

---

>

---

---

# A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

Bologna Working Group on  
Qualifications Frameworks

Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation  
February 2005

---

Framework for Qualifications  
of the European Higher  
Education Area

Bologna Working Group on Qualifications  
Frameworks

Published by:  
Ministry of Science, Technology and  
Innovation  
Bredgade 43  
DK-1260 Copenhagen K  
Tel: 3392 9700  
Fax: 3332 3501

This publication may be obtained  
free of charge as long as copies  
are available. Please contact:

The National IT and Telecom Agency,  
Denmark  
danmark.dk  
Telephone: 1881  
sp@itst.dk  
www.netboghandel.dk

The publication can also be downloaded from:  
<http://www.vtu.dk>  
ISBN (internet): 87-91469-53-8

Printed by:  
Grefta Tryk A/S  
Impression: 1,000  
ISBN: 87-91469-54-6

#### BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Mogens Berg (Chair)  
Andrejs Rauhvargers  
Eva Gönczi  
Ian McKenna  
Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérard  
Marlies Leegwater

Denmark  
Latvia  
Hungary  
Ireland  
France  
Bologna Presidency (NL)

#### EXPERTS

Seán Ó Foghlú

Séamus Puirseil

Nick Harris

David Young  
David Bottomley  
Gerard Madill  
Anne-Kathrine Mandrup

Tue Vinther-Jørgensen  
Albin Gaunt  
Bastian Baumann  
Sjur Bergan  
Peter van der Hijden  
Robert Wagenaar

National Qualifications Authority  
of Ireland  
Higher Education and Training Awards Council  
Ireland  
Quality Assurance Agency for  
Higher Education, UK  
Universities UK  
QAA, Scottish Office  
Universities Scotland  
Danish Centre for Assessment of Foreign  
Qualifications  
Danish Evaluation Institute  
Ministry of Education, Sweden  
ESIB  
Council of Europe  
European Commission EAC  
EUA

#### CONSULTANTS

Stephen Adam  
Bryan Maguire

University of Westminster, UK  
IADT, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland

Executive summary	7
Introduction	13
1 Context – higher education qualifications in Europe	17
1.1 The Bologna Process, European Higher Education Area and qualifications systems	17
1.2 Qualifications frameworks and the purposes of higher education	22
1.3 Qualifications frameworks at national and European levels and for different areas of learning	26
2 National frameworks of qualifications in higher education	29
2.1 Introduction	29
2.2 Systems of higher education and national frameworks of higher education qualifications	31
2.3 The purposes of national higher education frameworks of qualifications	32
2.4 Elements of national frameworks	36
2.4.1 Learning outcomes, including competences	37
2.4.2 Levels and typical/generic qualifications	42
2.4.3 Credits and workload	44
2.4.4 Profile	47
2.5 Quality assurance and national frameworks of qualifications within national contexts	48
2.6 The role of stakeholders in national frameworks	52
2.7 Conclusions: good practice for the development of national frameworks of qualifications	54

---

3	The framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area	57
3.1	Purposes and nature of the framework of qualifications of the EHEA	57
3.2	Cycles and levels	59
3.3	Descriptors of learning outcomes, including competences	63
3.4	Credit and workload	69
3.5	Profile	72
3.6	Further development	73
3.7	Conclusions and recommendations	73
4	Linking frameworks of qualifications in higher education	75
4.1	Introduction	75
4.2	Quality assurance and national frameworks of qualifications within the context of the EHEA	75
4.3	Criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of frameworks with the framework for qualifications of the EHEA	77
4.4	National frameworks of qualifications and recognition and transparency instruments	83
4.5	Conclusions and recommendations	88
5	Frameworks for higher education and for other education areas	91
5.1	Context – Lifelong Learning perspective	91
5.2	Initiatives inside “Education and training 2010” (the Lisbon Strategy)	94
5.3	Initiatives inside the Copenhagen Process	96
5.4	Towards a European Qualifications Framework for the EU	97
5.5	Conclusion	99
6.	Conclusions	101

---

## Executive summary



---

This report concerns the elaboration of qualifications frameworks as called for by ministers in the Berlin Communiqué; it makes recommendations and proposals for an overarching **Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**, and offers advice on good practice in the elaboration of national qualifications frameworks for higher education qualifications.

The report includes six chapters that cover:

1. The context – higher education qualifications in Europe
2. National frameworks of qualifications in higher education
3. The framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
4. Linking frameworks of qualifications in higher education
5. Frameworks for higher education and for other educational areas
6. Conclusions

**Chapter one** draws the lines from the Bologna declaration of 1999 to the Berlin Communiqué of 2003 in the development of describing qualifications and frameworks. It also demonstrates the impact of this development on the action lines of the Bologna Process. Finally it points to the underlying goals, priorities and assumptions of higher education, which have to be taken into account when developing qualifications frameworks, namely: preparation for the labour market, preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society, personal development and the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

**Chapter two** examines the nature, development and effectiveness of existing national frameworks for qualifications encompassing ‘new style’ higher education. It reveals a wide pattern of different experiences from which a number of good practice recommendations can be identified. Some useful aspects that can facilitate the creation of successful new national frameworks of qualifications are mentioned, including:

- > the development and review process for producing good national frameworks are most effective when they involve all relevant stakeholders both within and outside higher education.
- > a framework for higher education qualifications should identify a clear and nationally-agreed set of purposes. Frameworks for higher education qualifications benefit from the inclusion of cycles and /or levels, and articulation with outcome-focussed indicators and/or descriptors of qualifications. Higher education frameworks of qualifications can also benefit from being directly linked to credit accumulation and transfer systems
- > frameworks for higher education qualifications should explicitly link academic standards, national and institutional quality assurance systems, and public understanding of the place and level of nationally recognised qualifications. Public confidence in academic standards requires public understanding of the achievements represented by different higher education qualifications and titles.

**Chapter three** explores the possibilities for formulating a framework for EHEA and recommends that:

- > the framework for qualifications in the EHEA should be an overarching framework with a high level of generality, consisting of three main cycles, with additional provision for a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle.

- > the framework should include cycle descriptors in the form of generic qualification descriptors that can be used as reference points.
- > the Dublin Descriptors developed by the Joint Quality Initiative are proposed for adoption as the cycle descriptors for the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. They offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle.
- > responsibility for the maintenance and development of the framework rests with the Bologna Follow-up Group and any successor executive structures established by the ministers for the furtherance of the EHEA.

Chapter three also includes guidelines for the range of ECTS typically associated with the completion of each cycle:

- > Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications - approximately 120 ECTS credits;
- > First cycle qualifications - 180-240 ECTS credits;
- > Second cycle qualifications - 90-120 ECTS credits– the minimum requirement should amount to 60 ECTS credits at second cycle level;
- > Third cycle qualifications do not necessarily have credits associated with them.

**Chapter four** discusses how national frameworks of qualifications need to articulate in a transparent way with the overarching European framework for qualifications. The process of articulation should involve the careful mapping of national qualifications (their levels, learning outcomes and descriptors) with the cycle descriptors identified for the European overarching framework.

The following criteria are proposed for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework:

- > The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education
- > There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework
- > The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS credits
- > The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent
- > The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework for higher education qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent Ministerial Communiqués in the Bologna Process
- > The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements
- > The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published

It is proposed that each country should certify the compatibility of its own framework with the overarching framework according to the following procedures

- > The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework



---

>

---

- > The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies of the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process
- > The self-certification process shall involve international experts
- > The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall address separately each of the criteria established and shall be published
- > The ENIC/NARIC network shall maintain a public listing of States that have completed the self-certification process
- > The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework

The frameworks of qualifications have been identified as a key tool for the realisation of the European Higher Education Area. Therefore it is recommended

that all signatories will complete the self-certification process by 2010.

**Chapter five** looks at the framework and related initiatives outside of higher education. It takes into account wider European developments in lifelong learning, of which higher education is an intrinsic part, developments in the Lisbon process and the linked future objectives process, as well as development in the Copenhagen process on increased European co-operation in vocational education and training.

The change agenda being advanced through much of this work relates closely with the sorts of changes required by the Bologna process, as reflected through the introduction of national frameworks of qualifications, and an overarching

framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. It is proposed that:

- > national frameworks should include awards that integrate recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences.

This chapter also notes that an increasing focus on the individual learner rather than learning systems and institutions, which challenges the traditional boundaries within and between different levels of education and training, is also relevant.

The development of the plans of the European Commission towards a European Qualifications Framework is regarded as a helpful and important, and it is anticipated that the approaches developed in this report will support and be compatible with such a framework.

**Chapter six** provides a summary of conclusions of the report.

---

# Introduction

---

>

The conclusions of the Berlin conference (September 2003) of the ministers in charge of higher education included:

***Degree structure:** ‘Ministers encourage the member states to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile.*

*They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.*

This report was commissioned by the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) in furtherance of these undertakings.

The report includes five chapters that cover:

- > The context – higher education qualifications in Europe
- > National frameworks of qualifications in higher education
- > The framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
- > Linking frameworks of qualifications in higher education
- > Frameworks for higher education and for other educational areas

Meeting in Dublin in March 2004, the BFUG approved the establishment of a Working Group to coordinate the work on the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA, and appointed the following to that Working Group: Mogens Berg (Denmark) as chair, the BFUG Chair (Ian McKenna (Ireland) until 1 July 2004, and Marlies Leegwater (The Netherlands) from 1<sup>st</sup> July), Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gerand (France), Éva Gonczi (Hungary), and Andrejs Rauhvargers

(Latvia). The Working Group was joined by a number of experts (listed in Appendix 1 to this report).

The terms of reference BFUG (Appendix 2) provided for the Working Group were to:

- > identify reference points for national frameworks of qualifications (in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile), which may assist Member States in establishing their frameworks;
- > elaborate on an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area;
- > establish key principles for frameworks of qualifications, both at national and European levels.

The Working Group took into account other policy areas, including those within the Copenhagen Process and the wider Lisbon Agenda as articulated in "Education and training 2010"<sup>1</sup>. The Working Group, with its experts, met 6 times; in Dublin, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Stockholm, Budapest and Riga. Prior to this a preparatory group was set up by Denmark, Ireland, the UK (including Scotland), and the President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. This preparatory group undertook some coordinating work prior to the formal appointment of the Working Group.

The Working Group has drawn heavily upon work done by others, especially that of the Joint Quality Initiative<sup>2</sup> who formulated and further developed the 'Dublin Descriptors' and organised an introductory conference in London in January 2004. It has also drawn on experiences in countries that have already established qualifications framework for their national

---

<sup>1</sup> Title: [www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/jir\\_council\\_final.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/doc/jir_council_final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.jointquality.org](http://www.jointquality.org)

higher education systems, and conducted a comparative study of existing national frameworks.

The Working Group has consulted other organisations and networks that have contributed to the discussions; these include the European University Association (EUA) (which has also acted as coordinator of the ECTS counsellors), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB), the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The European Commission (EC) contributed both through their interests in the Bologna process and as coordinator of the Copenhagen process and of the Lisbon process as articulated in “Education and training 2010”.

In widening input into the deliberations, the Chairman presented interim findings of the Working Group at various conferences of important European organisations and networks such as ESIB, EURASHE and the ENIC and NARIC. He also conducted a seminar in Vienna attended by Austrian officials and organisations with regard to their Bologna and EU Presidency (2006). Members of the Working Group have presented reports to Bologna seminars in Edinburgh, Santander and Riga, and attended the Closing Conference on “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Phase 2”.

The report was discussed in detail at a Bologna seminar in Copenhagen<sup>3</sup> on 13-14 January 2005 and the report was revised following the comments at the seminar. The revised report, taking account of the conclusions and recommendations from the seminar, will be given to the BFUG, who commissioned the work. It will be available for the ministerial Bologna Conference in Bergen in May 2005.

---

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 7

---

# 1 Context – higher education qualifications in Europe

---

>

## 1.1 The Bologna Process, European Higher Education Area and qualifications systems

The identification of first and second cycle studies, within the Bologna Declaration (1999), was the first step towards developing an over-arching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). By creating this initial division between cycles the first elements of a qualifications framework were established.

The next steps were several national and international initiatives, including the development by the Joint Quality initiative (JQI) of the ‘Dublin descriptors’, the Trans-European Evaluation Project (TEEP), the Tuning project, and developments in national qualification frameworks for example Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, with separate qualifications frameworks for Scotland and the rest of the UK. Various Bologna seminars, e.g. in Helsinki, Lisbon, and Zurich, also provided additional discussion of context and detailed information. These initiatives were followed by the Danish Bologna seminar on *Qualification Structures in European Higher Education*, held in Copenhagen on 27-28<sup>th</sup> March 2003. This seminar was informed by a background report<sup>4</sup> that explored alternative approaches for clarifying the cycles and levels in European higher education qualifications. The report and the seminar examined the issues and debates associated with concepts useful for describing qualifications. They also focussed on current European approaches to qualifications structures, alternative methodologies and their theoretical foundations for conceiving different educational levels for all higher education qualifications, including lifelong learning.

---

<sup>4</sup> The report, *Qualifications Structures in European Higher education – Consideration of alternative approaches for clarifying cycles and levels in European higher education qualifications* can be downloaded from: <http://www.bologna.dk>

---

The 2003 Danish seminar resulted in a series of detailed recommendations to higher education stakeholders that were taken up by the ministers at their meeting in Berlin; these are summarised in Appendix 3. Their Berlin Communiqué (2003) called for the creation of an overarching framework for the European Higher Education Area. The following statements are of particular importance in this connection:

***Degree structure:*** ‘Ministers encourage the member states to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile.

*They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.*

*Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.*

*Ministers invite the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area*<sup>5</sup>

***Lifelong learning:*** ‘Ministers furthermore call those working on qualifications frameworks for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide range of flexible

---

<sup>5</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003,

*learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of ECTS credits.*<sup>6</sup>

***Additional actions:*** ‘...Ministers consider it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education to include a doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna process.’<sup>7</sup>

The challenge was thus to create a European qualifications structure that facilitates the connection between national frameworks of qualifications, in order to provide the basis for introducing more precision to the relationship between different higher education qualifications with Europe. As qualifications originate and exist within national or related systems, the framework should more properly be called a Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA.

An effective overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA is necessary for many reasons. Primarily it should help the Bologna Process establish real transparency between existing European systems of higher education through the development of a shared basis for understanding these systems and the qualifications they contain. This should improve the recognition of foreign qualifications, enhance the mobility of citizens and make credential evaluation more accurate. The overarching framework should also provide guidance to those countries developing their national frameworks. Last, but not least, it provides a context for effective quality assurance.

There are significant direct and indirect connections between the full Bologna agenda and the creation of effective systems for the description and location of qualifications in Europe. The overarching framework for qualifications should play a vital role in the EHEA. The majority of the ten action lines identified

---

<sup>6</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003,

<sup>7</sup> Berlin Communiqué 2003



in the policy documents of the Bologna Process will be affected fundamentally and positively by the development of clear, outcomes-focussed qualifications frameworks that share common methodological descriptors. The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, that aids recognition, requires these common and clear descriptors. Links to the action lines are provided through:

- > The adoption of a system essentially based on three<sup>8</sup> main cycles presupposes some agreement about the nature and role of degrees at different cycles/levels and is already the basis for such a framework.
- > The establishment of a system of credits is itself one approach to help describe and quantify qualifications and make them more transparent.
- > The promotion of mobility, of staff, students and researchers, can only be facilitated by a common understanding and the fair recognition of qualifications.
- > The promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance requires transparent and, if possible, common European approaches to the expression of qualifications, qualification descriptors and other external reference points for quality and standards.
- > The promotion of the European dimension in higher education, especially integrated study programmes and joint degrees, can be helped by more transparency between existing courses, curricula and 'levels'.
- > Regarding lifelong learning, any consensus for describing degrees and levels must have beneficial implications for

---

<sup>8</sup> The Bologna Declaration formulated this goal with regard to the first and second cycles; while the Berlin Communiqué added the doctoral degree as a third cycle

---

qualification structures, other higher education qualifications, alternative pathways and degrees, and thus all stages and types of learning.

- > Higher education institutions and students are paramount stakeholders who gain by the creation of effective national and European frameworks. The autonomy of higher education institutions can be strengthened through qualifications frameworks that provide for enough flexibility and are not too rigid.
- > National and European frameworks that provide various transition points, facilitate access for non-traditional learners and thus promote greater social cohesion and strengthen the social dimension.
- > Promoting the attractiveness of the European higher education area would be made easier as the transparency and comparability of European higher education degrees is made real by the development of a common framework of qualifications. Refining of ways to describe degrees and levels in higher education is fundamental to the Bologna Process.
- > A transparent and well-articulated overarching framework, supported by national frameworks, will also be of considerable importance to the recognition, in other parts of the world, of qualifications resulting from the Bologna reforms.

The development of conceptual approaches for describing qualifications is currently an important priority for many countries as they undertake educational reforms in the light of the Bologna process. These developments are not restricted to Europe, or indeed to higher education, and can be seen in other areas of education and training and in other parts of the world as shown by the experiences in, for example, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Unfortunately, the situation is complicated by the existence of several alternative and

competing approaches. Some stakeholders in the European higher education sector have been aware of the problems associated with the current situation and there are a number of ongoing national and international attempts<sup>9</sup> designed to resolve these problems and move towards a more common understanding.

There are different ways to express and measure study programmes, including time-based (years) approaches, credit points, identification of learning outcomes and competencies, qualifications and level indicators, subject benchmarks<sup>10</sup>.

Traditional models and methods of expressing qualifications structures are giving way to systems based on explicit reference points using learning outcomes and competencies, levels and level indicators, subject benchmarks and qualification descriptors. These devices provide more precision and accuracy and facilitate transparency and comparison. Without these common approaches, full recognition, real transparency and thus the creation of an effective European Higher Education Area, will be more difficult to achieve.

## **1.2 Qualifications frameworks and the purposes of higher education**

The elaboration of a qualifications framework, whether an overarching framework for the EHEA or a national framework, cannot be divorced from the underlying goals, priorities and assumptions of higher education. The Working Group has therefore found it both useful and necessary to briefly sketch the

---

<sup>9</sup> For example, the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA), Tuning, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Subject benchmark statements is a UK approach that provides the academic community with a means for describing the nature, standards and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject. This approach has also been adopted by the '*Tuning educational structures in Europe*' project.

assumptions on which it has based its work. The issues covered in this chapter have, at least to some extent, been addressed in the Bologna Declaration, as well as the Prague and Berlin Communiqués. They have also been addressed in a number of Bologna seminars, most prominently in the Greek seminar on the social dimension of higher education (February 2003), the Danish seminar on qualifications structures (March 2003), the Czech seminar on lifelong learning (June 2003), and the Council of Europe/Portuguese seminar on recognition (April 2002)<sup>11</sup>. They were also addressed by the Council of Europe seminar on the public responsibility for higher education and research (September 2004), and were considered at the Slovenian, EUA and ESIB seminar on employability (October 2004), and at the seminar on recognition organised by the Latvian authorities and the Council of Europe in Riga in December 2004<sup>12</sup>.

As the Bologna Declaration has been implemented, there has been debate among various stakeholders at national and European levels, particularly within the Council of Europe, and a common understanding of the multiple purposes of higher education is emerging. Broadly speaking, one may identify four main purposes of higher education:

- > preparation for the labour market;
- > preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society;
- > personal development;
- > the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

---

<sup>11</sup> For these seminars see [http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/bologna\\_seminars/index.htm](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/bologna_seminars/index.htm)

<sup>12</sup> For these seminars see <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

---

For the purpose of discussion, it may be convenient to separate the four elements. It should nevertheless be underlined that the distinction between the elements is not clear-cut, and the four elements are interlinked. It may also be noted that while for the first three elements, the main emphasis will most likely be on the individual earning the qualification, for the fourth element emphasis may be at the level of society, not least in relating qualifications to employability and other social objectives. Nevertheless, all four elements have individual as well as societal dimensions.

### **Preparation for the labour market**

Preparation for the labour market is the dimension that has over the past generation been most dominant in public discourse on education. Employers have complained that the current education systems of many European countries provide students with insufficient preparation for the labour market, and this concern was one of the driving forces behind the Bologna Process.

Preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society

While democratic institutions and laws are indispensable to democratic societies, they can only function in societies marked by a democratic culture that is tolerant and accepts diversity and open debate. Democracy ultimately depends on the active participation of educated citizens. Education at all levels thus plays a key role in developing democratic culture. In addition to transferable (transversal) skills, the active participation of citizens requires a broad education in a variety of fields as well as the nurture of democratic attitudes and values and the ability to think critically. This aspect of higher education was referred to in the Bologna Declaration and brought much more explicitly into the Process through the Prague and Berlin Communiqués.

### **Personal development**

This aspect of higher education has not been explicitly addressed so far in the policy texts of the Bologna Process. While personal development may have been a more explicit goal of education and higher education in earlier generations, it is still an underlying assumption of education in Europe. The assumption may appear to have been challenged through the development of mass education, but it should nevertheless be made explicit that whilst preparation for the labour market is an important purpose of education, the aim of personal development has far from disappeared.

### **The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base**

For society as a whole, it is important to have access to advanced knowledge in a broad range of disciplines. At the most advanced levels of knowledge, this relates to research and research training. It is, however, not limited to research, as advanced knowledge and the transmission of such knowledge play important roles in a wide range of areas and at levels below that of research. Thus, whilst knowledge of advanced skills and methods of, for example welding, as well as the ability to develop them further, may not be characterised as ‘research’, these skills and their transmission are likely to be of considerable importance to a modern, technologically advanced society. This aspect of higher education was addressed by the Berlin Communiqué, in the context of the synergy between the EHEA and the European Research Area and the inclusion of the doctoral degree as the third ‘Bologna cycle’.

### **1.3 Qualifications frameworks at national and European levels and for different areas of learning**

A qualifications framework provides a systematic description of the full range of qualifications within a given education system, as well as the ways in which learners can navigate between them. Qualifications therefore have to be described in such a way as to cover the full purpose of education, so the framework must be multi-dimensional.

This is true for both national frameworks and the emerging framework for the EHEA. The latter will be less detailed than national frameworks, but one of its purposes will be to provide an overarching framework that will simplify mobility, transparency and recognition between national systems. At the same time, it is important to recognise that national frameworks will reflect the respective national discussions on the purposes of higher education and different agendas in higher education policy. To find the right balance between the diversities of national frameworks and the benefits of a close linkages between them is the main challenge for constructing an overarching framework.

Developing qualifications frameworks is a task not only for higher education and the Bologna process. The Copenhagen process aims to develop instruments to enhance the transparency of vocational qualifications and competences, and to increase co-operation in vocational education and training. This is to be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training.

Few countries have developed comprehensive frameworks covering both higher education and vocational education and training, and such a framework does not exist at the European level. The European Commission and the European Council of

---

## 2 National frameworks of qualifications in higher education >

---

### 2.1 Introduction

There are a number of concepts associated with and essential to an understanding of national frameworks of qualifications, but there is unfortunately no widespread international agreement on the accepted use of such terms as level, cycle, workload, learning outcome, qualifications framework, etc. Differences in the use of these terms makes an explanation of national frameworks and their co-ordinated development problematic. In order to overcome these difficulties the followings definitions (see box below) are employed in this chapter and throughout the whole report:

***Credit:*** a quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workloads.

***Cycle:*** the three sequential levels identified by the Bologna Process (first cycle, second cycle and third cycle) within which all European higher education qualifications are located.

***Europe/European:*** Europe/European refers to those countries that are signatories to the Bologna Declaration, whilst 'national' is used to describe the contexts within each of those countries or education systems.

***Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area:*** an overarching framework that makes transparent the relationship between European national higher education frameworks of qualifications and the qualifications they contain. It is an articulation mechanism between national frameworks.

***Learning outcomes:*** statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.



**Levels:** represent a series of sequential steps (a developmental continuum), expressed in terms of a range of generic outcomes, against which typical qualifications can be positioned.

**National framework of qualifications (higher education):** the single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between higher education qualifications.

**Profile:** either the specific (subject) field(s) of learning of a qualification or the broader aggregation of clusters of qualifications or programmes from different fields that share a common emphasis or purpose (e.g. an applied vocational as opposed to more theoretical academic studies).

**Qualifications (higher education):** any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting that particular learning outcomes have been achieved, normally following the successful completion of a recognised higher education programme of study.

**Qualification descriptors:** are generic statements of the outcomes of study. They provide clear points of reference that describe the main outcomes of a qualification often with reference to national levels.

**Reference points:** non-prescriptive indicators that support the articulation of qualifications, learning outcomes and/or other related concepts.

**Workload:** a quantitative measure of the learning activities that may feasibly be required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (e.g. lectures, seminars, practical work, private study, information retrieval, research, examinations).

---

## 2.2 Systems of higher education and national frameworks of higher education qualifications

All countries in the Bologna Process necessarily have a system of higher education that includes an understanding of the roles of higher education, of higher education institutions, and of various stakeholders, such as learners, staff in higher education institutions, and social partners. The elements of such national higher education systems are often formally defined, however there may be many aspects of higher education systems that are not precisely defined but are understood within the society in which they operate. Within higher education systems, higher education qualifications themselves are a key element and are often not clearly separated in their definition from the programmes of study leading to them.

In recent years, there has been an increasing national and international debate on higher education qualifications, and in particular how they are organised, recognised and related to each other on national and trans-national bases. In particular, the emerging developments within the Bologna Process have been key factors in stimulating such debates. The OECD has made some advances in this area with its project entitled *The Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning*. Emerging from this debate has been recognition of the need to have a specific policy focus on the higher education qualifications attained by learners who have successfully participated in programmes of various types.

In simple terms a national framework of higher education qualifications is defined here as:

*the single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which*

*defines the relationship between higher education qualifications.*

Such national frameworks typically have a number of elements; these are discussed in detail in this chapter, and include sets of specific framework criteria, levels of learning outcome and descriptors for qualifications. Some such frameworks encompass many areas of learning whilst others are confined to higher education. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of view of social partners.

### **2.3 The purposes of national higher education frameworks of qualifications**

A comprehensive restructuring of the European landscape of higher education is underway, and qualifications themselves are becoming the focus of more attention as their meaning and relevance are being considered in relation to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Part of this process is a pronounced tendency to create more explicit systems that map and explain the purpose and relationship between different qualifications.

There are various forms of national qualification frameworks; some include all levels and types of qualifications whilst others, for example, specifically separate higher education qualifications from other types of qualifications. There are thus some national systems that employ a single framework whilst others have multiple frameworks that are generally integrated in a more or less formal way. Frameworks differ greatly in the detail of their purposes and components.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> For example, some are credit-based using the ECTS system, some use other credit systems and some use no credits at all.

---

Some frameworks have a strong regulatory function based in law, whilst others are descriptions and have evolved by agreement between stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> Modern national qualification structures invariably involve much more than a simple distinction between two cycles and commonly include a range of qualifications, intermediate qualifications and levels. The development of any over-arching European model will need to be flexible enough to encompass such variations.

National frameworks of qualifications in higher education can act in two distinct ways: firstly, by directly achieving certain things; and secondly, by enabling and encouraging other developments. This latter role has been shown to be important as it helps to drive change and improvement within educational systems. These different dimensions can be illustrated by separating and identifying them. National frameworks of qualifications can achieve the following; they:

- > make explicit the purposes and aims of qualifications - by their clear description through the articulation of the learning outcomes, and by clarifying any rights to professional practice and recognition associated with them;
- > delineate points of integration and overlap between different qualifications and qualification types - thereby positioning qualifications in relation to one another and showing routes (and barriers) for progression;
- > provide a nationally agreed framework that guides and reflects the agreement of stakeholders;
- > provide a context for the review, articulation and development of existing qualifications

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, in Scotland the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is a detailed agreement between stakeholders that entails no legislation.

---

>

---

- > provide a context for the design of new qualifications.

National frameworks of qualifications can act as drivers of change in that they can help to:

- > promote the attainment of qualifications - by indicating their role and benefits for citizens, employers and all members of society;
- > nationally and internationally, raise the awareness of citizens and employers in relation to qualifications - by clarification of the various national roles and relationships between qualifications and the opportunities, recognition and mobility that are possible;
- > facilitate and support learners and clarify all of the educational opportunities available to them - by encompassing all higher education qualifications and providing a comprehensive listing of all qualifications including intermediate qualifications and, where appropriate, their credit values;
- > improve access and social inclusion - by creating a variety of alternative routes, with entry and exit points that acknowledge attainment;
- > influence the reform of qualifications to reflect changing societal needs, including the introduction of new qualifications;
- > facilitate curricular change;
- > support (autonomous) higher education institutions in meeting their responsibilities to learners and other stakeholders

promote the attractiveness of the higher education from outside of the country.

There is no precise pattern to the way that national frameworks of qualifications develop. It is quite common for them to be created by bottom-up or top-down approaches or, a fusion of both. Their very development, by consultation between stakeholders (see section 2.6), is often a cathartic procedure which itself is a dynamic learning experience for all concerned. The ownership, control and development of national frameworks of qualifications do not follow a single pattern and this reflects the reality that such frameworks are, quite properly, an area of national autonomy and political decision-making. However, there is a need to explore the adoption of some elements of shared European methodologies and terminology to describe and express qualifications and frameworks of qualifications. This does not, and should not, mean that the content, purpose, organisation and delivery of qualifications should be standardised. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that national frameworks of qualifications are dynamic structures that need to develop as the national situation and priorities change.

National frameworks of qualifications are important parts of the academic architecture within which autonomous higher education institutions can flourish and be supported. They facilitate the creation of academic independence within a system of responsibility and external reference points. Higher education institutions are provided with clear parameters for the development and validation of their own qualifications. They can thus be held responsible and accountable for their activities (by internal and external quality assurance processes) whilst retaining real ownership of their curricula. Autonomous higher education institutions can then demonstrate that each of their qualifications is allocated to the appropriate level in any national framework.

In Europe a number of countries have, as a means of reform, pioneered new outcomes-focussed approaches to their national higher education frameworks of qualifications as well as the qualifications they contain. They have gone beyond traditional

systems by emphasising not only input factors and formal course characteristics but by also identifying output factors based on learning outcomes. These countries share similar tools and methodological approaches. It is this kind of approach that is important for the development of national frameworks and Framework for qualifications of EHEA. Such frameworks employ clear external reference points (learning outcomes, subject reference points/benchmark statements, levels/cycle descriptors, workload, qualification descriptors, etc.) and provide a context for qualifications that are themselves expressed with greater clarity and precision with regard to their nature, function and skills that they certify.

## **2.4 Elements of national frameworks**

National frameworks of qualifications are typically constructed using similar elements to those indicated in the Berlin Communiqué. Qualifications themselves benefit from being described clearly, and are defined for this report as:

*any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting that particular learning outcomes have been achieved, normally following the successful completion of a recognised higher education programme of study.*<sup>16</sup>

The award of a qualification indicates that the student has completed a range of studies to a given standard and/or indicates a level of achievement by an individual who is deemed fit to perform a particular role, set of tasks or job. Qualifications are increasingly expressed in terms of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate on the successful completion of the approved programme of learning.

---

<sup>16</sup> This definition is adapted from article 1.1 of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, Lisbon 1997

---

Higher education qualifications benefit from detailed description that reflect their purpose and function and facilitate their international comparisons and recognition. In ‘new style’ qualifications frameworks, qualifications are typically described in terms of workload, cycle or level, learning outcomes, competence and profile. These elements are explored in the following sections. It is these elements that provide the transparency and ultimately the improved recognition required by the EHEA.

#### **2.4.1 Learning outcomes, including competences**

Learning outcomes represent one of the essential building blocks for transparency within higher education systems and qualifications; they were the subject of a Bologna Conference held in Edinburgh, 1-2 July 2004, where all aspects of their application were examined in the context of Bologna developments. A background study and the conference report provide detailed information on the implementation of learning outcomes across Europe. Learning outcomes have been defined above as:

*statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning.*<sup>17</sup>

Learning outcomes have applications in many locations: (i) the individual higher education institution (for course units/modules and programmes of study<sup>18</sup>); (ii) nationally (for qualifications, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance

---

<sup>17</sup> Source: the UK ‘Using Learning Outcomes’ background report for the Edinburgh ‘Bologna seminar 1-2 July 2004, section 1.2. This section explores a number of definitions of learning outcomes. The use of the verb ‘do’ in the definition used above underlines the aspect of competence or ability rather than the way in which this ability is demonstrated.

<sup>18</sup> This includes all the study leading to a particular qualification.



regimes); and (iii) internationally (for wider recognition and transparency purposes). They are important for the understanding of qualifications in society, for example by learners and employers.

Learning outcomes statements are typically characterised by the use of active verbs expressing knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, etc. With ‘outcomes-based approaches’, they have implications for qualifications, curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment, as well as quality assurance. They are thus likely to form an important part of 21<sup>st</sup> century approaches to higher education (and, indeed, to education and training generally) and the reconsideration of such vital questions as to what, whom, how, where and when we teach and assess. The very nature and role of education is being questioned, now more than ever before, and learning outcomes are important tools in clarifying the results of learning for the student, citizen, employer and educator.

In terms of curriculum design and development, learning outcomes are at the forefront of educational change. They place a focus on the coherence and aims of the qualification, the judgement of the designer and how the qualification fits within the traditions of the discipline. They represent a change in emphasis from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’ typified by what is known as the adoption of a student-centred approach, as opposed to the more traditional, teacher-centred viewpoint. Student-centred learning produces a focus on the teaching - learning - assessment relationships and the fundamental links between the design, delivery, assessment and measurement of learning.

Learning outcomes are not just an isolated tool at the level of curriculum design but also represent an approach that plays a significant role in a much wider context that includes: the integration of academic and vocational education and training (VET); the assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL);

the development of qualifications frameworks that accommodate lifelong learning; the development of credit transfer and accumulation systems.

### **Achieving learning outcomes**

The concept of learning outcomes implies that the manner of the achievement of a qualification is not as important as the achievement of the qualification itself. This is very relevant to the recognition of prior learning, which is enhanced by the increased use of learning outcomes. A broad understanding of the recognition of prior learning in relation to qualifications is that this can be for the purposes of:

- > entry to a programme leading to a qualification;
- and also
- > allocation of credit towards an qualification, or exemption from some programme requirements
- > eligibility for a full qualification

The recognition of prior learning can also be directly relevant in terms of facilitating employment. Making a full qualification on the basis of the recognition of prior learning is a relatively new concept. Many countries are seeking to encourage the continuation, expansion and further development of processes for the recognition of prior learning. In France, a national system has been in place for some time; this is explained in Appendix 4. Whilst many higher education institutions within the UK also recognise and accredit prior learning, national guidelines have only recently been published<sup>19</sup>.

In June 2004 the Council of European Ministers, and the representatives of the Member States meeting within the

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/apel/guidance.htm>

European Council, adopted Common European Principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>20</sup>.

It is important to the development and implementation of a European framework that the broad connections between learning outcomes, levels, level descriptors and credits, and teaching, learning and assessment are recognised. Learning outcomes have been described as a basic educational building block and as such they have direct and powerful links with a number of other educational tools. They make possible much more than the simple identification of learning achievements. They have a direct relationship to levels and level indicators. When learning outcomes are written they are created in the context of the institutional/national/international reference points that aid the maintenance of standards and quality. The development of curricula in terms of learning outcomes does not, therefore, happen in a vacuum. Appropriate reference points guide the application of module/unit and programme learning outcomes.

### **Descriptors of learning outcomes**

In the context of the above descriptor of learning outcomes (statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning), there is a need to consider the extent to which common approaches to the understanding and definition of learning outcomes between countries should be explored.

In the Tuning project, the description of competences embraces three strands, 'knowing and understanding' (theoretical knowledge of an academic field, the capacity to know and understand), 'knowing how to act' (practical and operational application of knowledge to certain situations), 'knowing how

---

<sup>20</sup> Council 9600/04

to be' (values as an integral element of the way of perceiving and living with others and in a social context). Several countries, including Ireland<sup>21</sup> and Denmark<sup>22</sup> have subtle variations in their approaches to, and definitions of, learning outcomes.

Furthermore, a general distinction can be made between generic outcomes associated with all holders of an qualification and specific outcomes associated with disciplines and fields of learning and their particular qualifications. Both the Tuning project, and the shared qualification descriptors (Dublin descriptors) that were developed within the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), include generic competences (skills and knowledge) and include attributes such as the capacity to learn, the capacity for analysis and syntheses etc. The Tuning project identified a list of 30 generic competences and has also identified specific outcomes in each of the fields of learning that it has examined.

There has been much discussion about the nature of learning outcomes in higher education and in education generally. So far, there is no agreed approach to describing them in a generic sense. For the purposes of this report, learning outcomes are understood in their broadest sense and, in the case of the Dublin Descriptors and the Tuning project, include competences. Within some discourses competences may have a more precise meaning, for example, in some assessment contexts they are associated with the performance of work-related tasks.

In developing frameworks of qualifications the associated descriptors of learning outcome statements need to be explicit about whether they are, for example, written to represent minimum threshold statements (showing the minimum requirements to obtain a pass), or written as reference points

---

<sup>21</sup> See annex 5

<sup>22</sup> See annex 5

---

describing the typical (showing the normal level of achievement of successful learners). Either approach is legitimate but it is important, for the purpose of national and international understanding, that each national framework makes its approach absolutely clear.

#### **2.4.2 Levels and typical/generic qualifications**

Levels are traditionally the key structural elements on which many national frameworks of qualifications are built. Levels can be understood as:

*representing a series of sequential steps (a developmental continuum), expressed in terms of a range of generic outcomes, against which typical qualifications can be positioned.*

Levels are pragmatic constructs; they have been developed over the years. Different countries take different approaches in determining the number of levels, the ways in which levels are described, the range of outcomes spanned by levels, and the width and depth of levels.

Some national frameworks while having levels in which qualifications are placed, do not explicitly set out the range of outcomes specifically associated with a level (for example the framework for England Wales and Northern Ireland). Others have what are described as *level descriptors* or *level indicators* (for example Ireland) that set out the range of learning outcomes associated with each level. Where there are no indicators or descriptors these can be understood in the context of the typical qualifications contained within them.

The majority of national frameworks of qualifications employ their own systems of levels, within the broad Bologna cycles, in order to increase the understanding and transparency between their qualifications. These levels need not be directly related to

years of full-time study, in either qualifications or/and credit frameworks e.g. in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) each of the 12 identified levels across all learning is the location of one or more typical qualification and each level is distinguished in terms of the complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding, degree of independence and creativity involved, general cognitive skills, the range and sophistication of practice, etc. The expression of clear levels is an important feature of any qualifications frameworks. They directly facilitate the realisation of the common purposes that qualifications frameworks are created to achieve.

The concept of typical/generic types of qualifications is also one that is incorporated in many national frameworks. The level indicators/descriptors act to assist in the positioning of typical/generic qualifications at levels.

These typical/generic qualifications are the principal class of qualifications made within each level. For most levels, such typical/generic qualifications capture a typical range of achievements in a typical qualification at the level – there may be more than one such typical qualification. They include the learning outcomes as they have been defined in a national framework. For example, many national frameworks incorporate first, second and third cycle degrees, as typical/generic qualifications.

Typical/generic qualifications act as a guide (for curriculum designers and learners) as to the kinds of demand it is appropriate to make of learners. The generic qualifications themselves often have descriptors that define the learning outcomes associated with them; these are normally generic in nature and can be applied across subject disciplines and modes of learning. In higher education they are primarily used by: course designers (developing learning outcomes and assessment criteria); those involved in quality assurance (validating, reviewing and approving programmes of learning); credential

evaluators (nationally and internationally, as reference points to help make accurate recognition judgements).

### **2.4.3 Credits and workload**

The Bologna signatory states identified ECTS as an important component of the European Higher Education Area and encouraged states to employ ‘a system of credits’ to facilitate international student mobility and international curriculum development. A large number of countries have already adopted ECTS by law as an accumulation system. Furthermore, the Zurich Conference on credit transfer and accumulation, held by the European Universities Association (EUA) in October 2002, stressed the central role of ECTS in higher education, which was endorsed by the ministers in Berlin.

A credit framework is a way of valuing, measuring, describing and comparing learning achievement, and credits themselves are a quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workload. Credits and levels are tools used to represent learning and measure learning volume. National credit frameworks can provide the broad underlying principles to be shared by higher education institutions and their stakeholders, whilst individual credit schemes can exist at the institutional level and detail the procedures and rules of progression established within them.

The drive to use credits is primarily because they support more flexibility within education systems. They can link diverse forms and types of education. The contribution of credits to national and the overarching European framework of qualifications is that they can provide an additional dimension, an added value, to further improve mobility (student, staff and programmes of learning), recognition and transparency.

The national role of credit frameworks varies between different countries just as their frameworks of qualifications and national systems of higher education vary. Similarly, the detailed nature, purpose and rules behind national credit framework are diverse, and matters of domestic concern and autonomy - as are national frameworks of qualifications. At the national level credits are introduced to achieve a range of objectives including any or all of the following:

- > to promote student mobility (within and between institutions as well as internationally;
- > to improve curriculum design (and innovation) and encourage flexible routes and pathways within and between qualifications;
- > to facilitate the creation of diversity in national higher education qualifications and institutions;
- > to promote the development of multiple higher education entry and exit points;
- > to help encourage widening participation and lifelong learning;
- > to improve the recognition of learning achievements including different modes, locations and types of learning (e.g. distance education and work-based APEL approaches);
- > to provide a reference point for the purpose of quality assurance
- > to provide a reference point for funding;
- > to assist in the clarification of information to all stakeholders;



- > to prevent overloaded curricula and undue burden on learners

Currently, many European countries are adopting, or have already adopted national, regional or local credit frameworks/schemes to facilitate the modernisation of their education systems. Increasing numbers of these are based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) using a tariff of 60-credits per full time year. This development has resulted in a shift in ECTS from its traditional role as a credit transfer, mobility system primarily concerned with the recognition of periods of learning for students who take part of their studies in another country. It is now evolving into a wider pan-European credit accumulation and transfer system which impacts on all higher education programmes of learning.

In the development of national frameworks of qualifications there is a need to show that they are supported by credit systems which are compatible with ECTS and that credits and qualifications are described in terms of learning outcomes, levels and associated workloads. Workload is defined for this paper as:

*a quantitative measure of all learning activities that may feasibly be required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (e.g. lectures, seminars, practical work, private study, information retrieval, research, examinations).*

The time required for an average student to undertake the workload should inform the national credit system. The feasibility of attaining the learning outcomes required for credit within programmes is important for the credibility of the framework and its helpfulness to learners. It is important, in order to avoid confusion, that there is consistent use of credits in both national and European contexts.

#### **2.4.4 Profile**

National frameworks typically include references to ‘profile’; this is an important element for consideration when building any national framework of qualifications. Profile can refer either to the specific (subject) field(s) of learning of a qualification or to the broader aggregation of clusters of qualifications from different fields that share a common emphasis or purpose, for example on applied vocational as opposed to more theoretical academic studies.

Fields of learning are central to the European tradition of higher education. Students typically obtain a degree in some field. The work of the Tuning project has demonstrated how much common ground can be identified by trans-national collaborative efforts within fields of learning. This work will continue and inasmuch as higher learning is by definition always changing, the work is unending. Even the boundaries between fields are evolving. The level of detail with which the boundaries are drawn varies across fields. In some cases there are professional reasons for being quite precise about whether a qualification is or is not within a field, whereas for others some measure of ambiguity about which field a qualification belongs in may be acceptable. Various taxonomies of fields of learning exist. Recent years have also seen the development of a number of trans-disciplinary study programmes and it is recognised that, at least in many fields, a learner’s competence and attractiveness to the labour market may be enhanced by supplementing a concentration or core competence in a given area (e.g. economics or political science) with more limited competence in other areas, such as foreign languages, law, statistics, history, etc.

Profile, in the sense of clusters of qualifications sharing a purpose, is a prominent feature of some qualifications systems and is absent in others. In many cases the origins of the distinctions are rooted in binary (or even more complex) systems of provision. In some cases these distinctions have

been translated into outcomes terms and are a feature of the new post-Bologna system. Other systems have reduced or eliminated these distinctions. The existence of these differences in profile is relevant to the framework objectives as they sometimes influence mobility between cycles, even within countries.

## **2.5 Quality assurance and national frameworks of qualifications within national contexts**

Quality assurance has a double aspect: the internal quality assurance and development at higher education institutions and the external quality assurance undertaken by independent bodies.

In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on the development and use of explicit criteria and processes for quality assurance that are open to external scrutiny, and the majority of Bologna countries now have quality assurance bodies linked to higher education. Within the Berlin Communiqué, the ministers committed themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stressed that ‘consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework’. They committed themselves to have national quality assurance systems in place by 2005 meeting four minimum criteria<sup>23</sup>. At the European level they stressed the

---

<sup>23</sup> National quality assurance systems should include:  
A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.  
Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.  
A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.  
International participation, co-operation and networking.

need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance.

A set of common and shared principles for quality assurance is emerging; this is recognised as underpinning quality assurance irrespective of the various national approaches which must, if they are to be effective, reflect local context and culture in the detail of their application. These shared bases for quality assurance are described in detail within the ‘standards and guidelines’ being developed by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB under the mandate from the ministers in their Berlin communiqué.

Within the EHEA there are however significant differences in approach to quality assurance. Some countries include direct ministerial accreditation of individual programmes, whilst other systems accredit institutions. In yet others the quality assurance processes involve either the review of individual programmes and / or the audit of the institutions responsible for delivering the programmes of study. However, all systems include an element of ‘externality’, whether by external inspectors or by academic peers. There is also a general trend towards increasing the input of students and other stakeholders within quality assurance.

Increasingly, quality assurance involves procedures that are more clearly defined, and it thus relies upon the use of explicit criteria including, where they have been developed, national frameworks of qualifications. Greater transparency of quality assurance procedures is also being supported through inclusion of a wider range of external, and in some cases international, reference points.

In all cases where national frameworks of qualifications have been developed, whether for general, vocational, and/or higher education, they are primarily intended to provide information on qualifications and in particular their inter-relationships; but

they can be and are also used in quality assurance. There are, however, differences in the ways in which the frameworks are used, and intended to be used. Where the delivery of programmes is formally regulated, either by a ministry or other organisation external to the delivering institutions, the framework and its components may be used to establish and/or identify whether specified minimum standards have been met. Such can be the basis of accreditation, although regulation of programmes is not necessarily linked to minimum standards. Elsewhere, and in particular in those countries where the academic institutions have autonomous powers to design their own programmes and set academic standards themselves, qualification frameworks are used as a ‘point of reference’ for both general guidance and within a quality assurance system. In such cases the components of the framework tend to be expressed within a less prescriptive context.

‘Externality’ is increasingly recognised as an essential part of quality assurance, and so it should be within the development and application of new national qualifications frameworks. For such frameworks to be of benefit to stakeholders, including intending and current students, and their employers, the frameworks need to be expressed in terms that are understandable and relevant. These may not always sit comfortably with the precise and detailed language often used or thought to be necessary for regulation.

For pedagogical reasons and to address the needs of stakeholders, the descriptors used within national frameworks are increasingly concerned with identifying ‘achievements’, or the outcomes of learning, rather than referring primarily to ‘input measures’. The inclusion of such an achievements/outcomes based approach will be essential if national frameworks are to meet the needs of all stakeholders and interested parties. This shift in emphasis has a direct impact on quality assurance processes and provides both the rationale and the need to move away from the application of merely mechanistic

approaches, particularly where these are based primarily on ‘input measures’ (e.g. delivered material, time, etc.).

Traditionally within higher education, and largely irrespective of national agendas, programmes have been predominantly planned by the provider(s), with the coherence of the programme setting the context for any quality assurance, whether this is based on implicit/subjective or explicit/objective criteria. With the aspirations of the lifelong learning agendas being promoted at national levels throughout the EHEA, there is increasing emphasis on the role of the stakeholder (student and employer) in programme planning. To accommodate such changes new approaches to quality assurance will be required, including some that can cope with a primary interest in units of study and their combination.

With different emphases in purpose, and marked diversity in quality assurance practices it is inevitable that the application of national frameworks within quality assurance will vary with regard to emphasis and detail of process. Nevertheless, all are essentially concerned with “trust building” and establishing mutual confidence both within national and international contexts. National frameworks have and can continue to provide the stimulus for greater clarity about qualifications and their quality assurance, and progression between them. There is no single model for the application of national frameworks of qualifications within quality assurance whether for assessing the standards of those qualifications or the quality of the provision that leads to them. Experience in those countries that have developed national frameworks has clearly demonstrated that they can be, and are a vital component of the quality assurance environment. It is important to recognise that for national frameworks to fulfil their roles most effectively in supporting effective confidence and “trust” in qualifications, their form, components and application will need to reflect the characteristics of the national context in which they work, including the ‘quality culture’ of the HE community and how it addresses the needs of stakeholders.

## 2.6 The role of stakeholders in national frameworks

Qualifications are tools for the promotion of trust between the various parties who use these qualifications. There are many elements that go into building up trust. Historically qualifications may have relied for their currency on trust built up among relatively narrow groups of users. For example, such groups include those within a single professional or occupational sector, or those concerned with certain stages of education or training. In the era of lifelong learning, the community of trust surrounding qualifications must be broadened without undermining the strength of the trust itself. There are mechanisms to support the development of trust, such as provisions for setting standards and assuring quality, but it is fundamentally a social and political process as well as a technical one.

The centrality of trust to qualifications was well expressed in the Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa in April 2002.

*‘The success of a qualifications framework may be measured by the extent to which its standards and qualifications are valued and used. Unless providers offer them, and unless committed employers understand and demand them, standards and qualifications per se will be inert and disregarded. Thus a qualifications framework cannot stand on its own but needs to be embedded in both the provider community and the communities of users. Trust, which is closely allied to credibility and acceptance, is an essential attribute of successful qualifications anywhere, whether conventional or otherwise. If outcomes-based qualifications are too far removed*

*from the contexts where learning is done or where qualifications are put to use they will be rejected or ignored'.<sup>24</sup>*

The development of any framework of qualifications must take into account the need to develop trust among the various stakeholders and confidence in the integrity of the resultant framework.<sup>25</sup> It is vital to identify the stakeholders and advance consensus-building mechanisms in framework development. An important way to build trust and acceptance is to ensure that any top-down approach is fused with a bottom-up process. There is no perfect way to achieve this and different states have adopted different techniques. Whatever the approaches adopted, it is important to include a variety of stakeholders and a number of ways to build a consensus.

The stakeholders may include: learners/students; providers of education and training; government and appropriate government agencies; awarding bodies; higher education professors/teachers; employers and the business sector; trade unions; community and voluntary organisations; professional bodies; etc. The cooperation of governments, higher education institutions and students based on partnership is an underlying principle of the Bologna Process. Consensus-building mechanisms in the development of national frameworks of qualifications may include a number of measures such as: the broad composition of any statutory body and its executive staff; a publicly advertised consultation phase; publication of papers and submissions, on the internet; international research and consultation; formal survey work with learners and employers; a broadly-based consultative group that meets regularly to

---

<sup>24</sup> Report of the study team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa, April 2002, page 58.

<sup>25</sup> The concept of 'zones of mutual trust' has also been considered extensively in a recent report for CEDEFOP carried out in support of Copenhagen process for VET: Mike Coles and Tim Oates: European reference levels for education and training, March 2004.



produce extensive, supporting documentation; an open approach by all to questioning the purposes of qualifications and standards; sector meetings (e.g., to consider employment, community, and voluntary sector perspectives); bilateral meetings with stakeholder organisations; the securing of ongoing political support for the initiative; consultation outside the state, particularly with neighbouring jurisdictions; and participation in European and international organisations and meetings.

## **2.7 Conclusions: good practice for the development of national frameworks of qualifications**

An examination of the nature, development and effectiveness of existing ‘new style’ higher education national frameworks of qualifications reveals a wide pattern of different experiences from which a number of good practice recommendations can be identified. The following list indicates some of the most useful aspects that can facilitate the creation of successful new national frameworks of qualifications.

- > The development and review process for producing good frameworks is most effective when it involves all relevant stakeholders both within and outside higher education. Higher education frameworks naturally link to VET and post-secondary education and as such are best viewed and treated as a national initiative. This also makes possible the inclusion of, or links to, other areas of education and training outside higher education.
- > The framework for higher education qualifications should identify a clear and nationally agreed set of purposes (section 2.3 of this report explores a range of possibilities).
- > Frameworks for higher education qualifications benefit from the inclusion of cycles and /or levels, and articulation

with outcome-focussed indicators and/or descriptors of qualifications.

- > The use of learning outcomes in describing units, modules, and whole qualifications aids their transparency, recognition and subsequent student and citizen mobility. The identification of formal links to learning outcomes should play an important role in the development of national frameworks of qualifications.
- > More flexible higher education frameworks of qualifications have the benefit of promoting multiple pathways into and through higher education, and thus through encouraging lifelong learning and the efficient use of resources promote greater social cohesion.
- > Higher education frameworks of qualifications benefit from being directly linked to credit accumulation and transfer systems. Credits are student-centred tools that can enhance the flexibility, clarity, progression and coherence of educational systems when they are expressed in terms of learning outcomes, levels/cycles and workload. Credit systems facilitate bridges and links between different forms, modes, levels and sectors of education and can be instrumental in facilitating access, inclusion and lifelong learning.
- > Higher education frameworks of qualifications should explicitly link to academic standards, national and institutional quality assurance systems, and public understanding of the place and level of nationally recognised qualifications.
- > Public confidence in academic standards requires public understanding of the achievements represented by different higher education qualifications and titles. This confidence and understanding is enhanced by the publication of appropriate institutional audits and/or subject review reports.

---

>

---

- > The development and application of ‘new style’ national frameworks of qualifications facilitates the development of autonomous higher education institutions by creating clear external reference points that help to promote high quality, responsible and responsive institutions.
- > National frameworks of qualifications need to articulate in a transparent way with the overarching European framework for qualifications. The process of articulation should involve the careful mapping of national qualifications (their levels, learning outcomes and descriptors) with the cycle descriptors identified for the European overarching framework (see section three for a discussion of appropriate protocols).

---

## **3 The framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area >**

---

### **3.1 Purposes and nature of the framework of qualifications of the EHEA**

A framework for qualifications can fulfil many purposes and the various national frameworks already in existence or development embody diverse purposes. The framework for the EHEA derives its distinctive purposes from the objectives expressed through the Bologna Process. The most directly relevant of these objectives are international transparency, recognition, and mobility.

- > International transparency is at the heart of the Bologna Declaration's call for a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. While other devices, such as the Diploma Supplement, also have a role to play in this objective, it will be difficult to ensure that qualifications can be easily read and compared across borders without a simplifying architecture for mutual understanding, through the construction of a framework,. Moreover the relatively rapid success in the introduction of the two-cycle model through much of the EHEA has in some ways already served to underline that comparable structure of qualifications is not in itself sufficient for genuine comparability and transparency. This realisation led to the call in the Berlin communiqué for an overarching framework to link the national frameworks together in a coherent way.
- > International recognition of qualifications builds on transparency. A framework, which provides a common understanding of the outcomes represented by a qualification rather than a mere assertion of comparability, will greatly enhance the usefulness of qualifications across the EHEA. There are a variety of purposes for the recognition of qualifications – including employment and access to continuing education – involving different stakeholders. The development of a common overarching framework through the collaborative efforts of stakeholders

across Europe will enhance the other actions being made to improve recognition for all of these purposes.

- > International mobility of learners and graduates depends on the recognition of their prior learning and qualifications gained. Learners moving between qualifications or cycles require recognition in order to access more advanced programmes. Students moving within their studies, and their advisors, can benefit from the clarity that may be provided through the specification of the level and nature of the study programmes. These support mobility since learners can have greater confidence that the outcomes of study abroad will contribute to the qualification sought in their home country. A framework will be of particular help in supporting the development and recognition of joint degrees from more than one country.

An overarching European framework has some distinctive objectives, which differ from those of national frameworks. As a meta-framework, it is intended to assist in the identification of points of articulation between national frameworks. It also serves as a point of reference for those developing or reviewing national frameworks of qualification.

The framework for qualifications of the EHEA should be regarded as an overarching framework. That is to say, it provides a meta-framework within which to develop national frameworks and, in broad terms, it stipulates the outline and boundary of national frameworks, and is a device, which helps to provide clearer understanding of how the various qualifications made within the European higher education area, are related to each other and articulate with each other. It expresses how the qualifications systems of the various states in the area are related to each other, especially where these national systems have themselves been incorporated into formal national frameworks. It offers a common set of cycles and levels, with descriptors for those cycles. Much of the detail expressed in national frameworks is neither necessary nor

desirable in an overarching framework. Indeed, one would expect that as national frameworks evolve they would introduce elements that reflect national needs. These may include qualifications for partial completion of cycles or attainment within a cycle. The framework for qualifications of the EHEA does not replace national frameworks. It augments them by providing a series of reference points whereby they can demonstrate their mutual compatibility.

The overarching framework does not prescribe the content or form of national qualifications systems. They are a matter for the competent national authorities and may be achieved through the specification of national frameworks of qualifications.

Not all qualifications included in national frameworks will necessarily correspond to the completion of one of the major cycles in the overarching European framework. Some qualifications fall within cycles. The framework will however also provide some implicit guidance for the assessment of such qualifications. There may also be specialised and minor qualifications, which do not correspond to one of the cycles.

The dimensions and features of some qualifications within national frameworks do not have counterparts in other countries. The overarching European framework will not refer to such features but neither will it exclude them from national systems. One example of such a feature is ‘profile’, as discussed in section 2.4.4, which is an important element in some national qualifications systems but not in others. The overarching framework will not refer to such features; it has no intentions or competence to influence inclusion/exclusion of such features from national frameworks.

### **3.2 Cycles and levels**

A fundamental question for any framework of qualifications concerns its structure and the number of divisions it contains.

For the EHEA framework this question is already largely answered. The Bologna Declaration asserts that there will be two main cycles and the Berlin Communiqué elaborates upon this to specify a third (doctoral) cycle linked to research. The successful completion of the first cycle gives access to programmes of the second cycle. The successful completion of the second cycle gives access to programmes of the third cycle. “Access” is used here in the same sense as in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, namely the right to apply and be considered for admission to a programme of higher education. It does not necessarily imply an automatic right of admission or entitlement to a place on a programme.

In addition, the Berlin communiqué requests that the Bologna Process Follow-up Group explore whether and how shorter programmes within higher education may be included. The short cycle qualifications of interest are those within or linked to the first cycle.

Some national frameworks include further sub-divisions within the three main Bologna cycles, but such sub-divisions are not widely shared across the area. The relationship of qualifications in such subdivisions to those corresponding to the main cycles within the respective national frameworks can and probably will be used informally to indicate their approximate position in relation to the EHEA framework. Such qualifications may also be awarded credit that can contribute towards qualifications of another cycle. The overarching framework of qualifications should play an important role in facilitating fair recognition of such qualifications within national frameworks that do not have similar qualifications by a process of partial recognition.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> For Partial recognition see the Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in 2001.

The concept of “cycle” has been used in the Bologna Process to refer to stages in higher education, incorporating qualifications, programmes, and phases of learning. The term “level” is more commonly found in documentation on national frameworks of qualifications.

Level is also used to refer to the provision of education, for example in UNESCO’s International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Unlike the framework, which has the variety of purposes already discussed, ISCED is primarily a tool for statistical classification.<sup>27</sup>

The Berlin communiqué refers to basing the framework on “levels”. It is not intended that the EHEA framework would specify conventions on naming qualifications. It is unlikely that conventions such as “bachelor’s level” or “master’s level”, which are used in some though by no means all national systems, would be acceptable. A simple numeric designation such as “level 1”, “level 2” would risk confusion, especially where some national framework have numbered level systems starting well ‘below’ higher education. The link with study programmes suggested by “cycles” is however not inappropriate given that the specifications of the framework must take workload into account. Therefore it is proposed that the three principal divisions in the framework be identified by reference to qualifications corresponding to completion of the cycle:

---

<sup>27</sup> ISCED 1997 recognises that while it is desirable to classify levels on the basis of educational content, the diversity of programmes, curricula and structure make this impossible to do on a worldwide scale without employing additional criteria such as entrance requirements, duration and national qualification structure. ISCED Level 5 and 6 refer to tertiary education. Level 5 is defined as tertiary education not leading to an advanced research qualification. It is further divided in 5A and 5B, using a set of subsidiary criteria. Level 6 refers to tertiary education leading to an advanced research qualification.





- > First cycle (higher education) qualifications
- > Second cycle (higher education) qualifications
- > Third cycle (higher education) qualifications

The Berlin communiqué asked that shorter higher education linked to the first cycle be considered. For the purposes of this report this is referred to as the short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle). Qualifications corresponding to successful completion of the short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) can be identified. Such short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications are not universally employed, and comparable qualifications do not exist in all national systems. There is no intention to mandate the creation of such a qualification where the national system does not see fit to include it. However, since short cycle qualifications are found in many countries it is important to give them a place in the framework. This will help for the mutual recognition of the qualifications between those states that have them. It will also help to develop recognition of short cycle qualifications in those states which do not use them in their national systems but who receive holders of such qualifications. At the same time it is recognised that some states have a variety of qualifications in or about this level, with diverse purposes and structures. Some are part of higher education and some are classified as being outside of higher education. The short cycle descriptor is not intended to cover all of the diversity of qualifications that fall within, but do not complete, the first cycle.

Programmes leading to a first cycle qualification (or a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle where it is used) have a 'start point'. This is sometimes spoken of as an entry route. Strictly speaking this is not a qualification and is thus not part of the framework for qualifications of the EHEA. Moreover there are diverse pathways into the various forms of higher education within some states, which make it difficult to define a

‘level’ for entry in higher education; indeed, ‘level’ may not be the most appropriate concept to apply. However, it is thought useful that some reference is made to the starting point(s) for the framework. For the purposes of the EHEA framework it is generally considered sufficient to refer to Article IV of the Lisbon Recognition Convention concerning qualifications giving access to higher education:

*“Each Party shall recognise the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for access to higher education in those Parties for the purpose of access to programmes belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought.”*

### **3.3 Descriptors of learning outcomes, including competences**

A key element in contemporary qualifications frameworks is the specification of outcomes. There are various ways in which the range of outcomes can be categorised and specified. Traditionally higher education was relatively explicit about the knowledge (outcomes) to be achieved, or at least the knowledge covered by the curriculum. It was however somewhat less explicit on the skills or competences required for the award a given qualification. Competences, such as those of critical evaluation, were and are embedded or implicit in the assessment values and practices. It is becoming increasingly widespread practice that as wide a range of the outcomes as possible are specified. Such explicit specification facilitates the comparison of qualifications.

The generic outcomes for a qualification, that is the learning outcomes common to all holders of a particular type of qualification, may be expressed in a ‘qualification descriptor’.

The descriptors for a European framework must of necessity be quite general in nature. Not only must they accommodate a wide range of disciplines and profiles but they must also accommodate, as far as possible, the national variations in how qualifications have been developed and specified. For practical purposes, the descriptors should be short and easy to understand. They should avoid technical language, bearing in mind that they will be used in reference to national qualifications systems expressed in a variety of languages.

After the Prague Ministerial Conference (2001), it became increasingly clear that the structure of cycles introduced through Bologna would have to be supplemented by more detail on the outcomes of these cycles if the objectives of transparency, recognition and mobility were to be met. An informal group of higher education specialists from a variety of countries met under the umbrella of the Joint Quality Initiative ([www.jointquality.org](http://www.jointquality.org)). This grouping developed a set of descriptors that have come to be referred to as the ‘Dublin Descriptors’. The initial descriptors for the first and second cycle were commended to the ministers’ meeting in Berlin by the Amsterdam Consensus. Subsequently the group has developed a descriptor for the third cycle. Recently, a descriptor for a short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), following the pattern of the other three cycles, has also been produced. These descriptors (especially for the first and second cycles) have been found to be useful in various ways by national quality assurance agencies, developers of higher education standards, and designers of higher programmes. So far, no significant revisions have been proposed.

Qualification descriptors are usually designed to be read as general statements of the typical achievement of learners who have been awarded a qualification on successful completion of a cycle. The concept of typical qualification cycle descriptors was developed within the Joint Quality Initiative. This concept found wider acceptance and applicability than possible use of broader level descriptors. Level descriptors are typically more

comprehensive and attempt to indicate the full range of outcomes associated with a level.

The Dublin descriptors have been developed as a set and are intended to be read with reference to each other. They are primarily intended for use in the alignment of qualifications and hence national frameworks. National frameworks may themselves have additional elements or outcomes, and may have more detailed and specific functions.

The Dublin descriptors were built on the following elements:

- > knowledge and understanding;
- > applying knowledge and understanding;
- > making judgements;
- > communications skills;
- > learning skills.

The Dublin Descriptors offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle. They are not meant to be prescriptive; they do not represent threshold or minimum requirements and they are not exhaustive; similar or equivalent characteristics may be added or substituted. The descriptors seek to identify the nature of the whole qualification. The descriptors are not subject specific nor are they limited to academic, professional or vocational areas. For particular disciplines the descriptors should be read within the context and use of language of that discipline. Wherever possible, they should be cross-referenced with any expectations/competencies published by the relevant community of scholars and/or practitioners. In adopting the Dublin descriptors the Working Group recognise that further elaboration of the existing elements and/or introduction of new elements will be part of the evolution of them as reference

points to the framework for higher education qualification of the EHEA.

**The Dublin descriptors (December 2004) include:**

*Qualifications that signify completion of the **higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle)** are awarded to students who:*

- > have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education<sup>28</sup> and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle;*
- > can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts;*
- > have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems;*
- > can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients;*
- > have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.*

*Qualifications that signify completion of **the first cycle** are awarded to students who:*

- > have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education<sup>27</sup>, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported*

---

<sup>28</sup> General secondary education also includes vocational education with a sufficiently general component.

*by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;*

- > can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional<sup>29</sup> approach to their work or vocation, and have competences<sup>30</sup> typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;*
- > have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;*
- > can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;*
- > have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.*

*Qualifications that signify completion of **the second cycle** are awarded to students who: [det efterfølgende skal være i kursiv]*

- > have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or*

---

<sup>29</sup> The word ‘**professional**’ is used in the descriptors in its broadest sense, relating to those attributes relevant to undertaking work or a vocation and that involves the application of some aspects of advanced learning. It is not used with regard to those specific requirements relating to regulated professions. The latter may be identified with the profile / specification.

<sup>30</sup> The word ‘**competence**’ is used in the descriptors in its broadest sense, allowing for gradation of abilities or skills. It is not used in the narrower sense identified solely on the basis of a ‘yes/no’ assessment.

---

*opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research<sup>31</sup> context;*

- > *can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;*
- > *have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;*
- > *can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;*
- > *have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.*
- > *Qualifications that signify completion of **the third cycle** are awarded to students who: [disse linier er ikke i bullit]*
- > *have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;*

---

<sup>31</sup> The word ‘**research**’ is used to cover a wide variety of activities, with the context often related to a field of study; the term is used here to represent a careful study or investigation based on a systematic understanding and critical awareness of knowledge. The word is used in an inclusive way to accommodate the range of activities that support original and innovative work in the whole range of academic, professional and technological fields, including the humanities, and traditional, performing, and other creative arts. It is not used in any limited or restricted sense, or relating solely to a traditional ‘scientific method’.

---

>

---

- > *have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;*
- > *have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;*
- > *are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;*
- > *can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;*
- > *can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.*

The Joint Quality Initiative has also compared the descriptors and identified the step changes found between cycles in each of these elements. See Appendix 6.

### **3.4 Credit and workload**

The advantages associated with national credit systems can to some extent be replicated at the European level. Furthermore, there would be additional benefits in the adoption of a suitable common credit system that could support the qualifications framework and could potentially:

- > provide national frameworks of qualifications with a common credit language (based on learning outcomes and student workload) for describing and locating diverse national qualifications;



---

>

---

- > help promote the widespread development and implementation of learning outcomes and competences with credits used as a method of quantifying and expressing learning achievement;
- > build upon a wide existing European base of experience amongst institutions associated with the international credit developments;
- > facilitate the precise location of learning by linking credits to national systems of levels and the overarching Bologna cycle descriptors;
- > act as an additional set of reference points to facilitate Europe-wide quality assurance and the understanding of national frameworks of qualifications;
- > provide a seamless bridge between higher education and other education, particularly enabling the development of a consistent and common European framework for lifelong learning that integrates all forms and modes of learning;
- > aid the development and construction of international joint degree programmes and programme collaborations by facilitating flexible learning paths and a range of different qualification profiles;
- > facilitate the global articulation of the European Higher Education Area (and the recognition of its qualifications) with other credit-based systems.

The Berlin communiqué noted that “ECTS is increasingly becoming a generalised basis for the national credit systems.” ECTS was initiated in 1989 as a credit transfer system but is now developing as a system for credit accumulation as well as for transfer. Additionally, and importantly, although ECTS was initially conceived of as a measure of work load, it has also been further developed to include the concepts of learning outcomes, and in some of the national implementations of

ECTS there are examples of the use of ‘notional learning time’ to relate ECTS to volumes of learning outcomes.

While some national frameworks are styled as frameworks for credit and qualifications, in which it is possible to assign units of learning directly to the framework without regard to a specific qualification, such an approach is not necessary or feasible for an overarching European framework. The overarching framework for the EHEA is intended to facilitate the comparison of qualifications as awarded within national qualifications systems, or less frequently jointly between two or more national systems under a joint degree arrangement.

It is proposed that credits are assigned to qualifications within national systems, and credit systems developed and implemented within national qualifications frameworks should be compatible with the ECTS.

The discussions in recent years about the first and second cycle qualifications, notably the Bologna Process seminars of 2001 and 2003 in Helsinki, have discussed qualifications in terms of the range of ECTS credits associated with them. Approaches to ECTS weightings for the short cycle, were considered in the work of the JQI and EURASHE. There has not been any detailed consideration of ECTS and the third cycle. This topic was considered at the Austrian-German-EUA Seminar in Salzburg in February 2005 but a conclusion was not reached<sup>32</sup>.

Building on these discussions, the following are proposed as guidelines for the association of credits with qualifications within national frameworks:

---

<sup>32</sup> A joint statement by the Rector’s Conferences in Austria, Germany and Switzerland indicates that an appropriate limit on the time to doctorate is, as a rule, three years. UK, France and Denmark have the same limit.

---

---

>

---

- > Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications may typically include / be represented by approximately 120 ECTS credits;
- > First cycle qualifications may typically include / be represented by 180-240 ECTS credits;
- > Second cycle qualifications may typically include / be represented by 90-120 ECTS credits – the minimum requirement should amount to 60 ECTS credits at second cycle level;
- > Third cycle qualifications do not necessarily have credits associated with them.

### **3.5 Profile**

Profile is used here to refer to the specific field of learning of a qualification. Fields of learning are central to the European tradition of higher education, with learners typically obtaining their degree in a particular field. The work of the Tuning project has demonstrated how much common ground can be identified by trans-national collaborative efforts within various fields of learning. Such work will continue and, in as much as higher education is by definition always changing, the work is unending. Even the boundaries between fields are evolving, and the level of detail with which the boundaries are drawn in itself varies across fields. In some cases, there are professional reasons for being quite precise about whether a qualification is or is not within a field, whereas for others some measure of ambiguity about which field a qualification belongs in may be acceptable. Whilst various taxonomies of fields of learning are available, notably that of ISCED, it does not appear useful at this stage to specify that such a taxonomy should be a feature of the framework.

There have been a number of developments within the EHEA, where academic and professional bodies have come together and shared expertise to ‘tune’ their curricula and in some cases harmonise them. While these developments can be helpful in promoting recognition and mobility, it must be noted that professional profile is a matter for national sovereignty. Developments within a discipline on a voluntary basis at European level cannot supplant the competent national responsibility for standard setting. The function of recognition is also a matter for each state and is facilitated through the ENIC/NARIC network.

### **3.6 Further development**

The ownership of the overarching framework rests collectively with the ministers of the signatory states. Responsibility for the maintenance and development of the framework rests with the Bologna Follow-up Group and any successor executive structures established by the ministers for the furtherance of the EHEA. Ongoing tasks following the establishment of the framework could include the development, monitoring and revision of the criteria and procedures to link national frameworks with the overarching framework, periodic review of the framework structure, including the descriptors, and liaison with groups working across Europe more widely on vocational education and training and (other) integrated frameworks.

### **3.7 Conclusions and recommendations**

This chapter has set out and supported the objectives of a framework for qualifications of the EHEA. It is important that all members recognise that such a framework will contribute to transparency and mobility but only if it is underpinned by commitment and trust. Whilst such a European framework is ‘overarching’ it must have the capacity to influence the developments of national frameworks. Compatible elements of

good practice for the development of national frameworks are set out in section 2.7, and where national frameworks are built on such principles it will greatly facilitate the role of the European framework as an important element within the EHEA.

**Recommendations:**

*The framework for qualifications of the EHEA should be an overarching framework with a high level of generality, consisting of three main cycles, with additional provision for a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle.*

*The framework should include cycle descriptors in the form of generic qualification descriptors to be used as reference points.*

*The Dublin Descriptors are proposed for adoption as the cycle descriptors for the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. They offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle.*

*Guidelines are proposed for the range of ECTS typically associated with the completion of each cycle.*

---

## **4      Linking frameworks of qualifications in higher education      >**

---

### **4.1      Introduction**

Forty different independent national frameworks, which are not linked together in a coherent way, would not fulfil the learners' expectations of a European Higher Education Area of transparency and mobility where qualifications are easily recognised across borders. The way in which the national frameworks are aligned to the overarching framework is therefore of outmost importance.

In order to facilitate fair recognition it is necessary for foreign partners to trust that national qualifications also in practice correspond to the levels to which they are attached. In this context, the quality assurance system, however it is organised nationally, has a role to play.

There are already many transparency instruments at the disposal for learners, higher education institutions, employers and recognition centres. They might be rendered more effective by the introduction of qualifications frameworks nationally and internationally.

### **4.2      Quality assurance and national frameworks of qualifications within the context of the EHEA**

Although higher education has, to a large extent, historically reflected national cultural contexts it has also always included an international dimension in the establishment of its qualifications and their standards. Similarly, the mobility of staff and students has introduced an international element to quality assurance although again this is generally based predominantly on national contexts. In both areas the contribution of such an international element may have been somewhat implicit and there has until recently been little use of clear and explicit, internationally recognised criteria for supporting quality assurance processes or making objective

assessments. ‘Trust’ has to a large extent been based on personal knowledge within a limited community and ‘reputation’.

The development of the Bologna process brings with it increased expectations around an international ‘marketplace’ for students, employees and employers. If the process is to be successful it will inevitably need to address ‘trust’ within a much wider context, and particularly increased expectations of greater transparency about (national) qualifications, their standards and their quality assurance.

The roles of national frameworks for qualifications in the description and assurance of standards has been described above (chapter 2.5), but they can also have particular roles where there is international interest in the nature of qualifications. It is perhaps inevitable however that the greater international interest is likely to be in comparison *between* frameworks and the qualifications they include. Comparability is an important element particularly where students are seeking to utilise their qualifications within an international arena.

The Bologna process provides a platform for supporting such trust through improving knowledge and understanding; the national frameworks are integral and essential elements within this. Their value is reinforced through the establishment of an overarching European framework that can provide a reference point to establish comparabilities between national frameworks and their component qualifications.

Such an overarching European framework can provide a mechanism through which national frameworks and particularly their qualifications can, at a somewhat generic level, be compared. Neither a European framework nor indeed national frameworks can by themselves be expected to provide discipline specific detail, but they can provide a guide (and in some cases depending upon national contexts perhaps also a guarantee) of the range and extent of competencies that holders

of particular types of qualification can be expected to have. Qualifications frameworks help provide the basis for confidence in whether an applicant has the relevant skills for employment or further study at a particular level.

In addition to providing a template for national frameworks, a European framework can provide a means for building international confidence in the standards of qualifications by setting quality assurance within trans- and inter-national contexts. It is not possible for a qualifications framework to do this by itself. In addition this requires an understanding and application, perhaps only within a national context, of a series of principles for quality assurance that are agreed within an international context.

Such a set of common and shared principles is emerging within the Bologna Process. These principles are recognised as underpinning quality assurance irrespective of the various national approaches. These shared bases for quality assurance are described in detail within the ‘standards, procedures, and guidelines’ being developed by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB under the mandate from the ministers in their Berlin communiqué.

### **4.3 Criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of frameworks with the framework for qualifications of the EHEA**

The regulation of qualifications is linked to the education system within which the qualifications are issued. The EHEA framework is not a regulatory instrument. It serves as a reference point to help national authorities (and other agencies, institutions and individuals) in determining how their qualifications might be compared to others within the EHEA. The development or formalisation of national frameworks in a way that takes note of the overarching framework will greatly



facilitate the objectives of transparency, recognition and mobility in the future. It is for national authorities to determine which qualifications are included in national frameworks. While the linking of qualifications to Frameworks is a national matter, it is vital for the development of mutual trust on an international basis that the manner in which this happens at national level is rigorous and transparent. Furthermore, for the functioning and reputation of the Framework for the EHEA as a whole, it is also important that there will be a clear and demonstrable national process for aligning national frameworks within the European Framework. Thus, it is proposed that criteria should be put in place for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA Framework. Furthermore it is proposed that the criteria adopted should set out the minimum requirements that a national framework must fulfil, before it is likely to be considered acceptable to its peers in other signatory states, by the other stakeholders for the European Higher Education Area. It is also important to note that section 2.7 of this report sets out a list of the most useful aspects identified by the working group to facilitate the creation of successful new national frameworks of qualifications and the review of existing such frameworks.

A number of criteria are proposed below for the verification process. A primary criterion is that the national ministry with responsibility for higher education must designate a body or bodies who are responsible for the development of the framework. This is important because it is necessary that the national ministry establishes who is responsible and that the framework development process can be initiated in this way. Furthermore, it is vital that there is a clear and demonstrable link between qualifications in national frameworks and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European Framework (Dublin descriptors). Another important element is that the framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits. While it is recognised that it will take some time to fully implement a learning outcomes based approach for all higher

education qualifications, it is considered necessary that the national framework itself will be demonstrably based on such learning outcomes and that there are links to credit arrangements. The manner in which qualifications are included in national frameworks will vary depending on the national arrangements and may, for example, involve an accreditation arrangement that in future should establish the compliance with the criteria mentioned below. It is important to note that the responsibilities with the various domestic parties to the National Framework need to be clearly determined and published and this will help in the transparency.

It is considered important that the National Framework refers to the national quality assurance system for higher education that is in place in the jurisdiction to which the Framework relates. At the time of the writing of the report, the advice of ENQA to the Bologna Follow-Up Group on the implementation of the quality assurance requirements in the Berlin Communiqué had not been made<sup>33</sup>. It is not the intention in this report to second-guess such advice, but rather to set out that there is a need to ensure that national quality assurance systems are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent ministerial communiqués in the Bologna Process. These arrangements will ensure the link between the Framework and quality assurance. It is also important that the Framework links with other instruments of the Bologna Process, such as the diploma supplement and that these are incorporated into the criteria for national frameworks.

Accordingly, building on this rationale, the following criteria are proposed for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework:

- > The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are

---

<sup>33</sup> See chapter 2.5 for Berlin Communiqué on quality assurance.

designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education

- > There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework
- > The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits
- > The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent
- > The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqués agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process
- > The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements
- > The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published

It is considered that there is no necessity for the creation of a new trans-national agency to validate and certify the fulfilment of the compatibility of criteria listed above. Furthermore, from the consultation undertaken by the working group, there is no desire that any such arrangement be put in place. Indeed, the general view is that there should be as little additional administrative burden as possible on existing resources and networks should be used where possible, rather than to deploy new ones.

It is important to consider the process by which each country will certify the compatibility of its own framework with the overarching framework. Furthermore, it is considered that the manner in which each country does this should be published. Accordingly, it is proposed that procedures of such compatibility will apply for self-certification by each country. A number of elements are proposed for such a self-certification of compatibility procedures.

A primary procedure, which is proposed is that the competent national body or bodies shall oversee the self-certification process. This parallels the recommendation that a criterion be established that national ministries will identify the body or bodies responsible for the development of a National Framework. It is also important that all national quality assurance agencies in the jurisdiction to which the Framework relates which are recognised through the Bologna Process will be involved in the self-certification of compatibility process. While the precise outcome of the ENQA work has yet to be determined, it is envisaged that a peer-review process will be put in place, which will identify national quality assurance bodies and that it is necessary that all such national bodies in any jurisdiction be involved in the self-certification process. A further key element is that the self-certification process should not only be a national one and should involve international experts.

It is also important that the evidence supporting the self-certification process should identify each of the criteria proposed and that this should all be published. Where needed, translations of this evidence into English should be provided. It is through the publication of the evidence that greater trust can grow among countries about the developments. It is envisaged that the evidence will involve addressing each of the criteria in turn and will involve the inclusion of the formal record of the decisions and arrangements that are put in place in relation to the Framework. It is important that this will not result in a single short letter from a ministry signing off that all of the

arrangements be put in place. Rather, a much more detailed procedure is envisaged which will address each of the elements and give specific evidence in turn, for example, including templates for diploma supplements which reference the national framework and the alignment with the European Framework.

A further key element is that it is proposed that the ENIC and NARIC networks will maintain a public listing of states that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process. Also, paralleling the criteria for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework, it is proposed that the completion of the self-certification process should be noted on diploma supplements by showing the link between the National Framework and the European Framework.

Accordingly, building on this rationale, the following procedures are proposed for self-certification of compatibility:

- > The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework
- > The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process
- > The self-certification process shall involve international experts
- > The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out
- > The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process

---

>

---

- > The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.

Only following the self-certification process should any link be made between section 8 of the Diploma Supplement “information on the higher education systems” and the overarching framework for qualifications of the EHEA.

The framework of qualifications has been identified as a key tool for the realisation of the European Higher Education Area. Therefore it is recommended that all signatories will complete the self-certification process by 2010 and that ministers recommend this in their Bergen communiqué.

#### **4.4 National frameworks of qualifications and recognition and transparency instruments**

National frameworks of qualifications obviously interface with the existing array of European instruments, which include legal instruments but which also serve the purpose of increasing transparency, in particular:

- > the Council of Europe / UNESCO Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts
- > EU Directives

as well as transparency instruments such as the Diploma Supplement, ECTS, Europass, the ENIC and NARIC networks, and national recognition centres.

These tools differ in nature, application and impact but all share a common aim to promote good practice and improve the national and international recognition and understanding of study components, qualifications, higher education institutions

and education systems. They are designed to advance transparency and improve the mobility of qualified citizens.

The interaction between transparency instruments and national frameworks of qualifications is complex. They are all designed directly and indirectly to help learners and holders of qualifications as well as all relevant stakeholders including employers, credential advisers, academics, civil servants, etc. The Bologna process has strongly supported the implementation and development of these instruments and it is useful to explore how they impact on new national frameworks of qualifications and the European framework of qualifications, and how they relate to the individual.

In any national system the individual learner (as well as employers, parents, prospective students, etc.) need to know, understand and judge the nature, achievements and attributes represented by different qualifications (and higher education institutions). The individual needs to make informed choices and feel confident that there is worth, value and subsequent recognition in what they study. In addition, detailed information is needed to assist the learner in identifying potential progression routes that they might utilise as they progress through a series of qualifications. In this way national frameworks of qualifications support learners by clarifying the learning opportunities available to them. Furthermore, once a qualification has been obtained the learner is aided, by reference to the frameworks, when they seek fair local, national or international recognition of their achievements.

The various transparency instruments play an important role as they interact with both national and the European Framework of Qualifications. The main role of transparency instruments is that they help:

- > record and transmit detailed information about the individual's achievements (e.g. Diploma Supplement, Certificate Supplement);

- > interpret and explain the place and role of qualifications (e.g. NARICs, ENICs);
- > provide good practice to credential advisors and evaluators (e.g. Lisbon Recognition Convention);
- > identify where information and recognition advice can be obtained as well as act as a main source of information (e.g. NARICs, ENICs);
- > improve curriculum comparability in valuing, describing and comparing learning achievement by employing credits as a quantified means of expressing learning equivalence (e.g. ECTS);
- > aid the recognition and recording of learning wherever it takes place (e.g. Mobilipass).

In fulfilling such roles these tools often serve to empower the learner. They also have an important mediating role between the learner and often complex, and sometimes non user-friendly education systems.

New-style national frameworks of qualifications will strengthen existing transparency instruments by simplifying what they have to transmit. The value of Diploma Supplements will be reinforced, as they will be able to locate qualifications against precise national and European frameworks of qualifications. They will also be strengthened when they can refer to nationally and internationally understood learning outcomes, levels and qualifications descriptors. In this context the part of the Diploma Supplement describing the national education system is particularly important; it should describe the national or other relevant system in terms of its qualifications framework. Similarly, the ECTS Information Packages will become more transparent as modules, units and programmes of study are expressed in terms of outcomes.



The Diploma Supplement already requests issuing bodies to place the qualifications covered by the Diploma Supplement within the context of the ‘the national higher education system’ (section 8 of the Supplement). This information is designed to help guide credential evaluators. Obviously the creation of national frameworks of qualifications will provide a further context within which to place any qualification. Furthermore, following the self-certification process it is sensible that the national framework is directly cross referenced to the framework of qualifications for the EHEA – in particular to the Bologna cycles. The inclusion of such information can serve as evidence that the self-certification process has taken place. This is one concrete example of the way a transparency instrument can benefit from qualifications frameworks.

The use of a common language and approach to express frameworks of qualifications will improve mobility, transparency and recognition. Existing transparency tools, as well as qualifications frameworks, benefit from this mutually reinforcing process. This was recognised by the Riga recognition seminar 3-4<sup>th</sup> December 2004, ‘Improving the recognition system of degrees and study credit points in the European Higher Education Area’<sup>34</sup>. This seminar explored a number of strong links between recognition, transparency and qualifications frameworks. The international recognition of qualifications builds on transparency. Frameworks, which provide a common understanding of the outcomes represented by a qualification rather than a mere assertion of comparability, will greatly enhance the usefulness of qualifications across the European Higher Education Area.

The international mobility of learners depends on the recognition of their prior learning and qualifications gained.

---

<sup>34</sup> The full conference report and recommendation of the Riga seminar can be obtained from: <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>.

Learners moving between qualifications or cycles require recognition in order to access more advanced programmes. Students moving within their studies, and their advisors can benefit from the clarity that may be provided through the specification of the level and nature of the study programmes. Learners can have greater confidence that the outcomes of study abroad will contribute to the qualification sought in their home country. A framework will be of particular help in supporting the development and recognition of joint degrees from more than one country. Improved international recognition has benefits for employment, access to further qualifications, exemptions from parts of study, access to continuing education, etc.

It is clear that qualifications frameworks are likely to have a large impact on existing recognition tools and practices. The potential benefits to recognition from qualifications frameworks can be summarised as follows. Qualifications frameworks:

- > improve the transparency of qualifications, make credential evaluation easier (for higher education institutions and other stakeholders) and judgements more accurate;
- > act as a common language/methodological approach that internationally can improve recognition and understanding between educational systems;
- > facilitate the recognition of prior experiential learning and lifelong learning between states;
- > simplify our understanding and improve the expression of the curriculum between countries through the use of common reference points;
- > facilitate the application of the 1997 Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon 'Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education'.
- > ease the pressure of work on the ENIC-NARIC network;

---

>

---

- > make European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) based on learning outcomes and levels more effective;
- > allow higher education institutions and credential evaluators to move away from measurement indicators that focus on formal procedures (admissions criteria, length of studies, qualification titles, years/hours of study undertaken) to focus on the results of learning.

## 4.5 Conclusions and recommendations

Criteria for verifying the compatibility of national frameworks with the overarching framework for qualifications of the European higher Education Area are recommended. A set of procedures for the transparent self-certification of compatibility by member states is recommended. It is proposed that all signatories will have completed this self-certification by 2010, the target date for the establishment of the European Higher Education Area.

### **Recommendations:**

*The following criteria are proposed for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework:*

- > *The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education*
- > *There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework*

---

>

---

- > *The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits*
- > *The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent*
- > *The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin communiqué and any subsequent communiqués agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process*
- > *The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements*
- > *The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published*

*It is proposed that each country should certify the compatibility of its own framework with the overarching framework, and that details of this self-certification be published.*

*The following procedures are proposed for self-certification of compatibility:*

- > *The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework*
  - > *The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies of the country in question recognised through the Bologna process*
  - > *The self-certification process shall involve international experts*
-

---

>

---

- > *The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out*
- > *The ENIC/NARIC network shall maintain a public listing of States that have completed the self-certification process*
- > *The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.*

*The framework of qualifications has been identified as a key tool for the realisation of the European Higher Education Area.*

*Therefore it is recommended that all signatories will complete the self-certification process by 2010.*

*It is important that national frameworks be developed or revised to provide detail and clarity regarding the qualifications within national systems and how they correspond to the cycles described in the European framework.*

*All qualifications should be subject to appropriate systems of quality assurance.*

*The development and use of a shared and common language and approach is recommended for expressing frameworks of qualifications to improve mobility, transparency and recognition.*

---

## 5 Frameworks for higher education and for other education areas

---

>

### 5.1 Context – Lifelong Learning perspective

Whilst lifelong learning was referenced in the Bologna Declaration, when Ministers met in Prague in 2001 they included a strong reference to lifelong learning in the communiqué that followed:

*Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life.*

At their subsequent meeting in Berlin (2003), the communiqué again stressed the relevance of lifelong learning:

*Ministers underline the important contribution of higher education in making lifelong learning a reality. They are taking steps to align their national policies to realise this goal and urge Higher Education Institutions and all concerned to enhance the possibilities for lifelong learning at higher education level including the recognition of prior learning. They emphasise that such action must be an integral part of higher education activity. Ministers furthermore call those working on qualifications frameworks for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS credits. They stress the need to improve opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education.*

The concept of lifelong learning as set out in the two communiqués indicate the Ministers' view that lifelong learning is an inclusive way to define all learning activity and, within this, that higher education has a vital role. This understanding is very much in line with developing thinking within the European

Union. Whilst looking at European Union developments, it should be noted that 15 countries, which participate in the Bologna process are not members of the European Union. There are currently forty countries participating in the Bologna process, including the 25 member-states of the European Union. It is further noted that an additional five countries party to the European Cultural Convention have applied for accession to the Bologna Process, and that the Bergen Ministerial meeting will decide whether to accept these applications.

In the mid 1990s there was, within the European Union, a revival of the concept of a continuum of lifelong learning; first mooted in the 1970s, the EU designated 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning. Despite separate legal bases for education and vocational training in the EU Treaty, distinctions between parts of the education and vocational education and training systems were, by this stage, becoming more blurred. There was greater integration between general and vocational curricula, and provision and increased “bridging” between education and vocational education and training pathways. In addition, there were emerging approaches to training and competences in economic sectors, for example in the information and communications technology.

The EU definition of lifelong learning covers learning from pre-school age to post-retirement and includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. It encompasses all activities in life that improve knowledge, skills and competences, regardless of where and how they are acquired. The concept of lifelong learning places the focus on the individual learner rather than learning systems and institutions. This challenges the traditional boundaries within and between different levels of education and training. It also challenges the principles underlying the development, packaging, delivery and evaluation of knowledge and know-how, the nature of institutions, the teaching and learning processes and how learning is valued. The concept of qualifications is precisely that which links peoples’ learning achievements with the recognition of these in a formal way for

society and all of its dimensions. This might mean that there is a need for some re-thinking of the nature of qualifications. While we must broaden our understanding of the range of qualifications and the variety of learning outcomes associated with these, it is important that there is a need for a sign-off on behalf of society that such learning outcomes have been attained and this is the value-added that having a qualification brings.

The focus on lifelong learning began to influence systemic reform processes, mainly due to its relevance to the changing profile and needs of learners. It also gave rise to the emergence of new sub-sectors at the interfaces between basic education and vocational education and training, and between higher education and vocational education and training. This was accompanied by a growing trend to recognise learning which had taken place in less formalised environments, creating new challenges concerned with how learning is assessed and validated and by whom. It also increased the need for improved learner support mechanisms, including the provision of information about learning opportunities, and guidance and counselling to assist learners to make suitable choices. In the late 1990s EU Member States recognised the necessity to develop and support the principles of lifelong learning and began the process of introducing the necessary reforms to help make it a reality.

This report has been drafted from a lifelong learning perspective. National Frameworks of Qualifications have a key role in encouraging lifelong learning within countries. Indeed, National Frameworks, and their related features such as the links to credit accumulation and transfer, moving towards a learning outcomes based approach and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning that is enabled by a real learning outcomes approach, all facilitate and encourage increased lifelong learning and international research shows that these are important elements of many countries approaches to encouraging lifelong learning. Bringing all of the frameworks



---

together within the Framework for the EHEA, brings all of these developments together on a European basis and enables countries' qualifications systems to relate to each other.

## **5.2 Initiatives inside “Education and training 2010” (the Lisbon Strategy)**

In the Lisbon conclusions of March 2000, the EU Heads of State and Governments set out the strategic goal that the European Union should, by 2010, have become the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. Education and training are considered to be key factors in achieving this goal. In order to develop, sustain and benefit from this evolving economic and social order, and to become a world-class workforce, EU citizens needed to acquire and update, on an ongoing basis, the requisite knowledge, competences and skills. As part of its strategy the EU aims to make its education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 and has undertaken a commitment to provide access to new and enhanced learning opportunities throughout life for all of its citizens.

Responding to the challenge set at Lisbon requires major efforts to strengthen co-operation on education and training policy. At the request of the Stockholm European Council in 2001, a set of future objectives for education and training systems was defined, and a work programme agreed, the fulfilment of which will constitute a large step towards the Lisbon goal. The Barcelona European Council in March 2002 underlined these ambitions by pointing out that education was one of the bases of the European "social model" and that Europe's education systems should become a "world quality reference" by 2010. An important part of the objectives process is the definition of indicators and benchmarks which can measure the progress of each country and of Europe as a whole towards the objectives set for 2010.

---

The Council of EU Education Ministers and the European Commission agreed a Joint Interim Report on 26 February 2004; 'Education and Training 2010' reviewed progress in implementing the working programme on the future objectives and set out a number of priority areas for future work. The report called for the establishment of a European framework to stand as a common reference for the recognition of qualifications. The Report further indicated that, given the diversity across Europe in structures and organisation, it is the learning outcomes and competences acquired through the programmes or training periods that should be regarded as important reference levels for the description of qualifications. The report also indicated that a framework of this kind for Europe should naturally be based on national frameworks, which themselves must be coherent and cover higher education and vocational education and training.

While elements of the Bologna Process are broader than the Lisbon strategy, and the Bologna process involves many countries outside the European Union, there are many parallels between the two processes. Furthermore, the Lisbon Strategy has had regard to developments in the Bologna Process in its own development. The Lisbon goals of making European Union education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010 very much parallel the goals of the Bologna Process for all countries within the process by 2010. There has already been extensive reform within the Bologna process, notably quality assurance initiatives, transparency developments, developments in relation to the recognition of international awards, the setting up of National Frameworks of Qualifications and now the establishment of an overarching Framework of Qualifications. These will do much to enhance the European labour market across all countries in the Bologna Process. In many ways, it could be argued that the Bologna process has been a major contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon agenda on a broader basis than just within the European Union.

### 5.3 Initiatives inside the Copenhagen Process

At the European Union political level, the Education Council adopted, on 12 November 2003, a Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training. In addition, the Copenhagen Declaration was adopted at the informal ministerial meeting on 29-30 November 2003, taking up the same principles and priorities for enhanced cooperation as the Resolution. The Declaration commits the 31 countries and the Social Partners to giving priority to

*Investigating how transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels, could be promoted by developing reference levels, common principles for certification, and common measures, including a credit transfer system for vocational education and training*

In addressing this priority, a technical working group on credit transfer in vocational education and training was set up in November 2002. The group was, inter alia, asked to make proposals on common reference levels for vocational education and training. The group has developed a number of important concepts in relation to the reference levels as follows:

- > a vertical dimension of eight levels each divided into three sub-levels. The sub-levels seem to be designed as an operational tool to allow for an assessment of the extent of compliance of an qualification with a reference level to support a pragmatic “best-fit” approach;
- > a horizontal dimension, which will be occupied by prototype descriptors of knowledge, skills and competences, linked to broad occupational profiles or work processes, which are in the process of being developed;
- > general descriptors in relation to existing qualifications structures.

It is of note that the reference levels incorporate a broad understanding of vocational education and training which includes many people's understanding of higher education qualifications, expressed from a vocational perspective.

A major stock taking review of the Copenhagen process took place in autumn 2004 and was completed before the Ministers of the states involved met in Maastricht in December 2004. The stocktaking report includes progress reports of national, vocational and education training systems towards Lisbon objectives, and covers innovations in teaching and learning and progress towards building competences for a European labour market. When meeting in Maastricht, the Ministers issued a communiqué that reviewed progress and indicated the areas to which priority should be given in the next two years. Among these, the Ministers agreed to give priority to the development of an open and flexible European Qualifications Framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust. Furthermore, the ministers agreed to prioritise the development and implementation of the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training.

## **5.4 Towards a European Qualifications Framework for the EU**

The call of the Council and Commission, in its Joint Interim Report, 'Education and Training 2010', for the development of a European framework to stand as a common reference for the recognition of qualifications, is referenced above.

In addition, the Irish Presidency conference (March 2004) on "common themes in higher education and vocational education and training" recommended that a European Qualifications Framework be taken forward within the framework of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme, with a view to linking together the common reference levels framework for vocational education and training and the Qualifications

Framework currently being developed for the European higher education area.

On the basis of the mandate in the Joint Interim Report, in November 2004 the European Commission established an expert group on a European Framework for Qualifications (EFQ) which is to build on the results of the Bologna process in higher education and the Copenhagen process in vocational education and training, and to take into account existing qualification and competence frameworks at national, European and international levels with a view to:

- > clarifying the conceptual basis for a EFQ;
- > assisting the Commission in the collection and analysis of information relevant to the development of a EFQ;
- > identifying the main components of a EFQ, and in particular address the functions and links between common reference levels, learning outcomes, guiding principles and supporting instruments;
- > supporting the Commission in formulating a draft proposal by mid-April 2005 for a EFQ, to be used as a basis for an extensive consultation of relevant stakeholders throughout Europe;
- > assisting the Commission in the planning and organising of a consultation process on a EFQ to be carried out in 2005.

The establishment of this expert group with a view to assisting the Commission in preparing a European Framework for Qualifications is seen as a very helpful development. It is anticipated that the broad and deep consensus represented in this report will be reflected in the approaches that are developed by the European Commission in its proposals for the European Framework for Qualifications. This report intends to make an important and valuable contribution to these developments, and should serve as a model for the European Commission's

proposals. It is important that this synergy continues as the European Commission continues its work in this area. At this stage, an initial proposal from the Commission is anticipated in advance of the Ministers' meeting in Bergen. The plans of the Commission are that there would be an extensive consultation process prior to the establishment of the European Framework for Qualifications in 2007.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In the drafting of this report the working group has taken into account wider European developments in lifelong learning, of which higher education is an intrinsic part, developments in the Lisbon process and the linked future objectives process, as well as development in the Copenhagen process on increased European co-operation in vocational education and training. The change agenda being advanced through much of this work inter-relates closely with the sorts of changes required by the Bologna process and reflected through the introduction of national frameworks of qualifications, and an overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The change agenda also gives rise to the need for national frameworks to include qualifications that result from the recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences. In addition, the increasing focus on the individual learner rather than learning systems and institutions, which challenges the traditional boundaries within and between different levels of education and training, is also relevant.

---

## 6. Conclusions

---

>

This report concerns the elaboration of an overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It builds on the assumption that qualifications are primarily a matter of national concern and articulated in national qualifications frameworks and that such national frameworks can be inter-connected through linkage to the overarching framework of EHEA.

The Working Group and its expert panel, who were invited by the Bologna Process Follow-up Group to undertake the work, provide a series of recommendations and proposals regarding the framework for qualifications of the EHEA, and advice on good practice in developing national (or equivalent) frameworks.

### **It is recommended that:**

- > the framework for qualifications in the EHEA should be an overarching framework with a high level of generality, consisting of three main cycles, with additional provision for a short cycle within or linked to the first cycle;
- > the framework should include cycle descriptors in the form of generic qualification descriptors that can be used as reference points. It is *proposed that*:
  - > the Dublin Descriptors are adopted as the cycle descriptors for the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. They offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle.
- > responsibility for the maintenance and development of the framework rests with the Bologna Follow-up Group and any successor executive structures established by the ministers for the furtherance of the EHEA.

---

>

---

- > all signatories will complete the self-certification process by 2010.

**It is proposed that:**

- > *guidelines* for the range of ECTS typically associated with the completion of each cycle include:
  - > Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications may typically include / be represented by approximately 120 ECTS credits;
  - > First cycle qualifications may typically include / be represented by 180-240 ECTS credits;
  - > Second cycle qualifications normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits -- the minimum requirement should amount to 60 ECTS credits at second cycle level;
- > Third cycle qualifications do not necessarily have credits associated with them.
- > *criteria* for the verification that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework include:
  - > The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education
  - > There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework
  - > The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS credits
  - > The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent



- > The national quality assurance system for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqués agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process
- > The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements
- > The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published
- > each country should certify the compatibility of its own framework with the overarching framework, and that details of this self-certification be published, with the following *procedures* used for self-certification of compatibility:
  - > The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework
  - > The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process
  - > The self-certification process shall involve international experts
  - > The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out
  - > The ENIC/NARIC network shall maintain a public listing of States that have completed the self-certification process

---

>

---

- > The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework
- > national frameworks should include awards that integrate recognition of non-formal and informal learning experiences.

**Advice on good practice** to facilitate the creation of successful new national frameworks of qualifications includes:

- > the development and review process for producing good national frameworks are most effective when they involve all relevant stakeholders both within and outside higher education. Higher education frameworks naturally link to vocational education and training and post-secondary education and as such are best viewed and treated as a national initiative. This also makes possible the inclusion of, or links to, other areas of education and training outside higher education.
- > a framework for higher education qualifications should identify a clear and nationally-agreed set of purposes. Frameworks for higher education qualifications benefit from the inclusion of cycles and /or levels, and articulation with outcome-focussed indicators and/or descriptors of qualifications. Higher education frameworks of qualifications can also benefit from being directly linked to credit accumulation and transfer systems.
- > frameworks for higher education qualifications should explicitly link academic standards, national and institutional quality assurance systems, and public understanding of the place and level of nationally recognised qualifications. Public confidence in academic standards requires public understanding of the achievements represented by different higher education qualifications and titles.

---

## Appendices

>

---

1. Working Group and experts
2. Terms of reference
3. Bologna Seminar on Qualification Structures in Higher Education in Europe,  
27-28 March 2003, Copenhagen Denmark:  
Recommendations
4. La validation des acquis de l'expérience.  
L'expérience française (with a summary in English)
5. Some National Qualification Frameworks in Europe
6. Dublin Descriptors ("step changes")
7. Bologna Conference on Qualifications Frameworks,  
Copenhagen 13 – 14 January 2005.  
Report by the General Rapporteur
8. The Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA

---

## Appendix 1

### Working Group and experts

---

>

BOLOGNA WORKING GROUP	Mogens Berg (Chair)	Denmark
	Andrejs Rauhvargers	Latvia
	Eva Gönczi	Hungary
	Ian McKenna	Ireland
	Jacques-Philippe Saint-Gérand	France
	Marlies Leegwater	Bologna Presidency (NL)
EXPERTS:	Seán Ó Foghlú	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
	Séamus Puirseil	Higher Education and Training Awards Council Ireland
	Nick Harris	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK
	David Young	Universities UK
	David Bottomley	QAA, Scottish Office
	Gerard Madill	Universities Scotland
	Anne-Kathrine Mandrup	Danish Centre for Assessment of Foreign Qualifications
	Tue Vinther-Jørgensen	Danish Evaluation Institute
	Albin Gaunt	Ministry of Education, Sweden
	Bastian Baumann	ESIB
	Sjur Bergan	Council of Europe
	Peter van der Hijden	European Commission EAC
CONSULTANTS	Robert Wagenaar	EUA
	Stephen Adam	University of Westminster, UK
	Bryan Maguire	IADT, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland

---

### **Some national Qualification Frameworks in Europe**

Four European countries/areas have developed qualifications frameworks (QF) with a methodology based explicitly on competencies and learning outcomes. These are Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) and Denmark. Hungary is in the process of developing a QF, and Sweden has conducted a review of degrees awarded by HEI. The Swedish review is not included in the analysis.

The purpose of this analysis is to identify similarities and differences between the four national qualification frameworks. It will focus on the background and purpose of the frameworks, their scope, the structure and the elements used to build the frameworks such as cycles, levels, credits and descriptors.

#### **Background**

In EWNI and in Scotland the drive for developing a framework came from an inquiry into higher education in 1997. In Ireland the development of a qualifications framework was initiated by an act of parliament. And in Hungary and Denmark, the Bologna process has directly inspired the development of QFs.

As mentioned before, the Irish framework is established under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. The Hungarian framework is intended to be included in a new Higher Education Act. The other frameworks do not have a legal basis.

#### **Stakeholders**

In all countries/areas educational institutions have been involved in developing the frameworks. In most countries other stakeholders have been involved as well. Stakeholders such as awarding bodies, learners, quality assurance and accreditation

agencies, university associations, social partners and ministries have to different extent been involved.

### **Purpose**

The frameworks state a number of purposes as their *raison d'être*:

- > Information to employers and the general public, e.g. about award structure and graduates' competencies.
- > Guidance to learners, e.g. about pathways and progression in the educational system.
- > Recognition of former learning, e.g. in connection with credit transfer and Life Long Learning.
- > Tool for educational institutions, e.g. in curriculum planning and programme development.
- > International comparability and mobility, e.g. in recognition of qualifications from foreign HEI.
- > Quality assurance, e.g. as points of reference in evaluations.

### **Scope**

The Irish and the Scottish frameworks cover the whole educational sector from school education to Ph.D.-degrees. The other NQFs do not encompass qualifications outside the HE sector. Hungary intends to extend the current system to all qualifications that can be gained across the education system in the country.

There are also differences as to what types of qualifications are included in the frameworks. The Danish and the EWNl-framework include only qualifications leading to a degree or an award. The Irish framework includes all learning achievements from education and training, and the Scottish framework also

aims at recognising outcomes of learning not leading to a degree. The Hungarian framework may provide points of reference for placing qualifications gained through further professional education schemes, but at the current stage only qualifications leading to a degree are taken into account.

### Structure

All frameworks are divided into levels, with growing demands to learning outcome at each level. Differences in the frameworks scope and in educational structure influence the number of levels. Frameworks, which include qualifications from schools, VET, FE and HE have more levels than those only including HE. Levels within HE differ from 4 to 6 (see table below).

**Table 1, number of levels in national frameworks of qualifications**

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>EWNI</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
Non-HE levels	0	0	0	5	6
1 <sup>st</sup> cycle levels	2	3	2	3	4
2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle levels	1	1	1	1	1
3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle levels	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>12</i>

The Hungarian and the Danish frameworks relate levels to the cycles defined in the Bologna Process (first, second and third cycle). In the Hungarian framework the four levels are related to the three Bologna cycles. The original Danish framework

only operates with two cycles, as the doctoral level had not yet been identified as an independent third cycle when the framework was first developed. For the purpose of table 1, the Danish doctorate level has been placed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle. As shown in table 1 it is possible to align all frameworks with the Bologna Cycles.

### **Level descriptors**

Most frameworks have identified level descriptors, which describe expected outcomes of qualifications at this level. Some level descriptors function as common denominators for qualifications at the particular level i.e. as minimum standards. Other level descriptors describe a whole range of outcomes and it is not envisaged that every qualification will, or should, have all of the characteristics set out in the level descriptor.

In the Scottish framework each level is described in terms of its characteristic general outcomes under five broad areas: Knowledge and understanding; practice; generic cognitive skills; communication, numeracy and IT skills; and finally autonomy, accountability and working with others.

In the Irish framework, level indicators are also broad descriptors of learning outcomes. The descriptors are a range of standards of knowledge, skill and competence. 8 sub-strands have been defined: Breadth and kind (knowledge); range and selectivity (know-how and skill); context, role, learning to learn, and insight (competence).

The Hungarian framework will apply generic descriptors on the basis of the Dublin descriptors for each level. The descriptors are of two types: learning outcomes and general competencies.

### **Awards**

All five frameworks associate one or more awards with each level in the framework. In general, most awards are associated



with 1<sup>st</sup> cycle levels, fewer with 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle levels and one award with the level corresponding to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle. The difference in number of awards, are shown in table 2 below.

**Table 2, number of awards in national frameworks of qualifications**

	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>EWNI</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
All awards	8	5	None yet*	15	?
HE awards	8	5	None Yet*	7	?

\*Award-types have not yet been identified and described in the ongoing Hungarian process.

Most frameworks contain generic award-type descriptors. These are a combination of learning outcome descriptors and fact and input oriented descriptors, e.g. related to the programme of study. Some frameworks only describe the main qualification at each level and others describe all award types included in the framework.

In Ireland, descriptors have been determined and published for each of the 15 major award-types. In addition to the 8 sub-strands used to define knowledge, skill and competence at each level, award-types are described by title, class of award-type, purpose, level, volume, progression and transfer, and articulation.

In Denmark, the descriptors of learning outcomes are divided in 3 sub-strands of competencies: Intellectual competencies; professional and academic competencies; and practical competencies. In addition to the 3 sub-strands, a competency profile and formal aspects describe each award-type.

---

The Irish framework has a special feature with four different types (classes) of award-types:

- > Major award-types (principal class of awards);
- > Minor award-types (recognition for learners who achieve a range of learning outcomes, but not the specific combination of learning outcomes required for a major award);
- > Special-purpose award-types (for specific, relatively narrow qualifications, e.g. a Safe Pass certification);
- > Supplemental award-types (for learning which is additional to a previous award).

This detailed structure is supposed to allow for recognition of all learning, including qualifications achieved through experience in the workplace or other non-formal settings.

The other four NQFs only operate with what is called major award-types in the Irish terminology. In Scotland, plans are underway to map the qualifications of other bodies to the framework, e.g. employers' professional and statutory bodies.

*Named awards in specific fields of study are not integrated into any of the national qualifications frameworks.*

### **Progression and credits**

Only the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework integrates credit transfer values into the QF. The Scottish QF not only describes the level of outcomes, but also describes the volume of these outcomes in terms of credit points. Credits can be used to assist learners to transfer between programmes, but it is the responsibility of the awarding bodies to determine how much credit can be transferred into their programmes.

---

## Appendix 8

>

---

### The framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

	Outcomes	ECTS Credits
Short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) Qualification	<p><i>Qualifications that signify completion of the <b>higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle)</b> are awarded to students who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education<sup>64</sup> and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle;</li><li>&gt; can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts;</li><li>&gt; have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems;</li><li>&gt; can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients;</li><li>&gt; have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.</li></ul>	approximately 120 ECTS credits

---

<sup>64</sup> General secondary education also includes vocational education with a sufficiently general component.

---

First cycle qualification	<p><i>Qualifications that signify completion of <b>the first cycle</b> are awarded to students who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education<sup>27</sup>, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;</li> <li>&gt; can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional<sup>65</sup> approach to their work or vocation, and have competences<sup>66</sup> typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;</li> <li>&gt; have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;</li> </ul>	typically include 180-240 ECTS credits
---------------------------	--	--

<sup>65</sup> The word ‘**professional**’ is used in the descriptors in its broadest sense, relating to those attributes relevant to undertaking work or a vocation and that involves the application of some aspects of advanced learning. It is not used with regard to those specific requirements relating to regulated professions. The latter may be identified with the profile / specification.

<sup>66</sup> The word ‘**competence**’ is used in the descriptors in its broadest sense, allowing for gradation of abilities or skills. It is not used in the narrower sense identified solely on the basis of a ‘yes/no’ assessment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;</li> <li>&gt; have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.</li> </ul>	
Second cycle qualification	<p><i>Qualifications that signify completion of <b>the second cycle</b> are awarded to students who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research<sup>67</sup> context;</li> </ul>	normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits - the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at the second cycle level

---

<sup>67</sup> The word ‘**research**’ is used to cover a wide variety of activities, with the context often related to a field of study; the term is used here to represent a careful study or investigation based on a systematic understanding and critical awareness of knowledge. The word is used in an inclusive way to accommodate the range of activities that support original and innovative work in the whole range of academic, professional and technological fields, including the humanities, and traditional, performing, and other creative arts. It is not used in any limited or restricted sense, or relating solely to a traditional ‘scientific method’.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;</li> <li>&gt; have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;</li> <li>&gt; can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;</li> <li>&gt; have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.</li> </ul>	
Third cycle qualification	<p><i>Qualifications that signify completion of <b>the third cycle</b> are awarded to students who:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;</li> </ul>	Not specified

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;</li><li>&gt; have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;</li><li>&gt; are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;</li><li>&gt; can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;</li><li>&gt; can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.</li></ul>	
--	--	--