ON IMPLEMENTATION

FOSTERING IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREED KEY COMMITMENTS FINAL REPORT

WORK PLAN 2015-2018

ON IMPLEMENTATION
FOSTERING IMPLEMENTATION OF AGREED KEY COMMITMENTS
FINAL REPORT

Working group 2

**Report by the working group 2
"On Implementation" –
Fostering implementation
of agreed key commitments**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary

The report of working group 2 "On Implementation" gives an account of the work done by the working group according to the Terms of Reference. The ToR include a list of tasks as well as a list of decisions to be implemented after the Yerevan Communiqué and a list of commitments the ministers agreed upon in Yerevan as well. The report doesn't cover all the decisions and commitments included in the Yerevan Communiqué. That was not the aim of the working group. The purpose of the working group was to support countries in the implementation exercise. The working group has explored different ways of fostering the implementation of the agreed goals: organizing reversed peer reviews bringing together countries that are in different stages of implementation, national seminars with an international perspective and thematic sessions including experts in the area from different countries. The overall aim of all those activities was mutual learning, sharing ideas and experiences and having a dialogue. The working group has identified strengths and weak points in the way we have operated.

The strengths are related to:

- The active involvement of the different stakeholders in the different initiatives in particular in the reversed peer reviews;

- The willingness of the countries to enter in a policy dialogue fostering the mutual understanding of the implementation issues;

Weak points are related to:

- The disperse character of the initiatives; the list of events was characterized by a diversity in terms of purposes and goals, topics, context and orientation.

- Coherence among the different events was missing and there was no ex ante concertation;

- The lack of follow-up of the outcomes of the events;

- The lack of sufficient international orientation of most of the initiatives

In our recommendations on working methods for implementation to the BFUG we would like to keep the strengths and to address the weak points:

- All countries should engage in an active dialogue across the EHEA and in particular with the countries that not yet fully implemented the structural reforms;

- The concept of reversed peer review should be further developed

- All countries should intensify their cross-border cooperative efforts and make the necessary resources available;

- In order to concentrate and focus our efforts and to avoid a too disperse and wide-ranging list of actions the BFUG working plan should include a cross border concerted joint action programme in order to foster the implementation with a clear purpose and focus, an evaluation of the usefulness of the actions/initiatives and a follow-up of them;

- The BFUG should encourage different stakeholders to organize cross borders targeted events as a means to follow-up and to enhance the visibility.

The main focus of the working group was to foster implementation of the agreed goals within the EHEA. The report includes a theoretical background on the notion of implementation within the EHEA based on the findings of research conducted in that topic. The research revealed that implementation of agreed commitments is a complex, multidimensional and multilevel issue and that a distinction should be made between implementation as policy adoption through legislation and implementation as policy enactment through practice. Furthermore, we should also be aware of the fact that the agreed goals are of a different nature: a distinction could be made between agreed structural reforms and agreed policy themes, preferences and priorities.

Based on the material that was available and taking into account the relatively limited working period we have selected nine topics/commitments: the short cycle, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the recognition practice, quality assurance, recognition of prior learning, staff mobility, student mobility, the social dimension and the employability. In the different paragraphs on each topic we have looked at the context, we have made an analysis of the conclusions of the activities that have been organized around that issue and we have formulated some recommendations for future implementation work. Some of recommendations are related to the content of the topic other recommendations are related to how to foster the implementation.

The main recommendations on topics/commitments refer to:

- The short cycle as an autonomous cycle in the European higher education landscape and the articulation between the short cycle and the first cycle;

- The full implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in particular the Article 7 regarding refugees and the forthcoming subsidiary text (November 2017) and the full implementation and the use the notion of substantial differences in all recognition practice;

- The improvement of the recognition practice by fostering the automatic recognition at system level within the EHEA and the creation of a culture of recognition;

- Recognition of prior learning: to create favorable framework conditions allowing recognition of prior learning in a consistent way and to involve the practitioners in the implementation;

- Staff mobility and in particular the creation of an environment supportive to staff mobility

- Student mobility and in particular removing barriers and obstacles to a full recognition of credits gained abroad and stimulating the mobility of students from disadvantaged background;

- The internationalization of quality assurance: to fully implement the ESG 2015, to allow the HEIs to choose a QAA for their External Quality Assurance, to provide the framework conditions stimulating the HEIs to develop joint study programmes, to allow the use of the European Approach, to recognize the role of governments in supporting the development of adequate frameworks and systems for the delivery and quality of both inbound and outbound CBHE;

- The social dimension: building a more socially inclusive higher education system requires measures and actions in different areas and a multidimensional approach in order to mainstream the social dimension;

- Employability: to develop and improve arrangements concerning graduate tracking at national and at institutional level in order to improve our knowledge of what graduates of higher education do following their studies.

Introduction

Working Group 2 "On Implementation" was established by the BFUG as part of the 2015-2018 work plan. WG2 was tasked with fostering the implementation of the agreed commitments in the Yerevan Communiqué and commitments in previous communiqués where relevant. Its remit was to support member states in their implementation actions of the agreed goals at national and institutional level. It was mandated to coordinate a programme of actions based on policy dialogue and peer learning and review.

Support was supposed to be provided through participation in events, seminars, and peer learning activities.

WG 2 met six times in Brussels (January 2016), Tbilisi (June 2016), Nice (November 2016), Vienna (March 2017), Malmö (June 2017) and Zagreb (October 2017).

The WG 2 was co-chaired by Helga Posset (Austria), Bartlomiej Banaszak (Poland), Noël Vercruysse (Flemish Community of Belgium) and Nino Kopaleishvili (Georgia till February 2017) and Maia Margvelashvili (Georgia from March 2017 on).

The co-chairs have drafted the report with contributions by some members of the WG for specific topics.

The BFUG secretariat represented by Fabien Neyrat (till June 2016) and by Mariana Saad (from July 2016 on) has provided the secretariat for the working group.

Some 34 BFUG members and consultative members have participated in the work of WG 2.

The large membership of the group means that WG 2 has been broadly representative of both the members and the consultative members of the BFUG. Generally most of the representatives of the members and the consultative members attended all meetings and engaged in the discussions, although there were a couple of exceptions.

In addition the co-chairs of WG 2 have met three times with the co-chairs of the BFUG and the co-chairs of the others BFUG structures. In particular we have liaised with the co-chairs of working group 3 and advisory group 3. Full implementation and non-implementation are the two opposite ends of the implementation continuum. WG 2 has approached the implementation issue from the perspective of full implementation and has searched for appropriate working methods to foster implementation. That journey led us to the formulation of some methodological recommendations and recommendations connected to the implementation of a specific topic.

I. Reflections and theoretical background

SELF-REFLECTION ON THE WORK MODE OF WORKING GROUP 2 "ON IMPLEMENTATION"

Terms of Reference[1]

In general the working group is responsible to provide support to member states for the implementation of agreed goals at national and institutional level. It is mandated to coordinate a programme of actions based on policy dialogue and peer learning and review.

The Terms of Reference define the purpose and outcome of this working group as following:

"The working group on 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, voluntary peer review, conference, seminar, workshop etc.) based on policy dialogue and exchange of good practice; actions proposed and organised by countries, institutions and/or organisations. The Working Group will develop policy proposals based among others on conclusions from events aiming at providing support to countries in achieving the implementation of agreed key commitments within the European Higher Education Area."

The Terms of Reference include also a list of specific tasks:

- *to use the implementation report 2015 as evidence base to identify topics for peer learning and voluntary peer review 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 organized by countries, institutions and organizations;*

- *to guide and assist countries, institutions and organizations in organizing activities;*

- *to ensure and foster the involvement of national, European and international stakeholders in the organization 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 action taken, national policy recommendations if needed, and on reflections on the WG concept.*

---

1   See Annex item 1 for the full text of the ToR of WGII.

Furthermore, the terms of reference identified the implementation of the agreed structural reforms as a prerequisite for the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area and for its success in the long run.

The terms of reference listed also the implementation of the Yerevan agreed commitments as part of the Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference do also include a reference to the conclusions and the recommendations laid down in the "Bologna Process Revisited" document as well as the outcomes of the research work carried out by higher education researchers in general and the conclusions and recommendations summarizing the second Bologna Researchers' conference in particular.

Working method

Membership of the working group was initially intended to be based on the commitment to organize an event contributing to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the working group. We started our work with a list of very diverse initiatives mostly inspired by the national higher education policy agenda or national Bologna agenda. Many of the events were part of the national Erasmus + project KA3 Consolidation of the EHEA. Of course we may say that goals of the mentioned Erasmus + project are similar to the goals of our working group.

The proposed initiatives didn't really focus on the implementation of the agreed structural reforms. The aim of most of the proposed events was evidently not to have a policy dialogue between countries that are in a different stage of implementation as it was suggested in the Yerevan Communiqué.

Before we could start our work as a working group there was already a list of events on some of the specific tasks included in the Terms of Reference. Nevertheless, for the first meeting we had developed two papers describing the state of affairs regarding the implementation issues related to quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition, social dimension, mobility based on the monitoring report 2015, the Yerevan Communiqué and the report of previous structural reforms working group.

During the following meetings of the working group we have had thematic discussions about the social dimension, the short cycle, internationalization of quality assurance, mobility of students and staff and the recognition of prior learning.

After the first meeting there was an update of the lists of events and some new events were added in line with the Terms of Reference. Although the ToR refer to the concept of "key commitments" but that was before the BFUG has identified the "key commitments". In the subsequent meetings the working group decides to put some focus on the implementation of the "BFUG key commitments".

As an outcome of our discussions on how to support the implementation of agreed structural reforms the working group has adopted a working paper introducing the concept of a "reversed peer review"[2]. Based on this approach two initiatives took place: one dedicated to quality assurance and one dedicated to qualifications frameworks.

---

2   See Annex item 2 Concept note Reversed Peer Review

Our report is based on the outcomes of three types of actions:

- Actions organized by members of the working group and directly related to the tasks of the working group;

- Thematic sessions as part of the regular meetings of the working group;

- Actions organized by members of the working group or other countries, organisations or institutions as part of Erasmus + projects or other projects (FAIR report, PLA mainstreaming Social Dimension…).

We have used the implementation report 2015 as evidence base to identify topics (key commitments) and partners for the reversed peer review and policy dialogue. Representatives of the institutions attended the peer reviews about quality assurance3[3] and qualifications frameworks4[4]. The stakeholders were also highly involved in the PLA on permeability5[5] between the different categories of higher education (articulation between short cycle and the first cycle). Generally spoken the stakeholders (representatives of HEIs, QAA, ministerial departments, students and practitioners) have been involved in all the actions that will be included in our report. But we also have to admit that the involvement of the stakeholders varied among the different countries participating in the activities.

The secretariat has disseminated the information regarding the planned activities. We have to admit that the response was relatively disappointing. Of course there could be good reasons as there are probably too many events and that most of them were organised in a national context.

Furthermore, we have also developed a format/template for describing the initiatives: aims, audience, reporting outcomes; asking the organizers to focus a part of the programme on the implementation of the key commitments. The response was rather low with not too many results/feedback from organizers of events.

Genesis and outlook

The working group has to rely on the voluntary initiatives and contributions of the members of the working group in particular and of the BFUG members in general

Reflecting on the way the working group has started its journey we could say that the working group started in a reversed order: first the events and thereafter the Terms of Reference. As a consequence the list of proposed events didn't directly meet the needs of the working group, neither the terms of reference strictly.

In general the concept of "Reversed peer review"[6] was welcomed by all the participants and actors involved in Bologna matters as an innovative approach to bring together countries to discuss issues related to implementation of the agreed structural reforms at national and

---

3   See Annex item 3 Report on the "Reversed Peer Review" with regard to QA in higher education, Ghent 16.12.2016

4   See Annex item 4 Report on the "Reversed Peer Review"… qualification frameworks in the EHEA, Ghent 24.,25.4.2017

5   See Annex item 5 Conclusions of the PLA on Permeability, Brussels, 20. ,21.6.2016

6   See Annex item 2 Concept note on RPR

institutional level. The participating countries were in different stages of implementation and are facing different challenges linked to conditioning domestic and policy specific factors as defined by Eva Maria Vögtle. It was rather difficult to stir the interest of countries that have sufficiently implemented the commitments concerned in participating in and contributing to such events.

The "reversed peer review" offers plenty of opportunities of an in depth policy dialogue and exchange of good practices and as well as opportunities to involve the academic communities, professional practitioners and stakeholders. The two exercises that took place demonstrate the value of bringing together representatives from public authorities and institutions coming from very different higher education systems to discuss the implementation of quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks. By bringing together different actors who are responsible for the implementation it could contribute to bridge the gap between *le pays politique et le pays reel* (see page 17). It gives also the opportunity to the participants to tell their own story and to explain their own context. At the end of the day it will lead to a better understanding of the different approaches and to a better insight in the way the key commitments could be implemented. It offers also an opportunity to learn from each other. Although the organization of such events requires important human and financial resources we would like recommend that the countries intensify their cross-border cooperative efforts to make available the necessary resources. See in annex the reports of the two reversed peer reviews that took place: one dedicated to Quality Assurance and the other dedicated to Qualifications frameworks.

The report of the working group takes also into account the conclusions of a broad range of actions as far as the conclusions are relevant for the work of the working group. Many of the initiatives were not organized from the perspective of the working group. Mostly the conclusions are of a very general nature. The presentations were fine but mostly not concluding with respect to the achievement of the goal of the working group. So at the end of the day the learning effect/outcome was minimal. In order to achieve a really sustainable learning effect requires a set of interconnected events building upon the conclusions of the previous one. So it was very difficult to define some guidelines or recommendations for further policy developments and for changing practices.

The mandate of the working group is very broad. It requires members' holistic approach to issues being a subject of WG activities. This could be perceived as an asset taking into account how much different aspects of the Bologna Process are interrelated. However, this may also create challenges when other working structures have also broad terms of reference. Blurred boundaries between working groups in terms of scope were some of the reasons for long discussions during working group meetings what the group should focus on and what it should report. They were also a rationale for additional coordination meetings of co-chairs of the working groups next to the meetings of the BFUG Board.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION CONCEPT

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

Nonetheless, implementation of the structural reforms is uneven and the tools are sometimes used incorrectly or in bureaucratic and superficial ways. Continuing improvement of our higher education systems and greater involvement of academic communities are necessary to achieve the full potential of the EHEA. We are committed to completing the work, and recognize the need to give new impetus to our cooperation.

Implementing agreed structural reforms *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.*

We [the ministers] ask[ed] the BFUG (…) to involve higher education practitioners in its work programme.

The **Terms of Reference** include the following sentence: the working group will also make full use of… as well as the outcomes of research work carried out by higher education researchers in general…

This chapter refers to research conducted by a number of Bologna Higher Education researchers[7], and reflects on different aspects of the implementation concept.

Already in 1986 Cerych and Sabatier[8] identified in their book "Great Expectations and mixed performance" also five factors affecting implementation:

- Goals and extent of change and in particular goal clarity and consistence and scope of change;

- Underlying theory and assumptions: adequacy of causal theory;

- Commitment and resistance to policy objectives;

- Centralized versus decentralized control;

- Adequacy of financial resources;

- Environmental (social and economic) change.

---

7   Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study*, Palgrave Macmillan 2014; Christina Sin, Amelia Veiga & Alberto Amaral (2016) *European Policy. Implementation and higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan; Johanna Witte, *Change of degrees, degrees of change* (2006) Enschede CHEPS/UT; Martina Vukasovic and Mari Elken, "Higher Education Policy Dynamics in a Multi-level Governance context: a comparative study of four post-communist countries", in Pavel Zgaga, Ulrich Teichler and John Brennan (eds) (2013) *The Globalisation Challenge for European Higher Education: Convergence and Diversity*, Centres and Peripheries, Peter Lang.

8   Cerych and Sabatier (1986), *Great Expectations and Mixed Performance: the implementation of higher education reforms in Europe*, Trentham Books.

Originally and in its simplest form implementation was about political decisions (formulation on goals) and how these decisions were carried out and transformed into policy (means) in order to implement the decisions. The factors mentioned above are general and crucial in al implementation whatever the organization or process is studied.

The Bologna Process started as a process of traditionally voluntary intergovernmental policy creation. The voluntary nature of the process can be challenged. Some researchers came to the conclusion that the Bologna Process has become institutionalized, an institutionalization evident in the regularity of the ministerial and other formal meetings and in formal monitoring and stocktaking exercises. Some argue that it has gradually evolved into a permanent intergovernmental institution. But there are no legally binding requirements that oblige the signatory states to implement reforms and there is no central steering authority. But many countries were really committed to implement the agreed goals and take many initiatives both at national and at international level to foster the implementation. The initiatives aimed at sharing knowledge, ideas and practices and mutual learning and getting a better understanding of the implementation context.

Policy implementation in the realm of the Bologna Process is concerned with processes of policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence at different levels, according to Vögtle[9].

Although the implementation of the structural reforms is crucial, the main challenge was and remains curriculum reforms (use of ECTS, the learning outcomes approach) as pointed out by some researchers.

We may distinguish three patterns of policy diffusion/transfer: a top-down mechanism, a bottom-up mechanism and a horizontal mechanism.

- A top-down mechanism is a process where actors at the highest level promote policy transfer and convergence for instance by coercion.

- A bottom-up mechanism implies to a certain extent that actors experience similar challenges at the same time and react to them in similar ways for instance transnational advocacy coalitions promote certain policy approaches.

- The horizontal mechanisms focus on interdependencies among countries/actors causing policy diffusion/transfer mechanisms including learning, competition, cooperation and symbolic imitation.

These patterns also function as perspectives how different actors on different levels view implementation.

Mechanism of policy diffusion and transfer:

- Networks and knowledge communities: through networks and knowledge communities best practices and problems perceptions can diffuse and lead to the emergence of common normative goals.

---

9 Eva Maria Vögtle, *Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study*, Palgrave Macmillan 2014.

- Norms, legitimacy and opinion leadership leading to the emergence of a common culture comprising broad consensus on the set of the appropriate social actors, appropriate societal goals and means of achieving those goals.

- Policy learning is a process where policy makers use the experience of others and of the past to update/change their beliefs on the consequences of reforms. Policy learning occurs due the benchmarking and performance comparisons. Also bottom-up feedback[10] may have an impact on this learning.

There are a lot of domestic and policy specific factors that are conditioning policy diffusion and transfer. It is important to keep in mind that there are 48 national governments/ministries interpreting the decisions made in an intergovernmental process. The factors below also have an impact on the different governments' interpretations and on the implementation at the institutional and individual level.

- Cultural factors

- Institutional factors

- Socio-economic factors

- Policy specific factors.

For a more elaborated description of all those elements we refer to the work done by Eva Vögtle[11].

Policy convergence can have different meanings: convergence in policy goals, policy content, policy instruments, policy outcomes and policy styles. The question arises on what policy implementation has to put its focus: on the goals, the content, the instruments, outcomes or styles[12]?

According to Veiga as mentioned in Sin (2016)[13] there are two perspectives of policy implementation:

- Policy adoption mostly through legislative measures

- Policy enactment in the meaning of realizing policy through practices.

Policy implementation cannot be seen as a linear process. Also the stocktaking process demonstrates initially a naïve faith in the linearity of policy implementation overvaluing the adoption of policies and the passing of legislation as implementation criteria. We have to take into account that there is an implementation stair case (Trowler)[14] and that implementation may be conceptualized as mutual adaptation and a learning process and as negotiation and interaction (Gornitzka, cited in Sin[15]). The perspective of policy implementation processes is essentially that of policy enactment in the meaning of realizing policy through practice. The Bologna Process is realized in and through practice.

---

10 The feed-back is important in policy (system) analysis since it means that a bad/unclear decision can be adjusted/corrected when receiving new information (Learning).

11 Eva Maria Vögtle. *Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study*, Palgrave Macmillan (2014).

12 Based on the research work done by Eva Maria Vögtle and published in her book *Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study*, Palgrave Macmillan (2014).

13 Christina Sin, Amelia Veiga & Alberto Amaral (2016) *European Policy Implementation and higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

14 Eva Maria Vögtle in her book *Higher Education Policy convergence and the Bologna Process. A cross-national study*, Palgrave Macmillan 2014.

15 Christina Sin, Amelia Veiga & Alberto Amaral (2016) *European Policy Implementation and higher education*. Palgrave Macmillan.

There are two dimensions that are relevant when implementation is studied: the *pays politique* and the *pays réel*. Below is a descriptive model of possible relations between these dimensions and the balance between the dimensions have an impact on the implementation of policies.

Four Combinations	Pays réel +	Pays réel –
Pays politique **+**	+ + Implementation	+ –– Implementation problem
Pays politique **–**	– + Implementation problem	– – Non-implementation

The *pays politique* is dominated by the official field of political discourse (dominated by the national governments and the supranational bodies). The *pays réel* is dominated by institutional dynamics and the pedagogic field. The implementation problem is also reflected in the gap, or imbalance, between the *pays politique* and the *pays réel*.

The gap may work out in both directions. We have too little knowledge about the implementation of the Bologna Process at institutional level. We have too little information about the extent to which the Bologna process is embedded into the institutional practice and the key features of the Bologna process are durably set in practice or are simply taken on as lip service.

Policy implementation in the realm of the Bologna Process is concerned with processes of policy diffusion, policy transfer and policy convergence at different levels.

Although the implementation of the structural reforms is crucial the main challenge was and remains curriculum reforms. The perspective of policy implementation processes is essentially that of policy enactment in the meaning of realizing policy through practice. The Bologna Process is realized in and through practice.

As stated in the Yerevan communique a strong involvement of all stakeholders at national level and cross-border is a crucial success factor in order to achieve a sustainable implementation. Johanna Witte reports in her book the following: *"A consistent finding from my interviews is that personal participation in European-level meetings and activities tends to foster a positive attitude towards the idea of the European higher education area and increases enthusiasm for mutual policy learning[16]."*

Implementation is not an end in itself, it is a means towards a more integrated and consolidated EHEA as the end result.

---

16 Johanna Witte, *Change of degrees, degrees of change* (2006) Enschede CHEPS/UT

Considering the different agreed goals and commitments as defined in the subsequent communiqués we have to conclude that the agreed goals are of a different nature:

- Agreed structural reforms;

- Agreed policy challenges, policy themes, preferences and priorities.

Based on the findings of different research papers we may see the Bologna Process in three different ways: the Bologna process is:

- a process of vertical higher education policy convergence;

- a process of transnational communication about policy dissemination and coordination;

- a transnational platform for defining common responses to the challenges and problems higher education systems are facing and which higher education systems have to cope with.

Eva Vögtle defines three indicators of policy implementation for measuring the factual implementation/convergence:

- The policy adoption

- The instrumental design of the policy adopted

- The degree of implementation

In particular when it comes to the design of the policy adopted the national peculiarities emerge, which can make the realization of the EHEA more troublesome.

Looking at the monitoring report we may conclude that the implementation of agreed structural reforms measured by the indicator "policy adoption" is completed. Of course there is still room for further developments (for instance regarding the cross-border activities of quality assurance agencies and regarding recognition).

When it comes to the agreed policy issues, preferences and priorities the situation is less satisfactory taking into account that those policy issues have been repeated in the subsequent communiqués be it in different wordings (for instance: learning outcomes, automatic recognition, student-centred learning, teaching quality, employability, curriculum reform…).

Policy implementation of the agreed Bologna goals is a complex process characterized by different dimensions and perspectives:

Policy adoption	Policy enactment
Structural reforms	Problem solving, policy preferences, challenges
Policy convergence	Convergence in the design of the instruments and the degree of implementation
Top-down/vertical implementation	Bottom-up/horizontal implementation
Le pays politique	*Le pays réel*
Outputs	Outcomes
Summative objectives	Formative objectives
Harmonization of structures	Convergence in policy goals
Non-(or insufficient) implementation concerns a limited number of countries	Non-(insufficient) implementation concerns a significant number of countries
Single loop learning	Double loop learning (including a reflection on the in 1999 agreed goals)
Legislative implementation	Academic implementation
Structures	Content
Network of officials	Network of practitioners
Process	Activities/outputs
Rational/instrumental perspective on trust	Cognitive/normative perspective on trust[17]

In the previous working period the BFUG adopted the paper "The Bologna Process Revisited"[18]. The aim of that exercise was to give a new impetus to the Bologna Process and to overcome the perception of a kind of Bologna fatigue. The terms of Reference refer to that document.

With respect to the work of the working group the conclusions and recommendations laid down in the "Bologna Process Revisited" are still relevant. To mention some of them:

• We need more efficient communication of the common European vision and broader participation in order to highlight its benefits for the participating countries and institutions;

---

17 Bjorn Stensaker and Äse Gornitzka, "The ingredients of trust in European Higher Education" in Barbara Kehm, Jeroen Huisman and Bjorn Stensaker (eds) (2009) *The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target*. Sense Publishers.

18 http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Bologna%20Process%20Revisited_Future%20of%20the%20EHEA%20Final.pdf

- We need to develop a feeling of ownership of the goals pursued and of the results obtained;

- It is wise to consider the two main levels of implementation (the national and the institutional one) separately, handle them with different approaches and evaluate them in different ways. We have to be aware that implementation at the institutional level can be supported by national (and European) initiatives and incentives;

- Student-centred learning (and more in general curriculum reforms) was not sufficiently assimilated and implemented by the academic community. More in general curriculum reforms and student-centred learning can only take place when all members of the academic community are willing to engage in a constructive dialogue and in a process of cooperative learning (at programme, institutional, national and European level).

- The pan-European character of the process should be enhanced; its added value for national (and institutional) policies should be made more visible and steps should be undertaken to involve the whole academic community in elaborating the concrete paths towards its realization.

Originally a lot of research on and discussion around implementation was about problems and why good ideas/intensions went wrong. But it is also appropriate in this report to refer to five success factors the authors of the report[19] "Structural Higher Education Reforms: design and evaluation" have identified:

- Stakeholders' involvement and consensus;

- Adequate funding and funding instruments;

- Construct to the extent possible a win-win reform design;

- A timeframe for implementation and evaluation that is commensurate with the scope and complexity of the reform;

- Systematic monitoring and evaluation are valuable in supporting adaptation of the reform design and ensuring that it is in tune with the context of the implementation.

Some concluding remarks

The Bologna Process has been successful as a driver for national policy changes and adaptations leading to the implementation of structural reforms at least with regard to the degree structure and quality assurance. We may argue that in that respect there is a relative high degree of policy convergence as it comes to policy adoption. When delving deeper into the matter we see a huge diversity with regard to the design of the instruments/tools and the degree of implementation. The attempt to establish a transnational process of problem solving and of defining common answers to the problems and challenges our higher education systems are facing, was less successful: the same policy issues (social dimension, internationalization, LLL, employability, RPL, academic values) have been repeated (in different wording) communiqué after communiqué).

---

19 Structural Higher Education Reforms – Design and Evaluation, A report prepared by Jon File, Jeroen Huisman, Harry de Boer, Marco Seeber, Martina Vukasovic and Don Westerheijden, EU Publication April 2016 DOI 10-2766/79662.

At the end of the day (after nearly 20 years) we are still stuck at the macro-level: the adoption of policies with regard to the structural reforms. And still the implementation of the commitments regarding recognition is lagging behind.

The European Higher Education Area remains to a large extent an area covering 48 different higher education systems that have adopted similar structural reforms at the macro-level. It remains a nice patchwork of different patches held together by a certain degree of coherence. A sufficient degree of structural policy convergence has been achieved facilitating the exchange and mobility of students and early stage researchers. We have realized one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process: the mobility of students and early stage researchers (with the support of the Erasmus plus programme). Although we have to admit that there are still some obstacles that are not completely removed: recognition and the portability of grants and loans, mobility of under-represented/disadvantaged student groups.

But if we would like to move to the establishment of a more integrated EHEA and to enhance the Pan-European character then we have to achieve a higher level of convergence with regard the design of the instruments and tools (criteria of QA, learning outcomes, student-centred learning, ECTS, qualifications frameworks) and a higher degree of implementation. This implies a stronger involvement of the practitioners while recognizing the importance of the national level in the translation and mediation of Bologna policy.

Some questions and answers based on the insights from the theoretical background and our reflections

What are the key determinants/enablers of a successful implementation?

- Steering competence of the public authorities

- Matching European preferences with national actions

- Ability to find a consensus

- Involving and active participation of all the stakeholders and in particular the academic community

- Clear benefits/added value

- Clear vision/objectives

What may constitute an incorrect or superficial use of the Bologna tools?

- Implementation limited to policy adoption/structural reforms

What may be the factors that could hinder a successful implementation?

- Ambiguity of the objectives/goals to be achieved

- Differing perspectives of the Bologna Process

- The perception of reforms as top-down impositions (related to a lack of academic engagement)

- Lack of common understanding of the different concepts (student-centred learning, learning outcomes, joint degrees, international QA activities, social dimension)

- Resistance (recognition of prior learning)

Summarizing we come to the following insights that underpin our methodological recommendations:

- From the research we learnt that implementation is a complex, multidimensional and multi-level process and in particular we should distinguish the implementation as policy adoption through legislation and implementation as policy enactment through practice.

- Regarding the implementation issue we should be aware of the fact the agreed goals are of different nature: We could make a distinction between agreed structural reforms and agreed policy themes, preferences and priorities.

- The list of events which working group has to rely upon was characterized by a huge diversity in terms of purposes, topics, orientation (mostly national and less international and cross-border), connected to national policy objectives and only partially or indirectly to the Terms of Reference of the working group.

- There was no formal system of reporting by the organizers to the WG

- The participation of the stakeholders among the different countries was uneven;

- There was rather a loose ex ante concertation.

- There was also a substantial time gap between the Yerevan conference and the real start of the working group. The active working period was limited to 20 months.

- The terms of reference of the working group were relatively vague and there was some overlap with other working groups and advisory groups.

- The reversed peer reviews demonstrated the willingness of the countries and the stakeholders to enter in policy dialogue and review in order to foster/improve the implementation of the key commitments;

- The organization of well-structured and well-prepared events requires substantial resources.

- The quality of the preparation of the events is crucial for its success.

- We have to be aware of the fact that implementation at the institutional level is a process that takes times.

- We need more efficient communication of the common EHEA vision in order to highlight the benefits and the achievements.

- We need to create a new momentum aiming at a further development of the EHEA in a more coherent way and enhancing the pan-European character of the Bologna Process

- European as well as national stakeholders have to play a more active mediation and translation role.

- The consolidation of the European Higher Education Area requires a proper implementation of the agreed structural reforms but also a shift of the focus from structures to a dialogue among stakeholders about the "content" while respecting the diversity of systems and the autonomy of institutions.

- A cross border dialogue could contribute to a better understanding of the diversity and the different contexts of the implementation.

Methodological recommendations

1. We strongly suggest that all countries engage in an active dialogue across the EHEA and in particular with the countries (including the stakeholders) that have not yet implemented fully the structural reforms that are crucial for the consolidation of the EHEA; We recommend to further develop the concept of "reversed peer review" as an instrument and tool to provide support to the members experiencing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals. These reviews should include a follow-up and monitoring exercise to look at whether the activity was useful and whether the conclusions have been implemented. We would like to advise to establish thematic (related to one structural reform) peer groups including representatives (ministries, HEIs, practitioners and students) of countries that have sufficiently implemented the agreed structural reform and countries that have not yet reached a sufficient level of implementation.

2. We recommend that the next working plan should include a cross-border concerted joint effort/action programme involving all higher education stakeholders and actors to address the key challenges regarding the implementation of the agreed goals and to realize them in practice. We advise to focus and concentrate our efforts during the following working periods on one basket/group of interrelated topics/issues (possible suggestions could be: recognition, recognition of prior learning, learning outcomes and QF's as one group, transparency tools, mobility (staff and students) and QA as another group, social dimension, LLL and employability as a third group?) The programme should include clear purposes and aims and a mechanism of follow-up, evaluation of the usefulness of the actions and initiatives and monitoring the impact (from conclusions to actions). The activities should include a mix of countries, experts, practitioners and policy makers. We recommend that the countries intensify their cross-border cooperative efforts and to make the necessary resources available in order to carry out such a program for instance by hosting such events. The programme should be ready to start in June 2018 right after the Paris Ministerial conference.

3. The BFUG should stimulate the different actors involved in the Bologna process to organize cross-border targeted events as a means to follow up on implementation, and also to enhance the visibility of the process within the EHEA.

4. The BFUG could consider experience of working groups established for the period 2015-2018 while discussing the outline of the BFUG Work Plan 2018-2020.

II. Implementation of selected topics/commitments

TOPIC: QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: SHORT CYCLE

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

> ➔ *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 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*

Context

The position of the short cycle qualifications is a heavily discussed issue in the EHEA. Should the qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF for EHEA) include the short cycle qualifications as a distinct cycle? The QF for EHEA as it was adopted in Bergen mentioned the short cycle as a kind of a sub-cycle of the first cycle: "within the first cycle". Following the recommendations made by the Structural Reforms Working Group to the ministers in Yerevan, the ministers decided that the short cycle qualifications should be included in the QF for EHEA as a distinct cycle. Countries that have short cycle qualifications should include them in the NQF for HE. Those countries have to make provisions for the recognition of those qualifications in particular to progress to the next cycle of HE (the bachelor programmes). Countries that do not have short cycle qualifications aren't obliged to organize it. But those countries have also to make provisions for the recognition of those qualifications from other EHEA countries allowing those graduates to progress in their first cycle (bachelor) higher education. The use of ECTS, a diploma supplement, the use of learning outcomes and a system of QA in line with ESG could foster the recognition.

Analysis

Working group 2 has discussed the implementation of the short cycle commitment during its meeting in Tbilisi. As an outcome of that discussion the WG2 proposed to the BFUG to delete the wording "within the first cycle" in the QF for EHEA as it was adopted in Bergen in 2005.

WG 2 felt that it won't be appropriate to ask the countries to go through a new self-certification procedure when they have included the short cycle qualifications in their own NQF.

Under the umbrella of the Erasmus + programme – KA3 Consolidation of the EHEA – the Flemish Community of Belgium organized a peer learning activity on permeability between the different categories of higher education: level 5/short cycle to level 6/bachelor and level 6/bachelor to level 7/master. The conclusions of this PLA are enclosed in the annex[20].

---

20 See Annex item 5 Conclusions of the PLA on permeability.

CEDEFOP working paper "Qualifications at level 5: progressing in a career or to higher education"[21].

Conclusions

The Peer Learning Activity demonstrates that the short cycle qualifications or level 5 qualifications are characterized by a huge diversity regarding:

- the drivers, rationales and purposes are depending on demographic changes, societal changes, economic changes; technological changes, the needs of the labor market;

- short cycle higher education plays a role in the social dimension of higher education, widening participation and ensuring success in higher education, in improving the position of graduates on the labor market and the further development of the higher education system as a whole;

- there are across the EHEA and even within a single country different types of institutions that have been authorized to offer level 5 qualifications;

- the name of the degree or qualification or certificate awarded;

- the student body;

- the learning pathways;

- the QA system;

- the use of credits and learning outcomes approach;

- the transition to the next cycle.

Some countries make a distinction between "educational" qualifications awarded by education institutions and "vocational" qualifications that could also be awarded by other providers, reflecting the distinction between education and training.

In Yerevan the ministers committed themselves 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.

In order to fulfill that commitment we should proceed to a revision of the Dublin descriptors and the Qualifications framework for higher education as it was adopted in Bergen without modifying all the Dublin descriptors but by just deleting the wordings phrase "within the first cycle". As a consequence the short cycle becomes an autonomous cycle in the qualifications framework for higher education in the EHEA. Those small changes don't imply that the four cycles should be considered as four subsequent cycles. This revision will lead to the use of the following terminology: short cycle, first cycle, second cycle and third cycle. For most of the

---

21 www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/6123_en.pdf

countries the proposed deletion of the wordings "within the first cycle" won't have consequences for the finalized self-certifying process or self-referencing process. It could be advised that the countries that are including short cycle higher education into their qualifications framework for higher education to consider an update/revision of the self-certifying process.

We have to avoid that the short cycle becomes a dead end for the students. Therefore all countries and the higher education institutions should take the necessary measures to ensure that the holders of short cycle higher education degrees can progress to the first cycle by recognizing and validating and transferring the credits when those holders would like to enroll in a first cycle study programme within the national borders or cross border while complying with the national requirements regarding access and admission to the programmes concerned. Furthermore the countries and the higher education institutions should take the necessary measures to ensure that holders of vocational or professional qualifications at level 5 but which qualifications aren't included in the national qualifications framework for HE can progress to the first cycle study programmes by recognizing and validating and transferring the credits when those holders would like to enroll in a first cycle study programmes within the national borders or cross border while complying with national requirements regarding access and admission to the programmes concerned. The use of the ECTS credit system or a credit system comparable to the ECTS system, a diploma/certificate supplement, the use of learning outcomes and a system of quality assurance compatible with the ESG could foster the recognition and validation of the learning and those vocational qualifications.

Recommendations

1. We recommend the ministers to make a small adjustment of the Dublin descriptors and the Qualifications framework for higher education as it was adopted in Bergen and to delete the wordings phrase "within the first cycle" in paragraph including the descriptors of the short cycle.

2. We recommend that the ministers and the higher education institutions should take the necessary measures to ensure an advanced entry in the first cycle for the holders of a short cycle higher education degree included in the national qualifications framework of the country of origin and provided that the Bologna tools are applied to those degrees, while complying with the national requirements regarding access and admission.

3. We encourage all countries to consider measures to ensure an advanced entry in the first cycle if relevant for the holders of a EQF level 5 qualification or equivalent while those qualifications have been placed as post-secondary non higher education qualifications.

4. We recommend keeping the diversity of the learning provisions in place but also to encourage the use of the ECTS credit system and a system of QA in compliance with the ESG in order to facilitate the mobility and the articulation between short cycle higher education study programmes and other higher education study programmes.

TOPIC: QUALITY ASSURANCE

Yerevan Communiqué – Policy measures adopted

➜ *the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*

➜ *the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*

Commitments: ➜ *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*

Context

Quality Assurance is an integral part of the process of voluntary convergence and coordinated reform that characterizes the EHEA. Of the three policy measures adopted in Yerevan, two relate to QA: the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Furthermore, the policies adopted in the Bologna Process have supported external quality assurance (EQA) activities crossing borders.

Analysis

The main vehicle for disseminating the revised ESG was the Erasmus + funded EQUIP project. The project was conducted by a consortium including EURASHE (coordinator), ENQA, EUA, ESU, EI, EQAR, University of Oslo and Portuguese Polytechnics Coordinating Council Over the first half of 2016, webinars and workshops were organized looking at how, in the light of ESG 2015, QA must respond and what the implications are of the new focus on learning and teaching. In 2017, a series of focus groups for different stakeholders were organized to verify and further consolidate the evidence collected through the previous phases about implementation challenges with the ESG 2015. One of the important outputs of the EQUIP project was a *Comparative Analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005* [22], which highlights the new focus areas of the ESG 2015.

Since Yerevan, a number of QA agencies have undergone review against ESG 2015, the majority of which were coordinated by ENQA. While most were reviews of agencies that previously demonstrated compliance with the ESG 2005 already, four national quality assurance agencies and one European subject-specific agency have newly demonstrated compliance with the ESG and became registered on EQAR, which per 1st June 2017 lists 47 agencies in total.

Responding to the transition to ESG 2015, the Register Committee of EQAR adopted a new policy on the *Use and Interpretations of the ESG* [23], to increase transparency, understanding and consistency within the decision-making process of the Register Committee.

---

22 Comparative analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005 (2016). Available at: www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/associated-reports/EQUIP_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf

23 Use and Interpretation of the ESG (2015) www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v1_0.pdf

Joint programmes: In 10 EHEA countries, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes[24] is available to all higher education institutions. In 18 further countries, the European Approach is available to some institutions or subject to further national conditions. Two joint programmes have been successfully accredited based on the European Approach, while a few external QA procedures based on the European Approach are planned or currently carried out by EQAR-registered agencies.

Cross-border quality assurance: A big change coming with the ESG 2015 is that responsibility for ensuring periodic review now lies with the institution itself, which should be able, as stated in the Communiqué, to freely choose a suitable QA agency from among those registered in EQAR. It appears that an increasing number of HEIs wish to be evaluated by an agency from another country, in order to raise their international profile.

Cross-border QA often takes place in parallel to the obligatory, national external quality assurance arrangements due to a lack of a legal framework allowing the recognition of such procedures. While cross-border QA activities take place in most EHEA countries, only in 13 EHEA countries is cross-border evaluation/accreditation by a suitable EQAR-registered agency recognized as part of the obligatory, national external quality assurance system. In another 10 EHEA countries, cross-border external QA is available only some higher education institutions or subject to additional, specific requirements.

In 2016-2017, the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) together with EQAR developed a set of "key considerations" for cross-border QA. Reaffirming that the ESG are the basis for all QA in the EHEA, the document aims to support and inspire higher education institutions and agencies when engaging in cross-border QA activities.

Quality assurance of cross-border higher education: As per the findings of the Erasmus Mundus supported project "Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education" (QACHE) carried out in 2013-2016, there is a lack of comprehensive information concerning cross-border higher education (CBHE) throughout the EHEA. It appears that in many cases, national frameworks for the quality assurance of CBHE are not yet developed and there is very little comprehensive information available, while at the same time the main responsibility for QA should lie at the exporting country. The main project output was the QACHE Toolkit[25], which aims at supporting QA agencies and institutions willing to engage in cross-border activities.

Governments have a key role to play in supporting the development of adequate frameworks and systems to support the delivery and quality of inbound or outbound CBHE for the benefit of all stakeholders. This would protect the system from dubious providers and low quality education provision and quality assurance services.

In case there are no national regulations regarding the way a foreign agency should operate in another national system the Agency should duly consider the contextual specificities in which the institution operates and should strive to fully understand the implications and make reasonable adjustments to existing methodology, continuing to ensure that such adjustments do not contravene the ESGs.

---

24 European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2015). Available at: www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/bologna/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

25 Cooperation in Cross-border Higher Education. Toolkit for Quality Assurance Agencies (2015). Available at: www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/QACHE%20Toolkit_web.pdf

Conclusions

Per 1st June 2017 23 EHEA countries[26] fully implement the Bologna key commitment that external QA is performed by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG, preferably registered on EQAR. In six further countries, external QA is performed by ESG-compliant agencies for some, but not all higher education institutions.

Many other countries are, however, in the course of establishing national QA agencies, which actively network and exchange with colleagues across European (e.g. through affiliation to ENQA or regional networks) in an effort to align external QA with the ESG.

The European Approach for joint programmes is not yet available to most all HEIs in the EHEA, as legal provisions do not always allow carrying out single, joint external evaluation or accreditation procedures. While cross-border external QA remains at less than 10% of all external QA activities of EQAR-registered agencies, it is significant for some agencies and for those EHEA countries where the legal frameworks allows for the recognition of cross-border external QA procedures as part of the obligatory, national QA system.

European-level support for the creation of a European approach for quality assurance in CBHE through the comprehensive implementation of the QACHE Toolkit and by means of developing favorable policy for cross-border cooperation, and through capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the competencies of QA agencies, would respond to many of the challenges related to CBHE.

Recommendations

We recommend that

1 Higher education institutions within the EHEA should be evaluated on a cyclical basis by an external quality assurance agency operating in substantial compliance with ESG 2015;

2 The governments should provide conditions for the agencies to carry out their work in line with the ESG 2015;

3 More efforts should be put into allowing recognition of cross-border EQA in legal frameworks, as set out in the Communiqué. Peer-learning events and activities could be organized to exchange experiences, good practices and common pitfalls in legal frameworks for cross-border QA;

4 QA agencies and HEIs engaging in Cross-border Quality Assurance are encouraged to reflect on the "Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the EHEA" outlined by ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE and EQAR;

5 The governments should provide the framework conditions stimulating the HEIs to develop joint study programmes and, in particular, removing obstacles in order to allow the use of the European Approach for joint programmes. Governments and other stakeholders should join their efforts in order to promote the use of the European approach;

6 Governments should recognize their key role in supporting the development of adequate frameworks and systems for the delivery and quality of both inbound and outbound CBHE. While joint procedures of quality assurance between the sending and receiving country are strongly encouraged, the primary responsibility for QA should be recognized as resting with the sending country.

---

26 Presentation of the EQAR Strategy 2018-2022 at the members' dialogue.

TOPIC: THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION

Changes of the Lisbon Recognition convention (LRC) – Yerevan Communiqué

➜ *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;*

Context

In the Yerevan Communique ministers asked countries to review national legislations with a view to fully complying with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, taking due account of the monitoring of the Convention carried out by the Convention Committee.

Analysis

In 2015 the elected bureau of the LRC Committee monitored the implementation of the LRC Bureau and its report[27] was adopted at the convention Committee Meeting in Paris in February 2016.

The survey was sent to the 53 parties to the convention and the bureau received 50 responses. The focus was on the legal implementation of the convention and countries had to send links to relevant legal acts and orders to prove the implementation of the convention in national legal acts.

The main provisions of the LRC was monitored: The access to an assessment, criteria and procedures of recognition, time limit for assessments, the right to appeal, recognition of refugees' qualifications and the information on educational systems and on recognised higher education institutions in national ENIC-Offices websites. Furthermore, the bureau asked countries about the interpretation of the basic concept substantial differences. The LRC outlines that foreign qualifications should be recognised as comparable to similar national qualifications, unless the competent recognition authority can prove substantial differences between the qualifications.

The monitoring showed that 28 countries of 50 have detailed regulations on the criteria and procedures of recognition implemented in national legislation. In most cases the regulations focus on the procedures of recognition and are not very detailed about the criteria of recognition. Furthermore, the monitoring showed in general that many countries have an emphasis on quantitative criteria such as nominal duration and workload in their legislation and not to the same extent on qualitative criteria such as learning outcomes, level, profile and quality. The same results came out of the analysis of what countries perceived to be substantial differences.

The monitoring also showed that a minority of countries do not give adequate information on their educational systems and on national recognised higher education institutions. This information is important for credential evaluators in order to understand and fairly assess

---

27 monitoring the implementation of the lisbon recognition convention: www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring_the_Implementation_of_the_Lisbon_Recognition_Convention_2016.pdf

qualifications from these countries. A few countries have only information on recognition procedures in national language making it very difficult for applicants to apply for recognition, if they do not understand the language of the country in which they seek recognition.

It is appropriate to refer here to the FAIR-project[28]. Importantly, the project did show that the level of awareness of LRC expectations is lacking at institutional level in some systems, even when the HEIs are responsible for the (academic) recognition.

One of the most significant findings of the monitoring of the implementation of the LRC was that only 8 countries have implemented article 7 of the LRC: The access to fair recognition of refugees' qualifications even in cases where the qualifications cannot be proven. Out of the 8 countries only few of these had truly implemented article 7, while some of them only proved to have legal provisions on softer requirements of documentation or where provisions in which recognition is only related to access to bachelor programmes.

The Convention Committee adopted a clear statement after the meeting in Paris in February 2016 asking countries to take measures which secure the access to recognition of refugees' qualifications no later than 2018. Furthermore, the Convention Meeting asked the LRC Bureau to speedily draft a subsidiary text to the convention on the recognition of refugees' qualifications.

Events following the monitoring of the implementation of the LRC have mainly focused on the implementation of article 7 on refugees' qualifications. The Commission initiated a PLA on recognition of refugees' qualifications in May 2017[29] focusing on exchanging practice on measures to recognise refugees' qualifications[30].

A Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation was adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee meeting in Strasbourg on November 14, 2017 as a subsidiary text under the Convention[31]. The Recommendation aims to facilitate the implementation of Article VII of the LRC, through which parties undertake to ensure the fair recognition of refugees' qualifications even when these cannot be fully documented. The monitoring report showed that only 8 States had taken measures to implement this article. The subsidiary text addresses the basic principles such as recognition as well as legislation, assessment and information. It also underlines the need to provide information on refugees' qualifications through background documents and provides examples through the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, developed by the Council of Europe and Greece with the strong contribution of the ENICs of Greece, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom; the Erasmus +-funded project "Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees" as well as national background documents from Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The Recommendation also underlines the importance of making the background documents and the assessments they describe portable so as to smoothen recognition in cases where refugees move to other states party to the Convention.

The monitoring exercise also showed that all countries have implemented appeal procedures of recognition decisions and statements and that the vast majority of countries finalise recognition within the recommended 4 months' time limit.

---

28 https://www.nuffic.nl/en/news/nuffic-news/new-european-recognition-report-published

29 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29

30 The conference report and the background material are available at https://www.uhr.se/bolognarpl

31 https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-on-recognition-of-qualifications-held-by-refugees-displ/16807688a8

Conclusions

The monitoring exercise did show that most countries to a large extent have implemented the main provisions of the LRC. However, the LRC Bureaus report showed that progress must be made in important areas to improve recognition.

These areas relate to the use of more qualitative criteria in recognition of foreign qualification and not just to focus on quantitative criteria. Furthermore, information provision in a widely spoken language about the procedures of recognition to applicants and on information on national education systems and recognised HEIs to credential evaluators in other countries. Finally, the implementation report shows that very few countries have legally implemented article 7 of the LRC concerning refugees' right to recognition even in cases where their qualifications cannot be proven.

Furthermore it should go without saying that recognition refers to recognition of a qualification indifferently the mode of the delivery the education and the programme (e-learning and learning periods abroad) and indifferently whether the holder of the qualification has been exempted from parts of the programme based on recognition of prior learning. Sometimes those qualifications are qualified as non-traditional qualifications, while those qualifications should be treated in the same way as the regular/traditional qualifications since they are part of the QF. It is the institution that has awarded the degree that is responsible for the recognition/validation and accreditation of the learning that took place outside the regular programme. We would like to refer here to the ESG in particular the guidelines under Standard 1.3 "Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment": the implementation of student-centred learning and reaching respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths and considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate.

Recommendations

We recommend

1. That countries fully implement article 7 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention establishing the right of refugees to have fair access to recognition even when their qualifications cannot be proven. Particularly emphasis should be on the duty of competent recognition authorities to create background documents as described in the subsidiary text to the LRC on the recognition of refugees' qualifications and of the portability of background documents carried out by competent recognition authorities. Moreover it is also important that the rules and requirements are clearly stated by the ENIC-NARICs and the information on processes and requirements is made available to all stakeholders[32].

2. That countries through national legislation make explicit in their recognition criteria that substantial differences should be related to the five elements of a qualification: level, learning outcomes, profile, workload and quality. Additionally, the formal rights of the foreign qualification should be considered.

3. That countries inform applicants on recognition procedures and provide adequate information in a widely spoken language on the ENIC-Office websites on national education systems and recognised higher education institutions.

4. That countries should remove obstacles impeding the full recognition of all qualifications independently of the learning path leading to the qualification.

---

32 A lesson learnt in the EUA Refugee Coalition Group.

THE RECOGNITION PRACTICE

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

> ➜ *to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are automatically recognized at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications;*

Context

All actors in the EHEA have agreed that automatic recognition is a cornerstone of the EHEA and is a key element in order to realise the EHEA vision as it was expressed in the Yerevan Communiqué. The Pathfinder Group traced out a path towards automatic recognition. So in order to reach our destination we have to take a lot of little steps.

During the past three years there were some initiatives aiming at paving the way towards automatic recognition[33]:

- The Erasmus + project regarding automatic recognition in Flanders;

- The FAIR (Focus on Automatic Institutional Recognition) project

- The Erasmus + project GEAR (Greece Exploring Advanced Recognition in Higher Education)[34]

- The Erasmus + project Paradigms

- The Erasmus + project Mastermind Europe

- The Nordic-Baltic Admissions manual

- The Baltic Automatic Recognition project Aurbell[35])

Analysis and conclusions

The Erasmus + project Paradigms[36] aims at identifying and exploring good practice in applying automatic recognition within EHEA.

The project has identified four different models of automatic recognition.

> **1.** Legal bilateral and multilateral agreements: This model can be seen in the Benelux agreement, where the Benelux countries have agreed on the acceptance and full recognition of bachelor and master programmes Across the EHEA a number of regional multilateral agreements have emerged.

---

33 See annex item 6 on Automatic Recognition

34 https://gear.minedu.gov.gr/en/home/

35 www.aic.lv/portal/en/par-aic/projects/aurbell-automatic-recognition

36 The Paradigms project is an Erasmus + project 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.

2. A legally implemented unilateral list of degrees, which are automatically recognised: In Portugal a unilateral list of degrees from EHEA countries have been legally implemented applying automatic recognition for all degrees mentioned in the list. Flanders is now working on the (legal) automatic (unilateral) recognition of the higher education qualifications awarded by a HEI in Portugal, Denmark and Poland. Combined with a firm political commitment from the Portuguese, Polish and Danish side we hope to establish a de facto mutual recognition

3. Non-legal multilateral agreements: The Nordic-Baltic ENIC NARIC Offices have made a non-legal multinational agreement on automatic recognition[37]. A website, www.nordbalt.org, has been developed with description of the educational systems and most notably a recognition grid showing the comparable degrees for the Nordic-Baltic region. Poland has also adopted regulations which allow for automatic recognition of qualifications from EU, OECD or EFTA countries at system level (for the purpose of further studies and access to non-regulated professions). A degree awarded by an institution operating in the education system of an EU, OECD or EFTA country, upon completion of 1) 3-year studies or first cycle studies with the nominal duration of min. 3 years – confirms possession of a first cycle degree in Poland 2) second cycle studies or long cycle studies with the nominal duration of min. 4 years – confirms possession of a second cycle degree in Poland.

4. De facto automatic recognition: This refers to some ENIC-NARIC Offices which apply full recognition/automatic recognition of either all EHEA bachelor degrees or all EHEA bachelor and master degrees.

The three first models are usually based on the pre-condition that participating countries have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, apply the ESG's and have self-certified and referenced their qualifications systems to the EHEA Framework and the EQF if applicable. De facto automatic recognition is based on the experiences of the competent recognition authorities and implicitly on QA and QF.

Legally implemented bilateral and multilateral agreements have the advantages of fully securing the transparency of recognition decisions and the rights to recognition to applicants. The back draw is that the process of drafting the agreements is lengthy and often complicated. Furthermore, the agreements are inflexible and require renegotiations in case of changes in the degree structures in any of the participating countries.

The Portuguese approach with a unilateral legally implemented list of list of recognised degrees bears to a large extent the same advantages and difficulties as the legally implemented bilateral or multilateral agreements: Full transparency of decisions and lengthy bureaucratic implementation processes. This approach adds some more flexibility towards changes in educational degree structures, since the Portuguese authorities do not have to renegotiate the list in case of changes in the educational degree structures in other countries. However, a unilateral decision does not secure reciprocity of recognition.

Non-legal multilateral agreements have the advantages of being flexible and easy to implement, e.g. by creating a website like in the Nordic-Baltic case. However, this approach

---

37 See Annex item 7 Benelux Agreement and Annex item 8 on Country Seminars in Flanders and DK et al.

cannot fully guarantee the implementation of the agreement, since this is not a legal agreement and central authorities have no possibilities of implying sanctions or to fully monitor the agreement in case it is not applied by HEIs, unless this is regulated in other legislation within each country. It could be advised that those agreements include a reference to the appeal procedure as a means to ensure those agreements are fully applied.

Lastly, the de facto automatic recognition is a highly flexible way of implementing automatic recognition, if central recognition authorities have assessed that the general standards of recognition is full level recognition of all comparable degrees within EHEA. This model is by far the most voluntary model and can accommodate changes within countries' educational systems and is based on a high degree of trust in the assumption that countries actually apply de facto automatic recognition.

Although Automatic Recognition doesn't guarantee automatic admission to any cycle of higher education, each of the four models has a highly symbolic value expressing the political willingness to achieve automatic recognition in higher education. Reciprocity and mutual recognition are key issues in order to enhance the acceptance and the implementation of automatic recognition. Automatic recognition guarantees that the holder of a foreign qualification will be treated in the same way as the holder of a comparable domestic qualification in particular when it comes to get access to the next cycle. Automatic recognition has the potential to lower the administrative burden with respect to the applicants as well as the HEIs and the agencies.

From the **FAIR project**:

- The current national recognition infrastructure should be reviewed in terms of transparency, efficiency; consistency and ability to apply the LRC.

- Continuous efforts should be made to implement and sustain the LRC by encouraging HEIs to train their admission officers in good practices of recognition. This can be thought of as a building a national recognition culture.

- Encourage (recognition)/admission officers to form a national (transnational) platform of experts in order to raise the awareness of the LRC and exchange information and knowledge about foreign qualifications with the purpose of securing a smoother and more fair institutional recognition decisions

- Only evaluate a qualification based on its five main elements (level, quality, workload, profile and learning outcomes) and additionally the formal academic rights attached to the qualification in its home country and where possible (i.e. qualifications from within the EHEA) standardise decisions on the level and quality of foreign qualifications This way a flexible form of automatic recognition may be introduced into the evaluation of foreign qualifications.

The FAIR project has shown that HEIs are willing to adapt their recognition/admission processes and procedures in order to make them more transparent, consistent and efficient. The FAIR project has also shown that sometimes relatively simple adjustments can make a significant contribution to smooth and transparent recognition of foreign qualifications.

GEAR (Greece Exploring Advanced Recognition in higher education), aims at tracking recognition processes of modules and incur simplifications in their conduction. Just like a gear gives speed, GEAR will endeavor to tackle obstacles in the intricate recognition processes, since recognition is a pre-condition for large-scale academic mobility and a complementary tool guaranteeing internationalization. The aim of the project was to review the Greek national legislative context regarding recognition. The project will be finalized by May 2018.

Excerpt from the **GEAR project**:

• The need to establish and cultivate a culture of mutual trust and confidence among HEIs persists as a corner stone in the bilateral agreements and relations among HEIs simplifying procedures.

• The importance of recognition tools (ECTS, DS, QA and Learning outcomes) is unquestionable so they need to be further developed to depict skills and competences, students will have acquired by the end of their studies.

At the institutional level recognition is closely linked to admission in so far that the **Mastermind Europe** project is talking about a paradigm shift: from recognition of diplomas to admission including an assessment of competencies focusing on three sets of competencies: substance-related knowledge and skills, general academic competencies and personal competencies and traits. The reasoning behind this shift is the huge diversity of the study programmes within the EHEA with regard to length of the studies, the orientation and the grading system. The mastermind Europe project sees competency-based admission as an alternative to recognition. The Mastermind Europe project even goes a step further by introducing the notion of Learning Incomes arguing that the assessment of the applicants' documents without prior definition of the "Learning Incomes" is equally problematic: it leads to a comparison (often the applicants' documents) without a benchmark of explicit "Learning Incomes". Furthermore the project aims at developing processes and concepts for institutional admission approaches – of which assessment and testing of competences is one, but not the only point. Important is that institution developed clearly structures well designed approaches, tested and improved in practice, to be fair towards all applications, and also ensure that they admit them to the right programmes. Automatic recognition at system level guarantees the students access to the admission procedures.

As it was many times said and repeated learning outcomes (and even "learning incomes") are a crucial concept and tool in the higher education practice. It is considered as being the linking pin between QF, QA and Recognition. The report of the Structural Reforms Working Group[38] defined learning outcomes as a crucial building block of the European Infrastructure for transparency and recognition. Also the Bucharest Communiqué emphasised that a meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed in order to consolidate the EHEA. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, Diploma-Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance. Further work is to be done to realise a meaningful application of learning outcomes within the EHEA.

---

38 http://bologna-yerevan2015.ehea.info/files/Final%20Report%20of%20the%20Structural%20Reforms%20WG.pdf

Recommendations

1. We encourage regional initiatives (the Baltic region, the Nordic Region, The German Speaking region, the Balkan countries and the Benelux, etc.) to connect their regional multilateral agreements in order to come to a cross-regional agreement.

2. We recommend countries to foster recognition at system level so that the institutions would only have to decide on admission.

3. Where recognition is carried out by agencies and institutions, we encourage them to to standardise recognition decisions on the structural elements/criteria: level, quality and workload and the rights attached to the qualification in particular as a first step towards full automatic recognition It should be taken into account if the Bachelor gives access to Master programmes and if the master gives access to doctoral studies in the country of origin.

4. Where recognition is carried out by agencies and institutions, we encourage them to cultivate a culture of recognition by fostering the establishment of transnational platforms of institutional recognition/admission officers so to provide capacity-building and staff development opportunities.

5. We call on the academic communities to elaborate further on the development, the mutual understanding and practical use of learning outcomes approach in a cross border perspective, in particular in designing curricula in order to foster a culture of mutual (normative-cognitive) trust and confidence among HEIs and academics.

TOPIC: RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➔ *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 recognize prior learning;*

➔ *to review national qualifications frameworks, with a view to ensuring that learning paths within the framework provide adequately for the recognition of prior learning;*

Context

RPL has been on the Bologna agenda since 2003, but progress in implementation is slow and uneven. There are guidelines and policy recommendations in place, such as the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP)[39] and the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, issued by the Council of the European Union, December 2012[40].

---

39 www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073

40 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29

Analysis

Focusing on the Yerevan Communique commitment: "to remove obstacles to the recognition of prior learning cited above the Swedish Council for HE arranged a conference" Refugees' impact on Bologna Reform – Recognition of Prior Learning and inclusion in the light of increased migration" in Malmö, June, 2017[41]. The refugee situation has made the need for functional processes more obvious in many countries, even if all groups of applicants for RPL experience more or less the same difficulties.

The conference, which gathered policy makers and practitioners from 23 countries, highlighted the issue of previous recommendations that have not been implemented, and the fact that legal implementation which allows RPL decisions mean different things, and is interpreted differently across the EHEA. Legislation can refer to either admission or credit transfer, or that it is allowed to recognize non-traditional learning for credits. It can be a generous legislation, which allows validation of the vast part of an academic programme, or a more narrow interpretation, which means that it is ok to admit adult students on other merits than the upper secondary school diploma. Many practitioners in countries where legislation does allow RPL decisions for admission and/or credit transfer still find it very difficult to apply RPL in practice, to get consistency in the process and to find financing for a time-consuming process. Further, it seems common that formal issues contradict a learning outcomes-based approach within the same system, i.e. a missing formal upper secondary school credential makes it impossible to get validated credit transfer at bachelor's level etc. Throughout the conference, it was made clear that continuous guidance and counselling as well as learning outcomes based course- and level descriptors are key to success in RPL.

Conclusion

There is a need for documentation of processes and more fora for sharing of practices and peer learning. There is also a need for definitions of what is meant by different kinds of RPL and validation activities, to enhance collection and comparability of statistics and processes. Practitioners at HEIs have to be involved to a greater extent. Further, it is necessary to underline the financial gains for the society as well as for the individual, if non-formal and informal skills can get validated and RPL is improved, and persons don't need to study formally what they already know. Crucial for a functioning process is that the outcomes are consistent and that there is trust in the process and the results. There is need for guidelines how to quality assure the RPL process at institutional level.

---

41 The conference report and the background material are available at https://www.uhr.se/bolognarpl

Recommendations

We recommend

1. That proper attention should be paid to the validation of non-formal and informal learning as well as recognition of prior learning both in Internal Quality Assurance and in External Quality Assurance in accordance with the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG 1.4).

2. That the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee considers whether a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention might be developed and, as appropriate, submit a draft text for adoption by the Committee by 2022.

3. That the governments review national legislations to allow recognition of prior learning in a consistent way and avoid contradictions regarding formal requirements, and to establish explicit routines and structures, which can be applied at HEIs.

4. That governments and/or public authorities involve practitioners and the relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the reformed legislation and routines.

5. That peer learning activities for practitioners are organized in order to exchange knowledge and to build trust in RPL, nationally and cross-border.

MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION TOPIC: STAFF MOBILITY

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➔ *to promote staff mobility taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalization*

Context

The importance of staff mobility has been widely acknowledged within the Higher Education community. The latest reference to staff mobility on the Ministerial level is in the Yerevan Communiqué (May 2015): recommendations to enhance staff mobility within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) clearly states that mobility of all groups of staff – not only academic, but also administrative and technical) – should be taken into consideration as a key factor for internationalising higher education systems.

From an implementation point of view, staff mobility is lagging compared with student mobility and the benefits that staff mobility provides the individual, the students, the institutions and the EHEA are not fully exploited.

Analysis

Analysis of staff mobility is taken from:

- Conference on "Ways and perspectives for non-teaching staff mobility", organized by DAAD in Berlin, June 2017

- Presentation by Riku Matilainen, ETUCE: "Staff (im-)mobility – challenges of and driving forces behind mobility WG on Implementation", 20 March 2017, Vienna

- Report of the 2012-2015 BFUG working group on mobility and internationalisation

- Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017. Euryd ice Report

As the Eurydice Report on Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017 shows, the definition and targets of staff mobility vary considerable within the national international strategies. In consequence, there is no common comparable view or statistics on staff mobility so far.

Since 2007 non-teaching and teaching staff has been able to have an Erasmus mobility period for training with different formats: international weeks, job shadowing, institutional visits, structured workshops or courses, and other[42]. Further opportunities beyond Erasmus + exist on national level.

The positive impact of staff mobility is diverse; it favours both the (professional) development of the respective staff member and the international profile of the institution:

By experiencing different international working environments mobility contributes to professional development and improves skills in different ways. But the positive effects go far beyond the individual level: Mobility will also assure and increase the quality of education, teaching, research, administration, management and student services by the creation of networks, sharing of good practices and knowledge.

From a systemic point of view, staff mobility provides practical European networking and fosters wider understanding of internationalisation and cultural diversity on the grass root level.

Last but not least, it is vital for a stronger European knowledge circulation that not only the learners but also the teachers are mobile. The connection between research and teaching is important in this context since it has the role of generating and defusing new knowledge.

However, in practice staff mobility still faces several barriers. Two of the main points are the missing structures and resources of support and the ignorance or underestimation of the benefits of staff mobility. Furthermore, the organisational culture of HEIs rarely takes into account that the idea of the internationalised institution comprises all levels of staff.

When it comes to **teaching staff mobility** the focus tends to be on research cooperation, while mobility based on teaching is comparatively underdeveloped. The professional benefits for mobile teachers and other experts are less obvious since experience and the knowledge accumulated is not seen as a merit with a positive impact on career progression.

The mobility of **non-teaching staff** has gained momentum just recently. Though, in most cases it is limited to single measures and not explicitly part of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy. As experience shows, most HEIs lack of appropriate structures

---

42 There has been a continuous growth in staff mobility numbers up to 57,488 staff mobility periods in total 2013/14 (Erasmus facts, figures and trends 2014) including 38,108 teaching assignments and 19,380 staff training periods.

in order to facilitate the mobility of technical and administrative staff, who often feel less involved in the dynamism of internationalisation.

But exactly non-teaching staff members often need more support and incentives from outside in order to venture the step abroad. In contrast, reality shows that they have less information and support of their superiors due to the ignorance of possible benefits staff mobility might bring for the services and international profile of the institution.

When planning mobility, higher education institutions staff faces all sorts of hindrances, like lack of career prospects, uncertainty of livelihood, spouses' work or work prospects, moving and travel costs, restrictive visa procedures, child care, lack of international connections, lack of support services and social security should be developed.

Conclusions

- Mobility is on the agenda of policymakers and interest and activities in staff mobility are growing. Steps have been taken in the right direction in this respect, but it is problematic to get a comprehensive picture of the state of implementation of staff mobility due to a lack of systematic information.

- The mobility within Erasmus + is essential for staff mobility so far, although other programmes (strategic partnerships, funding by the Universities etc.) exist.

- Untapped potential (especially for non-teaching staff) has to be explored.

- Transparent and easily accessible structures of staff mobility can widen participation.

- Successful internationalisation (of institutions) relies also on international experienced staff members, comprising administrative as well as teaching or technical staff.

- Staff mobility promotes the internationalisation of the single Higher Education system. Beyond, it also benefits international cooperation systems such as European Higher Education Area or European Research Area.

- Acknowledge staff mobility as a catalyst for student mobility.

Recommendations

1. Recalling the 2015 Yerevan recommendations, staff mobility must be further enhanced – especially by the establishment of supportive environments and structures and intensified funding opportunities in order to raise the number of mobilities. All types of staff should be involved in mobility and mobility then as to be recognised, e.g. in staff development.

2. As mentioned by the 2015 recommendations we recommend that a system for monitoring staff mobility in the European Higher Education Area should be established, based on the given definition of staff and the nature of mobilities. The objective pursued is to develop a shared view on mobility and also to take initiative to enhance staff mobility in number and quality.

MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION TOPIC: STUDENT MOBILITY

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➔ *"We will enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.* **We will provide mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas, while working to make it possible for them to return home once conditions allow. We also wish to promote the mobility of teacher education students in view of the important role they will play in educating future generations of Europeans.***"*

➔ *"Implementing agreed structural reforms 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."*

Analysis

No events on mobility were proposed to the working programme of the WG nor did any of the WG members take part in a PLA with regard to mobility which might lead to the conclusion, that the topic has not been visibly promoted during the 2015 to 2018 period or that it is not very high on the agenda. But quite the opposite[43] is the case: the Erasmus + programme's 30th anniversary has been celebrated and is well established and widely accepted. There are even calls for substantially more funding after 2020 for this programme.

With regard to the 20% benchmark for mobility (20% of graduates should have had a study or training period abroad) as agreed in the Bucharest Ministerial Conference Paper 2012 *Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA* member states have long been called upon to draw up national mobility and internationalization strategies. The initial phases of active promotion and strategic planning, during which there is a stronger focus on public communication and raising of awareness, were successfully completed in most countries. Most EHEA member countries and a large part of higher education institutions have come up with mobility strategies of their own (see Implementation Report 2018). Some political leaders already call for a new benchmark that every student should have profited from a mobility experience.

It is important to also stress international mobility as a means to enhancing the quality of higher education and the employability of participating students as well as a driver to secure and develop a better understanding of common European values.

Conclusions

Student mobility seems to be well established at the institutions thanks to programmes and measures that have already been implemented and student exchange seems to work smoothly.

---

43 See Annex item 9 The Austrian Higher Education Mobility strategy and item 10 Academic mobility of students and staff, Belarus, as well as Annex item 11 the NESSIE network.

In order to achieve the 20% mobility benchmark of the European Commission[44], the European Erasmus + program coordinates and organizes student mobility of individuals as well as strategic partnerships and cooperation projects. In the field of monitoring mobility, the collection of new data on credit mobility will enable better comparability between the member states.

If we want that by 2020-2030 all students will have had an opportunity to go abroad, the Erasmus + budget will not be enough, even in the best case scenario of a substantial increase. Complementary modes of mobility (virtual, blended etc.) are necessary to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student body (students who for personal reasons – work, family etc. – cannot be mobile for six months, but could complement a shorter physical mobility with a virtual one).

For a successful mobility period, leading to full recognition of credits accumulated abroad, it is crucial to implement certain quality measures. The most important is the timely signature of the learning agreement by the student, as well as the sending and receiving institutions. Online available and regularly updated course catalogues help mobile students and their sending institutions to prepare the learning agreements. Transparent procedures for the recognition of credits and learning outcomes within a reasonable timeframe after the mobility period are indispensable elements of high quality mobility. Even if these principles are part of the ECTS Guide and the Erasmus + Charter for Higher Education, recognition still seems to be a topic of concern for a number of students.

Mobility of students needs to become more inclusive. Looking into the extent and the reasons for underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in mobility has taken place during the last few years and countries have identified under-represented groups in mobility and some have set goals and put in place different measures at national or institutional level.

Recommendations

We recommend

1. That all countries take the necessary steps to complete the implementation of the EHEA mobility strategy by 2020 and in particular to further enhance the quality and quantity of student mobility, for example by widening the usage of mobility windows embedded in the curricula and if necessary, to consider initiating legislative modifications in order to create a favorable environment for mobility windows.

2. That all countries in consultation with the stakeholders monitor the data with regard to meeting the 20% mobility benchmark by 2020 as agreed by ministers in the EHEA;

3. That the BFUG takes measures to follow-up and to evaluate the implementation of the mobility strategy 2020 with a view to measuring the effects on the quality of higher education and with paying specific attention to balancing mobility flows.

4. To remove any remaining obstacle to a full recognition of the credits gained abroad By2020 the entire mobility cycle should be digitalized – from student selection to recognition of credits –. The cooperation of member States is needed to overcome paper signature requirements. The electronic exchange of student data is expected to improve the recognition of credits gained abroad, while at the same time respecting rules of data privacy.

5. To take actions in order to facilitate and stimulate the mobility of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

6. To promote mobility culture from primary/secondary education and through higher education from a more holistic perspective.

---

44 At least 20% of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad.

MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION TOPIC: SOCIAL DIMENSION

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

> ➔ *to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy*

Making our systems more inclusive **through equal and better access and success for a widened audience** is an essential aim for the EHEA as our populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic changes. The developments in the field of widening access and participation are based on the assumption that equity and diversity in higher education promote excellence and enable new knowledge to be created and fostered. It is therefore necessary to mainstream the social dimension on all levels (student level, institutional level, ministerial level) and to cooperate with stakeholders in and outside the higher education sector and intermediary institutions between e.g. higher education and the labor market.

Context

The 2007 London Communiqué formulated the "share[d] […] societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations". In order to reach this goal, the EHEA member states "declare[d] the commitment […] to implement appropriate measures on a national level". In the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué, and in the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué member states committed to making the EHEA higher education systems more socially inclusive, and the EHEA Social Dimension Strategy and its guidelines could assist member states in drawing up their own strategy or collecting initiatives and policy measures which equal such a strategy.

In the strategy *"Widening Participation for Equity and Growth. A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020"* the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) calls for the development of effective policies to ensure greater access to, participation in and completion of quality higher education for non-traditional learners and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. There are still too many capable students who are excluded from higher education systems because of their socio-economic situation, educational background, insufficient systems of support and guidance and other obstacles. The overall objectives of the strategy are:

• to develop a coherent set of policy measures to address participation in higher education,

• to engage in, encourage and promote the use of peer learning on the social dimension and to

• to support evolving data collection on the social dimension making optimal use of existing data resources across the EHEA

• to encourage higher education institutions to continue to develop and expand lifelong learning opportunities

- to improve opportunities for flexible learning by encouraging diversification of the way in which learning content is delivered

- to recognize the importance of teaching and learning – which strongly depends on e.g. feasible curricula, academic freedom, and many more – for successful completion

- to further facilitate graduates' employability

- to request the BFUG to report on progress at the next Ministerial Conference in 2018 in order to effectively monitor the implementation of this strategy for the development of the social dimension and lifelong learning

During its second meeting in Tbilisi in June 2016 Working Group II "Fostering Implementation" chose the Social Dimension as a thematic input. Martin Unger (Austria, Institute for Advanced Studies), representative of the PL4SD project (an initiative of the 2009 -2012 WG on SD, project period 2012 to 2015) presented the outcomes of the project and conclusions for policy development for policy makers. The PL4SD project collected about 300 measures at ministerial and institutional level dealing with the social dimension and undertook to a review of national social dimension approaches in three pilot countries, namely Armenia, Lithuania and Croatia. Experiences with these projects have had impact on the 2015 report and recommendations of the WG on the Social Dimension.

The PL4SD project identified the following areas that need to be developed further:

- Lack of evidence and evaluation of the effects and impact of the measures adopted at ministerial and institutional level on Social Dimension.

- How to get the students and the central bodies of universities involved in Social Dimension issues?

- Integrate the Social Dimension concept into the higher education funding systems and evaluate its efficiency.

- Relation between secondary school system and Higher Education system. There is an important drop in numbers of students ("early leaving") with low economic and social background before the end of the secondary school. How to bridge the policy gap between the two systems?

- The role played by "soft factors" such as social habits and the different educational background of the students. For example, many homepages of e.g. universities are only understandable by those with an "academic" background?

Analysis

A number of EHEA member countries have come up with coherent strategies on the social dimension in higher education, to widen participation in Higher education, for example: Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland Croatia, the UK, and Austria, but this list is probably not complete (see also Implementation Report 2018).

Following the presentation of the Austrian "National strategy on the social dimension of higher education" in February 2017 Austria invited policy makers, practitioners from higher education institutions and international experts, the Austrian and European Students' representatives to the University of Linz for an international PLA "Mainstreaming the Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Strategies, Tools, Raising Awareness" in March 2017 [45].

Representatives from the UK, Ireland, Croatia, Iceland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, ESU, the EC, Austria, discussed their status quo in the development of SD measures and strategies to mainstream the social dimension.

The necessity of sufficient and relevant funding of HEIs is discussed against the background of HEIs being required to use the financial resources efficiently. The current discussion in Sweden of a proposal to change the university law in order to broaden access and participation is exemplary of a certain tension that SD practitioners and policy makers face in practically all EHEA countries: Sufficient funding is important to enable high quality teaching and learning in a diverse surrounding, but a number of measures can be implemented at low or no cost.

In Yerevan the ministers committed themselves to make our higher education more socially inclusive by implementing the EHEA social dimension strategy. There are good examples of countries which have developed a national social dimension strategy. Other countries have put in place a set of measures aiming at realizing the objectives with regard to the social dimension without calling it a strategy. Building a more socially inclusive higher education systems requires measures and actions in different areas and a multidimensional approach: the teaching and learning dimension, the design and the delivery of the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, student facilities, transition from secondary to higher education, the transition from HE to the labor market, tuition fees, opportunities for combining working and learning, part-time studies, second chance learning paths, flexible learning paths etc. Other countries have a policy measures in place aiming at strengthening the social dimension by a more universal approach by offering free education, universal study grants in combination with good counselling systems, flexible admission pathways, recognition of prior learning and student centred learning.

Striving for an inclusive higher education means that higher education systems and institutions should mainstream and integrate the social dimension in all their purposes, functions, delivery of HE and actions (in order to enhance the quality of HE for all students and to make a meaningful contribution to an equitable society (paraphrasing the new definition of internationalization). Higher education practitioners have to play an important role.

Conclusions

The PLA in Linz, Austria concluded that while individual ways have to be found for each country for setting policy measures with regard to the SD there are still a lot of common tools that can be identified when it comes to mainstreaming the SD.

• New methods/tools fostering SD should be tested and successful methods/tools should be (adapted and) transferred to other types of HE institutions.

---

45 See Annex item 12 Summary of the PLA "Mainstreaming the Social Dimension", Linz, March 2017; all documents also available at www.sozialerhebung.at/sozdim

- It will be imperative to change the mindset of policy makers, leaders of higher education institutions (HEIs), (teaching) staff and students at HEIs. The Social Dimension has to be taken into consideration in all policy contexts, be it teaching and learning, student support, higher education financing, tracking students, study information, etc.

- It will be necessary to include the social dimension in budgeting: Financial incentives might be an instrument to accelerate implementation of SD policy measures. This has to be connected with implementing the social dimension in quality assurance, and for that cause criteria that best illustrate the implementation of the social dimension on an institutional level should be developed.

- Further exchange of SD practitioners at national (those working at HEIs) and international level will be needed to profit from other experience.

- It will be crucial to set measureable targets and check whether goals are being achieved. In that context the development of data continues to be an important issue. Policy measures will have to be evaluated, and then adapted according to the evaluation results. Although more difficult to measure, the fostering of a socially inclusive culture in higher education is seen as a challenge of great importance and a necessary precondition for successfully mainstreaming the social dimension.

- The (political) realm of school education has a direct impact on higher education policy and has to be addressed more effectively, e.g. in the course of implementing outreach measures, teacher education etc.

Recommendations

1. We recommend to expand and disseminate information on the social dimension aiming at further raising of awareness for the social dimension at system-level and institutional level.

2. We recommend "Mainstreaming" the social dimension in all policy contexts, be it teaching and learning, student support, higher education financing, tracking students, study information, quality assurance, etc.

3. We recommend to set up supportive monitoring (e.g. improve of data availability and interpretation and information structures) and evaluation procedures

4. We encourage countries to consider incentivizing funding and resourcing of HEIs with regard to SD.

5. We recommend to put more emphasis on the link between school education and higher education; encouraging the interface between school education and higher education, e.g. by implementing outreach measures, incorporating aspects of SD into teacher education.

6. We recommend to strike a balance of targeted (e.g. measures tailored for under-represented and/or disadvantaged groups vs. mainstreaming (e.g. SD budgeting, outcome oriented planning) approaches and measures with regard to SD or more universal measures built in higher education systems supporting all students.

7. We encourage all countries to implement the commitment to draw up Strategies for the SD in accordance with The Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area.

8. We recommend establishing a European thematic network of higher education practitioners to foster inclusive higher education. We would like to start with some five or six countries which are ready to put some resources in the functioning of the network by organizing some seminars and conferences of HE practitioners (2 seminars per year and one conference every two years).

MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION TOPIC: EMPLOYABILITY

Commitment – Yerevan Communiqué

➜ *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;*

Context

Employment and employability are among the key concerns of European governments as well as of most citizens. Both governments and citizens expect education, including higher education, to play a leading role in addressing Europe's employment needs. The Structural Reforms Working Group (SRWG; active in the framework of the BFUG work plan 2012-2015) discussed thoroughly the question of how the concept of employability should be defined in the context of EHEA. SRWG proposed a number of recommendations concerning employability, some of which were included in the Yerevan Communique. The mandate of the Implementation Working Group covers two commitments listed in the Appendix to the Communique which concern employability

The working group on implementation did not have a thematic session on employability. The issue of employability of holders of first-cycle degrees had not been taken up, neither at the WG meetings nor at the events which were reported to the group. However, the issue of employability was tackled at the meetings of the working group during discussions focused on other topics. WG members pointed out that 18 years after the beginning of the Bologna Process there are still misinterpretations of "employability". They claimed that critics use very restrictive definitions of what "employability" means – much narrower than the definition of the BFUG itself which defines employability as subject-specific, methodological, individual and social competences which enable somebody to successfully take up and pursue a profession/an employment and empower him or her to life-long learning.

At the first meeting of the working group, Polish co-chair presented briefly the conclusions from the peer learning Seminar on tracking graduates' career paths" which was held on 3-4 of September 2015 and was funded with support from the European Commission. The conclusions listed in the "Non-Paper: Chair's Conclusions" [46] (see Annex …) directly correspond to the Ministers' commitment from Yerevan concerning graduate tracking.

---

46 See Annex item 13 Peer Learning Seminar "Tracking graduates' career paths", Poland Sept. 2015

Analysis and conclusions

WG members pointed out that 18 years after the beginning of the Bologna Process there are still misinterpretations of "employability". They claimed that critics use very restrictive definitions of what "employability" means – much narrower than the definition of the BFUG itself which defines employability as subject-specific, methodological, individual and social competencies which enable somebody to successfully take up and pursue a profession/an employment and empower him or her to life-long learning. Graduate tracking, is more and more often considered 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. 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 HEIs also make use of qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups. All methods have their advantages and limitations and should be carefully selected depending on the purpose of tracking.

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. At the same time HEIs 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 contextualizing 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.

There is a strong need for further improvement of implemented arrangements which can be supported by mutual learning. Discussions on a possible European approach to graduate tracking, which was suggested in the SRWG report, may 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 could be considered 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.

Recommendations

We recommend with the objective of improving our knowledge of what graduates of higher education do following their studies, to develop or improve graduate tracking systems at education system level and at institutional level, and to build more focused cooperation among experts aiming at improving mutual understating of methods and indicators used across EHEA.'

ANNEXES

CONTENTS

I. TERMS OF REFERENCE WG II ON IMPLEMENTATION

**Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Implementation –
Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments**

Name of the Working Group

Working Group on Implementation – Fostering implementation of agreed key commitments

Contact persons (Co-Chairs)

Helga POSSET – Austria (helga.posset@bmwfw.gv.at)

Noel VERCRUYSSE – Belgium VL (noel.vercruysse@ond.vlaanderen.be)

George SHARVASHIDZE[47] – Georgia (gsharvashidze@mes.gov.ge)

Bartłomiej BANASZAK – Poland (Bartlomiej.Banaszak@mnisw.gov.pl)

Composition of the WG – Members

Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium VL, BUSINESS EUROPE, Croatia, Denmark, EI/ETUCE, ENQA, EQAR, ESU, EU Commission, EUA, EURASHE, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom[48 49 50 51 52 53]

Purpose and/or outcome

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.

Reference to the Yerevan Communiqué

• Implementing agreed structural reforms 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."

---

47 Mr Sharvashidze was replaced in 2016 by Mrs. Tamar Sanikidze (t.sanikidze@eqe.ge).

48 Liaison with the WG 1 on "Monitoring"

49 Liaison with the WG 3 on "New goals – Policy development for new EHEA goals"

50 Liaison with the AG 4 on the Revision of the Diploma Supplement

51 Liaison with the AG 2 on "Support for the Belarus roadmap"

52 Liaison with the AG 3 on "Dealing with non-implementation"

53 Liaison with the AG 1 on "EHEA international cooperation"

- 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;

- 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 recognize prior learning;

- to promote staff mobility taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalization;

- to promote the portability of grants and loans taking into account the guidelines from the Working group on mobility and internationalization;

- 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 recognized 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 maximizing 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 organized by countries, institutions and organisations;

- To guide and assist countries, institutions and organisations in organizing activities;

- To ensure and foster the involvement of national, European and international stakeholders in the organization 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

- Internationalization
- 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 finalizing 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[54] 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.

---

54 http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=115

2. Organisational framework

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

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

- 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.

- 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:

- 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.

- 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

Report on the "reversed peer review" with regard to quality assurance in higher education, held on the 14th and 15th of December 2016, 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) 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 14th and the 15th 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:

- the complex and not always consensual decision making process regarding the accreditation of study programmes and/or institutions;

- the composition of the review panels who assess study programmes and institutions;

- the creation of new study programmes and the "ex ante" and "ex post" accreditation;

- the evolution towards an institutional accreditation (a reality in Flanders and a likely future reality in Portugal);

- 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:

- the focus of the external quality assurance: processes and/or outcomes;

- 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";

- 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;

- the use and the impact of the external quality assurance (are students using the reports in order to make an informed study choice?);

- the independency of the agencies and the composition of the governing bodies;

- the relationship between the internal environment and the external environment;

- 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:

- 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;

- the possibility to reflect on the work being developed and, consequently, to increase the awareness about its weaknesses;

- 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:

- 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;

- 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:

- 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;

- the balance between the necessary and desirable compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and the particularities of the national higher education systems;

- 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;

- 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;

- 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 24th and 25th 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 24th and the 25th 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[55] and the measures adopted in the Yerevan Communiqué[56].

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.

---

55 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

56 Yerevan Communiqué 2015: http://media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf

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[57].

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[58] 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[59].

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[60].

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)

57 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.

58 The German speaking community did not take part in the seminar.

59 http://vlaamsekwalificatiestructuur.be/en

60 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).

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[61].

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 are 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 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.

---

61 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).

- 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[62].

---

62 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:

- demographic changes;

- societal changes;

- economic changes (level of economic growth or economic stagnation);

- technological changes;

- the employment of graduates in general (in order to fight against unemployment and underemployment)

- the needs of the labour market.

2. Short cycle qualifications play a role in (and contribute to):

- widening participation and improving the retention and the academic success;

- the social dimension

- meeting the needs of the labour market

- LLL and improving the position of graduates on the labour market (reverse permeability)

- the further development of the higher education system as a whole;

- 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:

• (Self-) employment in an economic sector in line with the study programme;

• Employment in a different economic sector or at a different level;

• 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 (18th 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 counseling 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 realized 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 1st 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"* (ie: Bachelor level) programmes afterwards.

17. There are three different types of permeability:

• Permeability between different study programmes;

• Permeability between work and study;

• 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: www.benelux.int/files/1914/3201/9435/basis_tekst_web_FR.pdf

- Portuguese list of recognised degrees: see annex

- 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 recognized 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 11th 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

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)

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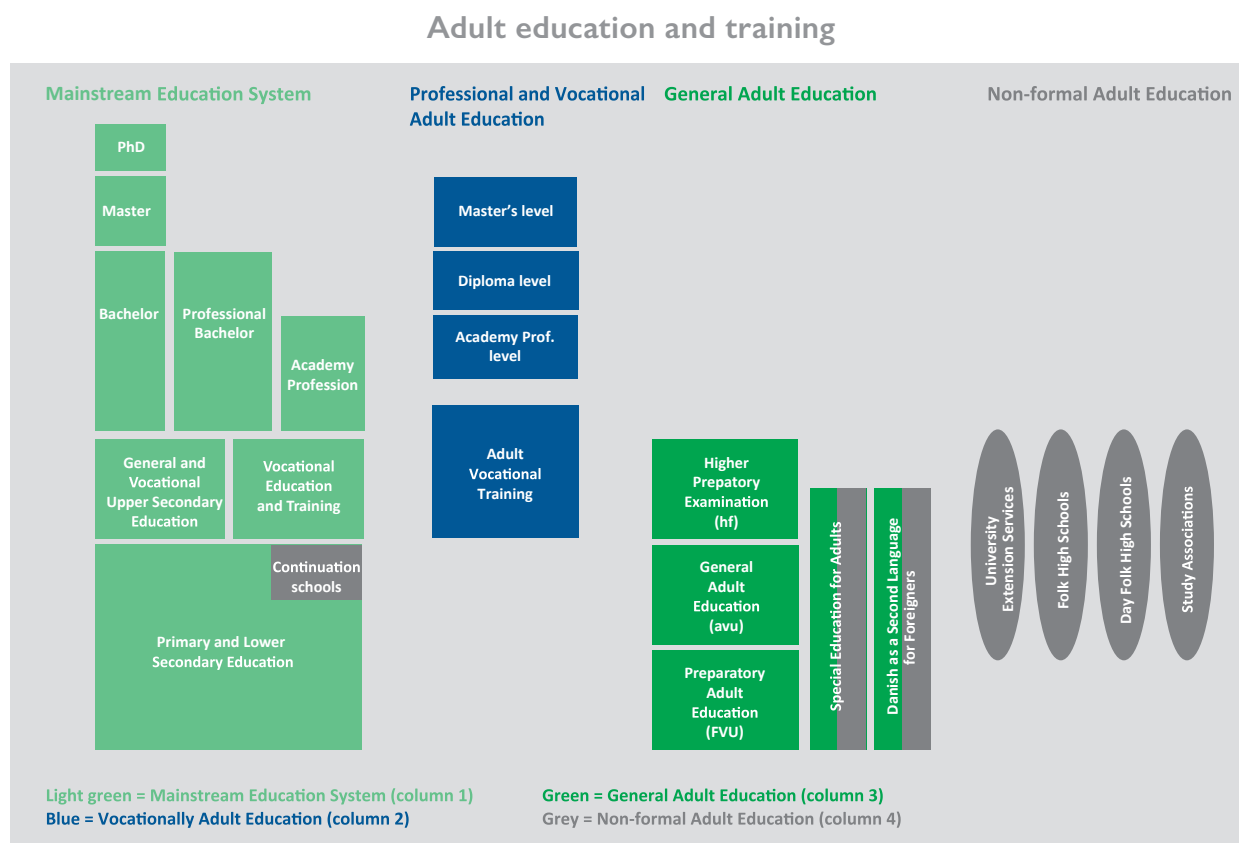
This report will introduce the wider higher education context in the two countries; will outline the context of automatic recognition. It will then outline the QA and QF arrangements in the two countries, as well as the recognition procedures. Finally the report will include the meeting conclusions.

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 bynary one, consisting of:

Adult education and training

- **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** on page 72.

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;

- Specialized institutions: management schools and schools for protestant theology.

3. Brief description of the Qualifications frameworks for higher education

Denmark

The National Qualfication 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 finalizing 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 organized) and skills test for arts and crafts (organized 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 perfomance indicators (KPIs)

2. Inspection meeting: agency visits each institution in a multi-anual 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 recognized 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 in 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 organization, 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 porogrammes and existing prog not accreditated

- 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 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 recognized.

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

- Both qualifications frameworks have been self-certified and comply with the European QF for HE;

- 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;

- The conditions stipulated in the Flemish law for the enactment of the automatic recognition are met:
  – The Academy Profession degrees awarded by a Danish College are recognized on

an equal level with the associate degree jointly awarded by a Flemish Centre for Adult Education and a Flemish University College;

– The professional Bachelor's degrees awarded by a Danish University College are recognized on an equal level with the professionally oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by a Flemish University College;

– The Bachelor's degrees awarded by a Danish University are recognized on an equal level with the academically oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by Flemish University;

– The Master's degrees awarded by a Danish University are recognized on an equal level with the Master's degree awarded by a Flemish University;

– The Bachelor's degrees in the field of Arts awarded by institutions in architecture and art and institutions under the Ministry of Culture are recognized 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

– 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 recognized on an equal level with the Master's degree in the field of Arts awarded by a Flemish University College/Schools of Arts.

• The Danish party will ensure that the Flemish higher education qualifications are recognized on an equal level with the Danish qualifications[63].

All the participants in the country workshop have endorsed the conclusions.

---

63 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

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 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 sand 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 Organization 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 organized 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)[64], and the *European Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA* (ESG)[65], as well a reliance on expertise in the ENIC-NARIC networks[66], closer cooperation with QA structures (both national and European), full utilization of tools such as the Diploma Supplement (DS) and the ECTS, setting up of free and accessible appeal procedures and structures, and utilization of the *European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions*[67]. 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[68].

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[69].

---

64 www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_EN.asp (page accessed 9 September 2015).

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

66 www.enic-naric.net (page accessed 9 September 2015).

67 http://eurorecognition.eu/Manual/EaR%20HEI.pdf (page accessed 9 September 2015).

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

69 www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=69 (page accessed 11 September 2015).

Brief description of the qualifications frameworks for higher education

Poland

Degrees

The Polish higher education degree structure includes:

- First-cycle (Bachelor's degree) programmes:
  − 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);
  − other specific first cycle degrees: inżynier architekt, inżynier architekt krajobrazu, inżynier pozarnictwa, licencjat pielęgniarstwa, licencjat położnictwa.

- Second-cycle (Master's degree) programmes:
  − Master programmes last 3 or 4 semesters and lead in general to the magister or magister inżynier;
  − There are also other specific second cycle degrees: magister inżynier architekt, magister inżynier architekt krajobrazu, magister inżynier pozarnictwa, 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 characterized as an establishment providing degree-level education with a minimum of one academic unit authorized to confer the degree of doctor. Most of them are public HEIs: universities, universities of technology, universities of fine arts, universities of economics etc.

The non-university higher education institutions are characterized 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;

- Specialized 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 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 recognized as equivalent with a specific Flemish degree or have been recognized at the bachelor or master level as requested. Unfortunately 3 magisters couldn't be recognized 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 recognized 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 summarized 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[70] and *numerus clausus*[71], 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[72]. 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 organized 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 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.

---

70 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 (p. 61/62).

71 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.

72 Exceptions to this are medicine and dentistry for which there are entrance exams, and arts for which there are artistic aptitude tests.

This lead 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 if 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:

Concerning characteristics of HE systems in Flanders and Poland that are of relevance for automatic recognition:

- Both qualifications frameworks have been self-certified and comply with the European QF for HE;

- 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;

- The conditions stipulated in the Flemish law for the enactment of the automatic recognition are met:
  – The diplomas certifying the title of licencjat and the diplomas certifying the title of inżynier awarded by a Polish University are recognized 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;
  – The diplomas certifying the title of magister, the diplomas certifying the title of magister inżynier awarded by a Polish University are recognized 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;
  – 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 recognized 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;
  – The Polish degree of "doktor" is recognized on an equal level with the Flemish degree of doctor (PhD);

- The Polish framework for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of further studies ensures that the Flemish higher education qualifications are recognized on an equal level with the Polish qualifications.

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.

References

Bucharest Communiqué. (2012). Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area.

EHEA PfG. (2015). Report by the EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition.

Country seminar on automatic recognition Flanders and Portugal

1. 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 Organization 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 summarized along with observations made by the independent observer. The final conclusions agreed upon by the participants are listed at the end of this document.

Portugal

Degrees

The Portuguese degree structure comprises three cycles: 1st cycle - licenciado degree; 2nd cycle - mestre degree and 3rd 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.

- 1st cycle: the licenciado degree consists of 180 - 240 ECTS

- 2nd 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)

- 3rd 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 degree 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 organized by the directorate general for higher education;

- Admission (private higher education institutions): annual calls for student admission organized individually by each organize 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. audiovisual 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 Organization 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

- Specialized 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	2nd cycle of basic education
2	3rd 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:

- nursery education (ages 2.5-6);

- primary education (ages 6-12);

- secondary school (ages 12-18);

- 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:

- the Board of Trustees which is comprised of five members appointed by the Cabinet with consultation from HEIs;

- the Management Board which is responsible for fulfilling the agency's objectives and makes the decision regarding assessment and accreditation;

- the Audit Committee which holds the responsibility for ensuring the legality and management of the agency's finances;

- the Appeals Council, a body in which appeals against the decisions of the Management Board regarding assessment and accreditation are made;

- the Advisory Council, a body that gives advice on matters of quality assurance;

- the Scientific Council, a non-statutory body integrating six recognized 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 internationalization 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, 1st and 2nd 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 analyzed and recommendations were drafted and a proposal sent to the Commission after which the Commission decided which countries and degrees are recognized 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 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 has partner countries/institutions do not always prioritize 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 prioritize 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 recognized 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 Organization. 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 summarized 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 realization 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

- Both qualifications frameworks have been self-certified and comply with the European QF for HE;

- 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;

- The conditions stipulated in the Flemish law for the enactment of the automatic recognition are met:
  – The licenciado diplomas awarded by a Portuguese Polytechnic are recognized on an equal level with the professionally oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by a Flemish University College;
  – The licenciado diplomas awarded by a Portuguese University are recognized on an equal level with the academically oriented Bachelor's degree awarded by Flemish University;
  – The master diplomas awarded by a Portuguese higher education institution are recognized on an equal level with the Master's degree awarded by a Flemish University;
  – The licenciado diplomas in the field of Arts awarded by a Portuguese Polytechnic or University are recognized 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;
  – The master diplomas in the field of Arts awarded by a Portuguese Polytechnic or University are recognized on an equal level with the Master's degree in the field of Arts awarded by a Flemish University College/Schools of Arts;
  – PhD diplomas awarded by a Portuguese University are recognized on equal level with the PhD degrees awarded by a Flemish University.

- 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 1st, 2nd or 3rd study cycle are considered of a level and nature and with objectives that are identical to "licenciado", Masters and Doctorate degrees in Portugal.

All the participants in the country workshop have endorsed the conclusions.

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

1. 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

Internationalization 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 (BMWFW). 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 und 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/Internationalization 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 – "Internationalization 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 klick www.bmwfw.gv.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 organizing academic mobility projects/programs for their students and staff. The most common challenges were:

- Lack of local regulatory and legal acts on academic mobility issues,

- An insufficiently effective mobility programs management system,

- Low motivation of staff and students to participate in mobility programs,

- Lack of a comprehensive effective communication system for informing the university community about mobility programs

- "language, social and psychological barriers", negative "intercultural stereotypes"

- Financing of mobility programs

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

- 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 formalization of business trips abroad for university staff and students, to the recognition of mobility results obtained abroad, as well as other organizational issues,

- to optimize the university structure, identify the roles, tasks and responsibilities of the university departments and officials involved in the management of mobility programs,

- to upgrade professional skills of the staff responsible for the management of mobility programs,

- to create an effective network of international project coordinators at all management levels (at the level of top administration, faculties, departments, other structural units);

- 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,

- 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.)

- 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,

- to organize 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",

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 PLA ON SOCIAL DIMENSION MAINSTREAMING, AUSTRIA

Summary

Peer Learning Activity at JKU Linz, Austria, March 23rd, 2017

On behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW), Maria Keplinger (head of expert unit on higher education development) emphasized 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 summarized 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 Gylafdottir (**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 emphasized.

Mary Tupan Wenno from ECHO (Center for Diversity policy) presented the results of the IDEAS project (Identifying effective approaches to enhancing the social 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 emphasized 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 prioritizing 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

12. 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

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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 contextualizing 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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 organized in the framework of the Bologna Follow-up Group Work Plan 2015-2018.

Conférence ministérielle européenne
pour l'enseignement supérieur

Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

MINISTÈRE
DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT
SUPÉRIEUR,
DE LA RECHERCHE
ET DE L'INNOVATION

bologna
process

EUROPEAN
Higher Education Area