



Working Group 2 "Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments"

## **ANNEX TO THE FINAL REPORT**

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## 1. Terms of Reference WG II on Implementation

### Terms of Reference

of

### the Working Group on Implementation – Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments

<b>Name of the Working Group</b> Working Group on Implementation – Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments
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<b>Composition of the WG – Members</b> Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium VL, BUSINESS EUROPE, Croatia, Denmark, EI/ETUCE, ENQA, EQAR, ESU, EU Commission, EUA, EURASHE, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom ( <sup>123456</sup> )
<b>Purpose and/or outcome</b> The Working Group on the Implementation is responsible to provide support to member states for the implementation of agreed goals on a national and institutional level. It is mandated to coordinate a programme of actions (such as peer learning, conference, seminar, workshop, etc.) based on policy dialogue and exchange of good practice; actions proposed and organised by countries, institutions and/or organisations. Activities may develop policy proposals aiming at providing support to countries in achieving the implementation of agreed key commitments within the European Higher Education Area.
<b>Reference to the Yerevan Communiqué</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Implementing agreed structural reforms</b> is a prerequisite for the consolidation of the EHEA and, in the long run, for its success. A common degree structure and credit system, common quality assurance standards and guidelines, cooperation for mobility and joint programmes and degrees are the foundations of the EHEA. We will develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning. Full and coherent implementation of agreed reforms at the national level requires shared ownership and commitment by policy makers and academic communities and stronger involvement of stakeholders. Non-implementation in some countries undermines the functioning and credibility of the whole EHEA. We need more precise measurement of performance as a basis for reporting from member countries. Through policy dialogue and exchange of good practice, we will provide targeted support to member countries experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals and enable those who wish to go further to do so.”</li><li>➤ to include short cycle qualifications in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), based on the Dublin descriptors for short cycle qualifications and quality assured according to the ESG, so as to make provision for the recognition of short cycle qualifications in their own systems, also where these do not comprise such qualifications;</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Liaison with the WG 1 on “Monitoring”

<sup>2</sup> Liaison with the WG 3 on “New goals – Policy development for new EHEA goals”

<sup>3</sup> Liaison with the AG 4 on the Revision of the Diploma Supplement

<sup>4</sup> Liaison with the AG 2 on “Support for the Belarus roadmap”

<sup>5</sup> Liaison with the AG 3 on “Dealing with non-implementation”

<sup>6</sup> Liaison with the AG 1 on “EHEA international cooperation”

- to ensure that competence requirements for public employment allow for fair access to holders of first cycle degrees, and encourage employers to make appropriate use of all higher education qualifications, including those of the first cycle;
- to ensure, in collaboration with institutions, reliable and meaningful information on graduates' career patterns and progression in the labour market, which should be provided to institutional leaders, potential students, their parents and society at large;
- to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, reporting to the Bologna Secretariat by the end of 2016, and asking 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;
- to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning for the purposes of providing access to higher education programmes and facilitating the award of qualifications on the basis of prior learning, as well as encouraging higher education institutions to improve their capacity to recognise prior learning;
- to promote staff mobility taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalisation;
- to promote the portability of grants and loans taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalisation;
- to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy;
- to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are automatically recognised at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications;
- to enable our higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR registered agency for their external quality assurance process, respecting the national arrangements for the decision making on QA outcomes.
- The EHEA has a key role to play in addressing these challenges and maximising these opportunities through European collaboration and exchange, by pursuing common goals and in dialogue with partners around the globe.
- We ask the BFUG [...] to involve higher education practitioners in its work programme [...].
- [...] we take this opportunity to underline the importance of all members and consultative members participating fully in the work of the BFUG and contributing to the EHEA work programme.
- Finally, we take note with approval of the reports by the working groups on Implementation [...].

### **Specific tasks**

- To use the implementation report 2015 as evidence base to identify topics for peer-learning actions;
- To contact BFUG countries, with the assistance of the BFUG secretariat, to clarify the needs of peer learning;
- To specify a range of topics in agreement with the BFUG;
- To gather and coordinate actions organised by countries, institutions and organisations;
- To guide and assist countries, institutions and organisations in organising activities;
- To ensure and foster the involvement of national, European and international stakeholders in the organisation of the events, the attendance of the events and /or active participation in drafting common policies;
- To ensure the dissemination of upcoming activities and their emerging results;
- To report back regularly to the BFUG on feedback, results of actions taken, national policy recommendations if needed, and on reflections on the WG concept.

### **Topics**

[topics are just tentative, will be proposed for agreement by the working group to the BFUG in March 2016]

- Automatic recognition
- Qualification framework
- Recognition of prior learning
- Student and staff mobility
- Mobility
- Internationalisation
- Social dimension strategy
- Quality assurance
- Etc

## Reporting

Minutes of working group meetings will be made available to the BFUG.

The co-chairs will present regular updates on upcoming and past activities (updates may include upcoming dates, policy recommendations, feedback, and results) to the BFUG.

In between meetings, updates should be circulated by the Bologna Secretariat via e-mail. A streamlined report on the results, feedback and reflections on the WG concept will be presented and discussed at the BFUG meeting at the latest in the second half of 2017.

## Meeting schedule

[meeting schedule is just tentative, will be decided by the working group at a later stage]

First WG meeting(s): November 2015 – February 2016

Discussion on proposals received from countries, institutions and organisations

Proposal of topics to focus on and translated into which action

2016 - July 2017 –

Upon agreement with the BFUG:

- organisation of activities and events,
- coordination, guidance, follow-up, taking stock, analyse feedback and results of activities,
- preparation of input and reports for the WG and the BFUG.

September 2017 – Reflect on the concept and the framework, Summing-up of events and finalising reporting

January 2018 (if necessary)

## Liaison with other WGs' and/or advisory groups' activities

- WG 1 on "Monitoring"
- WG 3 on "New goals – Policy development for new EHEA goals"
- AG 3 on "Dealing with non-implementation"
- AG 2 on "Support for the Belarus roadmap"
- AG 1 on "EHEA international cooperation"
- AG 4 on "The revision of the Diploma Supplement"

## Additional remarks

- Given that drawing a strict line between topics of the WGs on "Implementation" and on "New goals" is difficult, events of both WGs shall be tightly coordinated by the co-chairs in order to avoid overlaps or to collaborate, if applicable.
- The topics mentioned above do not lead to groups being set up for each topic, but are translated to activities that will foster exchange of good practice and peer review.
- These terms of reference may be reviewed in the light of progress of the work, in agreement with the BFUG.

## 2. Concept Note Reversed Peer Review

### General remarks

Reversed peer review is a possible tool which can be used in the context of the collegial support for countries experiencing difficulties in implementation of key commitments.

Most of the EHEA countries (EU member countries) experienced a peer review which is used in the framework of the European Semester. The Employment Committee<sup>7</sup> hosts the peer review sessions during which representatives of EU member countries are interviewed by their peers from other countries. Countries are reviewed on the issues which are addressed in the recent country-specific recommendations. The reviewed countries should present the policy measures and reforms implemented in response to the country-specific recommendations. The issues covered with CSRs often address the educational topics.

The philosophy behind the reversed peer review is different. Following the findings from the Implementation Report 2015 countries are clustered according to the identified difficulties in implementation of the three key commitments:

- a Three-Cycle System compatible with the QF-EHEA and scaled by ECTS
- compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)
- Quality Assurance in conformity with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

A volunteering country being relatively successful in implementation of particular aspect of the Bologna Process can invite selected clustered countries for a review of its system. For example a country which is marked dark green in all scorecard indicators concerning the three-cycle system can invite a country or a group of countries facing more serious implementation problems as regards the three cycle systems. Such a way of dealing with peer review exercise reflects very well the intergovernmental nature of the Bologna Process.

#### 1. Main steps in the framework of peer review:

- 1) The reviewed country prepares a short self-assessment report/note on the implementation of particular commitment, including the timing, the way it was put in regulations, the challenges in implementation on the grass-root levels, etc.
- 2) The interviewing countries prepare a set of questions which are important from their perspective.
- 3) The peer review session should address the questions (reviewed country should prepare answers beforehand) as well as follow-up questions asked by interviewing countries.
- 4) Interviewing country, with the assistance of reviewed country, write the report from the PR event. It should also specify how the review can contribute to their efforts regarding implementation of key commitments.

#### 2. Organisational framework

There are three possible organisational frameworks for the reversed peer review:

- 1) In the framework of the meeting of WG2. The meeting of the WG2 in course of 2017 can serve as a room for reversed peer review. Additional half-day meeting (or even one session can be dedicated to a review of a country being successful in implementation by WG members facing difficulties). The initiative can be taken by the WG co-chairs or a country (or group of countries)

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<sup>7</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=115>

facing difficulties or a country which volunteers to be reviewed. The initiative should be taken at least 3 months before a peer review session.

- 2) In the framework of an event. Organisers of an event listed as supporting implementation of Bologna commitments can offer a room for a reversed peer review session. The initiative can be taken by hosts of an event or a country (or group of countries) facing difficulties or a country which volunteers to be reviewed.
- 3) A sight visit to the reviewed country. A reviewed country invites the selected/volunteering countries for a sight visit. Except from interview with the experts such framework gives a possibility of meeting representatives of particular stakeholders and ask more in-depth/follow-up questions. The initiative can be taken by a host country.

### 3. Who are the peers?

Peers are policy makers and experts representing the ministries. The ministries should make their best to involve representatives of national stakeholders in the exercise. Especially the peer review with a sight visit should involve representatives of stakeholders from reviewed country.

### 4. Financing

There are two possible approaches to financing a reversed peer review:

- 1) Participation in the events/WG meetings is financed in the ordinary way by sending institutions. Some costs (e.g. meals) can be covered by hosting institutions.
- 2) The voluntary peer review can be partly funded by in the framework of the Erasmus projects (supporting EHEA implementation).

### 3. Report RPR on QA in higher education, Ghent, December 2016

<b>Report on the 'reversed peer review' with regard to quality assurance in higher education, held on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2016, in Ghent</b>
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**Report and conclusions** prepared by Maria J. Manatos, PhD researcher in the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal (maria.manatos@cipes.up.pt) and Maria J. Rosa, assistant professor at the University of Aveiro and researcher in the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal (m.joao@ua.pt)

On the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2016 took place, in Ghent, a seminar based on the concept of 'reversed peer review', involving four countries facing problems regarding the development and implementation of quality assurance in higher education (the 'reviewers': Greece, Albania, Hungary and Georgia); one successful country, with solid and successful quality assurance policies and practices at the national and at the institutional level (the 'reviewed': Belgium, with the Flemish and the French speaking community); another country (Portugal) with experience, not only on carrying out intensive research in the field but also on setting-up a quality assurance system in higher education; and an observer (Bologna secretariat). More than to give the opportunity to the 'reviewers' to learn about the 'best practices' from the successful countries, the goal of this seminar was to share experiences and to discuss relevant questions around quality assurance in higher education.

In the seminar, several topics around quality assurance on higher education were discussed. Some subjects were more or less previously determined as topics for discussion in the seminar 'programme', others however, emerged in the discussion, either because they were pertinent for the participating countries and their own institutions or higher education systems, or because they were controversial topics deserving particular attention.

The work of the national assessment and accreditation agencies was perhaps the most discussed and, we would say, the most 'participatory' theme of the seminar. In this context, three presentations about the work developed by three national agencies (Portugal, Flanders and the French speaking community of Belgium) led to a lively debate on the work of the agencies in the different countries. In this context, the countries discussed: i) the complex and not always consensual decision making process regarding the accreditation of study programmes and/or institutions; ii) the composition of the review panels who assess study programmes and institutions; iii) the creation of new study programmes and the 'ex ante' and 'ex post' accreditation; iv) the evolution towards an institutional accreditation (a reality in Flanders and a likely future reality in Portugal); v) the different philosophies and approaches of the agencies: a 'participative approach' which gives to universities the responsibility of developing and implementing their own quality assurance systems (Flanders), an 'external authoritative approach' albeit with an emphasis in the dialogue between the different parts (Portugal), and a 'light and trust based approach', based on a 'formative evaluation process' (French speaking community of Belgium). More in general facts and figures are becoming more important in the PDCA cycle. One of the impacts of the new emerging system in Flanders is that the universities become more aware of the weak aspects and points at institutional and programme level. It prompts the institutions to be more reflective. It creates a feeling of collective responsibility towards the quality of the programmes, which was less the case in the system of accreditation/evaluation of individual programmes.

In addition to those broad topics the participants have discussed the following issues:

- i) The focus of the external quality assurance: processes and/or outcomes;
- ii) The scope: only the teaching mission (level 5-8, level 6-8 or level 5-7) or also the research mission and the 'third mission',
- iii) The follow-up of the external quality assurance not only limited to the unsatisfactory evaluations but also more in general; to what extent is the agency formally responsible for a formal follow-up and are the institutions obliged to produce an intermediate follow-up report;
- iv) The use and the impact of the external quality assurance (are students using the reports in order to make an informed study choice?);
- v) The independency of the agencies and the composition of the governing bodies;
- vi) The relationship between the internal environment and the external environment;
- vii) The distinction between quality and quality assurance.

Furthermore, other questions indirectly linked to the work of the national assessment and accreditation agencies were debated. The employability as a 'criteria' for the assessment or the creation of a study programme was non-consensual. On the one hand, universities must be aware of the demands of the labour market and the society and, in some way, meet their needs; on the other hand, the role of universities is also to challenge the labour market, presenting study programmes which may not be needed by the labour market, but may play a role in changing it. The challenges brought by the development and the implementation of internal quality assurance systems to the internal actors of universities also deserved attention. Hence, the involvement of the different actors is as essential for the success of the quality assurance systems, as it is challenging. In fact, to involve and to engage academics and students who are less aware of the quality assurance 'process', 'mechanisms' and 'philosophy' seems to be a common problem in the universities. We could observe that the involvement of students in the internal quality assurance systems of their universities seems to be merely formal and limited to a minority of students. Similarly, the majority of the academics is not truly involved in the internal quality assurance systems. To overcome the lack of involvement of academics and students, universities must develop good communication and dissemination strategies. Quality assurance must be faced as a collective responsibility and increasing the participation of academics and students is a challenge for both internal and external quality assurance systems in the future.

Notwithstanding, the benefits brought by the internal quality assurance systems were also stressed by the academics involved in quality assurance activities:

- a) the contribution of the system to complete the 'plan, do, check and act' cycle, since the internal quality assurance system helps to 'check' whether the planned activities were successfully developed and implemented and also to 'act' in order to continuously improve and enhance the activities and processes of universities;
- b) the possibility to reflect on the work being developed and, consequently, to increase the awareness about its weaknesses;
- c) the development of an institutional quality culture rather than the compliance with external standards.

Still on the subject of internal quality assurance systems, their scope and approach, two topics were discussed: a) the quality assurance of degree programmes with internships and the way one can assure the quality of the degree programmes with internships, at the internal quality assurance level; b) the assessment of the degree programmes based on learning outcomes, by the internal quality assurance systems, and the need to assess how far the learning outcomes are being achieved and simultaneously to periodically revise the learning outcomes.

The importance of international benchmarking as part of the internal quality assurance system, in a context of internationalisation of higher education, and in a context where universities are part not only of a national higher education system, but also, and maybe more important, of a European Higher Education Area, was also emphasised.

In the course of the seminar, it was evident that when developing their internal quality assurance systems, universities tend to deal with common concerns which represent what we would call the different 'balances' with which universities must deal almost on a daily basis:

- a) the 'balance' between a 'systemic' and 'holistic' approach, and a 'diversified' and 'multifaceted' approach to quality assurance, meaning the need to build a common institutional identity or culture for quality, but never excluding the different identities, namely with regard to the different scientific areas inside the institution;
- b) the balance between the necessary and desirable compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and the particularities of the national higher education systems;
- c) the balance between the institutional level (the university) and the unit level (the faculties and departments), and the balance between the centralisation and the decentralisation of quality assurance;
- d) the balance between the different 'stakeholders' of the higher education system, and their different demands regarding higher education goals and priorities, namely the balance between the enhancement which universities aim to achieve, the accountability demanded by the governments, and the information required by the society as a whole;
- e) the balance between the resistance, the disbelief and the opposition to the internal quality assurance system, on the one hand; and the support, the participation and the engagement of the different actors in the system, on the other hand. This means the balance between a demanding and time consuming process, and the benefits and advantages that such process may bring to the universities



To conclude, we would say that several lessons can be learnt from this seminar, particularly regarding the external assessment and accreditation of universities and their study programmes and the development and implementation of internal quality assurance systems in universities; and more broadly, regarding the external and internal challenges that universities face nowadays and the different 'forces' and 'levels' inside and outside universities which play different but essential roles in the 'quality game'.

The global lesson regarding quality assurance in higher education seems to be that, in the end, there is no 'right and single way' to develop and implement quality assurance in higher education. From the experiences of the different countries, we observe that there are different ways to implement quality assurance in higher education. There are however, what we can call, some 'keys to success' which were underscored in the course of the seminar: involvement and engagement of internal and external stakeholders; integrative approach to quality assurance, integrating the different processes and levels of universities; 'plan, do, check, act' and we would add 'constant auto-reflect'; continuous improvement and enhancement.

Another important lesson is related to the 'format' of this seminar: a 'reversed' and 'untypical' format based on discussion, debate and experience sharing. The fact that there was a small number of people, deeply engaged in sharing their experiences and learning from the others, and the time available for discussion following succinct and very useful presentations of external and internal quality assurance systems, enabled a friendly environment where people openly asked questions, gave answers and explanations, shared doubts and put forward different challenges for the future of quality assurance in their own countries and in Europe. We would say that maybe universities and, globally, the higher education system, would benefit from more 'exercises' and 'reflexion activities' developed 'out of the box', like this 'reversed peer-review'.

#### 4. Report on the RPR Qualification Framework EHEA, Ghent April 2016

##### Report on the peer review and policy dialogue with regard to the implementation of qualifications frameworks in the European Higher Education Area, held on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2017, in Ghent

**Report and conclusions** prepared by Maria J. Manatos, PhD researcher in the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Portugal (maria.manatos@cipes.up.pt)

On the 24<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 took place, in Ghent, a seminar based on the concept of 'peer review' and 'policy dialogue' with regard to the implementation of qualifications frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The initial idea was to bring together countries of the EHEA that have already implemented the key commitment related to the qualifications framework with countries that are still working on the full implementation in order to discuss the related implementation issues and to exchange ideas and practices. Nevertheless, and due to withdrawals of some invited countries, only three countries have participated in the peer review: Slovakia and Russian Federation, which are still developing and implementing their qualifications framework systems; and Belgium (with the Dutch and the French speaking community), which have already developed and implemented their qualifications framework systems. Furthermore, the seminar was attended by one researcher who have developed intensive work on qualifications framework; another researcher and rapporteur; a Bologna secretariat; and the organisers, from the Flemish Ministry for Education and Training. More than to give the opportunity to the countries which are still developing and implementing their qualifications framework systems and facing problems and difficulties in relation to it, to learn to learn about the 'best practices' from the successful country, the goal of this seminar was to share experiences and to discuss relevant questions around qualifications frameworks in the EHEA.

This initiative was part of the Bologna working group on "Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments" which supports implementation on agreed purposes by peer learning, policy dialogue and exchange events fostering exchanges of good practice on the basis of the implementation report 2015<sup>8</sup> and the measures adopted in the Yerevan Communiqué<sup>9</sup>.

Qualifications framework is, mainly from the 1990s, an indispensable topic in the EHEA. Despite the interest in comparability and qualifications being not new in the European context, there was a change in focus, in the ways of coordination and in the specific tools and instruments used. Indeed, if 15 years ago, with few exceptions, European countries did not have national qualifications framework systems, and there was no overarching qualifications framework, nowadays not only there are two European level frameworks: EHEA Framework of Qualifications or Framework-EHEA (QF-EHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), but also most countries either have adopted a framework or are working on one.

Broadly, a qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors<sup>10</sup>.

In this seminar, Belgium was an example regarding the implementation of qualifications frameworks and simultaneously of diversity, not only of national qualifications frameworks, motivated by the particular national 'division' between the Flemish and the French speaking community<sup>11</sup> regarding the higher education system; but also, of higher education institutions, which are divided into universities and university colleges.

The Flemish Qualifications Framework, implemented in 2009, is learning-outcomes-based and includes all recognised qualifications, classified into 8 levels, each of them determined on the basis of 5 elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. It also makes an explicit distinction between professional and educational qualifications<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Implementation – Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments (WG 2): [http://media.ehea.info/file/20160307-08-Amsterdam/22/4/BFUG\\_NL\\_MD\\_50\\_5d\\_WG2\\_revised\\_ToR\\_615224.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/20160307-08-Amsterdam/22/4/BFUG_NL_MD_50_5d_WG2_revised_ToR_615224.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Yerevan Communiqué 2015: [http://media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniquéFinal\\_613707.pdf](http://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniquéFinal_613707.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning - An OECD activity, Report from Thematic Group 1: The development and use of 'Qualification Frameworks' as a means of reforming and managing qualifications systems

<sup>11</sup> The German speaking community did not take part in the seminar.

<sup>12</sup> <http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en/>

It acts as a reference for quality assurance, developing and renewing courses, developing and aligning procedures for recognising acquired competences, and for comparison (nationally and at European level) of qualifications. The Flemish Qualifications Framework plays an important role in strengthening the learning-outcomes-based approach and aims to strengthen policies and practices on validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>13</sup>.

In the Dutch speaking community, we find differences between universities and university colleges, as the cases of the University of Ghent and the Artevelde University College demonstrate. If on the one hand, they both represent very successful cases regarding the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks; on the other hand, their qualifications frameworks show clear differences regarding their main concepts and principles and their implementation processes.

Inspired by the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and by the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), while complying with the Flemish qualification structure, the University of Ghent has developed a qualifications framework based on the concept of “competency”, which is a “competency model” where the competences for bachelor and master programmes are explained. The university embraces the concept of “competences”, in which the emphasis is on acquiring and/or applying knowledge, insights and attitudes in complex theoretical contexts and/or specific situations, and uses the concept of “learning outcomes” as a complementary one, referring to domain-related aims. The aim is to match the set of programme and course-unit competences of each study programme with the domain-specific learning outcomes.

Based on the concept of learning outcomes and on the principles of co-creation, communication, cooperation, self-guidance and innovation, Artevelde University College has developed a qualifications framework with a significant impact at the macro (institutional) level, meso (departmental) level and micro (staff and students) level, the most relevant being: the impact in the curriculum design with less complex, reduced and more transparent learning outcomes; the impact in the formulation of learning outcomes and the translation of domain-specific learning outcomes to programme-specific learning outcomes; and the emphasis on partnerships and on the idea of “building bridges.”

In the French speaking community, the qualification framework was implemented in 2015. Similarly to the Flemish Qualifications Framework, the Francophone Qualification Framework is a learning-outcomes-based system with eight levels and describes levels in terms of knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. Despite being an important instrument for strengthening the use of learning outcomes and for referencing to the European Qualifications Framework, it does not have a regulatory role and is not seen as an instrument for reforming existing institutions and structures<sup>14</sup>.

At the other end of the qualifications framework implementation spectrum, Slovakia and the Russian Federation underlined their constraints in implementing the European demands for qualifications frameworks, which are mainly linked to the difficulty of countries with different a context, tradition, history, culture, higher education system and employers, to converge with a common European framework.

Hence, **diversity** together with **complexity** are perhaps the key words of this seminar:

- There is a **diversity of approaches** to qualifications framework, which leads us to state that there is no single and right way to approach qualifications framework.
- The EHEA is characterised by an important **national diversity**. Thus, the idea of trying to draw common policies and procedures and particularly and to develop an overarching European qualifications framework need to take into consideration that the EHEA is too diverse and involves very different national contexts, which should adapt the European requirements to their own specificities, instead of directly ‘**translate**’ them.
- Each country has diverse higher education institutions, with different aims and characteristics, which should also ‘**adapt**’ the European and the national requirements to their own reality and be responsible for the development of their qualifications frameworks systems. Ultimately, **institutional diversity** draws attention to the need to make higher education institutions responsible for the development and implementation of their own qualifications framework systems, as the examples of the University of Ghent and of the Artevelde University College demonstrate.
- Qualification frameworks act in a **diversity and multiplicity of levels, layers, functions and aims**. In this sense, the questions of how to connect these multiple levels in a coherent whole

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<sup>13</sup> CEDEFOP (2015), National qualifications framework developments in Europe, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 20-21 ([https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4137\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4137_en.pdf))

<sup>14</sup> CEDEFOP (2015), National qualifications framework developments in Europe, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 22 ([https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4137\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4137_en.pdf))

and how to coordinate the different aims, the different policy issues and the different actors involved, need to be considered.

- The diversity, combined with the **internal complexity** of the qualifications framework drives to several challenges regarding its implementation and to a **diversity of implementation processes**. Consequently, each country and each higher education institution should identify their own implementation problems and find adequate solutions. Naturally, there are best practices which can and should be highlighted, but they also need to be 'adapted' to each particular national and institutional context.
- One of the complicating factors as it was expressed by some of the participants is the co-existence side by side of two qualifications frameworks: the Qualifications framework for the EHEA and the European Qualifications framework for lifelong learning. The former is considered to be directly connected to the Bologna higher education degree structure which the higher education community is familiar with. The latter covers not only the traditional educational qualifications but also the vocational qualifications. And that seems to be a factor delaying the implementation of the commitment related to qualifications frameworks.

However, on the other side of the coin we find the need for **convergence** and its advantages for the EHEA and for the countries, individually. We cannot ignore that countries and higher education institutions operate in an international setting, where the importance of international benchmarking and of a common language is unquestionable. The question is: how to converge the different European, national and institutional agendas? **Co-creation, dialogue and transparency**, from the institutional to the European and the international level, seem to be the way forward.

The potential decoupling between the national qualifications frameworks rhetoric and the practical issues also deserved particular attention. How can we couple qualifications frameworks policy and practice? The qualifications framework history tells us that there is a gap between what seems to be a quick adoption of the qualifications frameworks and a slow and complex implementation, mainly due to the mentioned challenges of 'national and institutional diversity' and 'the internal complexity' of the qualifications frameworks.

To conclude, we would say that several lessons can be learned from this seminar, regarding the qualifications frameworks in the EHEA, their aims, features, benefits, implementation challenges, and the different levels involved. It is clear that qualifications frameworks are a very important instrument, but rather complex. We must acknowledge that the shift to learning outcomes is not minor, it is rather huge and complex for the countries and for the higher education institutions. It is what we can call a "**quiet revolution**" in which the different institutions and the different stakeholders need to engage. To this end, it is crucial for higher education institutions to understand its usefulness, which the practical consequences are and which implications in the quality of their study programmes it may have. The higher education institutions that have understood the usefulness of learning outcomes give evidence that the learning outcomes approach is a very effective and powerful instrument and tool to bring about changes in the teaching and learning environment (design of curricula, teaching and learning modes, new pedagogies, student-centred teaching and learning, quality assurance, dialogue with stakeholders, international cooperation and benchmarking, etc.).

The global lesson regarding qualifications framework in higher education seems to be that, in the end, there is no 'right and single way' to implement qualifications frameworks in higher education. There are however, what we can call, some 'keys to success' which were underscored in the course of the seminar: to consider the national and the institutional diversity inside the EHEA; co-creation and dialogue at the institutional, the national and the European level; to make clear for higher education institutions the usefulness of a qualification framework system; to consider an essential triangle which link qualifications framework, quality assurance and recognition, placing the learning outcomes in the middle<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The importance of learning outcomes for building and developing the EHEA, for achieving the different goals and implementing the different Bologna tools was mentioned in nearly all EHEA communiqués and in particular the Bucharest Communiqué: *To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed.*

## 5. Conclusions of the PLA on permeability /Short Cycle Studies, Brussels, June 2016

### Peer learning activity on permeability between different categories of higher education

Brussels, Erasmus University College, 20 and 21 June 2016

#### Conclusions of the PLA on Permeability

1. The drivers, the rationales and purposes of short cycle study programmes are varied. They depend on and change according to:
  - a. Demographic changes;
  - b. Societal changes;
  - c. Economic changes (level of economic growth or economic stagnation);
  - d. Technological changes;
  - e. The employment of graduates in general (in order to fight against unemployment and underemployment)
  - f. The needs of the labour market.
2. Short cycle qualifications play a role in (and contribute to):
  - a. Widening participation and improving the retention and the academic success;
  - b. The social dimension
  - c. Meeting the needs of the labour market
  - d. LLL and improving the position of graduates on the labour market (reverse permeability)
  - e. The further development of the higher education system as a whole;
  - f. Regional and local development of disadvantaged regions and local communities.
3. Short cycle study programmes should have a value in itself: SC is not only serving the societal needs but also other purposes such as personal development. It is a constituent part of a higher education system providing opportunities for all individuals to reach their full potential.
4. Short cycle study programmes require different and sometimes innovative pedagogic approaches due to the different profile of the learners (for example, the mature adult learner bringing with her or him a lot of life and work experience). By definition the curriculum design for adult learners is learner-centered. Blended learning is also part of the design and delivery of curricula for adults. The development of short cycle study programmes may have an impact on the higher education system. To a certain extent we have to overcome the gap between initial education and continuous education.
5. Teaching in short cycle study programmes may require that teachers acquire new competences in case short cycle programmes are partly dedicated to lifelong learning. What does it mean to teach adult learners in that case?
6. To provide flexible learning paths throughout higher education and to provide fair opportunities to progressing to other qualifications is a matter of equity and social justice.
7. To achieve a successful and meaningful articulation between different HE sectors, a competence-based approach for the curriculum design, with credits linked to learning outcomes, degrees included in national qualifications' frameworks self-certified to the EHEA-QF and to the EQF, together with a genuine recognition of prior learning, is critical. Besides, in terms of preparation of the students, making articulation work belongs to the joint responsibility of the 'sending' and the 'receiving' institutions.
8. Quality assurance in short cycle higher education – according to the ESG – is an important structural element. There is a need to develop a common system including common principles. This may require also some institutional, structural and governance reforms as it was shown in the Irish case (to overcome institutional fragmentation). Bigger entities could be held responsible for the internal quality assurance, complemented by an external quality review.
9. Destinations of graduates after being awarded a level 5 (or level 6) qualifications may be:
  - a. (Self-) employment in an economic sector in line with the study programme
  - b. Employment in a different economic sector or at a different level
  - c. Further studies: bachelor or master

The main destination of the graduates holding a short cycle qualification will/should have an impact on the teaching and learning process and on the curriculum:

- If the main destination is further studies the curriculum will perhaps more focus on the academic components;
  - If the main destination is employment in the relevant economic sector the curriculum will focus more on the work-based components;
  - Should the main destination of graduates happen to be unemployment or underemployment, a redesign of the curriculum should be required or even a cancellation of the programme (due to its lack of relevance).
10. With regard to the development or the relevance of level 5 qualifications as well as to the elaboration of the competences/learning outcomes it is important to bring the world of work (stronger focus on transversal competences and field specific practical competences) and the academic world (stronger focus on knowledge and disciplinary competences) together.
  11. The modular approach to the design of curricula could be helpful to facilitate horizontal (from one level 5 qualification to another level 5) as well as vertical (from level 5 to level 6 and from level 6 to level 7) progression. A curriculum shaped in a modular way (the completion of a module leads to a certificate) will require us to rethink the concept of 'a drop-out' and the way of rewarding performances in the area of teaching and learning. The modular structure which is fully related to sets of competences facilitates getting the relevant education and training 'just in time' according to the personal needs and situation. The modular structure and the set of competences are fully aligned.
  12. To complete a learning path through articulation between level 5 and level 6, level 6 to level 7 takes more time than the traditional learning path. But we need to take into account that there is a different underlying paradigm. With regard to the traditional learners (18<sup>th</sup> years old) to obtain a first degree and in some countries to obtain a first and a second degree as quick as possible in order to enter the labour market, is the main priority for the individual, the institution and the government. With regard to the articulation students, especially those who are combining working and studying, to acquire the knowledge and skills in order to improve their personal situation is the main priority. Therefore, there is a need for sophisticated data collection enabling to link personal characteristics and the socio-economic status to the achievements and to develop more relevant indicators. An articulation student who is still studying after 6 years could not be considered as a drop-out while a traditional full time student may be considered as a drop-out if the student has not yet graduated after six years. The same applies to other indicators such as 'time to graduation', ....
  13. The respective roles and responsibilities of the education sector and the employers with regard to the adjustment of the competences of the labour force to the economic, technological, societal changes and with regard to continuous professional development are evolving.
  14. Qualifications frameworks in general but also sectoral QF including short cycle qualifications are very helpful and should play an increasing role to enhance the permeability because they provide a framework to align the competence-based learning outcomes (including knowledge, skills and competences) of the different qualifications from different sorts of QFs.
  15. Guidance and counselling of students, especially at levels 5 and 6, are crucial and have to be developed further.
  16. In order to avoid any possible stigma on short cycle higher education in general, on awarding level 6 qualifications partly based on recognition of prior learning and on work-based learning, parity of esteem between the traditional route and the articulation route should be fully realised at least in some academic environments.

However, in France for example, short cycle programmes (DUT – 120 ECTS – especially), which are prepared at university (at IUT) and very valued by employers are often more appreciated by many students than the first two years of the traditional 1<sup>st</sup> cycle academic programmes, mainly because the admission to these short cycle programmes is more selective, and allows both easy integration into the labour market, and smooth access to "Licence" (i.e.: Bachelor level) programmes afterwards.

17. There are three different types of permeability:
  - a. Permeability between different study programmes;
  - b. Permeability between work and study;
  - c. International permeability.
  
18. The Dutch case shows it clearly that there are many advantages to have different learning routes and paths in the same study field: level 5 full time study programme, level 5 combination work/study programme, level 6 full time study programme and level 6 combination work/study programme. This allows students to switch easily between those different routes depending on the personal situation.
  
19. We have to make a shift in the minds from validation of learning outcomes (could be considered as a merely statistical approach) to valuing learning outcomes. Hence also the importance to further develop guidance services.
  
20. Especially in systems where short cycle qualifications meet multiple needs and change over time, it is important to design communications for (prospective) students, employers and other stakeholders to that make the options as clear and simple as possible.

## 6. Automatic Recognition

The **Paradigms project** is an ERASMUS+ project consisting led by NUFFIC, Netherlands and with the participation of 9 ENIC-NARIC-offices. The project runs from spring 2016 to spring 2018.

The aim of the project is to identify and explore systems of automatic recognition within EHEA and subsequently come up with recommendations and guidelines for EBIC-NARIC offices on possible ways to apply and support automatic recognition in their national setting in line with the recommendation of the Yerevan Communiqué.

The project makes use of good practice already developed through initiatives such as the Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition, the Focus on Automatic Institutional Recognition project (FAIR project), and the Baltic, Nordic and Benelux cooperation.

The recommendations and guidelines are not finalised in due time to make full use of the conclusions for the working groups report and recommendations on automatic recognition. However, during the project period models of implementing automatic recognition has been identified and initial discussions of pros and cons related to each model discussed, which will be presented and used for the purpose of the working groups recommendations on automatic recognition.

Link to:

- Benelux agreement:

<http://startpuntgrensarbeid.benelux.int/debe/fr/diplomes-et-qualifications-professionnelles/decision-benelux-reconnaissance-automatique-diplomes-enseignement-superieur>  
<http://startpuntgrensarbeid.benelux.int/debe/fr/diplomes-et-qualifications-professionnelles/decision-benelux-reconnaissance-automatique-diplomes-enseignement-superieur>

- Portuguese list of recognised degrees: see annex
- [www.nordbalt.org](http://www.nordbalt.org)
- The FAIR project: <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/diploma-recognition/fair>
- The GEAR Project: <https://gear.minedu.gov.gr/en/home/>
- The Mastermind Europe Project: <http://mastermindeurope.eu/>
- STREAM project: add link
- Report seminars automatic recognition Flanders:



## 7. Benelux Agreement on Automatic Recognition

### **BENELUX HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTERS AGREE ON AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES ACROSS THE THREE COUNTRIES**

On May 18, 2015 the five Ministers in charge of Higher Education of the BENELUX countries agreed on a BENELUX Decision on the automatic mutual generic level recognition of higher education degrees in the Benelux. This Decision is a clear expression of the mutual trust of the BENELUX authorities in each other's higher education systems and in particular in the quality assurance mechanisms underpinning them.

This Decision guarantees the legal right to each citizen to automatic degree recognition of any officially recognised Bachelor or Master degree obtained in the three countries of BENELUX. Such degrees will be automatically recognised as of equivalent – Bachelor or Master -level, without mediation of any recognition procedure whatsoever.

The BENELUX Decision is confined to the recognition of the degrees seen from their value as *learning qualifications* (so-called “academic” recognition). It is therefore not targeting the EU regulated aspects linked to the recognition of certain *professions* under the EU Directive on Professional Recognition. Nevertheless, the Decision is certainly expected to have a positive effect on labour and professional mobility across the three countries, as was announced in the recommendation on cross border labour mobility of the Benelux Committee of Ministers on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2014. Its limitation to *generic* recognition (recognition of the general “level” of the degree) will undoubtedly make a stronger case for the more *specific* recognition of degrees in a particular study field.

This Decision is an important step towards administrative simplification. The abolishment of the time- and cost-consuming recognition procedures will certainly benefit both individual graduates as well as public authorities. The complicated – and sometimes expensive - procedures for recognition of higher education degrees were indeed a serious practical obstacle for individual citizens, while the waste of resources of such lengthy procedures for public authorities should not be underestimated.

Moreover, the BENELUX Decision is a genuine break-through both at the level of the BENELUX countries as well as in the context of the European Union and the wider European Higher Education Area, who have put automatic recognition of degrees and qualification high on their agendas.

It is, first of all, a welcome complement to the earlier partial agreements of automatic recognition within the BENELUX, e.g. between the Netherlands and Flanders, stipulated in the bilateral agreement on the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation, the mutual recognition between the three Communities of Belgium as guaranteed by the Belgian Constitution, and the regulations on automatic recognition of several European degrees applied by the Luxembourg Government.

In European context the BENELUX Ministers in charge of Higher Education have always been the first to advocate that mutual trust, based on the observance of the common quality standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area should be the main guiding principle for higher education cooperation in Europe.

**The BENELUX Decision can therefore also be considered as the first concrete regional achievement to the common European goal of automatic recognition of degrees and qualifications and stronger convergence in higher education.**

## 8. Country Seminars on Automatic Recognition

**ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME  
GRANT AGREEMENT FOR AN ACTION  
AGREEMENT NUMBER – 2014-3619/001-001  
PROJECT NUMBER – 559252-EPP-1-2014-BE-EPPKA3-BOLOGNA**

### Disclaimer:

Below you find the draft reports of the three country workshops. The conclusions of those workshops reflect the outcomes of the discussions. The conclusions have yet to be validated on the political (governmental) level. The conclusions cannot yet be considered as formal decisions.

**Country seminar on automatic recognition Denmark**

**Brussels, 16 June 2015**

**Report and conclusions by** Ligia Deca, University of Luxembourg ([ligia.deca@uni.lu](mailto:ligia.deca@uni.lu))

### 1. Introduction

The project *Automatic Recognition at System Level in Flanders* is funded through Erasmus+ programme and seeks to explore new approaches to automatic recognition of foreign qualifications in Flanders. This requires peer learning between actors involved in recognition issues in Flanders and in other countries. Three countries with different education transitions were chosen as 'pilot countries': Denmark, Poland and Portugal. The project includes various peer-learning activities, including several country seminars during which civil servants, representatives of higher education institutions (HEIs), quality assurance (QA) agencies, government (both political representatives and civil servants), as well as actors working on recognition issues (including the NARIC centres) are expected to come to a common understanding of the two higher education systems, qualification frameworks (QF) and standards, guidelines and procedures related to QA in the two countries.

The country seminar which is the object of the current report took place with Flanders and Denmark on 16 Jun in Brussels. The aims of the seminar were the following:

- To explore new ways and new paths to handle the issue of automatic recognition of foreign degrees in Flanders;
- To develop a process for implementing and putting in practice the new regulations with regard to automatic recognition;
- To learn from each other and to come to a better understanding of the different systems of higher education and exchange knowledge and ideas with the partner countries.

In order to put in practice new regulations for automatic recognition, a common understanding of the two higher education systems involved, as well as of the two qualifications frameworks and the two systems of quality assurance is needed. That is a necessary step in the decision-making process in order to come to the final decision by the government.

Participants from Denmark included officials from the Ministry of Education and Science, Division for Higher Education, the Council of Accreditation, the University of Copenhagen and the University College Zealand. Flanders was presented by representatives of Flemish University and University Colleges Council (VLUHR), Accreditation Organisation of Flanders and the Netherlands (NVAO), Flemish NARIC and the Flemish Department of Education. The seminar consisted of presentations and discussions concerning: HE landscape, QA, QF, and recognition procedures in the two countries.

This report will introduce the wider higher education context in the two countries; will outline the context of automatic recognition. It will then outline the QA and QF arrangements in the two countries, as well as the recognition procedures. Finally the report will include the meeting conclusions.

## 2. General context of the HE landscape

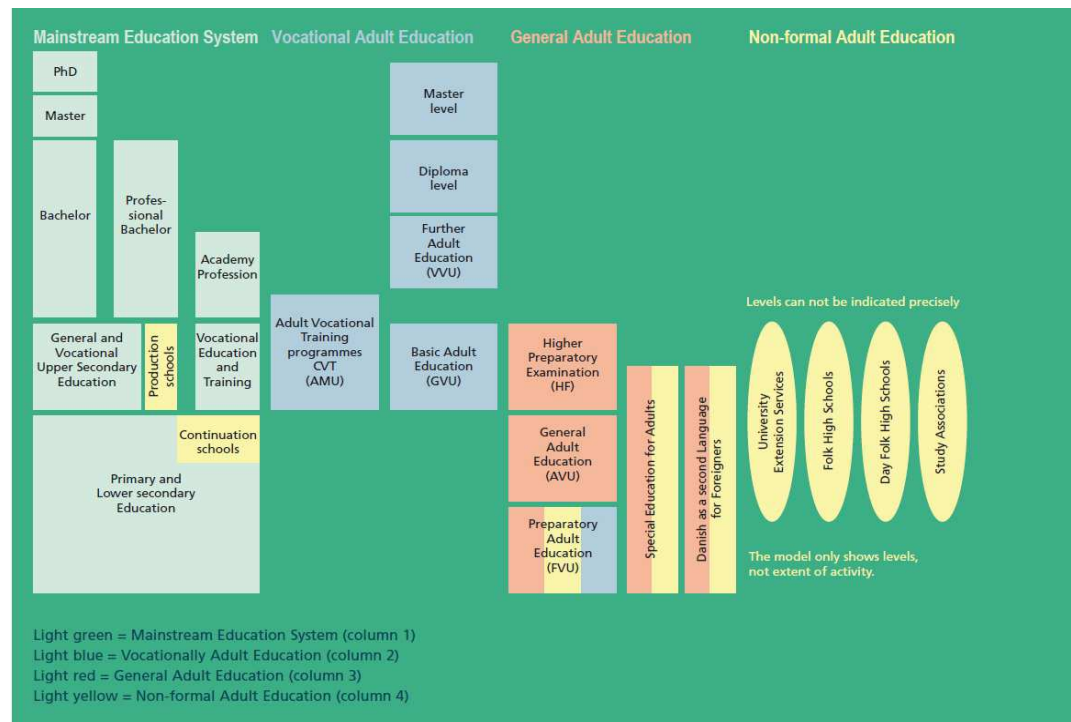
### Denmark

At the time of the seminar, a general election had been called in Denmark and thus the conclusions of the seminar would need to be discussed in a formal way with the new Danish representatives.

For Denmark, Camilla Badse introduced some key information about the higher education system and the recognition provisions in place. The Danish system is a binary one, consisting of:

- **Research-based programmes** offered by universities
- **Development –based Professionally oriented programmes** offered by University Colleges and Academies of Professional Higher Education

The structure of the system is outlined in Figure 1 below:



In terms of recognition arrangements, private higher education is formally recognised in a limited manner, as it is traditionally not part of the education structure.

Higher education degrees in Denmark are awarded by the following institutions:

- **8 Universities:** offering research-based bachelor and master programmes, and PhD.
  - **7 University Colleges:** offering professional bachelor programmes in fields such as Business and Economics, Pedagogy, Healthcare, ICT, media and communication, Social Science and Design
  - **9 Academies of Professional Higher Education:** offering short cycle (AP) programmes in fields of Business and Economics, Technology and ICT, Laboratory Technology, Design
  - **3 Institutions in architecture and art:** offering bachelor and master programmes, and PhD in Architecture, Design and Conservation
  - **5 maritime education institutions:** offering professional bachelor programmes
  - **7 institutions** under Ministry of Culture offering artistic programmes of higher education
- + institutions under Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice

### Flanders

For Flanders, Elwin Malfroy introduced some key information about the higher education system in Flanders. The Flemish degree structure includes:

- ▶ Associate degrees: short cycle study programmes last 90 or 120 ECTS credits;
- ▶ Bachelor: professionally oriented courses and academically oriented courses (at the level of Bachelor: binary system); bachelor study programmes last 180 ECTS credits;
- ▶ Advanced/subsequent bachelor's degree courses: the study programmes last 60 ECTS credits;
- ▶ Master: the master study programmes are all academically oriented and last 60 ECTS (humanities, economics, social sciences and industrial engineering), 120 ECTS (natural sciences; civic engineering, law, bioengineering, dentistry, life sciences, ) or 180 ECTS (medicine and veterinary sciences);
- ▶ Advanced/subsequent master's degree courses: the study programmes last 60 or 120 ECTS credits;
- ▶ The third cycle includes the doctoral programmes leading to the award of the degree of doctor (PhD).

There are bridging programmes between the professionally bachelor study programmes and the master courses. Holders of an associate degree can progress to a professionally oriented bachelor degree programme in the same or similar field. They may gain credits towards the bachelor programme (in the same field) for their previous short cycle studies.

The Flemish higher education landscape encompasses the following institutions:

- ▶ 5 universities: 3 public and 2 private; the mission of the universities is threefold: academically oriented higher education, research and community services;
- ▶ 12 University colleges/Universities of applied sciences: 6 public and 6 private; the mission of the university colleges is threefold: professionally oriented higher education, applied research and community services;
- ▶ Arts education is offered in Schools of arts; they are part of the UC but they are governed jointly by UC and Universities; their mission is also threefold: arts higher education (mostly academically oriented), research and community services;
- ▶ Centres for Adult Education: they are offering short cycle higher education in a partnership with the university colleges;
- ▶ Specialised institutions: management schools and schools for protestant theology.

### **3. Brief description of the Qualifications frameworks for higher education**

#### *Denmark*

The National Qualification Framework (NQF) in Denmark was introduced by Allan Bruun Pedersen, Senior Adviser, Danish Agency for Higher Education.

The First NQF for HE in 2003, later amended in 2008. The Framework was developed by an inter-ministerial group with representatives from various quality assurance agencies and educational experts. The first NQF for Lifelong Learning (LLL) was set up in 2009 and was developed by a National Coordination Committee, with stakeholders and experts involved. It includes 8 levels and is based on descriptors: knowledge, skills and competences.

The NQF HE was later on adopted in the NQF LLL. In the NQF HE, programmes have to meet all descriptors, in the NQF LLL the rule is the best fit (not the full fit as for HE). This was the solution to allow for NQF level 5.

The NQF HE self-certification against the QF-EHEA was done by a self-certification committee established in 2007. A group of stakeholders was attached to the process, which included the Rectors conference, labour organisations and students. The NQF LLL self-certification against the EQF was done by a National Coordination Committee in 2009. The Consultation Committee included a wider array of stakeholders. In terms of implementation, a soft approach was preferred, as there are no legal acts specifically on NQFs.

#### *Flanders*

The NQF system in Flanders was presented by Elwin Malfroy. The NQF for HE in Flanders covers EQF 5-8 and includes the short cycle. The NQF includes both professional and academic degrees. The

secondary school leaving certificate provides access to all types of Ba degrees (associate degree and Ba of academic or professional orientation). Those finalising an associate degree can access a Ba programme and even a Ma programme, through bridging programmes. All Ba programmes have 180 credits. Masters usually have 120 credits. For Medicine and Veterinary Science they are of 180 credits. Some other fields (social sciences) have only 60 ECTS, which raises the issue of achieving the needed learning outcomes to be at the Master level (second cycle) within the EQF. The credits used in Flanders are ECTS compatible. The only difference is that a subject has to have at least 3 credit credit points. In terms of admission regulations, there are no numerous clauses, but an entrance exam is required for Dentistry and Medicine (centrally organised) and skills test for arts and crafts (organised by HEIs). Students can opt for one of three existing learning paths: degree contract, credit contract, exam contract (via learning agreements). The NQF is based on learning outcomes and ECTS, not on duration of studies. It is self-certified and this is also mentioned in the Diploma Supplement from 2009/2010 onwards. The Associate Degree (EQF level 5) was introduced by Law 4 April 2003.

#### **4. Brief description of the Quality Assurance systems for HE**

##### *Denmark*

Denmark has an institutional accreditation system since 2007. The annual inspection of institutions of higher education is delegated from the minister to the Agency for Higher Education and is organised in four main activities:

1. Systematic inspection: periodic inspection e.g.:
  - Financial matters (examination of yearly report)
  - analyses of key performance indicators (KPIs)
2. Inspection meeting: agency visits each institution in a multi-annual cycle – focusing on performance and strategic development
3. Thematic inspection: specific focus - cross-cutting a number institutions
4. Ad hoc inspection: in cases of malpractice at institutional level

In terms of the pre-qualification of the HE programs – each HE program is assessed by an Advisory Committee (in terms of its need – relevance and demand, links and divisions within the HE system) and then approved by the Ministry of Education (very similar to the Flemish accreditation system). The professional Bachelors in Denmark are more easily recognised in the professional world, in comparison to the academic ones.

Historically, there were several phases of accreditation in Denmark:

- 2007-2013 – accreditation of new and existing programmes (75% already passed through the system)
- Since 2013 – mix of accreditation of programmes and institutions

Currently, a HEI can opt for institutional accreditation, instead of accrediting each programme at a time. A transitional phase is currently in place, allowing both the institutional and programme accreditation to co-exist until all HEIs go through the institutional accreditation phase. The change from programme to institutional accreditation was motivated by having less bureaucratic burdens and for connecting the internal QA system and the external one. If stakeholders single out a programme or a group of programmes, the Accreditation body can look at it specifically.

The Ministry regularly performs a screening of HE programmes, conducted by an International Advisory Committee, in order to judge their relevance.

An external examiners system exists in addition to accreditation. They need to cover at least 33% of ECTS. An annual report is produced, with the objective to guarantee that learning outcomes are assessed and achieved. The philosophy of the accreditation system is to allow HEIs to choose their own QA system, as long as they comply with the five criteria for quality and relevance as laid down in the ministerial order: QA policy and strategy, quality management and organisation, knowledge base of educational programmes, academic level and content, as well as relevance of educational programme. Past performance from programme accreditation is taken into account: match between course contents and the knowledge environment, overall learning objectives and programme design etc.

The system aims for an assessment of both quality and quality assurance, with an emphasis on QA.

Types of decisions for institutional accreditation:

- Positive: can establish new programmes and existing prog not accredited
- Conditional positive: new prog must be accredited and existing prog not accredited
- Denied: cannot establish new programmers and existing prog must be accredited

#### *Flanders*

Flanders is in a transitional phase moving from programme accreditation towards institutional review/accreditation. In the transitional phase the institutions will be reviewed against four standards: vision and (educational) policy, policy implementation, evaluation and monitoring and enhancement (future oriented). As the same time the institutions have to demonstrate how they intend to assume full responsibility for assuring and improving the quality of their programmes and that will be assessed. The NVAO has developed a quality code including quality features derived from Part I of the revised European Standards and Guidelines. In 2017-2018 an in-depth evaluation of the system will be carried out.

After 2020, it is foreseen that only institutional accreditation will be performed, with site visits foreseen only for new programmes and for those in repair. It might be that in 2017 a decision is discussed to not assess the new programmes. For all programmes the accreditation is prolonged until the institutional review pilots is completed. **For private universities, the previous accreditation arrangement stays in place, including the site visit and accreditation for all study programmes.**

The institutional review process' duration is 10 months. All reports will be published in July 2017. The majority of the review panel members will need to be international, but only one institution in Flanders opted to have the review in English. At the time of the seminar, there were no standards or criteria, a list of quality features however was already agreed upon.

In the future, it will be the HEIs and not NVAO will need to publish the reports.

### **5. Brief description of how foreign qualifications are treated**

#### *Denmark*

##### **Mr. Allan Pedersen introduced the Danish system of recognition.**

The establishment of the Danish ENIC-NARIC office, which is now situated in the Danish Agency for HE, took place in 2000. Recognition legislation was passed in 2001, revised in 2003.

Denmark has a comprehensive recognition system, which encompasses academic and professional recognition + VET qualifications. It makes legally binding decisions for HEIs in terms of access to HE. Private employers are guided by these decisions, but they are not legally binding. No system of automatic recognition, even though DK was part of the EC pathfinder group for automatic recognition.

The Danish legislation is based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). Recognition is based on comparison of learning outcomes. Recognition tools: European Area of Recognition Manual and other subsidiary LRC texts, including the 'Recommendation on the Use of QF in the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications' (one does not question the reference of qualifications to the QF-EHEA by countries, it just accepts them).

##### Ministerial cooperation with HEIs

Admission cannot be denied based on saying that the Ba diploma is not equivalent ('a Ba is a Ba is a Ba'). HEI can decide if applicants meet specific admission requirement: for Ba programmes – grade conversions + special subject requirements for specific programmes. A Ba also has to be relevant (e.g. a Law Ba if one wants to access to a Law Ma).

The Danish ENIC NARIC center offers database with information on 140 countries access to HE qualifications, together with comparison with the Danish systems.

There is no provision for automatic recognition for Bas obtained in EHEA countries, but de facto all Bas are recognised.

##### **Recognition at the Copenhagen University – presentation by Jakob Elmose, Admissions Officer, Faculty of Humanities**

The university does not have a central admissions office, recognition is thus handled at the level of each faculty (6 faculties in total). Full degree En taught prog students: 900 (2014). Increased by 1000 in 2015.

The resources used for the recognition process are the following: the Danish Agency for HE (assessment database, general assessment for specific countries, foreign qualifications for entry to HE), UK Naric, Nuffic, professional network with peers at UCPH. The recognition process looks at learning outcomes, transcript records, grades, English skills + the relevance of the Ba degree.

### *Flanders*

The Flemish higher education institutions treat foreign Bachelor and Master degrees in the same way as Flemish bachelor or master qualifications. The HEIs are obliged to apply the principles of the Lisbon Recognition convention.

The five main principles of the LRC are specified in our legislation: fair assessment, recognition if no substantial differences can be proven, legislation encourage comparing learning outcomes, recognition authority has to demonstrate substantial differences in case of negative decision and the right to appeal.

A protocol updating the NVAO Treaty has established the mutual automatic recognition of accredited bachelor and master degree programmes.

On 18 May 2015 the ministers of the Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have signed a decree establishing the mutual automatic recognition of higher education qualifications at system level.

The HEIs accept all EU- secondary education degrees. In general they accept also most non-EU secondary education leaving certificates for admission to HE provided that the certificates give access to HE in the home country.

At the institutional level, the situation is very similar as for the University of Copenhagen. There is a high diversity of the practices between institutions, but also within institutions. For the professional BAs, the language check is usually the reason for candidate rejection. Programme coordinators check the admission dossiers and refer back to the admissions office.

## 6. Conclusions:

- a. Both qualifications frameworks have been self-certified and comply with the European QF for HE;
  - b. Both QA systems comply with the ESG and guarantee that the learning outcomes of the different programmes which are further specifications of the level descriptors, have been achieved;
  - c. The conditions stipulated in the Flemish law for the enactment of the automatic recognition are met:
    - i. The Academy Profession degrees awarded by a Danish College are recognised on an equal level with the associate degree jointly awarded by a Flemish Centre for Adult Education and a Flemish University College;
    - ii. The professional Bachelor's degrees awarded by a Danish University College are recognised on an equal level with the professionally oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by a Flemish University College;
    - iii. The Bachelor's degrees awarded by a Danish University are recognised on an equal level with the academically oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by Flemish University;
    - iv. The Master's degrees awarded by a Danish University are recognised on an equal level with the Master's degree awarded by a Flemish University;
    - v. The Bachelor's degrees in the field of Arts awarded by institutions in architecture and art and institutions under the Ministry of Culture are recognised on an equal level with either the professionally oriented Bachelor's degree or the academically oriented Bachelor's degree, depending on the subject, awarded by a Flemish University College/Schools of Arts
    - vi. The Master's degrees in the field of Arts awarded by by institutions in architecture and art and institutions under the Ministry of Culture are recognised on an equal level with the Master's degree in the field of Arts awarded by a Flemish University College/Schools of Arts.
  - d. The Danish party will ensure that the Flemish higher education qualifications are recognised on an equal level with the Danish qualifications<sup>16</sup>.
7. All the participants in the country workshop have endorsed the conclusions.

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<sup>16</sup> This conclusion reflects the actual situation, where all Flemish degrees are recognised at the same level by the Danish Agency for Higher education/Danish ENIC-NARIC Office. Furthermore, as stated in the report HEIs are required to follow the agency's recognition decisions concerning the right to access. This latter part does not mean that we oversee all recognition decisions of Danish HEIs, but the Agency has a very close connection with admission officers and in my many years in the "recognition business" I have still to encounter difficulties with not accepting the level of Flemish degrees.



## Country seminar on automatic recognition Flanders and Poland

Brussels, 14 July 2015

**Report and conclusions** By Martina Vukasovic, Centre for Higher Education Governance Ghent (CHEGG), Ghent University (martina.vukasovic@ugent.be)

### Introduction

The project *Automatic Recognition at System Level in Flanders* is funded through Erasmus+ programme and seeks to explore new approaches to automatic recognition of foreign qualifications in Flanders. This requires peer learning between actors involved in recognition issues in Flanders and in other countries. Three countries with different education transitions were chosen as 'pilot countries': Denmark, Poland and Portugal. The project includes various peer-learning activities, including a country seminar during which civil servants, representatives of higher education institutions (HEIs), quality assurance (QA) agencies, government (both political representatives and civil servants), as well as actors working on recognition issues (including the NARIC centres) are expected to come to a common understanding of the two higher education systems, qualification frameworks (QF) and standards, guidelines and procedures related to QA in the two countries.

The country seminar with Poland took place on 14 July in Brussels. Participants from Poland included officials from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Under-Secretary of State as well as civil servants from different departments within the ministry, including the one in which Polish NARIC is located), representative of the General Council for Science and Higher Education (a buffer body) and the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA, the Polish QA agency). Flanders was presented by representatives of Flemish University and University Colleges Council (VLUHR), Accreditation Organisation of Flanders and the Netherlands (NVAO), Flemish NARIC and the Flemish Department of Education. The seminar consisted of presentations and discussions concerning: HE landscape, QA, QF, and recognition procedures in the two countries.

This report will first briefly present the context of automatic recognition, highlighting developments on the European level and in Flanders and then will include a summary of discussions related to the process of recognition.

### Context of Automatic Recognition

The overarching context of the project relates to developments on the European level and in the Flemish context.

Concerning the former, at the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Bucharest in 2012, the ministers expressed that they 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..."*  
(Bucharest Communiqué, 2012, p. 4)

as established a 'pathfinder group' of countries tasked with *"exploring the ways to achieve the automatic academic recognition of comparable degrees"* (p. 5). Participants from 11 higher education systems took part in the pathfinder group (PfG), including both Flemish and French Community, as well as two countries that are part of this project (Denmark and Portugal). The PfG agreed that automatic recognition organised on the system level is *"the most promising path to follow"* (EHEA PfG, 2015, p. 6), indicating that it is necessary to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries following the three-cycle structure should be recognised on an equal level with domestic qualifications. This requires, as stated by the PfG, full implementation of the *Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)*,<sup>17</sup> and *the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA (ESG)*,<sup>18</sup> as well a reliance on expertise in the ENIC-NARIC networks,<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_EN.asp) (page accessed 9 September 2015).

<sup>18</sup> <http://bologna->

[Yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/European%20Standards%20and%20Guidelines%20for%20Quality%20Assurance%20in%20the%20EHEA%202015\\_MC.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/files/European%20Standards%20and%20Guidelines%20for%20Quality%20Assurance%20in%20the%20EHEA%202015_MC.pdf) (page accessed 9 September 2015).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.enic-naric.net/> (page accessed 9 September 2015).

closer cooperation with QA structures (both national and European), full utilisation of tools such as the Diploma Supplement (DS) and the ECTS, setting up of free and accessible appeal procedures and structures, and utilisation of the *European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions*.<sup>20</sup> The importance of regional initiatives for building European-wide automatic recognition processes was particularly stressed and Benelux countries were explicitly indicated as one such region.

Concerning developments in the Flemish context, the first one concerns changes in legislation adopted in 2013 which foresee a possibility for automatic recognition of qualifications from countries whose QFs are self-certified in relation to the EHEA-QF and whose QA system is deemed to be in line with the ESG (indicated by their QA agency being registered in EQAR). It should be stressed that automatic recognition does not have a legal impact in relation to professional recognition (e.g. in the form of licencing to work in regulated professions) but may facilitate it. The other important development concerning automatic recognition related to Flanders is the May 2015 decision by the Benelux Committee of Ministers on automatic recognition of qualifications within Benelux, which guarantees a legal right of automatic recognition of any degree awarded by officially recognised higher education institutions within Benelux.<sup>21</sup>

It should be stressed that both Flanders and Poland have ratified the LRC (entry into force in 2009 in Belgium and in 2004 in Poland), have QA agencies registered in EQAR (Flanders: VLUHR and NVAO, Poland: PKA) and have self-certified QFs.<sup>22</sup>

## **Brief description of the qualifications frameworks for higher education**

### *Poland*

#### Degrees:

The Polish higher education degree structure includes:

- First-cycle (Bachelor's degree) programmes:
  - o two types of degrees in general: licencjat (6 semesters at a minimum) or inżynier degree (limited to specific types of programmes and lasting longer: 7 semesters at a minimum);
  - o other specific first cycle degrees: inżynier architekt, inżynier architekt krajobrazu, inżynier pożarnictwa, licencjat pielęgniarstwa, licencjat położnictwa.
- Second-cycle (Master's degree) programmes:
  - o Master programmes last 3 or 4 semesters and lead in general to the magister or magister inżynier ;
  - o There are also other specific second cycle degrees: magister inżynier architekt, magister inżynier architekt krajobrazu, magister inżynier pożarnictwa, magister pielęgniarstwa, magister położnictwa, magister sztuki.
- Besides the bachelor-master degrees there are long cycle programmes mandatory or possible in selected fields of study (law, medicine, psychology, veterinary medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and several areas related to art and design): those programmes can last from 9 to 12 semesters and lead to the magister degree or equivalent;
- Doctoral programmes lead to the award of the degree of doctor.

The Polish degree structure doesn't make any distinction with regard the orientation of the programmes: more professionally oriented programmes vs more academically oriented programmes. Programmes are defined separately as regards profiles: general academic and professional ("practical") ones. Ministerial regulation on qualifications framework defines learning outcomes separately for both profiles for each large subject domains. However this distinction is not reflected in degree structure and generic level descriptors in Polish qualifications framework.

Polish higher education does not encompass short cycle programmes or degrees.

#### Institutions:

The main distinction is between University and non-university higher education institutions.

University higher education institutions are characterised as an establishment providing degree-level education with a minimum of one academic unit authorised to confer the degree of doctor. Most of them

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/3\\_2014/141723.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/3_2014/141723.pdf) (page accessed 9 September 2015).

<sup>21</sup> <http://ecahe.eu/assets/uploads/2015/07/Benelux-decision-explanation.pdf> (page accessed 11 September 2015).

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=69> (page accessed 11 September 2015).

are public HEIs: universities, universities of technology, universities of fine arts, universities of economics etc.

The non-university higher education institutions are characterised as an establishment which offers first-cycle, second-cycle and/or long-cycle programmes but is not authorised to confer the degree of doctor. This group of institutions encompass most of non-public HEIs and so-called state schools of higher vocational education.

### *Flanders*

#### Degrees:

The Flemish degree structure included

- ▶ Associate degrees: short cycle study programmes last 90 or 120 ECTS credits;
- ▶ Bachelor: professionally oriented courses and academically oriented courses (at the level of Bachelor: binary system); bachelor study programmes last 180 ECTS credits;
- ▶ Advanced/subsequent bachelor's degree courses: the study programmes last 60 ECTS credits;
- ▶ Master: the master study programmes are all academically oriented and last 60 ECTS (humanities, economics, social sciences and industrial engineering), 120 ECTS (natural sciences; civic engineering, law, bioengineering, dentistry, life sciences, ) or 180 ECTS (medicine and veterinary sciences);
- ▶ Advanced/subsequent master's degree courses: the study programmes last 60 or 120 ECTS credits;
- ▶ The third cycle includes the doctoral programmes leading to the award of the degree of doctor (PhD).

There are bridging programmes between the professionally bachelor study programmes and the master courses. Holders of an associate degree can progress to a professionally oriented bachelor degree programme in the same or similar field. They may gain credits towards the bachelor programme (in the same field) for their previous short cycle studies.

#### Institutions:

The Flemish higher education landscape encompasses the following institutions:

- ▶ 5 universities: 3 public and 2 private; the mission of the universities is threefold: academically oriented higher education, research and community services;
- ▶ 12 University colleges/Universities of applied sciences: 6 public and 6 private; the mission of the university colleges is threefold: professionally oriented higher education, applied research and community services;
- ▶ Arts education is offered in Schools of arts; they are part of the UC but they are governed jointly by UC and Universities; their mission is also threefold: arts higher education (mostly academically oriented), research and community services;
- ▶ Centres for Adult Education: they are offering short cycle higher education in a partnership with the university colleges;
- ▶ Specialised institutions: management schools and schools for protestant theology
- ▶ Private-private institutions: College of Europe, Vesalius College, Kent University: those institutions offer accredited bachelor or master programmes, but they haven't any public funding.

Both the Qualifications framework for higher education and the overarching Qualifications framework have been self-certified against the EHEA qualifications framework c.q. the European Qualifications framework for LLL.

## **Brief description of the Quality Assurance systems for HE:**

### *Flanders*

Flanders is in a transitional phase moving from programme accreditation towards institutional review/accreditation. In the transitional phase the institutions will be reviewed against four standards: Vision and (educational) policy, policy implementation, Evaluation and monitoring and Enhancement (future oriented). As the same time the institutions have to demonstrate how they intend to assume full responsibility for assuring and improving the quality of their programmes and that will be assessed. The NVAO has developed a quality code including quality features derived from Part I of the revised European Standards and Guidelines. In 2017-2018 an in-depth evaluation of the system will be carried out.

### *Poland*

The Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) was established on 1 January 2002 by the Act of Law on Higher Education. It was established as the State Accreditation Committee and changed its name into current one on 1st of October 2011. PKA is listed in EQAR and has signed bilateral agreements with other agencies regarding the recognition of accreditations decisions. The main tasks are:

- Programme evaluation: PKA evaluates quality of education in a specific fields of study and at a specific level and profile of studies (programme assessment)
- Institutional evaluation: PKA evaluates basic activities of units of higher education institutions as well as quality evaluation of third - cycle and postgraduate programmes (if offered).

The institutional evaluation is complementary to the programme evaluation.

The criteria for Programme Evaluation have been presented as well as the criteria for institutional evaluation. There is 4 point assessment scale in use.

## **Brief description of how foreign qualifications are treated:**

### *Flanders*

The Flemish higher education institutions treat foreign bachelor's and master's degree in the same way as Flemish bachelor or master qualifications. The HEIs are obliged to apply the principles of the Lisbon Recognition convention.

The five main principles of the LRC are specified in our legislation: fair assessment, recognition if no substantial differences can be proven, legislation encourage comparing learning outcomes, recognition authority has to demonstrate substantial differences in case of negative decision and the right to appeal.

The last five years some 54 applications (9 licencjat and 45 magister) have been introduced. All except 3 have been recognised as equivalent with a specific Flemish degree or have been recognised at the bachelor or master level as requested. Unfortunately 3 magisters couldn't be recognised at the master level because of the insufficient scientific orientation or insufficient research-based.

A protocol updating the NVAO Treaty has established the mutual automatic recognition of accredited bachelor and master degree programmes.

On 18 May 2015 the ministers of the Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have signed a decree establishing the mutual automatic recognition of higher education qualifications at system level.

### *Poland*

Poland has a well-developed overarching legal framework for recognition: national legislation and international agreements, both the recognition of school certificates for the purpose of further studies and the recognition of higher education qualifications for the purpose of further studies.

With regard the recognition of higher education qualifications the following rules are applicable:

a foreign degree giving access to the second cycle studies, postgraduate studies, third cycle / doctoral studies or the right to start doctoral proceedings in the country in the educational system in which it was awarded gives access to further studies or the right to start doctoral proceedings in Poland (respectively)

a foreign joint degree giving access to further studies or to start doctoral proceedings at least in one country out of the countries in which the education has been provided gives access to the second cycle

studies, postgraduate studies, third cycle / doctoral studies or the right to start doctoral proceedings in Poland (respectively)

a foreign degree may also be recognised for the purpose of further studies on the basis of an international agreement.

The recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for professional purposes is also well elaborated, making a distinction between non-regulated professions and the regulated professions and – in the case of non-regulated professions - between EU/EFTA and OECD countries and other countries. Degrees awarded in EU/EFTA and OECD countries are automatically recognised in Poland (equivalence of the level of education).

A particular case is the recognition of foreign scientific degrees.

### **Focus on peer-learning and points of discussion**

Apart from requesting clarifications concerning specific aspects of each system, four topics were in the focus of more elaborate discussions. The discussions and conclusions are summarised below.

#### *Entrance requirements and flexibility of learning paths*

The procedure for enrolling new students into higher education differs in the two systems. While in Poland there are entrance exams<sup>23</sup> and *numerus clausus*<sup>24</sup>, which have been presented by the Polish participants as quality safeguards at the point of entry, in Flanders it is only necessary to pass final secondary school examinations and there are no limits with regards to how many students can enrol in a particular institution or programme.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, it is possible to pass these exams without having attended high school on a regular basis. The Flemish participants explained that this was a political legacy from the 1960s when it a decision was made to expand access to higher education. The indication that the first year of studies is crucial for further progress and successful completion and that, according to VLUHR representative, there is a significant drop after the first year of studies, was discussed by the Polish participants in relation to efficiency. However, the result of such a policy in Flanders is that 75% of students end up eventually with a degree, though not necessarily the one they started with.

Another issue concerned the flexibility of learning paths within higher education. While in Poland the learning paths do not seem to be very flexible and still are based on academic years, there are several options in Flanders with different units take as the basis for the learning agreement: degree contract, credit contract, exam contract, with different expectations concerning the existence and the amount of contact hours. The student therefore has several options at his/her disposal, although HEIs can limit which parts of a programme cannot be completed without any contact hours. The Flemish participants indicated that while alternative paths (in particular exam contract) are primarily organised as a 'second chance' for the students who could not progress through studies in regular way (e.g. due to full-time work), the proportion of such arrangements is relatively small.

#### *Associate degrees, bridging programmes and BA/MA in specific disciplines (law, medicine)*

Two issues concerning degree structure were points for discussion: one concerns the associate degree programmes in Flanders and the other concerns the implementation of Bachelor/Master degrees in specific disciplines.

Concerning the former, these are degrees awarded by university colleges and centres for adult education and comprise a 90-120 ECTS workload. While the Flemish participants indicated that these degrees correspond to EQF level 5, the Polish participants claimed that it would be difficult to find a corresponding level in the Polish system, not only due to the envisaged workload which is lower than the minimum for a

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<sup>23</sup> Admission to the first cycle and long cycle programmes are based first of all on results from final examination at secondary level (so called "matura" exam). Entrance exams have supplementary role. Universities have more autonomy in setting admission rules as regards second cycle programmes and exams can have more significant role in this case. See the Eurydice report "The System of Education in Poland" [http://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/THE-SYSTEM\\_2014\\_www.pdf](http://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/THE-SYSTEM_2014_www.pdf) (p. 61/62)

<sup>24</sup> Numerus clausus is usually defined by a university itself (there is a cap set by the law – if an institution wants to increase the number of students of particular programme by more than 2% it needs Minister's approval). The Minister of Health defines numerus clausus for programmes in medicines and dentistry.

<sup>25</sup> Exceptions to this are medicine and dentistry for which there are entrance exams, and arts for which there are artistic aptitude tests.

Bachelor degree (180 ECTS), but also due to the fact that in programmes leading to academic degrees the staff has to have a PhD level qualifications, while in programmes leading to associate degrees some of the staff may have only a Bachelor degree.

This led to a discussion about the distinction between professional and academic programmes in Flanders and the fact that in Poland a vast majority of study programmes has an academic orientation. In Flanders the holders of professional Bachelor degrees in Flanders can attend a bridging programme to attend an academic master programme. This was one point for which the Polish participants stated that they need to analyse in more detail, given that such bridging programmes don't exist in Poland. The practices in place show that there are no dead-ends in the learning paths. There is easy progression from practically-oriented to academically oriented programmes.

Another point of debate in relation to degree structure concerned the possibility to have a BA/MA structure in certain fields. In this respect, it was interesting to observe that while in Poland in some fields there is effectively no bachelor degree (e.g. a degree in law is 5 years), in Flanders the BA/MA structure was introduced even in fields which are often considered to be exempted from this (e.g. medicine). Although this was not discussed in detail at the seminar, it points to a possible problem of recognition of such BA degrees from Flanders in Poland.

#### *Accreditation and external evaluation*

The QA systems in the two countries, as previously indicated, operate in line of the ESG. The Polish system was changed significantly in 2011 and more autonomy with regards to programme development was granted to HEIs, although PKA is still involved in both programme and institutional evaluation. The Flemish system is currently undergoing change, given the recent legislative changes and from 2020 it will be primarily focused on institutional accreditation, with a much lesser focus on programmes. The Flemish HEIs will, under the new system, have an option to choose between (1) institutional accreditation with site visits and accreditation done for only a few study programmes and (2) institutional review with site visits and accreditation of each study programme. In Poland, the evaluation decisions are done in relation to a four-point assessment scale (outstanding, positive, condition and negative) while in Flanders the decision is binary – positive or negative. The participants discussed the pros and cons of the two assessment scales as well as how such assessments are reached (e.g. what is the purpose of study visits and how to avoid the process becoming only a bureaucratic exercise). The Polish participants in particular commented on the possibility of different treatment of HEIs in the Flemish system, given that such a practice would be inappropriate in Poland – the Polish law doesn't provide a basis for differentiating QA approach depending on the property status of an institution - , but the Flemish side clarified that this was introduced as a choice for HEIs in light of the principle of institutional autonomy.

#### **Conclusions of the meeting:**

8. Concerning characteristics of HE systems in Flanders and Poland that are of relevance for automatic recognition:
  - a. Both qualifications frameworks have been self-certified and comply with the European QF for HE;
  - b. Both QA systems comply with the ESG and guarantee that the learning outcomes of the different programmes which are further specifications of the level descriptors, have been achieved;
  - c. The conditions stipulated in the Flemish law for the enactment of the automatic recognition are met:
    - i. The diplomas certifying the title of licencjat and the diplomas certifying the title of inżynier awarded by a Polish University are recognised on an equal level with the academically c.q. professionally oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by Flemish University c.q. University college based on the diploma supplement
    - ii. The diplomas certifying the title of magister, the diplomas certifying the title of magister inżynier awarded by a Polish University are recognised on an equal level with the Master's degree awarded by a Flemish University c.q. University college (in the field of Arts), based on the diploma supplement;
    - iii. The diplomas certifying a title equivalent of that of a magister or a magister inżynier awarded on completion of a long cycle master's degree studies of at least 300 ECTS by a Polish University are recognised on an equal level with the Master's degree awarded by a

- Flemish University c.q. University college (in the field of Arts), based on the diploma supplement;
- iv. The Polish degree of 'doktor' is recognised on an equal level with the Flemish degree of doctor (PhD).
  - d. The Polish framework for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of further studies ensures that the Flemish higher education qualifications are recognised on an equal level with the Polish qualifications.
9. All the participants in the country workshop have endorsed the conclusions.

**Comments by the independent observer:**

Overall, the country seminar seemed to have been a good opportunity for those involved in recognition procedures to discuss concrete issues that might present obstacles to automatic recognition face-to-face. Given the atmosphere of mutual respect, the seminar was clearly a peer-learning opportunity, and while not all of the issues were completely resolved (e.g. recognition of Flemish short cycle or BA in medicine degrees in Poland), a clear willingness to resolve them in the near future was demonstrated.

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<b>Country seminar on automatic recognition Flanders and Portugal</b> <b>Brussels, 15 September 2015</b>
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**Report and observations** by Melissa Laufer, Centre for Higher Education Governance Ghent (CHEGG), Ghent University, melissa.laufer@ugent.be

## Introduction

The Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Bucharest in 2012 opened up the possibility to establish automatic recognition, however implementation of this practice was left in the hands of national governments. The project *Automatic recognition at system level in Flanders* is funded by the ERASMUS+ programme and aims to explore new pathways for achieving automatic recognition of foreign qualifications in Flanders. The project is designed to gain an understanding of foreign higher education systems through exchange between involved actors from different countries and to develop a process for implementing new regulations in regard to automatic recognition. Three countries, each with a different education system, were selected as pilot countries for this project: Denmark, Poland and Portugal. Involved actors in each country were invited to participate in a country seminar in Brussels. The country seminar served as a peer learning activity in which representatives of the two higher education systems presented and engaged in discussion regarding automatic recognition.

The country seminar between Portugal and Flanders took place on 15 September in Brussels. The participants were selected from a pool of involved actors: participants from Portugal included officials from the Directorate General for Higher Education, the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), the Council of Rectors and the Council of Polytechnics and participants from Flanders represented the Flemish University and University Colleges Council (VLUHR), the Accreditation Organisation of Flanders and the Netherlands (NVAO) as well as the Flemish NARIC and the Flemish Department of Education. The goal of the country seminar was twofold (1) to gain an understanding of the two higher education systems, qualification frameworks and quality assurance guidelines and (2) to formulate a collective response to the issue of automatic recognition in EHEA.

This report briefly outlines the presentations given on the higher education landscape in Portugal and Flanders including qualification frameworks, quality assurance systems and the treatment of foreign degrees. In addition, the discussion points that emerged during the seminar are briefly summarised along with observations made by the independent observer. The final conclusions agreed upon by the participants are listed at the end of this document.

## Higher Education Qualifications

### *Portugal*

Degrees:

The Portuguese degree structure comprises three cycles: 1<sup>st</sup> cycle - licenciado degree; 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle - mestre degree and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle - doutor degree. In 2014, a new short cycle, called professional higher technical course (TeSP) was introduced. This short cycle program is not a degree, but leads to the award of a diploma.

- 1<sup>st</sup> cycle: the licenciado degree consists of 180 - 240 ECTS
- 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle: the mestre degree consists of 90 - 120 ECTS; also some specific master degrees consist of 60 ECTS (e.g. teacher training). A mestre degree may also be granted following an integrated cycle of studies of 300 – 360 ECTS (e.g. medicine, psychology, pharmacy)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle: doutor degree

In the Portuguese higher education system mestre degrees are granted by universities and polytechnics and although the first are more academically oriented and the late more professionally oriented, no distinction is made between the degrees awarded. Furthermore, unlike the Flemish system the Portuguese degree structure does not offer a short degree cycle (associate degree) but a professional higher technical programme.

Institutions:

Portuguese higher education is structured as a binary system and composed of the following institutions:

- 129 institutions



- 39 public higher education institutions (14 university institutions, 20 polytechnic institutions, 5 military and police institutions)
- 88 private higher education institutions (28 university institutions, 60 polytechnic institutions)
- Admission (public higher education institutions): annual calls for student admission organised by the directorate general for higher education.
- Admission (private higher education institutions): annual calls for student admission organised individually by each organisation their own annual call for admissions

### *Flanders*

#### Degrees:

The Flemish degree structure consists of the following qualifications: associate degree, bachelor degree, advanced/subsequent bachelor degree, master's degree, advanced/subsequent master's degree and doctorate degree.

- Associate degree: a short cycle program consisting of 90 to 120 ECTS
- Bachelor degrees: 1) professionally oriented courses and 2) academically oriented courses; bachelor degrees consist of 180 ECTS
- Advanced/subsequent bachelor's degree course consists of 60 ECTS
- Master's degree: all master's degrees are academically oriented and granted by a university; 1) master degree consists of either 60 ECTS in humanities, economics, social sciences and industrial engineering; 2) 120 ECTS in natural sciences, civic engineering, law, bioengineering, dentistry, life sciences; 3) 180 ECTS in medicine and veterinary sciences
- Advanced/subsequent master's degree courses: these study programs consist of 60 or 120 ECTS
- PhD: this third cycle degree includes doctoral programs which lead to the awarding of a doctorate degree (PhD)

There is a central list of bachelor and master study programs and universities or university colleges are not able to establish new programs without allowance from the Ministry of Education. The main language of instruction is Dutch and there are a growing number of master programs offered in English. Furthermore, there are also bridging programs established between the professionally oriented bachelor degree and master courses. Holders of an associate degree may progress to a professionally oriented bachelor degree program within the same or a similar field and credits gained during the associate degree may count towards the bachelor program. The aim of the associate degree is to match students as early as possible to a specific education pathway. There are no professional oriented masters or PhDs. There is also no entrance exam or "numerus clauses" in Flanders except in the case of Medicine, Dentistry and some art programs (e.g. audio-visual and visual arts, music and performing arts).

#### Institutions:

The higher education landscape in Flanders consists of the following institutions:

- 2 ministries (in the Flemish government) the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Research and Innovation
- Advisory boards/councils: Flemish Council for Education and the Flemish Council for Research and Innovation
- Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)
- 5 universities: 3 public and 2 private; the mission of the universities is threefold: academically oriented higher education, research and community services
- Arts education is offered in schools of arts; they are part of university colleges and governed jointly by university colleges and universities; their mission is also threefold: arts higher education (mostly academically oriented), research and community services
- Centers for Adult Education: they offer short cycle higher education in partnership with the university college
- Specialised institutions: management schools and schools of protestant theology
- Private-private institutions: college of Europe, Vesalius College, Kent University: these institutions offer accredited bachelor or master programs, but do not receive any public funding

## Qualifications Frameworks in Higher Education

### Portugal

In 2005, the legal reform of higher education set the stage for the establishment of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA). The legal reform amended the basic law of the education system, introduced ECTS, mobility mechanisms and the diploma supplement. In addition, the legal reform adopted the three cycles of higher education and defined generic qualification descriptors for each cycle. Furthermore the legal reform established the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) which was given the accreditation competencies for the higher education cycles and institutions in 2007.

In 2009, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was approved, which operates as a single reference framework to classify all qualifications in educational and national training systems. In this system, qualifications are divided into eight levels, each defined by a set of descriptors (e.g. knowledge, skills and attitudes) from the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Furthermore, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training, I.P. (ANQEP) serves as the National Coordination Point charged with implementing the EQF, in coordination with the Directorate General for Higher Education in regard to education levels 5 to 8 (higher education). Lastly, the recently created Professional Higher Technical Course (in 2014) awards a level 5 diploma and is offered by higher education polytechnics.

### National Qualification Framework

Qualification Level	Qualification
1	2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle of basic education
2	3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle of basic education (lower secondary education) achieved in basic education or via double certification paths
3	Upper-secondary education - aim pursuing higher education studies
4	Upper-secondary education achieved via double certification paths (or upper-secondary education with the aim at pursuing higher education studies plus a professional traineeship (minimum 6 months))
5	Post-secondary, non-higher education qualification with credits to pursue higher education studies
6	Licenciado degree
7	Mestre degree
8	Doutor degree

### Flanders

In Belgium, the three communities (German/Wallonia/Flanders) have autonomy regarding education. The Flemish Qualification System is divided into four sections: (1) nursery education (ages 2.5 -6), (2) primary education (ages 6 – 12), (3) secondary school (ages 12 - 18) and (4) higher education (three-cycle education). Moreover in 2010, Flemish education adopted the 8 education levels and set of descriptors indicating learning outcomes from the EQF. In Flemish higher education, there are several flexible learning paths and learning agreements: degree contract, credit contract and exam contract. The higher education qualification framework is structured as follows:

Qualification Level	Qualification
5	Associate degree (awarded by university colleges and centers for adult education)
6	Bachelor degree (both academically and professionally oriented degrees awarded by universities and university colleges)
7	Master degree (awarded by universities and the School of Arts and the Maritime Academy)
8	Doctorate degree (awarded by universities)

## Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education

### *Portugal*

Historically, in Portugal there has been a tension between autonomy granted to HEIs and accountability measures enforced by the ministry. With emergence of the Bologna Process, the idea began to circulate in Portugal to grant universities more autonomy in order to allow them to adapt with more ease to the changing higher education landscape. Initial QA agencies established were the Foundation of Portuguese Universities (the first assessment cycle was completed in 1999) and an overall coordination council (CNAVES) was established in 1998 along with the QA agency for public polytechnics (ADISPOR) followed by the QA agency for the public sector (APESP) in 1999.

In 2007, the Quality Assessment Act (Law 38/2007) was passed which defined the new quality framework. In addition, the Decree-Law 369/2007 was passed that defined the statutes of the Assessment and Accreditation Agency (A3ES). The A3ES was established as a private foundation independent from the state and HEIs and is financially independent from the public budget. The A3ES is comprised of six bodies: (1) the Board of Trustees which is comprised of five members appointed by the Cabinet with consultation from HEIs; (2) the Management Board which is responsible for fulfilling the agency's objectives and makes the decision regarding assessment and accreditation; (3) the Audit Committee which holds the responsibility for ensuring the legality and management of the agency's finances; (4) the Appeals Council, a body in which appeals against the decisions of the Management Board regarding assessment and accreditation are made; (5) the Advisory Council, a body that gives advice on matters of quality assurance and lastly (6) the Scientific Council, a non-statutory body integrating six recognised foreign experts in the area of higher education quality assurance.

The aim of the A3ES is to assess the performance of HEIs and develop a quality culture through determining assessment criteria, ensuring the fulfilment of legal requirements for study program accreditation, informing society about the quality and performance of HEIs and lastly promoting an internationalisation of the assessment process. The A3ES is responsible for assessment and accreditation of all HEIs and their study programs and also aims to promote internal quality assurance of individual HEI. The A3ES is currently running its first regular accreditation cycle which will be completed in 2016. Study programs are assigned the status of accredited, accredited with conditions and non-accredited. Accreditation is granted for five years; however for programs which are accredited with conditions the follow-up may take place within 1 to 3 years. The accreditation agency is constructed as a comprehensive database and online platform which results of the assessment are made public.

### *Flanders*

Quality assurance in Flanders is currently transitioning from study program accreditation to institutional review/accreditation. Institutional review is a periodic assessment of the quality of an entire institution's education policy. The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) commissions an external panel to conduct this review. Presently and until 2020, HEIs may have the opportunity to select two pathways of quality assurance. One option is for the HEI to engage in an institutional review and a pilot on institutional conduct QA program. With this option, the HEI is granted more autonomy to cultivate their quality culture and monitor their study programs. Accreditation is then granted to the individual HEI and select study programs (e.g. new study programs are still individually accredited). The second option is for a HEI to engage in an institutional review in addition to individual accreditation of singular study programs. Reasons for these changes are due to changes in the political climate, a

dominant perspective shared among universities was that current QA measures (i.e. study program accreditation) were not adding any value to the programs and this lack of autonomy was unbeneficial. In this transitional phase, institutions will be reviewed against four standards: vision and (educational) policy, policy implementation, evaluation and monitoring and enhancement (future oriented). In addition, institutions will be assessed on how they demonstrate their strategy to assume full responsibility for assuring and improving the quality of their programs. The assessment process takes 10 months and involves a 6-part process; administrative consultation, a NVAO past-accreditation institutional portrait, critical reflection, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> site visits and review panel. Furthermore, the NVAO has developed a quality code offering a framework for the review of the internal strategy for assuring and enhancing the quality of study programmes. The quality code includes eight quality features derived from Part I of the revised European Standards and Guidelines. The institutions have to demonstrate how they will substantiate the quality features involving the internal and external stakeholders on the one hand and external independent peers (from the discipline) and experts (with, for example, educational or professional expertise) on the other. In 2017-2018 an in-depth evaluation of the system will be carried out.

## **Treatment of Foreign Qualifications**

### *Recognition in Portugal*

In 2007, the automatic recognition of foreign degrees from 34 countries was established. This feat was accomplished through the collection of information of each country's education system including their QA and accreditation practices regarding HEIs, national qualification frameworks, official degrees, grading scales and all other relevant data. Following the retrieval of this data, each country was individually analysed and recommendations were drafted and a proposal sent to the Commission after which the Commission decided which countries and degrees are recognised and legal acts were published in the official journal.

The procedure for applying for degree recognition takes place online and requires the applicant to provide the following: their original diploma issued by a competent foreign HEI; their final grade; documents issued either in PT, EN, FR, SP, IT or translated, and the fee (not exceeding 27 euro) for the registration of the diploma and the conversion of final grades. Applicants receive a verdict one month following the submission of their completed application. This procedure started in 2008 and boomed in 2010 with the majority of applicants with degrees from Spain, UK, Ukraine, Moldova, USA, France, Czech Republic, Russia, Italy, and Romania. Many difficulties do arise when conducting degree recognition as partner countries/institutions do not always prioritise passing along needed information such as official grading scales and there are several nuances in the various systems. Furthermore, a recommendation was made to improve this system would be to encourage other countries to prioritise providing open information about their higher education system as well as members of the Bologna process uniformly implementing bologna tools such as the diploma supplement throughout their higher education system.

### *Recognition in Flanders*

The Flemish higher education institutions treat foreign bachelor and master's degrees in the same manner as Flemish degrees. Foreign students may have their degree recognised by the university which they are applying to or apply for degree recognition through NARIC-Vlaanderen. HEIs are required to apply the principles of the Lisbon Recognition convention (LRC) regarding degree recognition. The five main principles of the LRC are specified in the legislation: fair assessment, recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; legislation encouraging comparing learning outcomes, recognition authority has to demonstrate substantial differences in case of negative decision and the right to appeal.

If a student decides to apply for degree recognition through NARIC-Vlaanderen, they are required to upload an application to the online portal. Following submission of the application a four step process is undertaken in which the qualification receives approval or rejection. Applicants with degrees from 'known countries' (countries which have previous approval) an internal decision may be reached regarding recognition. However, applicants with degrees from countries in which the higher education system has not been previously documented may either require external advice or a commission of experts before a decision can be reached. A positive outcome of this procedure results in the foreign degree/level receiving the same legal value as the equivalent Flemish degree/level. Following a negative outcome, the applicants has 6 months to request a revision after receiving the decision and may make an appeal to the Council.

Currently, there are already several general equivalencies in place. In 2010, the Flemish government approved the automatic level equivalence of Dutch Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate degrees accredited by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation. A protocol (2013) updating the NVAO Treaty has

established the mutual automatic recognition of accredited bachelor and master degree programs between Flanders and the Netherlands. In May 2015, the ministers of the Benelux (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) have signed a decree establishing the mutual automatic recognition of higher education degrees. Furthermore, in 2003, a decision of the Flemish government determined the equivalence for most Dutch secondary degrees and most recently in 2015, a ministerial decision was made regarding the determination of the international baccalaureate diploma and the European baccalaureate diploma with the Flemish diploma of secondary education.

## **Discussion Points**

During the course of the seminar several discussion points emerged. These discussions are summarised below.

### **Ambiguous understandings of “Automatic Recognition” and “Trust”**

During the discussion several participants remarked upon the ambiguous understanding of ‘automatic recognition’ and ‘trust’. First, the term ‘automatic recognition’ may be interpreted differently in various national contexts, for example may include different measures to check the authenticity of official degree documents. Second, automatic recognition as voiced by several individuals, goes much deeper than simply finding degree translation and transferability rather it is part of a much larger issue of mutual trust among partners. The example was brought forth that despite ministries having signed the Bologna process and practices such as accreditation and ECTS are in place the trend of finding new methods to measure comparability such as learning outcomes continues. The group came to the realisation that the issue of mutual trust may never completely diminish however by maintaining an open dialogue (i.e. automatic recognition meetings) may aid in bridging more trust between partners.

### **Accreditation Differences and Quality Assurance**

In the Flemish and Portuguese systems there are differences in the accreditation systems. In Flanders, the system is currently transitioning and from 2020 will focus primarily on institutional accreditation system. Under the new system, Flemish HEIs will have the option to select two accreditation methods: (1) institutional accreditation with site visits and an accreditation of a few programs and (2) institutional accreditation with site visits and accreditation of all study programs. In the Portuguese system, accreditation is granted solely to study programs. Due to the difference in these two systems two issues of concern were discussed (1) branch campus accreditation and (2) joint degree accreditation. The Portuguese participants expressed that a branch campus would need to be accredited in both national and local contexts. In response to the question of accreditation of the South Korea Ghent University branch campus, the Flemish partners responded that the branch campus must comply with both national (Flemish) and local accreditation measures. Second, the accreditation of joint degrees was discussed. The Flemish approach to accrediting joint degrees is to look at the whole study program and not to focus solely on the section of the study program that takes place in Flanders. Portugal follows a similar strategy and may use the approach of ‘agent exchange’ in which accreditation agents are sent to the partner country to assess the joint study program. The issue of degree document authenticity was also raised during the discussion. In Portugal, degree documents are tested for their authenticity while in Flanders this is not necessarily the case for all documents, rather in cases that degree documents from a partner country were already investigated and approved similar documents may be approved without a document authenticity test.

### **Associate Degrees and Professional Higher Education Programme**

In both the Portuguese and Flemish systems there has been a recent development of a short-cycle education option for students. In both systems this development was inspired by a similar aim – to get students plugged into higher education as early as possible. However, the difference emerges between the two systems in the recognition of this short-cycle in Portugal this is considered a short-cycle qualification while in Flanders this is considered an associate degree.

### **Comments by the Observer**

In general, the country seminar provided a space for open dialogue between the participants as well as the opportunity for the representatives to gain a deeper understanding of their partner’s higher education landscape and accreditation and quality assurance practices. The seminar also enabled participants to discuss face-to-face concrete issues that may hinder automatic recognition in an atmosphere of peer-learning. Not all issues between the two systems are straight forward and further discussions may be required to address the nuances between different accreditation systems (institutional review vs. study

program accreditation) and associate degrees and professional higher education programs, however overall there appeared to be a willingness among participants to work collectively towards further understanding and partnership.

## Conclusions

- a. Both qualifications frameworks have been self-certified and comply with the European QF for HE;
  - b. Both QA systems comply with the ESG and guarantee that the learning outcomes of the different programmes which are further specifications of the level descriptors, have been achieved;
  - c. The conditions stipulated in the Flemish law for the enactment of the automatic recognition are met:
    - i. The *licenciado* diplomas awarded by a Portuguese Polytechnic are recognised on an equal level with the professionally oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by a Flemish University College;
    - ii. The *licenciado* diplomas awarded by a Portuguese University are recognised on an equal level with the academically oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by Flemish University;
    - iii. The master diplomas awarded by a Portuguese higher education institution are recognised on an equal level with the Master's degree awarded by a Flemish University;
    - iv. The *licenciado* diplomas in the field of Arts awarded by a Portuguese Polytechnic or University are recognised on an equal level with either the professionally oriented Bachelor's degree or the academically oriented Bachelor's degree, depending on the subject, awarded by a Flemish University College/Schools of Arts
    - v. The master diplomas in the field of Arts awarded by a Portuguese Polytechnic or University are recognised on an equal level with the Master's degree in the field of Arts awarded by a Flemish University College/Schools of Arts
    - vi. PhD diplomas awarded by a Portuguese University are recognised on equal level with the PhD degrees awarded by a Flemish University.
  - d. By virtue of the Portuguese Decree-Law No 314/2007 of 12 October 2007 the academic degrees awarded by a Flemish higher education institution following a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> study cycle are considered of a level and nature and with objectives that are identical to 'licenciado', Masters and Doctorate degrees in Portugal.
10. All the participants in the country workshop have endorsed the conclusions.

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## 9. The Austrian Higher Education Mobility Strategy

### Higher Education Mobility Strategy of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy (HMS)

promoting transnational mobility at Austrian Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences  
& Private Universities

#### Main Features

- HMS promotes **transnational physical mobility** by enhancing its qualitative and quantitative aspects
- HMS helps to **improve Austria's standing as a relevant global player** in science, research, and business
- HMS provides a **framework for existing mobility schemes** in Austria
- The **added value of high-quality mobility**
  - benefits the higher education institutions (HEIs), their students, as well as teachers, researchers, and general staff
  - is reflected in the (inter-)national profile of higher education institutions
- **Internationalisation at Home** serves students who for various reasons cannot embark on physical mobility
- The **Scope of the HMS** covers all higher education sectors governed by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy (BWF). The link to the European Research Area is given by the inclusion of Early Stage Researchers.
- The **Target Groups** include
  - **students** (outgoing and incoming, credit and degree mobility) in bachelor, master and PhD programs,
  - study stays and study-related internships/traineeships
  - **teaching staff** incoming and outgoing
  - **general staff**
- **Target institutions** are
  - **public universities**
  - **universities of applied sciences**
  - **private universities**
- **16 Actions Lines** broken down into 4 categories (framework conditions, pre-mobility phase, mobility phase proper, post-mobility phase) including **targets, measures/instruments** and **recommendations**:

#### -Framework Conditions

Action Line 1 – Mobility Strategy/Internationalisation Strategy

Action Line 2 – Curricula

Action Line 2a – Curricula with mobility windows

Action Line 2b – Curricula with learning outcomes

Action Line 3 - financial support

Action Line 4 - social dimension, underrepresented groups

Action Line 5 - national authorities, administrative and legal matters

Action Line 6 - networking and partnerships

Action Line 7 - quality assurance and –instruments

Action Line 8 – monitoring

- **Pre-mobility Phase**

Action Line 9 - counselling and motivating (cf. AL 15) Action Line 10 - information and marketing/advertising Action Line 11 - linguistic and cultural preparation  
Action Line 12 - housing, visa, insurance matters

- **Mobility Phase Proper**

Action Line 13 - welcome culture and the role of administration

- **Post-mobility Phase**

Action Line 14 - crediting and recognition of periods of study abroad as well as crediting and recognition of teaching and research activities abroad for career purposes

Action Line 15 - re-integration, reflection on and use of mobility experience, alumni activities, sharing of international experience

Action Line 16 – „Internationalisation at home“

➤ **Quantitative targets**

for **student-outgoing-credit-mobility**:

- 30 – 35% of annual graduates should have embarked on a study-related stay abroad by 2025 (according to a survey the potential hovers around 33%).
- We are aiming for 100,000 Austrian ERASMUS+ students by 2018 and 120,000 ERASMUS+ students by 2021.

for **outgoing teacher mobility**:

- At least 4,500 scientific/teaching staff at Austrian universities should have embarked on a work-related stay abroad by 2020 (private universities and universities of applied sciences are not included in this projection, they are not covered by central data collecting).  
The aim is to underscore the pivotal role of teachers and researchers as motivators and multipliers for student mobility.

➤ **Monitoring**

2018 – First intermediary report as part of the Austrian Bologna Monitoring Exercise

2020 – Second intermediary report/stocktaking as special edition of the Austrian Bologna Monitoring Exercise

2025 – Analysis and evaluation

- The Higher Education Mobility Strategy is to be understood, in a first step, as a list of recommendations based on a (non-exhaustive) inventory of mobility measures and activities. As the implementation process unfolds there will be adaptations and probably new measures to answer to the need of future developments and changes in the framework conditions for mobility.

- For further Information please click [www.bmwf.wg.at](http://www.bmwf.wg.at) - **Studium** (German only).



## 10. Report on Student and Staff Mobility, Belarus

### Academic mobility of students and staff: possible challenges and ways out

Within the Tempus project "Promoting Internationalisation of HEIs in Eastern Neighbourhood Countries through Cultural and Structural Adaptations PICASA" (project No. 544125-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-AM-TEMPUS-SMGR) implemented by a consortium of education ministries and universities in Europe, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia and the Ukraine in 2013-2017, there was conducted a research aimed at studying the challenges that partner universities are facing when planning and organising academic mobility projects/programs for their students and staff. The most common challenges were:

1. Lack of local regulatory and legal acts on academic mobility issues,
2. An insufficiently effective mobility programs management system,
3. Low motivation of staff and students to participate in mobility programs,
4. Lack of a comprehensive effective communication system for informing the university community about mobility programs
5. "language, social and psychological barriers", negative "intercultural stereotypes"
6. Financing of mobility programs
7. Recognition of the results of mobility in the Belarusian educational institutions (recognition of the studied courses, gained grades and credit units (ECTS) by the student during the mobility period in a foreign university)

After careful analysing of the reasons why such challenges arise, the European partners in cooperation with other project partners developed possible ways to overcome these challenges:

1. to develop local normative acts (regulations, instructions, recommendations) at the ministerial and university levels that would regulate issues related to the creation and management of mobility programs, to the documental formalisation of business trips abroad for university staff and students, to the recognition of mobility results obtained abroad, as well as other organisational issues,
2. to optimise the university structure, identify the roles, tasks and responsibilities of the university departments and officials involved in the management of mobility programs,
3. to upgrade professional skills of the staff responsible for the management of mobility programs,
4. to create an effective network of international project coordinators at all management levels (at the level of top administration, faculties, departments, other structural units);
5. to develop an intra-university evaluating system of the effectiveness of the university structural units and staff, taking into account the criteria related to their participation in international projects,
6. to develop methodical instructions, guidelines with the description of various national and foreign scholarship programs, samples of documents for the participants of the mobility programs (e.g., motivation letter, CV, cover letter, letter requesting admission for an internship, etc.), samples of internal business trip documents (e.g., an internal memo, an order on a business trip, etc.)
7. to improve the communication system among the university community via active implementing of Internet resources (e.g. university website, social networks), conducting regular information and practical seminars on academic mobility issues, involving staff and students who have previously participated in mobility programs,
8. to organise cultural, educational and extracurricular activities with the participation of local and foreign staff and students in order to assist them to overcome their "language, social, psychological barriers" and "intercultural stereotypes",
9. to search actively national and foreign scholarship programs, funds, constantly expand partnerships in order to obtain funding for mobility programs from external resources.

## 11. Report from the NESSIE Network

To be added

## 12. Report from the PLA on Social Dimension Mainstreaming, Austria

### Summary

#### Peer Learning Activity at JKU Linz, Austria, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

On behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW), Maria Keplinger (head of expert unit on higher education development) emphasised in her introduction that different national contexts require different strategies that are specifically adapted or even tailored to the given circumstances. At the same time, international networking among experts is required in many areas – e.g. within this Peer Learning Activity – to also address challenges that are faced in different contexts likewise. The audience was then given a short insight into the Austrian strategy development process against the background of the national and international political context.

The following paragraphs are extracts from Lea Meister's speech which concisely summarised all the PLA inputs, the presenters coming from the following countries: Austria, Great Britain, Croatia, Iceland, Ireland, the research institute ECHO from the Netherland and a staff member from the University of Malmö, giving an insight into a university approach to the SD.

Ana Tecilazić Goršić from **Croatia** described the current process in Croatia which is part of a bigger education reform. In the case of Croatia, especially the paradigm shift from performance-related grants towards the predominance of need based grants is to be mentioned.

Another approach was presented by Anca Greere (UK). UK relies on different strategies concerning HE access. Bridging courses and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF 2016) should be mentioned explicitly. The TEF was intended to make HE teaching more attractive for an increasingly diverse student population by awarding certificates to HEIs who fulfil certain criteria concerning Teaching Quality.

Helga Posset presented an overview of the **Austrian** National Strategy, allowing some detailed insights into selected quantitative goals. The audience response contained numerous questions with regards to existing parameters for quality assurance and monitoring in the implementation phase.

**Ireland** is in its third cycle of "national strategies". The clear definition of goals and that of underrepresented groups have led to sustainable progress (e.g. percentage of graduates in general and quota of students with a disability and students with delayed entry to higher education has risen significantly). Ireland's input made clear that what is needed for the achievement of such goals are not only significant investments, but also the awareness of the fact that higher education cannot be regarded as a closed system and that difficulties do also occur at the preceding levels of education.

Maria Kristin Gylafdotir (**Iceland**) presented strategies from a totally different starting point, namely against the background of constraints and cutbacks in the education sector as a result of the economic crisis. The importance of available relevant data to adapt measures to the current situation was emphasised.

Mary Tupan Wenno from ECHO (Center for Diversity policy) presented the results of the IDEAS project (**I**dentifying **e**ffective **a**pproaches to enhancing the **s**ocial dimension in Higher Education). This is a project (within the life-long learning programme) within which efficient and effective approaches towards the social dimension were collected. Important findings were that not only the amount of funds, but also the allocation of funds is essential. The role of teachers concerning access to education was highlighted.

Mary T. Wenno's approach was affirmed by Patricia Staaf, who presented herself as being at interface of Malmö University and the Swedish Network on Widening Participation (INCLUDE). She furthermore emphasised the importance of early stage interventions (e.g. contact students directly who do not complete any credits) as a low-threshold measure to avoid dropout.

In the final discussion it became clear that nationally adapted approaches are required, and that international networking is essential. New methods should be tested, and successful methods should be (adapted and) adopted. The involvement of teachers and students is important. Strategies have to be communicated with those who will be implementing them, research supports the process. When prioritising the social dimension, not only funding but also the importance and reputation of particular activities are relevant.

All documents are available at [www.sozialerhebung.at/sozdim](http://www.sozialerhebung.at/sozdim)

### **13. Report from the Peer Learning Seminar on Tracking, Poland**

#### **Peer Learning Seminar „Tracking graduates’ career paths”**

**Warszawa, 3-4 September 2015**

#### **Non-Paper: Chair’s Conclusions**

1. Graduate tracking, defined for the purpose of the seminar as arrangements enabling gathering information on career paths of graduates from higher education, is considered by the countries participating in the seminar as a very significant tool supporting the improvement of graduates’ employability, dialogue between higher education and the world of work and transparency of educational offers. At the same time, there is a strong need for further improvement of implemented arrangements which can be supported by mutual learning.
2. Among the methods used, surveys, including census or sample surveys and panel design, as well as systems taking advantage of administrative data, are the predominant ones. Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) also make use of qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups.
3. Due to the information needs of potential students and their parents, society, the higher education sector, employers and public authorities regarding access to comparable, representative and objective information on career paths of graduates from particular HEIs and study fields, European governments ever more often opt for creating tracking arrangements that take advantage of administrative data.
4. Graduate tracking taking advantage of administrative data is usually based on (or shall be based on) matching data from different databases, above all – data from higher education information systems with databases of other administrative systems, especially social security systems. The objective of gaining comparable data from this type of tracking requires that it be managed at national level. Obviously, HEIs with a history of running comprehensive graduate tracking systems making use of data from different registers should continue their efforts to maintain and develop those systems.
5. Participants explored the pros and cons of graduate tracking taking advantage of administrative data. No response rate problem, low costs as well as representativeness and comparability of data are among the advantages of this tracking method. Nevertheless, it has a number of limitations, such as a limited number of variables, no control over data collection and no possibility of analysing opinions or satisfaction with the programme completed.
6. At national level, the results of graduate tracking are used mainly as information for potential students willing to make an informed decision on the choice of a study field and a HEI. Some countries elect to take account of the results in other aspects of higher education governance.
7. Regulations on personal data protection (privacy), whose stringency varies between countries, are the most important factor limiting the scope of graduate tracking based on administrative data.
8. Higher Education Institutions need in-depth analysis of their graduates’ career paths for the purpose of a full-fledged internal quality assurance system and institutional management. Therefore, surveys are an important tool for HEIs allowing them to explore issues relevant

from a HEI's perspective. Surveys also help in contextualising the results of tracking based on administrative data which are a good source of evidence but alone do not necessarily determine the quality of a programme. Qualitative research methods are also very useful in this context. It is a HEI's responsibility (also according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) to obtain information indispensable for a well-functioning internal quality assurance system. It has to be underlined that from HEIs' perspective, graduate tracking is only one phase of indispensable data collection concerning the whole student life cycle.

9. Surveys on graduates' situation in the labour market entail various methodological challenges: the self-selection bias, the need to secure a very high response rate, or the disparities in response rates between participating HEIs. As more HEIs participate, the challenges get weightier. Those methodological problems should therefore be carefully addressed especially in nationwide surveys on graduates' transition into the labour market.
10. Discussions on a possible European approach to graduate tracking should take into consideration the relevance of information on particular aspects of graduates' career paths in the European context, as well as methodological problems concerning the representativeness of data. It should be explored to what extent data collection should be coordinated in the framework of the joint European enterprise with voluntary participation of countries, and to what extent we should rather trust the robustness of data collected under national tracking systems, improve mutual understanding of the indicators used and explore the possibilities of making reliable comparisons between particular countries.
11. Publication of the results of graduate tracking needs careful and well-considered communication with the mass media so that graduate tracking truly contributes to raising public awareness of real outcomes of higher education. Ill-prepared collaboration with journalists can result in numerous misunderstandings.
12. The seminar was a good kick-off for further peer learning and networking between experts dealing with graduate tracking. There is a strong need for more focused cooperation among national experts concerning e.g. the use of administrative data in graduate tracking, including dealing with technicalities, discussing common limitations and supporting mutual understanding of different indicators, as well as further collaboration of policy-makers. Next peer learning events could be organised in the framework of the Bologna Follow-up Group Work Plan 2015-2018.