide the BFUG Secretariat with the official information needed to publish the self-certification through the EHEA web site.

> ➢ Student participation in the development, revision, and implementation of qualifications frameworks is important to furthering student centered learning.

> ➢ Cooperation with ENICs and NARICs in the development and implementation of QFs is essential to fostering fair and transparent recognition of qualifications.

> ➢ To further the comparability and compatibility of self-certified national higher education frameworks, pan-European peer learning activities, exchange of experience and advice, and comparative studies should be promoted.

> ➢ Cooperation between the competent authorities for quality assurance, qualification frameworks and recognition should be reinforced in order to ensure that qualifications frameworks are used as a tool for modernization of higher education systems.

> ➢ All EHEA members should reinforce the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks by appointing their national correspondent for qualifications frameworks and ensuring active participation in the network of national correspondents.

> ➢ The Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks should provide guidance, based on good practice from member states, on the inclusion of short cycle qualifications in national qualifications frameworks for countries that wish to do so.

IV.3   RECOGNITION

IV.3.1 Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR manual to advance recognition practices (ToR no. 1 and the Bucharest Communiqué)

While every member of the EHEA except Greece has now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the implementation of the Convention leaves much to be desired. The analysis of the 2007 national action plans for recognition[50] pointed to a wide range of challenges in providing fair recognition of qualifications, including the fact that many countries had not yet updated their legislation to incorporate the principles of the LRC. Hence, in a number of countries, there was discrepancy between the obligations undertaken by a country through the LRC and the provisions of the same country's national legislation. The successive stock taking and implementation reports also indicate that this situation has not evolved significantly. Since 2007, further developments in higher education – in particular as regards the role of and focus on learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks in recognition – also contribute to making a review of national legislation much needed.

In most countries, higher education institutions play a key role in the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of further study. The European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual provides good guidance in this respect and institutions should encourage its use.

All applicants should have the possibility to appeal recognition decisions and should be duly informed about the procedures for doing so. Institutions should review their appeals procedures with a view to ensuring they afford applicants adequate opportunities to appeal against recognition decisions made by the institution and include the principle of fair recognition in their codes of ethical behavior.

Recommendations

> ➢ At their 2015 meeting, *Ministers* should commit to reviewing their national legislation with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, taking due account of the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention by the Convention Committee, and report to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016. The Convention

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[50] Rauhvargers, Andrejs and Agnese Rusakova (2010). *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans* Strasbourg Council of Europe Publishing Council of Europe higher education series no.12

Committee could, in cooperation with ENIC and NARIC Networks be asked to prepare an analysis of the reports by the end of 2017.

➢ *Higher education institutions* should make adequate use of the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual in their own work on recognition. They should review their own institutional procedures with a view to affording applicants adequate opportunities to appeal against recognition decisions made by the institution and include the principle of fair recognition in their codes of ethical behavior.

IV.3.2 Recognition of prior learning (ToR no. 8)

The Structural Reforms Working Group regrets that, in spite of repeated requests, it has received no substantial input from the network for the recognition of prior learning. The following paragraphs have therefore been developed without the support of and input from the sub-structure established to cover this policy area.

While in principle the term "prior learning" could perhaps be applied to all learning (which by definition is prior to the present moment, otherwise it would not have been achieved), whether formal, non-formal or informal, it is most often used to designate learning other than that achieved through recognized formal education programs. This is the sense in which the term is used here, and – without aiming to provide a complete list of examples – the term includes learning through work experience, life experience, activities in voluntary associations such as student and youth organizations; religious, charitable, and cultural associations; arts activities; political work; sports activities; non-recognized formal education programs, etc.

"Recognition of prior learning" may refer to two related but distinct processes. On the one hand, recognition may be provided through a feedback process the main aim of which is to provide guidance to the individual learner for his or her further learning development. On the other hand, it may denote the formal assessment of learning outcomes achieved through non-formal or informal learning for the purpose of access to a study program or the award of a given qualification. It is in the latter sense that the term will be used here. This sense is akin to the definition of "recognition" in the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention as "A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities".

In the context of this report, then, "recognition of prior learning" will denote the formal assessment of learning outcomes achieved through non-formal or informal education for the purpose of granting access to a study program or facilitating the award of a qualification. Many EHEA members and their higher education institutions have well established practice for the recognition of prior learning, whereas in other countries and institutions, the recognition of prior learning is a new approach. Whether practices and policies for the recognition of prior learning have yet to be established or have been in operation for some time, they should constantly be (re)assessed with a view to further improvement.

Recognition of prior learning is an area where experience can be shared with the VET sector, where it has been successfully implemented in a number of countries, often on the initiative of and with the support of employers. Especially with the proposal to include short cycle qualifications in the QF-EHEA (cf. IV.2.1), both sectors could benefit from an exchange of good practice, especially though not exclusively at short cycle/EQF 5 level. . The rationale for introducing and implementing RPL may differ according to the sector, with a strong focus on employability in VET, supplemented with a strong concern for the social dimension and from a lifelong learning principle in higher education, but both sectors put the student/learner at the center. Convergence between higher education and VET in RPL (as in quality assurance, cf. IV.1.1) may enhance permeability in (higher) education and also help create trust between employers and the higher education sector.

To a greater or lesser degree, the recognition of prior learning maybe met with incomprehension by academic staff, employers and others whose conception of qualifications are predominantly formal. The network on the Recognition of Prior Learning was established with a view to improving and developing policy and practice throughout the EHEA but the Network has provided insufficient evidence of success in this endeavor. When developing its work program for the 2015 – 18 period, the BFUG should assess whether the Network is (still) an appropriate instrument for furthering the recognition of prior learning within the EHEA.

The recognition of prior learning is an area in which there are not only considerable differences still between the policy and practice of different institutions and countries, but also an area that has seen relatively rapid developments over the past decade or two. This is illustrated by the fact that the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention are relatively general (Article IV.8):

> In the Parties in which access to higher education may be obtained on the basis of non-traditional qualifications, similar qualifications obtained in other Parties shall be assessed in a similar manner as non-traditional qualifications earned in the Party in which recognition is sought.

This text reflects the fact that at the time the Lisbon Recognition Convention was adopted (1997), the very idea of the recognition of prior learning was unevenly accepted throughout the European Region.

The Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012[51] invites EU Member States have in place no later than 2018 arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to obtain full or partial recognition of a qualification on the basis of validated learning experiences. These validation arrangements should be inked to national qualifications frameworks. The Recommendation is relevant for all types and levels of qualifications, without prejudice to other applicable EU law such as on the recognition of professional qualifications

In the view of the SRWG, EHEA members and their institutions should continue to develop policy and practice to facilitate the recognition of prior learning. This is important from the point of view of individual justice – learners should get due recognition of their qualifications without

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[51] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF

having to repeat learning or exams that they have already undertaken – as well as of societal efficiency – as societies we cannot afford not to make full use of the qualifications of all citizens. The recommendations set out below aim to encourage and enable public authorities, higher education institutions and employers to facilitate the recognition of prior learning in their respective contexts.

Recommendations

Public authorities should

➢ Review current legislation with a view to removing any remaining obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning;
➢ Review their national qualifications frameworks with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;
➢ Encourage higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognize prior learning.

Higher education institutions should:

➢ Develop a coordinated approach to the recognition of prior learning, if and where such an approach has not yet been adopted;
➢ Further commit to the recognition of prior learning by developing institutional policies, guidelines, and recognition procedures;
➢ Develop and design flexible curricula that provide and take account of opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and that allow flexible learning paths with flexible modes of entry, progression and delivery;
➢ Ensure that possibilities for the recognition of prior learning are included in the development and design of curricula, study programs, and flexible learning paths.

Public authorities and higher education institutions should systematically collect data on the practice of RPL by higher education institutions to improve the visibility of these processes and to inform further policy development at national and European levels.

Employers and higher education institutions, with the support of public authorities as appropriate, should develop policies and practice for work based learning that provide sufficient grounds, *inter alia* through the clear definition and attestation of learning outcomes, for the recognition of work based learning not a part of formal education for the purposes of providing access to higher education programs and awarding qualifications.

The *ENIC and NARIC Networks and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should develop proposals for coherent policy and practice for the recognition of prior learning throughout the EHEA, taking due account of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012[52]. The *Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee* should consider whether a subsidiary

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[52] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF

text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by the Committee by 2019.

When developing its work program for the 2015 – 18 period, the *BFUG should* assess what the most appropriate instrument for furthering the recognition of prior learning within the EHEA would be.

IV.4   TRANSPARENCY

IV.4.1 Diploma Supplement (ToR no. 1)

The Diploma Supplement is a transparency instrument under the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as a part of Europass. It was developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO and belongs to the two separate frameworks for decision making just outlined.

There are at least two issues linked to the Diploma Supplement. The first is that in spite of ministers having committed to issuing the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language by 2005, 9 years later this is still far from being a reality in the EHEA – and it seems likely this will also be the case in 2015, 10 years after this commitment should have been honored.

The other issue is whether the Diploma Supplement should be reconsidered in the light of developments in higher education in Europe and beyond since it was adopted in the late 1990s. These developments include a stronger emphasis on learning outcomes, the development of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF, a much stronger emphasis on external quality assurance, including the development (and soon the revision) of the ESG and the establishment of EQAR, the development of on line information, and responsibility for ensuring the quality of Diploma Supplements. The SRWG is aware that the Pathfinder Group on automatic recognition will most likely recommend that the Diploma Supplement be reviewed.

The Diploma Supplement was developed jointly by three international institutions in two different formal settings, and modifying it will be an elaborate process in which, as far as the Lisbon Recognition Convention is concerned, the next opportunity will be the meeting of the Convention Committee in 2016. Neither the appropriate body of the European Union nor the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee) can adopt a revised Diploma Supplement without the consent of the other and it is important to ensure that both frameworks adopt an identical version of a revised Diploma Supplement.

Recommendations

At their 2015 meeting, Ministers should commit to fulfilling their previous commitment to issue the Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in a widely spoken language in time for this commitment to be verified in the 2018 Implementation report.

The Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO should:

➢ review the Diploma Supplement with a view to ensuring it reflects recent developments in higher education, including the development of learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks, is relevant and up to date for the purposes of mobility and the recognition of qualifications as well as promoting employability and that it takes into account the possibilities for providing up to date information offered by modern information technology, including the digitalization of the Diploma Supplement itself;

➢ ensure the adoption of any revised version of the Diploma Supplement, in identical versions, within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as that of the European Union (Europass) and taking account of relevant developments in other parts of the world;

➢ ensure coherence between a review of the Diploma Supplement and the possible development of a "Doctoral Supplement" within the European Research Area.

Higher education institutions should provide students who leave the institution without completing their degree with a certified statement of the learning outcomes achieved.

IV.4.2 **Review of the ECTS Users' Guide** (ToR no. 8)

Context

The Bologna Process recognized from the outset the central importance of a credit system – ECTS - for recognition, transfer and accumulation. The Bucharest Communiqué includes a commitment to ensuring the 'meaningful implementation of learning outcomes' and that the 'ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning'. The *ad hoc* Working Group on the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide was set up to achieve this task.

The European Commission has facilitated the work of the group, composed of representatives of 14 countries as well as from 4 organizations[53]. A stakeholders' consultation with 110 participants from 32 countries was organized in January 2014. The WG submitted regular reports to the

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[53] Armenia, Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom; ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE

Structural Reforms WG (SRWG) and presented the draft of the revised Guide to the SRWG on May 27, 2014. After accommodating the comments of the SRWG, the new draft was submitted to the meeting of the SRWG on September 16 – 17, 2014.

General considerations - Scope of the work

While ECTS is adopted as the national credit system in most countries of the EHEA and is increasingly used in other regions of the world, some differences can still be found in the implementation of the system.

The benefits of ECTS are clear to those who are closely involved with the system, but need to be explained and promoted to a broader range of stakeholders. Within the EHEA there continue to be misconceptions and misunderstandings that stem more from (national) reforms in higher education than ECTS *per se*. The Users' Guide seeks to give a clear description of ECTS and set it in the context of reforms, qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and enhancement developments, curriculum planning and development and other changes in higher education. The new ECTS Guide is intended to provide a coherent explanation and guide to implementation which will ensure that it is an instrument for good practice which will support consistent and correct implementation of ECTS throughout the EHEA. As ECTS was designed as a credit system, this function should be reinforced by the revised Guide.

The Group endorsed the value and critical role of learning outcomes in higher education and has sought to reflect this in the new ECTS Guide. However, the Group wishes to stress the other wide ranging benefits which the correct implementation of ECTS as a full-fledged credit system entails. ECTS:

- − Ensures transparency of programs and the related workload and protects students from overloaded programs;
- − Facilitates the movement of students and graduates for study and work;
- − Helps to build trust, transparency and cooperation between higher education systems;
- − Emphasizes learning outcomes and related assessment;
- − Facilitates flexible learning pathways, lifelong learning and the use of new methods of learning, teaching and assessment;
- − Underpins the shift to programs developing skills and competences relevant to the needs of society.

The Guide is a users' guide intended for all higher education stakeholders. It should set ECTS in the context of higher education developments, reform and change. It should give a clear, unequivocal description of ECTS credits; it should show how credits help in the design, description and delivery of programs; it should make it possible to recognize and integrate different modes of learning in a lifelong learning perspective; and it should facilitate the mobility of learners by providing a simple and transparent mechanism for recognizing qualifications and periods of study.

ECTS can be applied to all programs, whatever the mode of delivery or the status of the learners and to all kinds of learning contexts. National authorities should determine which institutions may award ECTS credits. All institutions awarding ECTS credits should be subject to the same quality assurance requirements.

The new Guide is designed for a broad range of stakeholders - students and other learners, academic and administrative staff in higher education institutions, employers, education providers and other interested stakeholders. It provides practical guidance for the implementation of ECTS and links to supporting materials.

The WG used the understanding of learning outcomes in the QF-EHEA, i.e. that learning outcomes and the associated workload are intimately linked and that assessment and assessment criteria are also integral to the correct application of a credit system. The WG noted that the shift to a student centered approach based on learning outcomes is difficult to achieve if the attainment of learning outcomes, and of the ECTS credits associated with them, is not assessed in a consistent and transparent way.

The WG focused on relevant developments since the previous revision of the Users' Guide in 2009, taking as a starting point the use of ECTS for accumulation within a study program, which is the basis for the transfer and recognition in both national and cross-border mobility.

What is new in the Guide?

➢ The structure has been revised, by adding chapters on Program Design, Delivery and Monitoring and on Lifelong Learning.

➢ Mobility and recognition are in a separate chapter.

➢ The Guide does not provide templates for the supporting documents but it includes recommended elements for the documents to be used in the application of credits.

➢ The appendix contains a glossary, examples of grade conversion and a recommended reading list on learning outcomes.

➢ Key definitions have been revised, without changing the associated rules.

➢ There is guidance on using credits for program design; on formulating learning outcomes; on monitoring credit allocation.

➢ The integral relationship of learning outcomes, the associated workload and assessment is explained.

➢ There is a clear reference to qualifications frameworks.

➢ Principles of learning, teaching and assessment are formulated.

➢ Possible links between ECTS and doctoral qualifications are touched upon.

➢ Flexibility has been incorporated to accommodate all types of learning and mobility.

➢ The importance of embedding mobility in study programs from the outset has been highlighted.

➢ A method of transparent grade transfer has been proposed, based on a European project on grade conversions.

➢ The relevance of credits for lifelong learning is emphasized.

➢ It shows how credits can apply to informal and non-formal learning and it calls for an open and flexible approach to recognize credits obtained in another context.

➢ The importance of vocational education and training is recognized and a reference to ECVET included.

➢ The reference to the importance of the role of quality assurance and quality enhancement in ECTS and related areas has been reinforced.

Status of the Guide

The Users' Guide is a guidance tool rather than a tool for recognition, as shown by its title. The key definitions included should be shared in the EHEA as cornerstones of ECTS, and these should be the basis for further national regulations. The Guide refers to examples which should support implementation without necessarily suggesting a uniform approach.

As the original proposal for a system of transferable European study credits arose from the Erasmus program the Guide has been considered to be a document of the European Union and specifically of the European Commission. Given the importance of ECTS for the EHEA across a much wider geographical area, for the transfer of credits not only between but within countries; and for the accumulation of credits within single study programs, even where there is no mobility, the Group proposes that the guide become an official document of the EHEA and that it be adopted by Ministers at the Ministerial meeting in Yerevan. It also proposes that the Guide be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it continues to be up to date, relevant, meet the needs of stakeholders, responsive to change and generally fit for purpose.

Recommendation

➢ The ministers of the EHEA should adopt the ECTS Users' Guide and make it an official EHEA document.

V.   OTHER ISSUES IN THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

V.1   Help identify and set priorities for peer learning activities (ToR no. 11) **and organize, or stimulate the organization of, Bologna conferences, mini-seminars, peer learning activities and events on issues related to structural reforms** (ToR no. 12)

As the further development of the EHEA will increasingly require that adopted policies be implemented at national and institutional level, the exchange of good practice will be crucial. As noted elsewhere in the report, uneven implementation of common structures may well lead to a situation in which the education structures of the 47 EHEA members are no longer sufficiently coherent to constitute a European Higher Education Area.

Following the discussion of peer learning activities in the BFUG, the SRWG encouraged its members to put forward suggestions for peer learning activities on issues of structural reform. As of July 2014, the following activities had been accepted by the BFUG:

PLAs already planned/organized

Organizers	Topic	Objectives	Proposed dates/period and venue	Comments
Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, EQAR	*The Role of NQFs and QA in Recognition*	To disseminate practical country examples/case studies related to the topics To discuss opportunities and challenges observed in different contexts To identify good practice in relation to the two topics that might help to guide other countries	11 December 2013 Trakošćan, Croatia	completed
EQF Advisory Board	*The use of QFs and Learning Outcomes in the recognition of foreign qualifications*		First semester of 2014, Brussels	

PLA proposals consistent with aims of potential funding under Erasmus+

Organisers	Topic	Objectives	Proposed dates/period and venue
Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) (for programme, see Annex2)	*The Achievement of Intended Learning Outcomes (LOs) Guidelines for Demonstrating the Achievement of intended LOs in HEIs and external QAs*	To discuss guidelines that can help to guide HEIs and QA agencies with demonstrating that intended learning outcomes have been achieved, based on practical examples	First semester 2015 The Hague, the Netherlands
ENQA	Accreditation of Joint Degrees	To present country examples related to the topic To examine national legislation and practices relating to joint programs To analyse obstacles for implementing Joint degrees and *identify good practices/possible solutions*	First Semester of 2015 (after the Yerevan Ministerial Events)
Flemish Community of Belgium	Permeability and articulation between the different categories of HE (between short cycle and bachelor and between professionally oriented bachelor qualifications and	To share practices concerning the use of qualifications frameworks, ECTS, quality assurance and RPL as tools for improved permeability and articulation between different levels/types/categories of HE and *identify good practices/possible solutions*	Organization in second semester 2015. Preparing activities in first semester (call for participation, questionnaire, background document).

	academically oriented master qualifications)		

PLA proposals with the need to clarify the subject and/or decide if a PLA is the right format

Organisers	Topic	Objectives	Proposed dates/period and venue	
Romania (TBC)	*Transparency Tools for the Third Cycle*	To map existing practices on DS issue in third cycle To start a discussion on what could be changed in the DS to make it useful for the third cycle as well To analyse the existing good practice in the use of ECTS for third-cycle programmes	Second Semester of 2014 TBC	Apparent overlap with tasks of the 3rd cycle working group; mapping and analysis tasks appear more suitable for the WG rather than for a PLA Angle on DS – could feed into a wider discussion on the DS, but probably more suitable as a WG action rather than a PLA
Poland	Structural Reforms and Employability	To discuss the role of SRs in enhancing employability of graduates To share good practice in tracking graduates' career path and discuss challenges as regards obtaining reliable and meaningful information on	First Semester of 2015 (after the Yerevan Ministerial Events) Poland	Proposed by Poland.

		graduates' employability To consider the role of employers in shaping curricula, QA processes and QFs		

PLA proposals to be volunteered and consolidated

Organizers	Topic	Objectives	Proposed dates/period and venue
TBC Could be covered in PLA No 6 in Ireland	Best Practices in Coherent Implementation of Structural Reforms	To share good practice in coherent implementation of structural reforms (Bologna triangle, transparency tools, transversal issues, i.a. employability) To identify obstacle and gaps in the implementation of structural reforms	First Semester of 2015 TBC

In addition to the activities recognized as "EHEA peer learning activities", individual members have also organized activities designed to improve good practice. While it is impossible to provide anything like a complete overview of these, Appendix 7 illustrates some activities that may also be organized by others:

In addition to the activities recognized as "EHEA peer learning activities", individual members have also organized activities designed to improve good practice. While it is impossible to provide anything like a complete overview of these, Appendix 7 illustrates some activities that may also be organized by others.

V.2   **Commission research** (ToR no. 14)

While commissioning research was included as a possible action in the ToR of the SRWG, the Group was unable to do so. In part, this was because the time frame was too limited, but the main reason was the absence of a budget for commissioning research. Under its current arrangements, without a budget to finance activities identified by the BFUG or tis working

groups, any research would need to be financed by EHEA members or consultative members from their respective budgets and would therefore need to align with national or institutional priorities. The SRWG nevertheless takes note of the fact that the EHEA, and structural reforms within it, is the topic of numerous research projects and articles. It notes that research on structural reforms is included in the program of the Bologna Researchers Conference on "The Future of Higher Education", organized by the Romanian and Armenian authorities in Bucharest on November 24 – 26, 2014.

The SRWG would like to see that the next work program make room for exploring how the findings of the Bologna higher education researchers could better inform EHEA policy making and could enhance our understanding of the implementation practices and our insights into what works and what does not and why.

APPENDICES

1. Terms of reference of the Structural Reforms Working Group
2. Terms of reference of the sub-group on third cycle qualifications
3. Terms of reference of the ad hoc group on the review of the ECTS Users' Guide
4. Terms of reference of the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks
5. Terms of reference for the Network on the recognition of prior learning
6. Members of the SRWG
7. Examples of Bologna conferences, mini-seminars, peer learning activities and events on issues related to structural reforms

APPENDIX 1

Terms of Reference on Structural Reforms (Qualifications Frameworks, Recognition, Quality Assurance and Transparency)

Name of the Working Group Working Group on Structural Reforms (qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications, transparency)
Contact persons (Proposed Co-Chairs) Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe)-Coordinator Noël Vercruysse (Belgium/Flemish Community) Fr. Friedrich Bechina, FSO (Holy See) Bartłomiej Banaszak (Poland)
Composition Armenia, Austria, Belgium/French Community Federation Wallonia-Brussels, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, Ukraine, BUSINESSEUROPE, European Commission, Education International, ENQA, EQAR, ESU, EUA, EURASHE. Representatives of sub structures under the Structural Reforms WG should be involved in its work as required.
Purpose and/or outcome The Working Group on Structural Reforms is mandated to develop proposals for policy and practice aiming to improve instruments for structural reform (QF, QA, recognition of qualifications, transparency instruments) and the coherence between the main elements of structural reform within the European Higher Education Area as well as to oversee and advise the BFUG on the implementation of structural reforms. The Working Group should consider structural reforms in relation to the major purposes of higher education: ➥ Preparing for employment; ➥ Preparing for life as active citizens in democratic societies; ➥ Personal development; ➥ The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base;

as well as the three missions:

- ➢ teaching and learning;
- ➢ research;
- ➢ service to society.

It should further be guided by the following policy considerations:

- ➢ Students, employers and society at large want more objective, reliable and high quality information about higher education;
- ➢ There is an increasing societal expectation of Higher Education Institutions that they enhance the employability of graduates and provide students with skills relevant to the labour market;
- ➢ There is a need to adapt the Bologna goals and instruments for structural reforms to the ever changing context of higher education and of our societies and to the evolving needs within the EHEA;
- ➢ There is a need to build trust and confidence in higher education;
- ➢ The relationship between the structural reforms developed within the EHEA and their impact on other regions needs to be considered;
- ➢ There is a need for a more supportive environment for academic staff and students;
- ➢ Higher Education needs to contribute to Lifelong Learning.

Reference to the Bucharest Communiqué

At the European level, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference in 2015 and together with relevant stakeholders, we will…

- ➢ Develop a proposal for a revised version of the ESG for adoption;

- ➢ Work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning;

- ➢ Coordinate the work of ensuring that qualifications frameworks work in practice, emphasising their link to learning outcomes and explore how the QF-EHEA could take account of short cycle qualifications in national contexts;

- ➢ Support the work of a pathfinder group of countries exploring ways to achieve the automatic academic recognition of comparable degrees;

- ➢ Examine national legislation and practices relating to joint programmes and degrees as a way to dismantle obstacles to cooperation and mobility embedded in national contexts;

- ➢ Develop EHEA guidelines for transparency policies and continue to monitor current and developing transparency tools;

At the national level, together with the relevant stakeholders, and especially with higher education institutions, we will:

➢ Allow EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements;

➢ Work to enhance employability, lifelong learning, problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills through improved cooperation with employers, especially in the development of educational programmes;

➢ Ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes;

➢ Invite countries that cannot finalize the implementation of national qualifications frameworks compatible with QF-EHEA by the end of 2012 to redouble their efforts and submit a revised roadmap for this task;

➢ Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR-manual to advance recognition practices;

Specific tasks
1) Consider and make recommendations on specific issues of policy and practice related to quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition of qualifications and transparency instruments and their mutual interaction;
2) Consider how the development and implementation of learning outcomes impact on and may strengthen the coherence between the policy areas covered by the WG;
3) In consultation with the ENIC and NARIC Networks and the Network of national QF correspondents, develop policy proposals aiming to improve the interaction between qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications;
4) The EQF Advisory Group and the BFUG working group on Structural Reforms, in co-operation with ENQA and EQAVET, should review and make proposals to strengthen the common principles of quality assurance to be applied across HE and VET.
5) Develop policy proposals aiming to improve transparency instruments for describing individual qualifications as well as higher education systems, in particular as concerns the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS. In this, the Working Group should establish cooperation with the institutions and bodies charged with the oversight and implementation of the relevant transparency instruments;
6) As appropriate, provide input to the WGs responsible for mobility and internationalization; the social dimension and lifelong learning on the role of structural reforms as well as to the Working Group on implementation in furthering the goals of these groups;
7) Consider and make recommendations on the interaction between the structural reforms and transversal issues, i.a. employability and the global dimension;
8) Consider and make recommendations concerning third cycle qualifications, the review the ECTS Users' Guide, the Recognition of Prior Learning and the implementation of

qualifications frameworks on the basis of proposals by the relevant sub structures.

9) Consider and make proposals concerning joint degrees and programmes on the basis of suggestion by a small ad-hoc group reporting to the working groups on Structural Reforms and Mobility and Internationalization.

10) Comment, as appropriate, on draft amendments to the European Standards and Guidelines prepared by the Steering Committee (E4 plus EQAR, EI, BUSINESSEUROPE).

11) Help identify and set priorities for peer learning activities concerning structural reforms;

12) Organize, or stimulate the organization of, Bologna conferences, mini-seminars, peer learning activities and events on issues related to structural reforms;

13) Consider developments in relation to EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies operating in countries other than their countries of origin and make policy proposals or recommendations, as appropriate;

14) As appropriate, commission research to support its work;

15) Maintain contact with and, as needed, oversee the work of any sub groups established to address specific aspects of structural reforms;

16) Advice the BFUG on any issues referred to it by the BFUG;

17) Submit proposals to the 2015 Ministerial conference, through the BFUG, aiming to improve the coherence of the structural reforms within the EHEA.

Reporting

Minutes of working group meetings will be made available to the BFUG on the protected part of the website (by the Bologna Secretariat).

BFUG should also receive regular reports and updates.
To allow for good communication with the BFUG as a whole and for the necessary consultations, progress reports should be submitted at least two weeks before each BFUG meeting. In between BFUG meetings, updates can be circulated by the Bologna Secretariat via e-mail.

The draft final report/conclusions will be presented and discussed no later than the BFUG meeting in the second half of 2014.

Meeting schedule:

The Working Group will meet once per semester; more often if required, most likely in the preparation of its report to the BFUG.

The co-chairs will aim to meet once between every meeting of the working group.

Any sub-group established by the BFUG under the WG on Structural Reform will meet as required.

Chairs of the sub-groups will be invited to the meetings of the Co-Chairs of the Structural Reforms WG as appropriate.

Liaison with other WGs' and sub structures

➢ Implementation of the Bologna Process

➢ Social dimension and lifelong learning

➢ Mobility and internationalization

The Structural Reforms WG oversees and receives reports from

➢ The ad-hoc WG on the Third Cycle

➢ The ad-hoc WG on the revision of the ECTS Users' Guide

➢ The network of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

➢ The Network of National Correspondents for Qualifications Frameworks

Additional remarks

Institutions and bodies outside of the BFUG or the framework of the EHEA are responsible for a number of relevant actions and instruments, e.g. the ENIC and NARIC Networks, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the Council of Europe and UNESCO (Lisbon Recognition Convention), the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO (Diploma Supplement), the European Commission (ECTS); the steering group of E4, EI, BUSINESSEUROPE and EQAR in consultation with the BFUG (European Standards and Guidelines). In these cases, the Working Group should establish close cooperation with the relevant bodies and institutions. It should also maintain close cooperation with the EQF, through the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission, CEDEFOP and the European Training Foundation.

APPENDIX 2

Terms of Reference on the Third Cycle

Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Third Cycle
Contact persons (proposed Co-Chairs) Nicola Vittorio-Italy (nicola.vittorio@uniroma2.it) Marzia Foroni-Italy (marzia.foroni@miur.it) Cezar Haj-Romania (cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro) Gloria Molero Martín-Portuguès-Spain (gloria.molero@mecd.es)
Composition The following countries/organisations are members of the Ad-hoc WG: Armenia, Austria, Belgium/Flemish Community, Belgium/French Community, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Holy See, Hungary, Ireland, Moldova, Poland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, EUA, EI, European Commission, EURODOC.
Purpose and/or outcome Map the current implementation of the third cycle in the EHEA, in the light of the "Salzburg II recommendations" and the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training ; Formulate policy proposals to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, on the basis of the outcomes of the previous point and taking into account the developments foreseen within the ERA by Horizon 2020 and other EU initiatives. Formulate policy proposals to improve the transition between the second and the third cycle, with the aim to strengthen the link between education and research.

Reference to the Bucharest Communiqué
 	
"**Enhancing employability to serve Europe's needs**"
   • In this respect, we will sustain a diversity of doctoral programs. Taking into account the "Salzburg II recommendations" and the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training, we will explore how to promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, as the education and training of doctoral candidates has a particular role in bridging the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA);
   • Next to doctoral training, high quality second cycle programs are a necessary precondition for the success of linking teaching, learning and research. Keeping wide diversity and simultaneously increasing readability, we might also explore further possible common principles for master programs in the EHEA, taking account of previous work.
"**Strengthening mobility for better learning**"
   • We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA.
"**Setting out priorities for 2012–2015**"

- Promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, while also building additional bridges between the EHEA and the ERA.

Specific tasks

1. In cooperation with EUA and the European Commission, analyse the current state of doctoral studies in EHEA countries, taking account of the two reference documents – the Salzburg II Recommendations and the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training.
2. Starting from the information provided by the existing National Qualifications Frameworks, map: i) the diverse kind of third cycle degrees offered by HEIs and possible pathways connecting them; ii) different types of doctoral programs in order to formulate policy proposals to improve existing models and instruments.
3. Explore and make proposals for strengthening the link between the second cycle and third cycle in order to facilitate progression, the development of research competencies and timely recruitment to doctoral programs.
4. Explore and make proposals concerning quality and quality assurance procedures in Doctoral training, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.
5. Formulate policy proposals to increase the use of existing transparency tools for third cycle degrees, based on existing good practices in the field, and explore new instruments to increase transparency of third cycle degrees.
6. Examine third cycle degrees with the view to identify , with a specific focus on Doctoral studies[54], the barriers and incentives to international mobility and define policy proposals for improvement.
7. Analyse the results achieved by the different profiles of third cycle degrees offered, with a specific focus on Doctoral Degrees[55], and define policy proposals to improve their employability.
8. **Make** other policy proposals related to the third cycle, as appropriate, such as sustainable funding for third cycle education or candidate recruitment practices.

Reporting

Minutes of working group meetings will be made available to the WG "Structural Reforms" and to the BFUG on the protected part of the website (by the Bologna Secretariat).

Reporting to the WG "Structural Reforms"
Besides minutes, the Co –Chairs of the WG "Structural Reforms" will receive all the working documents of the sub – structure. One of the Co – Chairs will ensure his/her participation to the "Structural Reforms" WG Co-chairs meeting as appropriate.

BFUG reports and updates.
To allow for good communication with BFUG as a whole and for the necessary consultations, the sub – structure will contribute to the progress reports of the WG "Structural Reforms" and will submit at least two weeks before BFUG meeting any document for approval.

The draft final report/conclusions will be presented and discussed no later than the BFUG

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[54] The term refers to standard PhD programs as well as Doctor of Science Degree, where applicable.
[55] The term refers to standard PhD programs as well as Doctor of Science Degree, where applicable.

meeting in the first half of 2014.

Meeting schedule:

The sub – structure of the WG should meet at least 4 times:
- 10th and 11th December 2012, Rome;
- 30th – 31st May 2013, Bucharest;
- 22nd – 23rd October 2013, Madrid;
- February 2014, Italy.

Liaison with other WGs' and networks' activities

Liaisons will mainly be ensured by the WG on "Structural Reforms". Certainly be in touch with Implementation WG and seek connections with other working groups when appropriate.

Additional remarks

APPENDIX 3

Terms of reference of the Ad-hoc Working Group on the Revision of the ECTS Users' Guide

Name of the (ad-hoc) working group **Revision of the ECTS Users' Guide**
Contact person (Chair) Adam Tyson – European Commission (adam.tyson@ec.europa.eu) Klara Engels-Perenyi – European Commission (klara.engels-perenyi@ec.europa.eu)
Composition Armenia, Austria, Belgium/Flemish Community, Germany, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Moldova, Sweden, Ukraine, UK, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, ENQA A number of external experts may assist the Working Group.
Purpose and/or outcome To prepare a revised version of the ECTS Users' Guide by mid-2014, by reflecting on policy development and implementation in the area of ECTS and learning outcomes since the previous revision of the ECTS Users' Guide in 2009, giving consideration to issues such as the following (and including in its scope further issues to be identified in consultation with the Working Group and external experts):   - Linking ECTS credits with student workload and learning outcomes   - Using ECTS in short-cycle provision, in 1st and 2nd cycle programmes of different length and in 3rd cycle   - Linking desired learning outcomes and assessment procedures   - Reflecting the developments in the area of the recognition of prior learning   - Reflecting on the revisions in the EU Directive on Professional Qualifications (due to be adopted in 2013)   - Reflecting on the use of the Grading table in Annex 3 of the current ECTS Users' Guide   - Reflecting on recognition procedures for credit transfer (Annex 2 of the current ECTS Users' Guide)   - Linking ECTS to other recognition and transparency tools, for example the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, ECVET (European

Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) or Qualification Frameworks

References to the Bucharest Communiqué

To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent. We call on institutions to further link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload, and to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures. We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning."

Specific tasks
- to identify in consultation with experts the key items to be reviewed
- to develop a revised version of the Guide
- to liaise with the Structural Working Group for their input
- to consult with external stakeholders
- to present a finalised draft to the Structural Working Group and the BFUG for adoption

Reporting

Minutes of working group meetings will be made available by the Bologna Secretariat.

BFUG Structural Working Group will receive regular reports and updates.

Progress reports will be submitted before the meetings of the Structural Working Group mid-2013 and end 2013/early 2014. The final report will be presented together with the revised ECTS Users' Guide mid-2014.

Meeting schedule

Location of the meetings: Brussels
First meeting: February 2013
Second meeting: April 2013
Third meeting: May 2013
Fourth meeting: October 2013
Fifth meeting: January/February? 2014
Sixth meeting: April 2014

Additional remarks

These terms of reference may be reviewed in the light of progress of the work, in agreement with the Structural Reforms Working Group

APPENDIX 4

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE NETWORK OF NATIONAL QF CORRESPONDENTS 2012 – 15

Submitted for consideration by the Network of national correspondents in its meeting in March 2013 and then the BFUG

Terms of Reference

Name
Network of National Correspondents on Qualifications Frameworks
Contact persons
Jean-Philippe Restoueix (jean-philippe.restoueix@coe.int)
Composition
- All countries of the EHEA are invited to appoint one or more members of the Network. Members should have responsibilities as concerns the development and implementation of the national qualifications framework in their home countries. In cases where countries develop comprehensive frameworks, the responsibilities of the national correspondent(s) should include the higher education part of the national framework. Where the national correspondents do not have overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the comprehensive framework, they should maintain close contacts with those exercising this responsibility and/or with the National Contact points of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).   - The European Commission and CEDEFOP are invited to participate in the meetings of the Network with specific reference to their responsibility for the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) and the follow-up of developments of national qualifications framework for lifelong learning.   - Consultative members of the BFUG as well as the ENIC Bureau/NARIC Advisory Board and the European Training Foundation are also invited to participate in the plenary meetings of the Network.   - The Chair may invite individual experts or organizations to participate in meetings of the

Network on an *ad hoc* basis and with specific reference to their role in relation to one or more items of the agenda of that meeting.

Purpose and/or outcome

The Network should facilitate the sharing of experience in the development of national qualifications frameworks compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA) as well as with the EQF. It should provide a forum for national correspondents to exchange experience and to discuss issues of particular relevance to the development and implementation of national frameworks. The Network should seek to further cooperation with the National Coordination Points (NCPs) of the EQF. It should report to the BFUG on its activities and may submit suggestions on policy and practice concerning qualifications frameworks.

Reference to the Bucureşti Communiqué :

At the European level, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference in 2015 and together with relevant stakeholders, we will….

- Coordinate the work of ensuring that qualifications frameworks work in practice, emphasising their link to learning outcomes and explore how QF EHEA could take account of short cycles in national contexts

At national level, together with the relevant stakeholders, and especially with higher education institutions, we will…

- Ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes;
- Invite countries that cannot finalise the implementation of national qualifications frameworks compatible with QF EHEA by the end of 2012 to redouble their efforts and submit a revised roadmap for this task.

Specific tasks
1) further contacts and cooperation between national correspondents of member countries;
2) further the exchange of experience and provide a platform for discussion of issues of particular relevance to the development and implementation of national frameworks compatible with the QF-EHEA;
3) as required, offer advice on the development and implementation of national frameworks

compatible with the QF-EHEA;

4) further and stimulate cooperation with the EQF-LLL, in particular with its National Coordination Points;

5) exchange experience with and provide mutual support for the self certification of national qualifications frameworks;

6) stimulate the organization of Bologna conferences and events on issues related to qualifications frameworks and its relation with other key elements of the process as learning outcomes, Quality assurance….

7) as appropriate, advice the BFUG on matters concerning qualifications frameworks;

8) coordinate requests for assistance, including as regards self certification of national frameworks against the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA.

Reporting

Minutes of working group meetings will be made available to BFUG on the protected part of the website (by the Bologna Secretariat).

BFUG should also receive regular reports and updates.
To allow for good communication with BFUG as a whole and for the necessary consultations, progress reports should be submitted at least two weeks before each BFUG meeting. In between BFUG meetings, updates can be circulated by the Bologna Secretariat via e-mail.

Meeting schedule

The Network will meet 2 – 3 times a year, as required. At least one yearly meeting should be held jointly with the National Contact Points of the EQF. It may be consulted through electronic correspondence, as appropriate.

Liaison with other Working Groups and networks 'activities

The Network of national correspondents will report to the Working Group on Structural Reforms. It may need to make contact with other structures and in particular the working groups responsible for Mobility and Internationalisation and Reporting on the implementation of the Bologna Process and shall consult with the Co-Chairs of the Working Group on Structural Reforms on any such contacts.

Additional remarks

Except in exceptional circumstances, members and observers shall cover the cost of their own

participation.

APPENDIX 5

Terms of Reference on Recognition of Prior Learning Network

Contact person (Chair)

Marin Gross- Coordinator

The network is Chaired by Estonia and there is a Steering Board that is coordinating the Network and is consisting of five members: Marin Gross (Estonia), Ruth Whittaker (UK/Scotland), Sylvie Bonichon (EURASHE), Mehmet Durman (Turkey), Deirdre Goggin (Ireland).

Composition

Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Belgium/Flemish Community, Belgium/French Community Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities, The Netherlands, Turkey, UK, UK/Scotland, Scottish Social Services Council, European Commission, EUA, EURASHE, UNESCO.

Purpose and/or outcome

➢ To help promote and inform about practices and effective implementation and use of RPL across the EHEA.
➢ To provide a platform for EHEA countries to share and learn from policies and practices on RPL development within the context of Lifelong Learning, widening participation and workforce development
➢ To build links and partnerships between EHEA countries at various stages in RPL development.

References to the Bucharest Communiqué

➢ "We will step up our efforts towards underrepresented groups to develop the social dimension of higher education, reduce inequalities and provide adequate student support services, counselling and guidance, flexible learning paths and alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning. "

> „We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning;"

> Fair academic and professional recognition, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning, is at the core of the EHEA;

> Work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning;

Specific tasks

➢ To elaborate strategies on how to develop and promote practice of RPL across the EHEA countries, including measures for removing various limitations leading to the award of complete HE qualifications.

➢ To build links between EHEA countries at various stages in RPL development.

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➢ To liaise with other relevant EHEA networks and working groups, in particular the BFUG Working Group on Structural Reforms.

Reporting

The RPL Network has to provide regular update to Structural reforms WG and its coordinator will liaise regularly with the Structural Reforms WG.

Meeting schedule of the RPL Network:

The Network will meet once per year, more often if required.

The Steering Board will aim to meet once per year before the Network meeting.

13 December 2012, Prague
26 September 2013, Poland
17-18 December in Tallin, Estonia

Other events of the RPL Network:

14 December 'EURASHE Seminar on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Flexible Ties within Higher Education', organized by EURASHE in cooperation with the European RPL Network, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) and the Czech Association of Schools of Professional Higher Education (CASPHE).

APPENDIX 6

EHEA WORKING GROUP ON STRUCTURAL REFORMS

Note: the composition and participation has varied somewhat in the course of the period

Co-Chairs

Council of Europe	Sjur Bergan (coordinator)
Belgium, Flemish Community	Noël Vercruysse
Poland	Bartłomiej Banaszak
Holy See	Fr. Friedrich Bechina, FSO

Participants-countries

Armenia	Arkadi Papoyan
Austria	Regina Aichner
Belgium, French Community	Kevin Guillaume
Bulgaria	Yana Dimitrova Yotova
Croatia	Ana Tecilazić Goršić
Czech Republic	Věra Šťastná/Tereza Kobelková
Denmark	Allan Bruun Pedersen
Finland	Carita Blomqvist
France	Patricia Pol
Georgia	Elene Jibladze
Germany	Olaf Bartz (Birger Hendriks until the end of 2012)
Greece	Christos Skouras
Hungary	Erzsébet Szlamka
Ireland	Bryan Maguire
Kazakhstan	Kymbat Beisekina
Lithuania	Aurelija Valeikienė
Moldova	Larisa Bugaian
Netherlands	Mark Frederiks
Portugal	Priscila Alexandra Couto
Switzerland	Eva Grob
Sweden	Sara Bringle
Turkey	Canan Unvan

United Kingdom	Carolyn Campbell
Ukraine	Ivan Babyn

Participants-organizations

BUSINESSEUROPE	Isabel Rohner
European Commission	Frank Petrikowski
European Commission (EQF)	Anita Krémó
Educational International	Karin Åmossa
ENQA	Padraig Walsh (Achim Hopbach until end 2012)
EQAR	Colin Tück
ESU	Nevena Vuksanović/Fernando Miguel Galán Paolmares
EUA	Michael Gäbel/Tia Loukkola
EURASHE	Stefan Delplace
Bologna Secretariat	Gayane Harutyunyan
Bologna Secretariat	Ani Hakobyan

APPENDIX 7

Bologna conferences, mini-seminars, peer learning activities and events on issues related to structural reforms

Event	Date	Host/organizer	Purpose/envisaged outcome
Bologna Day 2012: Student centered teaching and learning	14.03.2012	University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, Austria	What are the preconditions for implementing student centered teaching and learning successfully? Examples of good practise have been shared among 113 participants. Conference conclusions: http://www.bildung.erasmusplus.at/index.php?id=3806
Conference on the anniversary of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and ENIC-NARIC meeting	19.06.2012-20.06.2012	Toledo, Spain	Taking stock of the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Sjur Bergan and Carita Blomqvist (eds.): *The Lisbon Recognition Convention at 15: Making fair recognition a reality* Strasbourg 2014: Council of Europe Higher Education Series no. 19
EURASHE International Seminar on Quality Assurance	27.09.2012-28.09.2012	Nicosia, Cyprus	
Research-based Education: Strategy and Implementation *http://budapest2012.bolognaexperts.net*	05.11.2012-07.11.2012	Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary	Seminar conclusions: *http://budapest2012.bolognaexperts.net/sites/default/files/report_budapest_final.pdf*
Thematic Seminar on Curriculum Development	21.11.2012	Wien, Austria	90 representatives from Austrian HEI and students discussed on the challenges and flexibility when it comes to curriculum development. Seminar Outcomes: http://www.bildung.erasmusplu

			s.at/index.php?id=4487
Strengthening students' role in quality assurance – defining students' quality concept – QUEST Final Conference	30.11.2012-01.12.2012	Malta	ESU together with its Maltese member KSU is hosting the final conference of the QUEST project. QUEST for quality for students project, funded by LLLP, aims at providing research conclusions, how students perceive quality and what kind of actions should be taken to mainstream it.
Démarche qualité, moteur de modernisation de l'enseignement supérieur en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Quality assurance, motor of modernisation of the HE of the FWB) – 5th Bologna Experts seminar	05.12.2012	Brussels, Belgium	Further information (in French) available at: http://www.aef-europe.be/index.php?Rub=bologne&page=262&Article=1504
International Seminar on Recognition of Prior Learning	06.12.2012	Zagreb, Croatia	The main aim was to bring together some of the findings from the RPL related Project 'University Recognition of Prior Learning Centres – Bridging Higher Education with Vocational Education and Training', providing the opportunity to learn about the RPL practice in some leading European countries and to discuss some critical implementation issues as well.
Thematic Seminar on the Social Dimension	17.01.2013	University of Graz, Austria	80 Participants discussed about obstacles in mobility, financial and organisational student support systems and the challenges to arrange working and studying. Further information: http://www.bildung.erasmusplus.at/index.php?id=4354
Conference on Rankings and the Visibility of Quality Outcomes in the European Higher Education Area	30.01.2013-31.01.2013	Dublin, Ireland	For more information please follow the link provided below: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=418*

Conference on quality assurance in qualifications frameworks	12.03.2013-13.03.2013	Dublin, Ireland	This conference explored how policy and its implementation can be coordinated within national systems and at European level to support educational reform, the creation of jobs and growth and citizen mobility. See more at: *http://www.eu2013.ie/events/event-items/conferenceonqualityassuranceinqualificationsframeworks-20121201/*
Quality management and quality assurance in HE teaching: a glimpse in the EHEA.	19.03.2013	University of Applied Sciences Vorarlberg, Austria	What is the very meaning of Quality Assurance when seen through the EHEA perspective? How can respective targets and terms of reference be set into practice? Conference outcomes of 110 participants: http://www.bildung.erasmusplus.at/hochschulbildung/europaeischer_hochschulraum/veranstaltungen_trainings/bologna_tag/bologna_tag_2013/
Seminar on the validation of non-formal and informal learning	09.04.2013-10.04.2013	Mechelen, Belgium	The Seminar on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was organized by the DG EAC, together with Cedefop and in association with the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The seminar provided the first opportunity for validation stakeholders from all relevant areas, to discuss and take a first concrete step towards putting elements of the Recommendation into action.
The system of quality assurance of the Republic of Kazakhstan: New Challenges in the Bologna Process	11.04.2013	Astana, Kazakhstan	The purpose of the conference is to promote social and professional mechanisms of national education quality assessment system, the exchange of experience in innovative approaches to quality assurance

			in education, the formation of an independent assessment of education quality based on international experience, positioning Kazakh independent accreditation agencies in the international networks of quality. **Conference site: www.naric-kazakhstan.kz**
Promoting Quality Culture in Higher Education Institutions	22.05.2013-24.05.2013	University of Zagreb, Croatia	
International Conference on the Slovenian Qualifications Framework	19.06.2013	Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia	
QA in HE and VET in the context of NQFs, EQF and QF-EHEA– promoting trust between the sectors	27.06.2013	Biograd na moru, Croatia	The purpose of the Seminar is to examine QA capacities in HE and VET and how these interrelate with the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks. See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=477*
Neighbours.Higher Education.Cooperation. Conference on Higher Education Cooperation in Central, Eastern & South-Eastern Europe Higher Education Contact Seminar	03.-05.07.2013	Headquarter of Raiffeisen International, Wien, Austria	300 participants from 20 countries exchanged expertise on strategic deliberations and topics such as quality assurance, mobility, brain circulation, joint degrees by intending to foster academic cooperation in the region. Conference outcomes: https://www.oead.at/nhec-conference
Conference on quality assurance, trust and recognition.	20.09.2013	Brussels, Belgium	The seminar was an opportunity to hear about and discuss recent developments in Europe with the Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines, the Quality Assurance Register and the Qualifications Framework, as well as new tools such as the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and Learning Agreements with institutions located in third countries.

			See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=471*
University Recognition of Prior Learning Centres: Making Lifelong Learning a Reality	26.09.2013-27.09.2013	Kraków, Poland	See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmitedFiles/4_2013/171823.pdf*
Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education on the Implementation of the EHEA	17.10.2013-18.10.2013	Yerevan, Armenia	This was the third regional conference of Ministers of Education, organized by Armenia and the Council of Europe as part of Armenia's Chairmanship of the Committee of Minsters of the Council of Europe. See more at: http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=486
Quality Assurance in VET and Higher Education for improving their permeability	22.10.2013-23.10.2013	Brussels, Belgium	The European Commission, the EQAVET Secretariat and CEDEFOP organized a joint expert seminar to promote meaningful and sustainable cooperation on the issue of Quality Assurance in VET and Higher Education for improving their permeability. See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=501*
ESCO goes live	23.10.2013-24.10.2013	Brussels, Belgium	The conference officially launched ESCO, the Classification of European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations, and the ESCO Portal. It is the first time that ESCO will be publically accessible. See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=503*
EURASHE Seminar on the Implementation of Internal and External Quality Assurance	24.10.2013-25.10.2013	Bucharest, Romania	See more at: *http://www.eurashe.eu/events/seminars/qa-bucharest-2013/*
Cooperation Between HEI and Businesses – Why do we need	25.10.2013	Ljubljana, Slovenia	The conference addressed the interlinks between University-

to cooperate ?			Business cooperation, employability & higher education policy. See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=495*
ESU Conference: Quest for Quality for Students	31.10.2013	Brussels, Belgium	QUEST has been a 3 years-long project with the aim of defining a concept of quality that gives a better answer to the high quality student-centered learning model of higher education students in Europe.Through QUEST, ESU aimed to identify what information students think is important that higher education institutions provide to them and compare this to existing modes of information provisions. See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=506#*
Thematic Seminar on Employability: a key to a job or a mere fantasy?	06.11.2013	University of Applied Sciences, Salzburg	Employability plays a major role when curricula and trainings are designed. What are the expectations by the job market, by students, and by HEI themselves? Further information and seminar outcomes: http://www.bildung.erasmusplus.at/index.php?id=5168
European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)	21.11.2013-23.11.2013	University of Göteborg, Sweden	The European Quality Assurance Forum is a yearly event co-organized since 2006 by the European University Association (EUA), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European Students' Union (ESU). See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-*

			details.aspx?evId=502
PLA on Increasing Synergies between the Implementation of the Learning Outcomes Approach and Quality Assurance Arrangements	28.11.2013-29.11.2013	Leuven, Belgium	
International Seminar on the Role of NQFs and QA in Recognition	11.12.2013	Trakošćan, Croatia	Referring to some of the Bucharest Communiqué priorities and building on the conclusions from the QA Seminar held in July 2013 in Biograd na Moru, Croatia, this seminar addressed two specific issues: ways of establishing an efficient framework for enabling the work of foreign EQAR-registered agencies; external quality assurance as a reference point for recognition, together with national qualifications frameworks referenced to the EQF and QF-EHEA. See more at: http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=507
Exchanging Practices on RPL - Learning from Nordic-Baltic Experiences	16.12.2013-17.12.2013	Tallinn, Estonia	The seminar brought together RPL experts from around Europe to discuss the RPL developments in Nordic-Baltic region and offers insights into different RPL experiences the countries in the region have experienced.
International Conference on Bologna Structural Reforms: History, Problems and Perspectives	13.02.2014-14.02.2014	Astana, Kazakhstan	
Romania's commitments in the EHEA and their implementation at national level	14.02.2014	Bucharest, Romania	The event was aimed to raise awareness and debates on the conclusions and recommendations of the "Romania's commitments in the EHEA and their implementation at national level" study developed within the project. See more at:

			http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=528
L'internationalisation de l'Enseignement supérieur – Pilotage et stratégies des établissements d'Enseignement Supérieur de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Internationalisation of HE – steering and strategies of HEIs of the FWB) – 6th Bologna Experts seminar	17.03.2014	Brussels, Belgium	Further information (in French) available at: http://www.aef-europe.be/index.php?Rub=bologne&page=262&Article=1783
Breakfast briefing: Proposal for the revised ESG	18.03.2014	Brussels, Belgium	The Steering Group for the Revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) presented the proposal for the revised ESG during a breakfast briefing.
Bologna Day 2014: Recognition	24.03.2014	University of Business and Economics, Wien, Austria	Improving Mobility by supporting proper and high quality recognition. Keynote speakers: Carita Blomqvist and Fr. Friedrich Bechina; good practice examples presented by Austrian HEIs, 190 participants. Conference documentation including TV spot: http://www.bildung.erasmusplus.at/bolognatag2014
European QA agencies' ways to comply with the ESG in an international perspective - Shaping the future together	02.06.2014-03.06.2014	Brussels, Belgium	The Seminar provided information on the revision process of the ESG and its current status, explored the themes of resources, independence and system-wide analysis, as well as the links between national priorities and the European level needs.
Conference on the new ranking system of Universities U-Multirank	10.06.2014-11.06.2014	Athens, Greece	
Conference towards a European Area of Skills and Qualifications	17.06.2014	Brussels, Belgium	The conference presented the results of the public consultation and the Eurobarometer survey

			on a European Area of Skills and Qualifications.
RIQAA Dissemination Conference/EQAR Members' Dialogue	21.10.2014-22.10.2014	Palermo, Italy	The RIQAA project's overarching aim is to enhance the level of trust and recognition of EQAR-registered agencies carrying out reviews across borders, in line with the EHEA Ministers' commitment. See more at: *http://www.ehea.info/event-details.aspx?evId=556*
Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education on the Implementation of the EHEA	22.10.2014-23.10.2014	Baku, Azerbaijan	This will be the fourth regional conference of Ministers of Education, organized by Azerbaijan and the Council of Europe as part of Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Committee of Minsters of the Council of Europe.
Future of Higher Education - Bologna Process Researchers' Conference (FOHE – BPRC), second edition	24.11.2014-26.11.2014	Bucharest, Romania	With the second edition of the Conference, the organizers wish to continue this initiative, turning it into a landmark for European and international higher education research and policy making. The focus of the conference will include both the progress on the consolidation of the EHEA towards the increasingly close 2020 political deadline, as well as the broader regional and international developments that shape national higher education and research policies.