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Stefan Bienefeld, Nick Harris, Emmi Helle, Achim Hopbach, Bryan Maguire,  
Barbara Michalk, Christina Rozsnyai, Kurt Sohm, Sorin Eugen Zaharia

## Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks

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# Foreword

Quality assurance and qualifications systems were two of the Bologna Process action lines that saw significant development at the ministerial meeting in Bergen in 2005. The ministers adopted the Standards and Guidelines for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. Stocktaking for the London ministerial meeting in May 2007 reported on the implementation of these two tools for the reform of European higher education. National qualification frameworks and the overarching Bologna Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area will also have profound implications for the field of quality assurance, as well as for the methods used by quality assurance agencies.

At the moment, all over Europe, national qualifications frameworks are being developed and learning outcomes defined in stakeholder processes involving political bodies, higher education institutions, students, employers and quality assurance agencies. By 2010, the national frameworks are expected to be fully implemented in all 46 countries and certified against the overarching EHEA framework.

Quality assurance agencies play a major role in the development of national qualifications frameworks, as they help the institutions to demonstrate the link between their programmes and the framework. The EHEA Framework consequently calls for national quality assurance systems to refer to the national frameworks. The national frameworks also need to be consistent with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and with the related communiqués of the Bologna Process.

This report presents expert articles which examine the implications of the qualifications frameworks for the quality assurance agencies in five European countries. The report follows an ENQA Workshop on Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks, hosted by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) in Dublin in June 2007. The workshop was an excellent opportunity for ENQA members to exchange information, define concepts and examine best practice related to quality assurance and qualifications frameworks.

PETER WILLIAMS,  
*President*

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

# Chapter 1: Introduction

*Emmi Helle, ENQA Secretary General and Bryan Maguire, Director of Academic Affairs, HETAC*

## 1.1 Background information

The overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, or *Bologna Framework*, was adopted by the 2005 ministerial meeting in Bergen. It has three cycles based on the Dublin descriptors: first cycle - bachelor, second cycle - master and third cycle - doctorate. These are general statements on the skill and knowledge level of a student after successful completion of each cycle. The statements address the following outcomes: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, making judgements, communication and learning skills. They are independent of the precise nature of the educational process. The aim of the framework is to provide common understanding of the learning outcomes represented by qualifications, to promote mutual recognition of qualifications, to further linkage between education and working life and to provide common concepts for discussion.

The ministerial meeting in Bergen agreed that all participating countries would create their own *National Qualifications Frameworks* (NQF) by 2010. Resulting from a national need, some European countries - namely Denmark, EWNI (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), Scotland and Ireland have already had NQFs in place for some time. Drawing from these experiences, and also reacting to the Bologna process, the formulation of NQFs is underway in most other EHEA countries. The NQFs reflect different national structures and policy priorities. NQFs will be especially useful in countries where the national legislation does not clearly define the national system of awarded qualifications.

In February 2008, the European parliament and subsequently the Council of the European Union adopted the Recommendation on the establishment of the *European Qualifications Framework* for lifelong learning, or European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It has eight reference levels describing learning outcomes, of which the top three levels describe higher education. The EQF differs from the Bologna Framework, insofar as it encompasses a framework for lifelong learning, vocational education and training (VET) and informal learning (for example at work), as well as higher education.

In addition, there are several national or international *Subject Specific Frameworks*<sup>1</sup>. The aim of these is somewhat similar to the *EU-funded Tuning Project* that seeks to identify points of reference for generic and subject-specific competencies of first and second cycle graduates in a series of subject areas. Other programmes related to this are *Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks*.

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<sup>1</sup> One example is the European Language Portfolio (ELP), where language competences are described according to common criteria

## 1.2 Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks

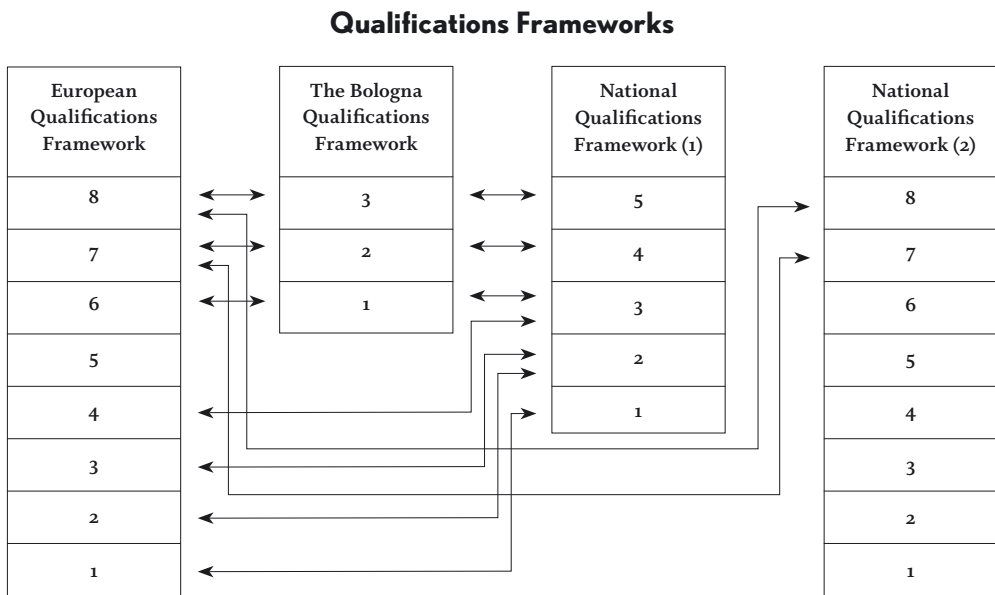
The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) call for quality assurance to pay attention to the learning outcomes of programmes. The Bologna qualifications framework calls for the specification of higher education programmes in terms of learning outcomes.

The alignment of the national frameworks of the EHEA countries to the overarching Bologna frameworks has to be verified by 2010. This verification is to be self-certified nationally according to a set of criteria adopted in Bergen. One of the seven criteria is that the national quality assurance system for higher education refers to the national framework for higher education qualifications and is consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent Ministerial Communiqués in the Bologna Process [this latter clause anticipates the adoption of the ESG in Bergen].

Moreover, the procedures for self-certification require that the self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies of the country in question, recognised through the Bologna Process.

So far there have been two initial national self-certifications; one in Ireland and one in Scotland. These bore out the importance of quality assurance in agencies and in higher education institutions in the implementation of a national framework of qualifications.

The 'self-certification' of the National Qualifications Frameworks against the European frameworks can in practise be illustrated as follows<sup>2</sup>:



<sup>2</sup> Presentation by Birgitta Vuorinen, Bologna seminar, 3 December, Helsinki

It was noted from these initial self-certifications in Ireland and Scotland that both countries had demonstrated a commitment to implement the ESG and that this commitment was included in the verification reports. It was not possible for the quality assurance element to be fully tested at this stage, nor to require that all quality assurance agencies should have undergone an external review. In due course however, perhaps by 2010, the EHEA countries may be expected to demonstrate compliance with the European standards at the level of HEIs and QA agencies. Also, many Quality Assurance Agencies will seek membership of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and higher education institutions will have incorporated the ESG into their internal quality assurance.

Programme approval or accreditation is a key feature of quality assurance within the EHEA. It is during the process of accreditation, whether organised by the higher education institution itself or by an external agency, that the learning outcomes for a specific programme are linked to those laid down in the descriptors of the national framework of qualifications. Different national systems have different ways of distributing the responsibility between external agencies and the higher education institutions themselves. The distribution of this responsibility changes over time within systems.

### **1.3 The ENQA workshop**

Quality is one of the main elements – together with workload, level, profile and learning outcomes – of the Bologna qualifications framework. Qualification has little value until it is good enough.<sup>3</sup> Therefore quality assurance and quality development are crucial to the implementation of the qualifications frameworks.

The ENQA workshop, hosted by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council in Dublin in June 2007 gathered nearly sixty delegates from agencies from all over the EHEA, and explored roles for quality assurance agencies in the development of national qualifications frameworks. It also examined methods used to incorporate national qualifications frameworks into programme accreditation policies and procedures, and shared practice and concepts on how responsibility for the implementation of national frameworks was distributed across internal and external quality assurance functions. During the workshop brief presentations were made on the state of development of national qualifications frameworks and the engagement to date by the various quality assurance agencies present, followed by synthesis and identification of a range of roles played. Case studies were also presented on approaches to using qualification frameworks in accreditation and a review of programmes, and brainstorming sessions were held on how framework effectiveness within institutions might be assessed and how to make operational ESG 2.1 (the use of internal QA procedures for external QA) in the context of qualifications frameworks.

The workshop demonstrated that there were numerous different practices in different countries. In most cases the qualifications frameworks were at the development stage, and the quality assurance agencies had been, or were to be, consulted in the process as partners. In some cases the quality assurance agency had been the lead agency for the development of the qualifications framework. The articles in this publication reflect the realities in five different countries: the UK, Austria, Hungary, Germany and Romania.

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<sup>3</sup> Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe Higher Education Forum on Qualifications Frameworks, 11-12 October 2007.



# Chapter 2: The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (the FHEQ) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> and its use in quality assurance

*Nick Harris, Director of Development and Enhancement, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)*

## 2.1 Introduction

The FHEQ is an essential part of an overall UK framework used both to describe academic standards and to quality assure them. There are in fact two frameworks, one for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and one for Scotland<sup>2</sup>. The latter reflects the fact that undergraduate students in Scotland typically take 4 years for their Bachelors (honours) award rather than the 3 (or 4) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish framework has self certified against the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

HEIs within the UK are responsible for the academic standards and quality of the study programmes they deliver and the awards they make. The UK does not have national degrees, each HEI awards its own; and there is no required ('state') accreditation. Instead the HE sector uses a shared and agreed set of 'reference points' for both programme design, and the quality assurance of delivery and the standards of the awards made.

There are four 'reference points'; three 'triangulate' academic standards and a Code of Practice<sup>3</sup> consisting of 10 parts which cover the management of quality within HEIs. The three components used in setting and quality assuring academic standards are:

- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications – a national agreement at a quite generic level;
- Subject Benchmark statements – provide the detailed exemplification of the generic set out in the FHEQ; these statements are prepared, and agreed through consultation, by the subject / discipline communities. There are more than 70 benchmark statements written to cover the end of the Bologna first cycle;
- Programme Specifications – are written by each HEI for each of the programmes it offers. The programme specifications set out the particular characteristics of the programme and draw upon both the generic expectations of the FHEQ and the specifics of any relevant benchmark statement(s).

These components are referred to together as the Academic Infrastructure (AI); in the absence of any national curriculum or accreditation procedures the AI provides

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/SCQF/default.asp>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/default.asp>

a flexible way of both guiding HEIs in the way they design and quality assure their programmes internally, and an agreed basis for external quality assurance.

There is a wide variety of HE provision in the UK and a variety of related quality assurance procedures. Irrespective of the type of provision and its specific QA procedures, the Academic Infrastructure provides a common basis for all quality assurance, both internally within the institutions and for any external processes.

## 2.2 What is the FHEQ and what does it contain?

The FHEQ was developed by QAA with and on behalf of the UK higher education sector in response to the 1997 reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the *Dearing and Garrick Reports*<sup>4</sup>).

The five levels of the FHEQ are:

- Certificate (C) includes: awards such as Certificates of Higher Education;
- Intermediate (I) includes: Diplomas of higher education, Foundation degrees and pass (bachelors) degrees;
- Honours (H) includes: bachelors degrees with honours, graduate certificates and diplomas;
- Masters (M) includes: masters degrees and postgraduate certificates and diplomas;
- Doctoral (D) includes: doctorates.

In addition to a description of the framework in terms of its 5 levels, the FHEQ documentation includes:

- a brief guide to academic qualifications;
- guidance on the implementation of the framework;
- qualification descriptors for the main HE award at each of the levels of the framework;
- guidance on qualification nomenclature.

The FHEQ covers those awards made by HEIs under their powers to award degrees. A separate framework [currently called the National Qualifications Framework but undergoing a major transformation to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (2008)] covers all nationally regulated secondary education and vocational education and training. This framework is the responsibility of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)<sup>5</sup> in England and Northern Ireland.

## 2.3 What is the purpose of the FHEQ?

The main purposes of the FHEQ are:

- to enable employers, schools, parents, prospective students and others to understand the achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles;
- to maintain international comparability of standards, especially in the European context, to ensure international competitiveness, and to facilitate student and graduate mobility;

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/InsertDearingGarrickreference>

<sup>5</sup> QCA: <http://www.qca.org.uk/> / NQF: [http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_5967.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_5967.aspx)

- to assist learners to identify potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning;
- to assist higher education institutions, their external examiners, and the QAA's auditors and reviewers, by providing important points of reference for setting and assessing standards.

## **2.4 How is the FHEQ used?**

In addition to its role in providing general information about HE qualifications, the FHEQ is widely used by HEIs in identifying the broad outcomes for the academic standards of its awards. The generic descriptors of the main HE qualifications within the FHEQ provide a series of reference points, agreed at national level, which can be exemplified by reference to relevant subject benchmark statements<sup>6</sup> (written by academic communities) and then related to the particular details of programmes offered by individual HEIs, as set out in their programme specifications<sup>7</sup>.

## **2.5 How do QAA's audit and review teams make use of the FHEQ?**

QAA auditors and reviewers draw upon the components of the Academic Infrastructure, including the FHEQ, as external reference points when considering an institution's approach to the management and security of academic standards of its awards and the quality of its provision.

They do not do this in a mechanistic way, or look for unthinking compliance. Rather, they look for evidence that institutions have carefully considered the purpose and intentions of the Academic Infrastructure components, have reflected on their impact on institutional practice, and have taken or are taking any necessary measures to best reflect in institutional practice the relevant guidance provided. So far as the FHEQ is concerned auditors and reviewers look at how institutions check alignment between the academic standards of their awards and the levels referred to in the FHEQ.

## **2.6 How is the FHEQ kept up to date?**

The FHEQ for England Wales and Northern Ireland was reviewed and revised during 2006/07.

This revision encompassed the recommendations of the 'Burgess Group' (Measuring and Recording Student Achievement) with regard to credit guidelines for HEIs in England, and also considered recent developments at a European level including the adoption, by education ministers within the Bologna Process, of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ=EHEA). This includes an equivalent set of 'levels' to the FHEQ and a set of descriptors (the Dublin descriptors), referred to as 'cycle descriptors' that are similar in purpose and style to the qualification descriptors of the FHEQ.

It is anticipated that following public consultations on proposed revisions to the FHEQ for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the revised FHEQ will be put forward for self certification against the FQ-EHEA in 2008.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/programSpec/default.asp>

# Chapter 3: Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks in Austria: perspective from the sector of the Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)

*Dr. Kurt Sohm*

## **3.1 Introduction**

Managing, ensuring and enhancing quality in higher education has been the key issue in higher education reform for quite a few years. The quality of higher education is pivotal in creating the European Higher Education and Research Area (EHEA). This point has been emphasised, and rightfully so, in the official documents published following the ministerial meetings of the European Ministers who have been in charge of higher education since 1999.

The development of a common framework of qualifications to promote the attractiveness of European higher education to students from Europe and other parts of the world, and the enhancement of the readability and comparability of European higher education degrees, will play a crucial role in the creation of the EHEA. The development of a common framework of European higher education qualifications was initially asserted within the Bologna process in the Prague Communiqué in May 2001.

The relevance of qualifications frameworks as important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between, higher education systems was recently strongly highlighted in the London Communiqué published in May 2007. The ministers in charge of higher education committed themselves “to fully implementing such national qualifications frameworks, certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, by 2010”.

According to the requirements stipulated by the official documents published following the ministerial meetings, national qualifications frameworks are faced with many challenging tasks and should serve as important instruments for meeting a number of different purposes:

- National qualifications frameworks should be certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. It remains unclear whether this process of certification is solely a national responsibility or includes a strong international dimension;
- They should be compatible with the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA, and the proposal from the European Commission on a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning;
- Qualifications frameworks should be important instruments for comparability and transparency of education systems and awarded degrees; for fostering the development of modules and study programmes based on learning outcomes and

credits; for improving the recognition of qualifications and of all forms of prior learning as well as for improving employability; and finally, for facilitating the mobility of learners and the transferability of learning through provisions for access, transfer and progression;

- Last but not least, qualifications frameworks should contribute to ensuring the continuing attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA.

This listing of challenging tasks and manifold purposes the qualifications frameworks are facing clearly demonstrates what a major role qualifications frameworks play in the reform of higher education systems in Europe. It also points out that (higher) education systems have to take note that we live in a knowledge society. Knowledge is the main prerequisite for social development and is becoming the most important driver in production. In addition to labour, capital and land, knowledge is now regarded as the fourth factor of production.

The correlation between education and knowledge, technological progress, economic growth, social development and prosperity, has increased tremendously in importance. Innovations and inventions primarily depend on the available knowledge in a society. Thus the learners and their learning processes need to be at the focus of all efforts and endeavours; learners have to be provided with the best possible learning environments and the quality of learning and education is of major significance.

The importance of qualifications frameworks furthermore shows how fascinating the Bologna Process is. In addition to the objectives explicitly mentioned, the process addresses fundamental questions regarding educational policy and the basic structures of the higher education system, while at the same time triggering considerable dynamics for reform. This dynamic reform movement is astonishing inasmuch as it is a commitment freely entered into by the European education ministers for the purpose of establishing congruence of the national higher education systems. While the process is not part of a binding European agreement, a monitoring system will be employed to verify whether the objectives are achieved, and thus a “strategy for avoiding embarrassment” will probably play an important role for the member states.

### **3.2 Quality assurance and qualifications framework in Austria**

At present, there is no National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in place in Austria. Before addressing the development of a NQF in Austria, a brief overview of the Austrian higher education system is provided, and the interrelation between the orientation towards qualification profiles, learning outcomes, and accreditation in the Austrian UAS (universities of applied sciences) sector is demonstrated.

### **3.3 Higher education in Austria at a glance**

In Austria the higher education system consists of 22 public universities with a proportion of approximately 83% of all higher education students, 18 universities of applied sciences with a proportion of approximately 10% of HE students, 10 private universities with a proportion of approximately 2% and 9 teacher training institutions with a proportion of approximately 5% of higher education students.

There are three organisations in Austria responsible for external quality assurance in higher education: the Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) Council (established in 1993), the Accreditation Council for private universities (established in 1999) and the

Austrian Quality Assurance Agency (established in 2004). The UAS Council and the Accreditation Council are both public authorities with a clearly defined national legal background. The Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance is organised as a non-profit association which currently has four members (the Rectors' Conference, the Conference of Universities of Applied Sciences, the National Union of Students and the Federal Ministry for Science and Research). The umbrella organisations of private universities and teacher training institutions will be invited to join as standard members of the agency.

### 3.4 The Austrian UAS sector

The Austrian UAS sector has a short history and is still at the development stage. It was established in 1994 as a completely new sector. After the UAS Studies Act became effective on 1 October 1993, the first 10 UAS programmes started during the academic year 1994/95. Currently there are 18 institutions offering 194 programmes with approximately 28.500 students (academic year 2006/07). The UAS sector has been built up by accrediting new programmes rather than by transforming existing educational institutions. The usability of the acquired qualification in the job market was an important factor in the decision to establish the UAS sector.

The UAS Studies Act is based on principles of "New Public Management". This means deregulation at the state level and regulation by the private sector under state supervision. This concept also triggered the end of the state monopoly as the supplier of higher education studies. The UAS institutions were given greater autonomy to organise themselves. The framework conditions can be summarised as follows:

- the state no longer centrally controls and regulates the Higher Education sector as it previously did;
- decentralisation of the decision-making process in order to foster independence, responsibility and flexibility of the institutions;
- private organisations of the course providing bodies (legal persons under private law, e.g. companies with limited liability, associations or public foundations);<sup>1</sup>
- public funding of study places;
- external quality assurance by an independent public authority.

### 3.5 The UAS Council

The UAS Council is the public authority responsible both for external quality assurance and the approval of new programmes. The members are appointed by the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Culture, with four members being appointed following the recommendation of the Advisory Board for Economic and Social Affairs. They are appointed for a 3-year term, that may be consecutively renewed once. The members are not bound by any ministerial directives and their independence is guaranteed by law. The UAS Council comprises 16 members, half of them come from the university sector and must hold a post-doctoral lecturing qualification; the other half of the members come from business and industry.

The external quality assurance system is characterised by a close connection between initial accreditation, evaluation and re-accreditation, and is based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Though the UAS Studies Act stipulates that the federal government and other legal entities under public law can be course-providing bodies, all but one of the course-providing bodies are legal entities under private law.

fundamental concept that the UAS institution bears the final responsibility for assuring and improving quality. In this system evaluation does not exist as an independent methodological concept, but serves to fulfil the task of programme accreditation.

The close connection between initial accreditation, evaluation and re-accreditation can be summarised as follows:

- initial accreditation and re-accreditation always refer to programmes; accreditation is granted for an approval period of a maximum of five years;
- each re-accreditation requires a new application and the submission of an evaluation report, i.e. the UAS Council decision on re-accreditation is based on a previously conducted evaluation as well as on the acceptance and assessment of the submitted evaluation report by the UAS Council;
- one year before the expiration of the accreditation period an evaluation procedure must be carried out (each re-accreditation is preceded by an evaluation).

### **3.6 Orientation towards qualification profiles, learning outcomes and accreditation**

Although there is currently no NQF in place, the focus on learning outcomes in the context of curriculum design and external quality assurance has already been put into practice in the Austrian UAS sector. The educational mandate is to provide scientifically sound and practice-oriented professional education at a higher education level, and particularly to provide graduates with the skills required in the respective professional field in accordance with the latest scientific developments and the requirements of the professional practice. This educational mandate focuses in particular on the employability of UAS students. The suitability of the acquired qualification for a particular occupation plays a central role.

Therefore the curricula are designed in such a way that graduates will stand a reasonable chance of finding a job that matches their qualification. The basic concept of a UAS degree programme must consider the connection between vocational fields of activity, the related qualification profile and the curriculum (a reflection of the qualification profile). These connections must also be demonstrated in the teaching concept. The degree programme profiles, which have been defined on the basis of the Dublin Descriptors and describe the characteristics of practice-oriented Bachelor's, Master's and diploma degree programmes, will also be taken into account when developing the concepts for the degree programmes. Therefore, an application for accreditation must contain a description of vocational fields of activity (the primary types of enterprises, sectors of industry or organisations that employ graduates should be named; the positions that graduates may fill should be specified; jobs and tasks that graduates can realistically carry out should be specified) as well as a description of the qualification profile (the knowledge and skills required to fulfil the jobs and tasks at higher education level should be specified, and technical and methodical skills, as well as inter-disciplinary qualifications should be taken into account).

Furthermore the modularisation of the curricula is a requirement for obtaining accreditation from the UAS Council. The curriculum must be structured in modules and the modules should be graphically presented. The contribution of the modules to implementing the knowledge and skills defined in the qualification profile should be specified. The modularisation of the curricula requires a fundamental change of perspective, moving from an input focus (what should the contents of the teaching be?)

to an output focus (which qualifications and/or competences should result from the teaching and learning process?).

For the purpose of accreditation the programmes are reviewed against the fulfilment of the educational mandate. The coherence of the aimed vocational fields of activity, the qualification profile and the curriculum all play a central role in the accreditation procedure. Important questions that need to be answered positively are, for example: does the submitted concept fulfil its educational mandate in a reliable and transparent way? Has the (field-specific) implementation of the educational mandate been demonstrated in a logical, conclusive and valid way? The aim of accreditation is to assure that institutions meet their responsibility for quality and to guarantee students, sponsors, the business community and society that the programmes offered have been through a positive quality assurance procedure prior to their approval.

In order to further strengthen the aspect of learning outcomes the UAS Council decided to commission a research project with the following aims: fostering the overall understanding of a learning outcome based approach in the Austrian UAS sector; supporting the institutions in the process of designing curricula based on the learning outcome approach; and strengthening the learning outcome approach in the system of external quality assurance.

### **3.7 Development of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF)**

The Austrian government has decided to develop and adopt a NQF and to link it with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), which should be developed by the end of 2010 and be operational in 2011. The Austrian national report 2005 – 2007, submitted under the framework of the Bologna stocktaking process, states that the development and implementation of a NQF is one of the key future challenges that Austria is faced with.

The national report suggests that every single aspect of the NQF should work together to fulfil its top level targets, which are to make study programmes more transparent, to provide full information on study and career paths, and to guarantee mobility within a given sector of education as well as among them. A balance between overt generality and excessive detail will need to be established in the definition of descriptors.

Discussions regarding the development and implementation of the NQF began in 2006. Some studies were initiated and are now partly complete, e.g. an analysis of the EQF in the context of tertiary education, based on a comparison of selected countries. The developing and consultation process started in 2007 and is supported by a group of 5 researchers representing higher, vocational and adult education, as well as several interest groups.

While the development of a NQF is a complex matter, the process of establishing such a Framework should be based on clearly defined principles and policies:

- comprehensiveness of the framework, as all areas of education should be covered;
- intensive collaboration between all areas of the educational system;
- long-term strategy and result-oriented planning with a realistic and fair time frame;
- consideration of the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA as the European frame of reference;



- extensive and comprehensive consultation process with all relevant stakeholders, and consideration of the needs of the labour market;
- evidence-based assistance from a research group representing higher, vocational and adult education;
- fostering of readability and comparability of educational achievements;
- consideration of the NQF as a dynamic instrument which furthers ongoing developments like quality assurance, orientation towards learning outcomes and credit points, and which adapts well to new developments;
- creation of transparency and trust, as well as fostering mobility;
- improvement of the recognition of forms of prior learning.

A national steering committee has been established, which is chaired by the Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture and the Federal Ministry for Science and Research. The committee also includes representatives of other relevant ministries, as well as social partners (for example, the Chambers of Labour and Commerce, the Federation of Austrian Industries, the Trade Union and the Chamber of Agriculture). A separate advisory board was established in June 2007. This board represents higher education in Austria and includes the Rectors' Conference, the UAS Council, the Private Universities' Conference, the Accreditation Council, the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency, the Universities of Applied Sciences' Conference, the Bologna Follow-up Group and the National Union of Students. This means that as a member of this advisory board, the UAS Council will be consulted on issues of higher education, including the implementation of a NQF in Austria.

# Chapter 4: Developing a National Qualifications Framework in Hungary – contribution of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee

*Christina Rozsnyai*

## 4.1 Developments in higher education in Hungary

In its report of 7 May 2007 titled *From Bergen to London. The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process*<sup>1</sup>, the Commission identified “three broad areas of possible reform in higher education”, these being curricular, governance and funding reforms. In Hungary, each of these areas has been fundamentally reformed in recent years, culminating in a new Higher Education Act, ratified in late 2005 and effective (for the most part) from 1 March 2006.

With the first handful of Bachelor programmes launched on a pilot basis in September 2004, the Bachelor/Master structure of educational programmes was implemented across the whole country as of September 2006.<sup>2</sup> This involved the redesign of all existing study programmes, which was undertaken by consortia of university and college staff from all institutions in the country, who were teaching the subject field in question. Another major change concerned the training of teachers of 5th to 12th grade students, which now constitutes Master’s programmes.

The higher education reform involved a number of measures. In state higher education institutions, the law distinguishes between the state’s public authority and its role as the maintainer of the institution. The Ministry of higher education set up a registry bureau for keeping records on institutions, programmes and other higher education entities, while the responsibility of the Minister of Education and Culture was limited to legal oversight. The establishment of economic councils – initially envisaged as Boards of Trustees – overseeing the handling of finances and financial policies of the higher education institutions was the most debated issue. Furthermore, the new law required the institutions to maintain an internal quality management system. Higher education institutions no longer needed Ministry authorisation to set up faculties, to launch new programmes and to set up doctoral schools, although these could be registered only after a favourable assessment by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC). Finally, universities could decide whether or not to offer habilitation<sup>3</sup> courses, which were earlier an inherent feature of a university.

With respect to financial reform, the law guaranteed retention of the value of normative funding, and introduced differentiation of funding based on quality factors

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1 European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture. *From Bergen to London. The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process*. Brussels, 7 May 2007.

2 Some medical fields, architecture, law and several art programmes remain in the single-stream structure leading to a Master’s degree.

3 Postdoctoral university degree with lecture qualification, *Privatdozent* in German. Habilitation is also used for example in Austria and in many former Eastern Bloc Countries.

(scientific support, teaching and research grants, teaching staff salary). According to the new law, the state would fund education for a maximum of twelve semesters per student. Some months after the introduction of the Act, tuition fees were introduced, although with some state support for the best students or those in financial need. It was promised that the income generated would be earmarked for use in the higher education sector. A referendum on 9 March 2008 revoked the measure by an overwhelming majority of voters.

With the introduction of the Act, the HAC became an independent legal entity and a public service organisation, which would receive a pre-defined part of the higher education budget and the opportunity to conduct for-profit activities. However, probably due to the country's declining economy, the Ministry has not observed this clause of the law and has cut the HAC's budget considerably in both 2007 and 2008. The new Act also introduced a board of appeals in the HAC.

#### **4.2 The European qualifications framework in Hungary**

Hungary has been involved in the work on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, the initiative by the European Commission, since 2004. A representative of the Ministry has been active in the working group outlining the structure of the Framework, and an international conference was held in Budapest in February 2006. The main outcome of the conference was an agreement by the participants to incorporate vocational education and training outcomes into the top four levels of the European Qualifications Framework, expanding the already existing higher education qualifications.

A national written consultation and various meetings involving different sectors of education and their partners preceded the conference. The aim of the consultation was to outline the relevance of the European framework in the Hungarian context. The HAC regularly received working documents from the Ministry for comment and has been invited to workshops and consultations.

#### **4.3 Prior qualifications frameworks in Hungary**

A qualifications framework for higher education has been in operation in Hungary since the first Higher Education Act of 1993. These "Qualification Requirements" were replaced by "Education and Outcome Requirements" when the Bachelor/Master structure was introduced. The latter take into consideration the Dublin descriptors<sup>4</sup> and incorporate learning outcomes as a novel element in higher education.

In addition to changes in higher education, the National Curriculum for primary and secondary education (NAT) was amended in 2006. In 2007 the Vocational Qualifications Register (OKJ) was considerably expanded to include skills and competences, and enable the recognition of applied learning as input requirements for Lifelong Learning programmes.

The concept of a national qualifications framework was approved by the government in late 2006.

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<sup>4</sup> Shared 'Dublin' descriptors for Short Cycle, First Cycle, Second Cycle and Third Cycle Awards. A report from a Joint Quality Initiative informal group (contributors to the document are provided in the Annex). 18 October 2004. <http://www.jointquality.nl/content/descriptors/CompletesetDublinDescriptors.doc>

#### **4.4 The National Qualifications Framework in Hungary**

The concept of a national qualifications framework is gaining ground in Hungary. In a press release on 22 May 2007 the Minister of Education and Culture noted that a connection between higher education, adult education and public education has to be established.<sup>5</sup>

Based on a decision by the Ministry of Education in April 2006, an expert group worked out a concept for a national qualifications framework, based on the European Qualifications' Framework for Lifelong Learning. In January 2007 a decision was made to establish three working groups to delineate various aspects of a national framework under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. The participants of the working groups were expert officials from ministries, the National Credit Council, the National Institute for Vocational and Adult Education, the National Institute for Public Education and external experts and researchers. The task of Working Group 1 was to work out level descriptors. Group 2 delineated the mechanisms for implementing the framework, such as the necessary developments, regulations, institutional and financing instruments. Group 3 analysed existing output factors for all sectors – public, vocational, higher and adult education – and proposed necessary codification requirements based on the level and content descriptors and other aspects described by the first two groups.

The Ministry of Education and Culture issued, under the Leonardo da Vinci scheme, a call for proposals to analyse the Education and Outcome Requirements for higher education, and how these could be linked to a national qualifications framework. Several national consortia have begun work on the subject.

#### **4.5 Participation of the HAC in the process**

The importance of quality assurance as an element of any framework is evident from the European Credit Transfer System in Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, and the working documents for the National Qualifications Framework.

As is the case in ministerial administrative procedures, the HAC will continue to be invited to various events summarising progress towards the National Qualifications Framework. It will also receive draft documents relating to the framework for comment before they go before government. The Committee's representatives – staff or council members – regularly attend the meetings of related decision-making bodies, such as the National Rectors' Conference, the Higher Education and Research Council, or the Adult Education Accreditation Body, where they have a chance to participate in discussions.

#### **4.6 How the HAC can contribute to the National Qualifications Framework**

The Committee had already revised its Accreditation Guidelines in 2005-2006 to reflect the learning outcome factors, skills and competences. With this it has also begun to adapt its requirements to reflect the elements of a future framework. The actual realignment of criteria and procedures can only take place once the framework becomes concrete.

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<sup>5</sup> www.okm.gov.hu, 22 May 2007 (in Hungarian)

There are a number of identified weak points, however, which stand in the way of a functioning framework, but that quality evaluation can focus on to stimulate change. A case in point concerns the transfer of studies. Internal mobility of students is still low in Hungary even though the Higher Education Act supports it. A background document to the National Qualifications Framework has identified that the funding structure for transferring students is not portable to the new institution. Another issue is credit recognition: Erasmus students still report difficulties in getting their studies abroad accepted by the relevant professors back home. And while credit allocation to courses has been implemented, there are still great variations in translating units into actual workload. External practical work, moreover, is rarely recognised unless it is conducted in the framework of work-based learning set up in agreement with a professor. The current Education and Outcome Requirements, though warming up to the concept of learning outcomes, are still rather input-based. The structure of the requirements does not leave enough room for institutions to specialise in order to be competitive.

#### **4.7 Conclusions**

A great deal has changed, and is still changing, in Hungarian higher education. The required cultural change has not fully kept pace – or has not been able to keep pace – with the rapid transformation on all fronts. Nevertheless, the main elements of the Bologna process, the Bachelor and Master programme structure, and internal quality assurance are now implemented at all Hungarian higher education institutions. The details, such as the significance of student involvement in education and quality assurance processes, and the real meaning of output-based, learning-based education, are conceptual questions that require time to be fully understood and accepted.

It is fully expected that the HAC will be invited to be part of a complex, cross-sector, quality assurance system for the National Qualifications Framework. The HAC is the legally recognised body for higher education quality assurance in Hungary, with fifteen years of experience, and it enjoys extensive international recognition. Whether the sectoral quality assurance bodies will be asked to pool their efforts to develop the quality assurance aspect of the framework has not been decided at this stage.

# Chapter 5: The German qualifications framework for higher education - new content approaches in German higher education and its role in quality assurance procedures

*Stefan Bienefeld and Barbara Michalk, German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Quality Management Project and Dr. Achim Hopbach, German Accreditation Council*

**Abstract:** This article provides background information on the development and functioning of the German national qualifications framework for higher education (HE), and its role in quality assurance (QA) procedures in Germany. More specifically, it aims to provide an overview of the development and implementation of the qualifications framework for the HE sector in Germany. Firstly, the general background to the introduction of the two-tier system, and the functions of Bachelor's and Master's Programmes, are described. The main part of the article deals with the Qualifications framework for German HE, its categories and their sub areas. The article concludes with some remarks on future challenges and an outlook on possible developments in Germany.

## **5.1 Introduction**

A systemic reform of the degree and study system is currently taking place in Germany. It is probably the largest reform effort that has been undertaken in German HE in recent years. It will result in a total renewal of the study system and a number of paradigmatic shifts. The process, which began in the "Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna" has already resulted in dramatic changes in German HE and is generally perceived as irreversible and, in many ways, unavoidable.

In Bergen in 2005, the European ministers adopted the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the overarching European Qualifications Framework, which they had recommended be developed in all signatory countries back in 2003. They sought increased efforts in the continued introduction of the two-tier system, and in the development of national qualifications frameworks. This commitment, in particular to the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), was renewed in London in 2007.

Parallel to these developments, the European Commission has introduced an all-encompassing qualifications framework for the entire educational system of its member states. It is against this European background that the following remarks about qualifications frameworks in German HE are made.

## **5.2 The two-tier degree system and doctoral studies in Germany**

The introduction of Bachelor's and Master's Degrees has been possible for some time under the national framework law on higher education. New laws have been adapted

to designate Bachelor's and Master's as the degrees indicating completion of HE studies in Germany. Most of the federal states have introduced Bachelor's and Master's programmes in their own higher education legislation, and are currently changing the structure of their programmes.

The standing conference of the ministers of education and culture, the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK), is the permanent body of the ministries of the 16 German federal states. Due to the federal structure, the KMK is the main co-ordinating and regulatory body in terms of structural guidelines and regulations for the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's programmes. The KMK has adopted two important rules for the implementation of these programmes; the framework regulations for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's Programmes, and the framework regulation for the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the design of study modules. In addition, KMK has adopted a number of detailed regulations for specific issues. The frameworks mentioned above apply equally to all subject areas, although there are specific regulations for certain fields (fine arts, music and the state examination programmes) within them. However, until now, the goal has been to change all programmes in all subject areas to the two-tier system or compatible structures. The frameworks also apply equally to both universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen) and both types of institutions can and will offer Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The formal distinctions between the two types of institution in terms of length of study and degrees awarded have formally been eliminated, since the degree names are now the same for all institutions.

According to these regulations, the Bachelor's degree can last a maximum of three to four years, corresponding to 180-240 ECTS. This degree is relevant to the labour market, and is the first-level degree granted in the HE system. The Master's degree is awarded after an additional one to two years of study (corresponding to 60-120 ECTS). It provides in-depth specialisation and allows the pursuit of further studies at any time (not just immediately after the Bachelor's degree). Formally, a Bachelor's gives access to the Master's (i.e. it entitles Bachelor's graduates to apply for a Master's programme) and the Master's allows access to doctoral studies, but most of the students have to undergo a selection process before being admitted to next level of studies. Highly qualified Bachelor's graduates can also enter PhD programmes directly after completion of their Bachelor's degree. The introduction of ECTS, including the definition of modules, learning outcomes and competences acquired, is mandatory for both degrees.

As a result of these regulations, it is necessary to rethink curricula, design new programmes with new approaches to teaching, and to reorient the programmes towards study outcomes and student competences. This represents a significant shift away from the traditional German degree system.

German higher education institutions and politicians hold that doctoral candidates are both students and early stage researchers. Therefore, the independent and individual research project must remain the core element of the doctorate, in line with the Bergen communiqué. There are several options available for doctoral study:

1. PhDs can be financed and conducted independently on a full-time or part-time basis by the PhD student.
2. PhDs can be undertaken with grants from foundations (political parties, churches, companies).
3. They can be conducted as part of a (part-time) employment position as an assistant in higher education institutions.

Structured PhD programmes and graduate schools are evolving in Germany. Even though the number of these graduate schools is increasing, they remain only one of the several possible options to obtain a doctoral degree in Germany.

Parallel to the introduction of the new degree structure, the procedures for quality assurance have undergone a fundamental change. Instead of being approved by the state ministries, new study programmes have to be accredited. There is a national accreditation council that accredits agencies who, in turn, carry out the programme accreditations. Currently, there are six accredited accreditation agencies in Germany, some of which cover all subject areas and some of which are subject specific. The Council is organised as a foundation.

### **5.3 The German qualifications framework for higher education**

The development of a NQF has been one of the areas of work of the national Bologna Follow-Up group in Germany. A working group has been formed, comprising of the national Ministry and the KMK, the Rectors' Conference, the students' organisation and social partners (employers and trade unions). Discussions have taken into consideration the experiences of other countries that already have a NQF for higher education, such as Scotland and Ireland, and the European qualifications framework and 'Dublin descriptors'.

The goal was to develop a qualifications framework describing the HE system and the degrees in terms of learning outcomes, student competences and skills, as well as formal aspects of a given degree. The qualifications framework focused only on the "new" degrees, creating equivalences between the Bachelor's and Master's degrees and the already existing German Diploma and Magister degrees. Thus, the "old" degrees are indirectly divided between the university diplomas and equivalent degrees that are equal to Master's Degrees on the one hand, and the Fachhochschule degrees that are equivalent to Bachelor's Degrees on the other.

The overall goal is to provide a structure to systematically describe, develop and systematise the relationships between different degrees within the HE system. The qualifications framework increases the readability and transparency of the degrees. In these times of growing diversity and horizontal mobility between the educational sectors, the qualifications framework provides information for students, employers and the public and heightens the transparency of the system for lifelong learning purposes. It can further be used as an instrument for quality assurance, accreditation and curriculum design. By focusing on outcomes, competences and skills the qualifications framework strengthens the shift that has occurred in German HE reforms over the last few years. That is, the shift from teacher to student, from teaching input to learning outcomes and from entry requirements and course content to skills acquired and competences gained, thus creating a framework of competencies, independent of the educational biography. This transparency is a contribution to quality assurance and to the reduction of barriers between academic and vocational training.

The qualifications framework has been formally adopted by the KMK and additionally, has also been passed by the highest decision-making body of the Rectors' Conference. Thus, legitimacy is given by both the ministries in charge of higher education in Germany and the German higher education institutions themselves.

The core elements of the qualifications framework are workload, level, outcomes, competencies/skills and profile in relation to the degree awarded.



Within the framework, there are two broad categories entitled “knowledge and understanding” and “skills”. Additionally, formal aspects of the three different degrees within the HE system are given.

“Knowledge and understanding” describes subject specific competencies, i.e. competencies gained with reference to subject specific knowledge acquisition in the chosen field of study. These competencies are subdivided into two subcategories: “knowledge broadening” and “knowledge deepening”. The first subcategory describes competencies in terms of the capability to horizontally enlarge the knowledge acquired in a given subject area. The second subcategory then describes competencies in terms of the capability to vertically increase this knowledge. The two subcategories describe the competencies of Bachelor’s, Master’s and doctoral graduates.

The second broad category “skills” describes the capability to apply the knowledge acquired in any given subject area. It is subdivided into methodological and communicative/social skills. The latter are again subdivided into instrumental competence, systemic competence and communicative competence.

The formal aspects of the degrees are included in the NQF and are summarised in Table 1. They stem mainly from the structural guidelines for the degrees and decisions on equivalence of the old German degrees as mentioned previously.

The two subcategories of knowledge and understanding contain generic and broad level descriptors for each of the three degrees (Bachelor’s, Master’s and PhD), thus forming a hierarchical structure. For knowledge broadening (i.e. horizontal enlargement), Bachelor’s graduates have a knowledge and understanding that builds upon the HE entry exam and exceeds it substantially. They have further demonstrated a broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scientific foundations of their area of studies. Master’s graduates have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that builds upon the Bachelor’s level and exceeds and deepens it substantially. They are capable of defining and interpreting the specifics and terminologies of the subject of study. PhD graduates have demonstrated a systematic understanding of their area of research as well as the research skills and methods used in this area. They have also gained an encompassing knowledge of the relevant literature in their area of expertise.

In the second subcategory, knowledge deepening (i.e. vertical enlargement), Bachelor’s graduates are expected to have a critical understanding of the most important theories, principles and methods of their study programme. They are also able to increase their knowledge vertically, horizontally and laterally. Their knowledge and understanding is equivalent to the state of the literature, but should also comprise some deeper knowledge relating to the state of research in their subject area. Master’s graduates are expected to have gained a level of knowledge and understanding that forms the basis for the development and/or transfer of their own ideas. These ideas can be developed and oriented either to a more research, or a more applied, direction. They should also have a broad, detailed and critical understanding of the most up-to-date level of knowledge in one or more specialised areas at their disposal. PhDs are expected to have contributed independently to research by a thesis, which enlarges the boundaries of knowledge and has been disputed and reviewed nationally or internationally.

In the “skills” component, methodological skills encompass all skills that are related to approaching any question in a manner that makes use of the methodology inherent to the field of study completed.

In terms of instrumental competences, Bachelor’s graduates are capable of using their knowledge and understanding with reference to their job or employment and of developing and elaborating problem solutions and arguments. Master’s graduates are capable of using their knowledge, understanding and problem solving skills in new and challenging situations, which have a broad and multidisciplinary relation to their area of expertise. Doctoral graduates are expected to be able to independently design and conduct relevant research projects with scientific integrity.

The broad facet of systemic skills involves a large number of competencies for the three degree types. For Bachelor’s graduates these competencies are first to collect, judge and interpret relevant information, especially within their field of study; then, to use this information by deducing scientifically founded arguments and judgements that take into account societal, scientific and ethical considerations; and finally, to organise further education and lifelong learning in a self-determined and self-regulatory manner. Master’s graduates are expected to be able to integrate knowledge from various sources and handle the complexity attached to this process. They should also be able to make scientifically grounded judgements on the basis of incomplete or limited information, taking into account societal, scientific and ethical considerations which stem from the application of their knowledge. They should acquire new skills and knowledge in a self-regulatory way and lastly conduct their own research or applied projects autonomously. Doctoral graduates are expected to be able to identify scientific questions without help, conduct a critical analysis and synthesis of new and increasingly complex ideas and advance the societal, scientific, artistic and cultural progress of the knowledge society in both academic and non-academic settings.

In terms of communicative competencies, Bachelor’s graduates are able to formulate and defend subject related positions and problem solutions. They are also capable of exchanging ideas, information, problems and solutions with both experts and laymen and of assuming responsibilities in a team. Master’s graduates are able to explain their conclusions, and the information and lines of thought on which these are based, in a clear and unambiguous way to laymen and experts on the up-to-date level of research. They can further exchange ideas, problems and solutions with both experts and laymen on an advanced scientific level. They are able to take senior positions in a team. PhDs are able to present knowledge from their area of expertise to a scientific audience, discuss this with colleagues and explain these to laymen. They are able to lead a team.

The qualifications framework can be found in Table 2.

The NQF does not contain subject specific components. Thus, at the beginning of the drafting process – and especially after the formal introduction of the NQF – the question was raised whether or not it would be helpful or even necessary to add subject specific components in order to support the adoption of the NQF in the various disciplines, and to foster the use of the NQF in quality assurance processes. There was some reluctance to introduce subject specific descriptors similar to the subject benchmark statements in the UK, mainly due to the “pre-Bologna” method of approving degree programmes in Germany. Until 2001, the so-called framework regulations defined curricula in detail in terms of contact hours and content. This input driven approach was abolished not only because of the input orientation, but also

because it was very restrictive and only gave higher education institutions a limited number of opportunities to adapt to new developments in the disciplines, and to create innovative curricula. Therefore anything resembling the former framework regulations is examined carefully and with suspicion by the German HE sector. To serve the needs of the higher education institutions subject specific applications of the NQF need to be defined and owned by the scientific community itself. They must not be binding legal regulations but guiding reference points, and they need to be combined with other reference points.

#### **5.4 The use of the NQF in QA procedures**

The NQF is an important tool for transparency and confidence-building when designing a framework for the competence-based and level-oriented designing and describing of degree programmes. Therefore it plays a major role in QA procedures.

Due to the traditional dichotomy of QA in HE since the late nineties, the role of the NQF differs. In the case of evaluation of teaching and learning (the first pillar of QA in German HE), the role cannot be described precisely because there are no common standards for evaluation. As a consequence, one institution might consider the NQF as a core reference point whereas another institution might not even consider it important.

The system of programme accreditation that forms the second pillar of quality assurance in higher education is much more regulated.

In theory and in terms of legal matters, the NQF as a decision of both the KMK and the Rectors' Conference is de facto binding even though there is no strict de jure legislation governing the NQF.

Furthermore, the compliance with the NQF is a criterion in the standards for programme accreditation that the German Accreditation Council adopted in 2006 in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines.

This means that Bachelor's and Master's Programmes have to fit conceptually into the NQF in terms of orientation towards the four types of learning outcomes and level descriptors.

On the operational level of the actual accreditation process, compliance with the NQF is part of the criteria used by the agencies when accrediting programmes, and has to be taken into account in the peer review and the final report of the accreditation procedure. To achieve this, it is necessary for peers to be sensitive to the relevance of the NQF in the process of accreditation. Furthermore, it is important to stress that the NQF is not sufficient for the accreditation procedure as a stand-alone tool but needs to be considered in conjunction with the other relevant criteria (structural guidelines, ECTS guidelines, etc.) mentioned above.

In practice, the NQF results in a number of questions that could be posed to institutions during the accreditation process. They were summarised by the former Chair of the German Accreditation Council, Professor Juergen Kohler as follows:

- Reflectiveness/completeness: have the categories of the NQF been taken into account when developing the Learning Outcomes of the study programme?
- Concreteness: how does the concrete programme address these generic descriptors?
- Validity: how did you arrive at these answers, what evidence are they based on?

- Programmatic consequence: how do actual programme elements, as well as the setting and learning environment, contribute to reaching the aspired outcomes?
- Soundness of Implementation: does the programme actually do what it is intended to do? How is this being checked?
- Revision: how is the achievement of the desired/wanted effects assured/evaluated? How is the issue continuously readdressed?

Obviously, these questions may not necessarily be asked in this order or in this format. In some cases not all of these questions may be asked. However, the given examples show that the NQF and its categories can actually be operationalised in terms of concrete questions in the accreditation process.

Furthermore, the descriptors of the NQF can be used to determine whether or not a programme is covering content and learning formats, and achieves outcomes that are associated with the level of the degree that the programme offers (i.e. it is possible to check that the majority of courses offered within a Master's programme actually consist of units and modules at Master's level).

Finally, the NQF can be used to assess the soundness of Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) and Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) procedures used by some institutions in Germany to award credits for a given study programme and thus shorten the study time and the number of credits still to be obtained by a student. This feature requires further development and will certainly increase in importance in the near future.

### **5.5 Future challenges and further reform issues**

This paper has briefly outlined both the changes in the degree system in German HE and the development and function of the German qualifications framework. However, despite the reform impetus which has certainly gained in both momentum and pace in recent years, a number of challenges and reform issues remain pertinent.

The shift from input to outcome orientation which is at the heart of the reforms, remains a challenge to the entire system. Many subjects have deeply rooted problems in properly defining outcomes and operationalising them in a way which allows both measurement and decision making on the basis of this assessment. This challenge is relevant to all disciplines, even though its pronunciation may vary a lot. The sciences and engineering disciplines tend to have somewhat smaller problems than the social sciences and humanities. In the ongoing debates, the biggest challenges occur in arts and music and those disciplines that have traditionally ended with a state exam (Staatsexamen). But as reforms continue, most disciplines slowly, but determinedly, find a way to implement outcome definitions in their curriculum design.

The second challenge relates to changes within the HE sector in Germany. The traditional binary system with universities and Universities of Applied Sciences is changing now that both types of institutions offer Bachelor's and Master's programmes. This creates new competition between institutions and the development of profiles. These sometimes challenge the traditional roles assigned to both types of institutions. In the long run, it will probably be the programme itself (and its quality) that will determine its attractiveness and competitiveness. Therefore, the type of institution will possibly become secondary in the years to come.

Furthermore, the use of the qualifications framework for both curriculum development and quality assurance makes it necessary to break down the broad generic descriptors to subject level and to develop subject specific qualifications frameworks or subject benchmark statements. This development requires a number of questions to be answered: which descriptors are able to clearly define skills, knowledge and competencies in the subject area? Are overarching descriptors as proposed by the national qualifications framework able to encompass subject specific requirements? How can they possibly be broken down to subject-specific issues so as to adequately describe those? How can overarching criteria be used to define standards for review procedures within quality assurance? These questions need to be answered by each discipline if a usable qualifications framework for that discipline is to be the result. Some (psychology, social work, informatics) have started these developments and have already proposed concepts which resemble a subject specific qualifications framework.

On the other hand, how can a subject specific qualifications framework keep the necessary flexibility to be on the edge of scientific progress? Maybe a subject specific qualifications framework is a stumbling stone on the way to a university specific profile of a study programme?

Additionally, as mentioned above, APL and APEL procedures, the growing importance of and shift towards lifelong learning and the interrelated development of an NQF which encompasses all levels and sectors of the educational system, are enormous future challenges. The traditionally well established and visible boundaries between the higher education system and the vocational training system are boundaries that will increasingly become targets and issues for discussion.

The qualifications framework can be an instrument for transparency and the building of mutual trust by offering terms of reference in relation to competencies and levels of competencies. This requires the largest structural reform process of German HE in decades. It is a defining character of each process that the only constant variable is change. We are convinced that we have already made a huge step forward. Nevertheless, we are also aware that further changes are necessary and needed to realise the full potential of German HE and its contribution to a European Higher Education and Research Area.

## 5.6 Annexes

**TABLE 1: FORMAL ASPECTS OF GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREES ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR HE**

LEVEL	BACHELOR	MASTER	DOCTORAL
Time of study	3, 3-5, 4 years	1, 1.5, 2 years	n/a
ECTS points	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	60, 90 or 120 ECTS	n/a
Entry requirements	General HE entry exam [Abitur (maturation)], UAS entry exam (Fachabitur), specific regulations for qualified applicants with HE Entry exam (Länder specific)	First qualifying degree (Bachelor's or equivalent), plus additional entry requirements to be decided upon autonomously by the higher education institution	Usually a Master's or equivalent (i.e. minimum of 300 ECTS)
Degrees	B.A., B.Sc., B.Eng, etc. Diploma (UAS), State exam	M.A., M.Sc., M.Eng., etc. Diploma (Univ.), Magister, State exam	Dr. Ph.D.
Formal rights after degree	Application for Master's programmes, immediate admission to PhD possible for highly qualified graduates (special exam needed), further education opportunities (LLL)	Application for PhD (for UAS sometimes different), further education	

n/a.= not applicable;

N.B. The list of officially allowed degree names at both Bachelor's and Master's level can be found in the framework regulations for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's programmes which has been adopted by the KMK.

N.B. Entry requirements for candidates with the general HE entry exam as well as length of study may vary between the 16 federal states.

**TABLE 2: QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS**

*Preliminary remark: For the time being the present conception only concerns higher education qualifications. Further steps will include the overall school education area as well as vocational training and Lifelong Learning.*

STUDY STRUCTURE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA		
Qualification Cycles	Formal Aspects	Qualifications of HE Study: HE Degrees and State Examinations (Staatsexamen) <sup>1</sup>
1st cycle: Bachelor level	Degrees at Bachelor level: 3, 3.5 or 4 years full-time study resp. 180, 210 or 240 ECTS credits; all degrees qualify for application to Master's programmes	B.A.; B.Sc.; B.Eng.; B.F.A., B.Mus., LLB Diploma (UAS), State exam
2nd cycle: Master level	Degrees at Master's level: usually 5 years full-time study resp. 300 ECTS credits; for cycled studies 1, 1.5 or 2 years resp. 60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits at Master's level; types of Master's qualifications: more application- oriented, more research-oriented, artistic profile, teacher's profile; all degrees qualify for application to a PhD Programme <sup>2</sup>	M.A., M.Sc., M.Eng., M.F.A., M.Mus., LL.M., etc. Diploma (university), Magister, State exam, non-consecutive and advanced training Master <sup>3</sup>
3rd cycle: Doctorate level	(In general degrees are based on the Master's level qualification, i.e. 300 ECTS credits or more) <sup>4</sup>	Dr., Ph.D.

1 See List in Enclosure 1. State examinations are generally assigned to the 2nd cycle study; though the following specific rules apply: studies with state examination imply a standard study period of 3 years (teacher's training in 'Grundschule' resp. 'Primarstufe' and 'Sekundarstufe I' with possible assignment to the 1st cycle) up to 6.5 years (medicine); this corresponds to 180 - 390 ECTS credits.

2 As to artistic studies at HE institutions for art and music, this applies with certain reservations only.

3 The designations for qualifications of non-consecutive and advanced training Masters are not prescribed and are not restricted to the designations for qualifications mentioned above, e.g. MBA.

4 Particularly well-qualified Bachelor and 'Diploma' (UAS) graduates can be admitted directly to the Doctorate.

## CYCLE 1: BACHELOR'S LEVEL (180, 210 OR 240 ECTS CREDITS)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS (OPENING UP KNOWLEDGE)	FORMAL ASPECTS
<p><b>Knowledge enhancement:</b> Knowledge and understanding of graduates build upon the level of access to HE institutions and exceed these to a considerable extent.</p> <p>Graduates have demonstrated a broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scientific basics of their field of learning.</p> <p><b>Deepening of knowledge:</b> They demonstrate a critical understanding of the most important theories, principles and methods of their study programme and are able to deepen their knowledge on a vertical, horizontal and lateral level. Their knowledge and understanding correspond to the actual level of the technical literature. They should, however, also include some profound knowledge issues at the actual level of research in their field of study.</p>	<p>The graduates have acquired the following competences:</p> <p><b>Instrumental competence:</b> – to apply their knowledge and understanding to their work and to develop and progress problem solutions and arguments in their specific subject</p> <p><b>Systemic competences:</b> – to gather, evaluate and interpret relevant information, especially in their field of study – to derive from that scientifically founded judgments taking into account social, scientific and ethical findings – to develop progressive learning processes autonomously</p> <p><b>Communicative competences:</b> – to formulate subject-related positions and problem solutions and to sustain them argumentatively – to compare information, ideas, problems and solutions with specialists and non-specialists – to assume responsibilities in a team</p>	<p><b>Access criteria:</b> – admission to HE institutions (see Encl. 2) – in line with the regulations of the individual German federal states concerning the admission to HE institutions for vocationally qualified applicants without educational admission to HE institutions<sup>5</sup></p> <p><b>Term:</b> (incl. final thesis) 3, 3.5 or 4 years (180, 210 or 240 ECTS credits)</p> <p>Degrees at Bachelor's level represent the first vocationally qualifying qualifications.</p> <p><b>Follow-up options:</b> Programmes at Master's level or directly at PhD level (only in case of excellent qualification), other advanced training options</p> <p><b>Transfers from vocational training</b> Qualifications and competencies acquired and proven by examination outside HE institutions can be recognised by the HE institution where study is taken up, by means of an examination of equivalence, i.e. to a degree corresponding to the performance requirements of the respective course of studies<sup>6</sup></p>

5 Compare Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (editor): Synoptic illustration of the HE admission options available in the German federal states for vocationally qualified applicants without educational HE admission on the basis of legal HE regulations. State March 2003.

6 Compare Common Recommendation of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and the German Rectors Conference to the HE institutions for awarding credit points in the vocational advanced training and credit to HE studies dd. 26/09/2003.



## CYCLE 2: MASTER'S LEVEL (300 ECTS CREDITS, AFTER QUALIFICATION AT BACHELOR'S LEVEL 60, 90, 120 ECTS CREDITS)

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS (OPENING UP KNOWLEDGE)	FORMAL ASPECTS
<p><b>Knowledge enhancement</b> Master's graduates have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that usually builds upon the Bachelor's level. A Master's Degree is designed to deepen or enhance this to a considerable extent. Master's graduates are able to define and to interpret the particularities, frontiers, terminologies and doctrines of their field of learning.</p> <p><b>Deepening of knowledge</b> Their knowledge and understanding constitute the basis for the development and/or the application of autonomous ideas. This can be done in an application-oriented or research-oriented manner. They possess a broad, detailed and critical understanding of the latest level of knowledge in one or more specific fields.</p>	<p>The graduates have acquired the following competences:</p> <p><b>Instrumental competences:</b> – to apply their knowledge and understanding as well as their problem solution abilities to new and unfamiliar situations which are related to their discipline in a broader or multidisciplinary context</p> <p><b>Systemic competences:</b> – to integrate knowledge and to handle complexity – to make scientifically founded judgments even on the basis of incomplete or restricted information, and to take into account in this context social, scientific and ethical issues, arising from the application of their knowledge and of their decisions – to acquire new knowledge and skills autonomously – to perform independent research-oriented or application-oriented projects, largely self-controlled and/or autonomously</p> <p><b>Communicative competences:</b> – to communicate their conclusions and the underlying information and motives clearly and unambiguously to specialists and non-specialists, at the actual level of research and application – to compare information, ideas, problems and solutions at a scientific level with specialists and non-specialists – to assume senior responsibilities in a team</p>	<p><b>Access criteria:</b> For degree programmes (Diploma, Magister, State exam)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– admission to HE institutions</li> <li>– in line with the regulations of the individual German federal states concerning the admission to HE institutions for vocationally qualified applicants without educational admission to HE institutions</li> </ul> <p>For the Master's level: first graduation qualifying for profession, at least at Bachelor level, plus further admission criteria to be defined by the HE institutions<sup>7</sup></p> <p><b>Term:</b> – for Master's programmes 1, 1.5 or 2 years (60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits) – for degree programmes with HE graduation 4, 4.5 or 5 years, incl. final thesis (240, 270 or 300 ECTS credits) – for studies with 'State exam'<sup>8</sup></p> <p><b>Follow-up options:</b> Doctorate, advanced training options</p> <p><b>Transfers from vocational training:</b> Irrespective of the need for a first graduation qualifying for a profession, qualifications and competencies acquired and proven by examination outside HE institutions can be recognised by the HE institution where the study is taken up, by means of an examination of equivalence, i.e. to a degree corresponding to the performance requirements of the respective study process<sup>9</sup></p>

7 Compare Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (editor): Synoptic illustration of the HE admission options available in the Federal states for vocationally qualified applicants without educational HE admission on the basis of legal HE regulations. State March 2003.

8 See footnote 1.

9 See Common Recommendation of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and the German Rectors Conference to the HE institutions for awarding credit points in the vocational advanced training and credit to a HE study dd. 26/09/2003.

### CYCLE 3: DOCTORATE LEVEL 300 ECTS CREDITS +

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS (OPENING UP KNOWLEDGE)	FORMAL ASPECTS
<p><b>Knowledge enhancement</b>            Doctorates have demonstrated a systematic understanding of their research discipline and the mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field.</p> <p>They can demonstrate extensive knowledge of the relevant literature.</p> <p><b>Deepening of knowledge</b>            Through a scientific thesis they have made an autonomous contribution to research which enhances the frontiers of knowledge and stands up to a national or international valuation by specialised scientists and academics.</p>	<p>Doctorates have acquired the following competences:</p> <p><b>Instrumental competence</b>            - to design and perform substantial research projects autonomously with scientific integrity.</p> <p><b>Systemic competences</b>            - to identify scientific issues autonomously            - to perform the critical analysis, development and synthesis of new and complex ideas            - to promote the social, scientific and/or cultural progress of a knowledge-based society in an academic or non-academic vocational environment</p> <p><b>Communicative competences</b>            - to communicate findings of their specific disciplines with specialists in their own field, present them in front of an academic audience and explain them to non-specialists</p> <p>- to lead a team</p>	<p><b>Access criteria</b>            Master's (univ., UAS), Diploma (univ.), Magister, State exam, highly qualified Bachelor's graduate or highly qualified UAS-Diploma</p> <p>Further access criteria are defined by the faculty.</p>

#### Survey: State examination (Staatsexamen)

- Teaching posts of 'Grundschule' resp. 'Primarstufe' (6 – 7 sem.);
- Overarching teaching posts of 'Primarstufe' and all or individual school types of 'Sekundarstufe I' (7 - 9 sem.);
- Teaching posts of all or individual school types of 'Sekundarstufe I' (7 - 9 sem.);
- Teaching posts of 'Sekundarstufe II' (academic subjects) or for 'Gymnasium' (9 sem.);
- Teaching posts of 'Sekundarstufe II' (vocational subjects) or for the vocational schools (9 sem.);
- Pedagogical teaching posts (8 - 9 sem.);
- Law (9 sem.);
- Medicine (13 sem.);
- Dentistry (11 sem.);
- Veterinary medicine (11 sem.);
- Pharmacy (8 (- 9) sem.);
- Food chemistry (8 (- 9) sem.).

# Chapter 6: The present state of the National Qualifications Framework for higher education in Romania

*Prof. Dr. Sorin Eugen Zaharia, Director of National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment (ACPART)*

## 6.1 Introduction

As Romania's population joins that of almost half a billion people in the existing Member States of the EU, the opportunities for personal development and growth will greatly increase. However, the ability to move freely and work within the expanded EU will only become a reality if people are able to find fulfilling employment and the recognition of qualifications is an important factor to enable this. The development of the National Qualifications Framework is one of the priorities identified by the Romanian Government and social partners, and thus several actions are planned for the implementation of the NQF in the longer term.

Romania has made major steps towards the European Higher Education Area by reorganising the entire spectrum of university programmes. A new higher education structure has been adopted by Law 288/2004 (on the organisation of university studies), providing the legislative framework for the introduction of the three cycles of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral studies, according to the Bologna objectives. The law came into force in the academic year 2005-2006 and the first generation of Bachelor students will graduate in 2008/2009. Ministerial Order No. 3617/16.03.2005 generalises the application of ECTS in Romanian universities and ministerial Order No. 4868/2006 (concerning the implementation of the Diploma Supplement for certifying the graduation of a study cycle) stipulates that all HEIs will issue, free of charge, the Diploma Supplement, starting from the academic year 2005-2006.

One of the main achievements for Romanian higher education on the path to becoming an active and attractive part of the future European higher education system was the adoption of Law 87/2006 which approved Emergency Government Ordinance No. 75/2005 on quality assurance in education.

In order to ensure a broad consensus on the structure of the higher education system, the Ministry of Education involved various think-tanks, the National Rectors' Council, the National Council for Educational Reform, and representatives of the students' bodies and trade unions acting in the sectors of education, when designing and implementing the legislative framework.

## 6.2 Objectives of the qualifications framework for higher education

In Romania, the development of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQFHE) is the responsibility of the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment (ACPART). It responds to a specific need identified at national and European level regarding the access, progress and mobility of students and graduates. The NQFHE expresses a new perspective, adapted to the contemporary international context and

prerequisites for a learner-centred education. Therefore the fundamental features of this complex system should be those of readability and visibility of training programmes to all stakeholders, thus becoming a mechanism for internal and external regulation of the higher education system.

Romania welcomes the proposal to develop an overarching European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education by ensuring that its NQFHE will be compatible with the EQFHE. The rationale for the EQFHE is to provide a mechanism to relate the national frameworks to each other so as to enable international transparency, recognition of qualifications and mobility of learners and graduates. The process of international transparency should be carried out and supported at the level of HEIs, employers and other stakeholders. The main instrument for achieving this aim is the Diploma Supplement. The increase in international mobility of learners and graduates can ultimately offer learners greater confidence that the learning outcomes of foreign study programmes will contribute to a qualification recognised in their own country. The development of the qualifications framework will also be of particular support in the development of joint degrees from more than one country, and recognition of the national diploma.

### **6.3 National authority for qualifications framework for higher education**

ACPART is the national authority for establishing and regularly updating the national qualifications framework for higher education, and is a specialised body subordinated to the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, which in turn is a public institution with legal personality. ACPART Agency has branches in Cluj-Napoca, Galați, Timișoara, and Iași.

The primary missions of ACPART are:

- to elaborate, implement and update the national qualifications framework for higher education concerning the development, recognition and certification of qualifications based on the knowledge, abilities and competences acquired by beneficiaries of the higher education system;
- to analyse compatibility of the specialisations curricula in the fundamental areas of higher education with national qualifications framework standards;
- to involve Romanian higher education institutions in the development of a European society based on knowledge and productivity, with a competitive and dynamic economy;
- to promote the opening of higher education institutions towards the socio-economic environment through cooperation between higher education institutions, economic operators and other organisations, aimed at developing specific partnerships, labour market research, an entrepreneurial dimension to Romanian universities, as well as knowledge transfer.

### **6.4 The ACPART strategy for 2007-2010**

The ACPART Strategy regarding the qualifications issue for 2007-2010 is to ensure that:

- Qualifications are well designed, up-to-date and meet market needs;
- Processes are established for reviewing the qualifications and identifying the need for new qualifications;
- Access and progression are promoted through different types of learning and career mobility is promoted;

- Certification is mapped and a certain value is placed on each type of learning;
- Recognition of prior learning/current competence is improved;
- Employers, learners and the public are able to understand the full range of qualifications and how they relate to each other, thus contributing to the improvement of skills in the workforce;
- Parity of esteem is offered (for academic capabilities and vocational competences);
- Post-graduate training programmes are recognised as elements of a system for Lifelong Learning.

The main actions in ACPART's operative plan relate to both national and international levels.

At national level, four priorities have been identified:

- Elaboration of the methodology for the development of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education by September 2007;
- Description of a set of pilot qualifications by December 2007;
- Identification of the national compatibilities between the pre-university level and the university level;
- Design, implementation and permanent updating of the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education in 2008.

At international level, three lines of action have been established:

- Exchange of good practice;
- Involvement in European actions concerning the qualifications framework;
- Harmonisation of the Romanian NQFHE with EQF and with the NQFs of other countries.

## 6.5 National activities

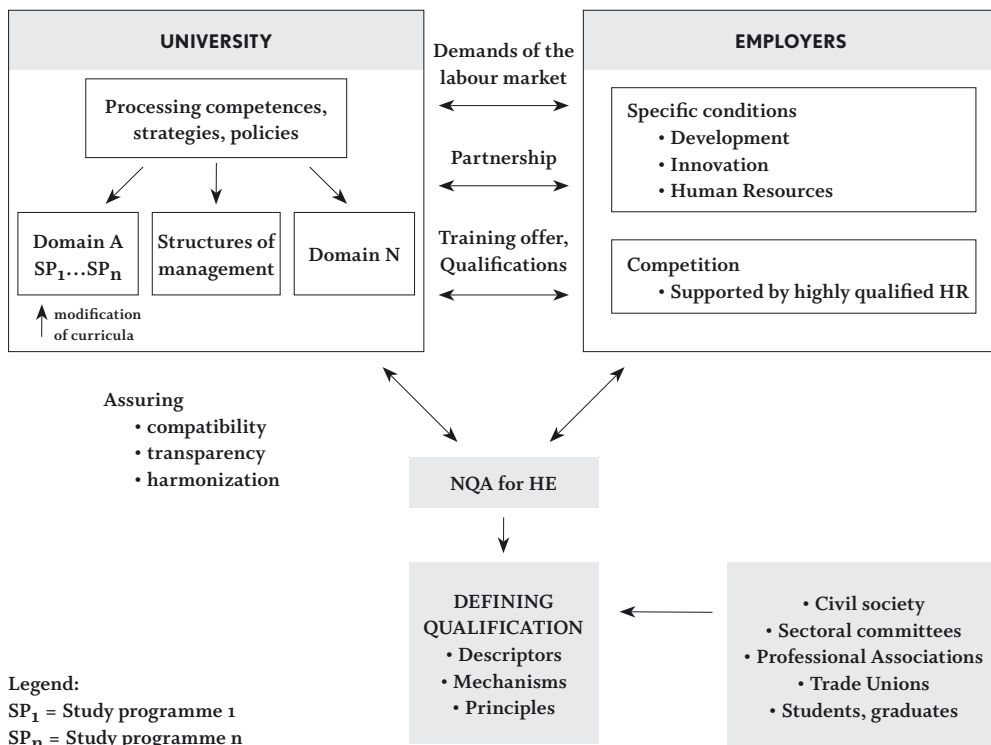
A public debate has already been conducted on the elaboration of the methodology to be used for the development of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The debate consisted of 8 regional workshops during April and May 2007, and included representatives from a number of Romanian higher education institutions. The consultation period ended with a National Conference where the final, revised form of the methodology was presented and validated.

The methodology comprises of: the structure of the NQFHE including the definition of the key concepts; the descriptors for defining the higher education professional qualifications; the set of guidelines for designing qualifications; the procedures an institution has to comply with in order to be given the right to certify a qualification (the application for validation of a qualification); the structure of the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education.

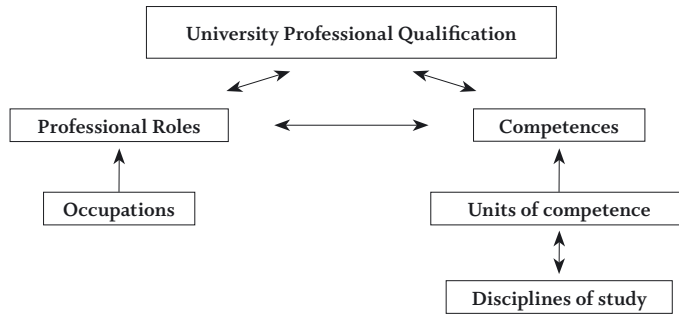
The Strategy is based on a transparent process within the universities, on programmes compatible with those in similar institutions, as well as on means for harmonisation between the educational programmes of different universities and the training demand from the labour market (Figure 1). EQF aims at identifying the training needs directly linked to the labour market (employers') demand. The labour market demands for competencies and qualifications (which require training) are addressed to the university, which processes them and turns them into training

strategies and later into programmes of study. All qualifications (expressed in learning outcomes) should be transparent and legible to the economic environment. As for the employer, the qualifications are moulded by specific conditions ensuring both competitiveness and innovation. In this context, the university and the enterprise transmit information to the national qualifications authority for higher education, which synthesises and defines the formal qualifications in terms of descriptors, mechanisms and principles. This process takes into account the opinions of the general public, sectoral committees, professional associations, trade unions, students and graduates.

**Figure 1. Each Party's Role in Defining Qualifications**



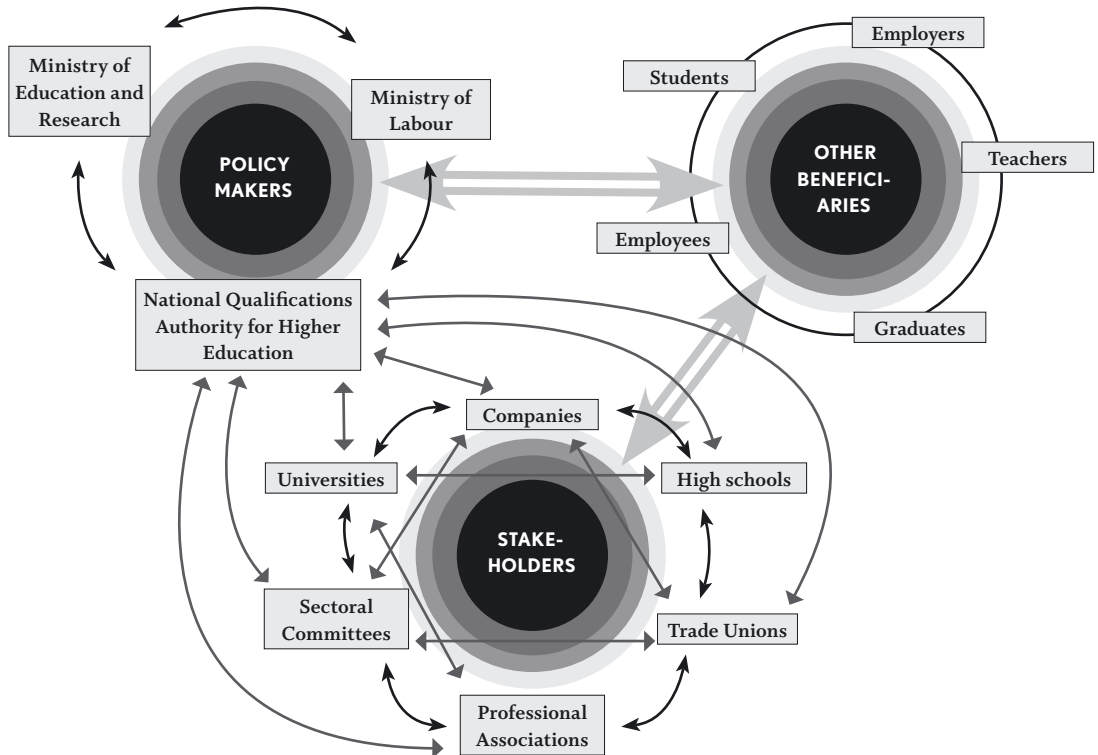
**Figure 2. The description process of the university professional qualification**



### 6.5.1 INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

An important axis of the ACPART strategy is to build up the NQF in partnership with all parties and beneficiaries (Figure 3) involved in the qualifications issue, who can assume different roles according to the situation. The interface between the policy-makers and the stakeholders is primarily represented by the national qualifications authorities for higher education, a position held by ACPART in Romania. These authorities develop their activities based on the opinions of, and continuing consultation with, the stakeholders. At the same time, the opinions of other groups of beneficiaries should also be considered.

**Figure 3. Partners, Parties and Beneficiaries**

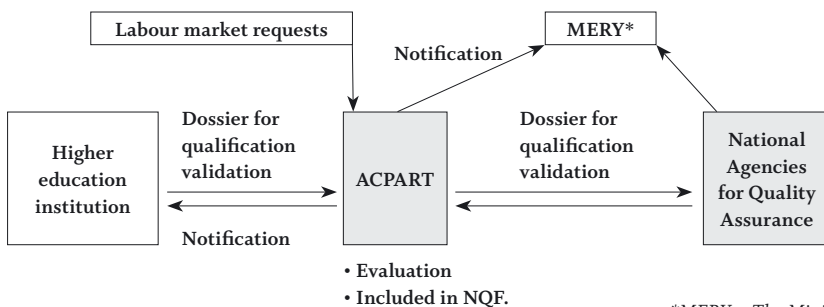


ACPART will develop a permanent dialogue on the organisation and progress of its activities with all NQFHE-interested stakeholders as follows:

- The Ministry of Labour, Family and Equal Opportunities and social partners (sectoral committees, trade unions, syndicates and professional associations) for harmonising higher education qualifications with the labour market demand, and its permanently changing needs;
- Other institutions directly involved in the development of the National Qualifications Framework (National Adult Training Board, National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development, higher education institutions and high schools) in order to identify coherent ways of correlating the qualifications in higher education with those of other levels (e.g. TVET) and EQF, respectively;
- Romanian Agencies for Quality Assurance in Higher Education that are responsible for the external evaluation of the criteria and benchmarks of academic quality. Their main missions are: a) to regularly develop the methodology and the accreditation standards for different types of programmes and higher education providers, b) to conduct assessments based on the standards and methodology approved by Government Decisions, either upon request or on its own initiative, and to propose the authorisation and accreditation of higher education providers and their academic programmes.

In accordance with their institutional missions, there should be a synergetic relationship between ACPART and the agencies for QA. While ACPART manages the definition and description of higher education professional qualifications for each programme of study and validates the new qualifications, the National Agencies for QA exercise an external evaluation concerning the content and quality of the process, which is concluded by the certification of a specific higher education programme. After completing the procedures for provisional authorisation, the QA Agencies, together with ACPART, notify the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth of their decision. In the case of a positive decision, ACPART will propose the initiation of the procedures to issue the government decision concerning the provisional functioning of the programme of study.

**Figure 4. Procedures an institution has to follow in order to obtain the right to certify a qualification**



\*MERY – The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth



### 6.5.2 NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS REGISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

As the national authority for the development of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, ACPART has the responsibility for designing, implementing and maintaining the National Qualifications Register for Higher Education (NQRHE) as a tool for identification, registration, permanent consultation and updating of qualifications, namely of degrees and awards issued by higher education institutions.

The NQRHE should be regarded as a multi-party and multi-national tool of interest. As a multi-party tool, NQRHE represents the result of collaboration between different stakeholders, while as a multi-national tool, NQRHE will be available on-line both in Romanian and in English, to ensure national and international access to information.

NQRHE is in its first experimental form, bringing together all the titles and qualifications delivered by Romanian universities. This has been publicly available since May 2007 on the ACPART website. The future development of the Register will be supported by projects from governmental and structural funds.

### 6.5.3 NATIONAL HARMONISATION OF QUALIFICATIONS

A process has been initiated to describe 22 qualifications from different higher education areas, as follows:

- Computers and information technology;
- Electronics and telecommunication engineering;
- Electrical engineering – electrotechnics;
- Systems engineering – automatics and applied informatics;
- Mathematics;
- Informatics;
- Machine engineering;
- Industrial engineering – technology of machine manufacturing;
- Mechanical engineering;
- Chemistry;
- Chemical engineering;
- Environment engineering;
- Civil engineering;
- Building Service/Installation Engineering;
- Finance – finance and banks;
- Administration Sciences;
- Communication Sciences;
- Business Administration – commerce, tourism, services economy;
- Transportation engineering;
- Naval and navigation engineering - maritime and fluvial navigation and transport;
- Department of teacher training;
- History.

Within the Phare Project for Technical Assistance *Training and counselling for continuing the TVET development in Romania* RO2006/018-147.04.01 (conducted in partnership with the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development - NCTVETD), the qualifications correlating to 10 study programmes from different fields of study in higher education will be harmonised with

the corresponding VET qualifications. This process will be completed by November 2007.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

The key to a good NQF is improvement of the dialogue between representatives of all HEIs, other stakeholders and students, in order to explain and build up the NQFHE together. This will also ensure valuable feedback regarding the development and implementation of the NQFHE. The NQF must assure the transparency and visibility of HE study on offer.

The NQFHE will further allow the development of real student-centred higher education. In order to achieve all its goals the NQFHE should be characterised by flexibility, simplicity, applicability and visibility.

Therefore, if we develop the qualifications framework, we can develop the mobility of students, graduates and the labour force, improve the curricular reform, and develop a better understanding of study cycles and learning outcomes correlated to each cycle.

All stakeholders should be involved in the actions which link the development of the qualifications framework to other Bologna action lines: quality assurance, credit transfer and accumulation systems, lifelong learning, flexible learning paths and the social dimension, recognition of qualifications (particularly the Diploma Supplement), and quality assurance.

A NQFHE would be of direct relevance to the policy-makers and expert bodies responsible for education, training, and learning policies and systems at both the national and international level. The relevance of the NQFHE to individual members of the public will be ensured by the development and implementation of transparent instruments and tools for “reading” and understanding the higher education qualifications (including the credit transfer and accumulation system, entry and exit level requirements, etc.). Following the development and implementation of the NQFHE, individual qualifications awarded at national level should contain a clear reference to the EQF, further strengthening the direct relevance of the framework to the public.

# Chapter 7: Conclusions

*Emmi Helle and Bryan Maguire*

The Bologna Framework provides a context for effective quality assurance. The development of clear, outcomes-focused qualifications frameworks that share common methodological descriptors will have a substantial impact on European higher education. These descriptors will facilitate the adoption of a system of readable and comparable degrees. They can also be used in the internal and external quality assurance processes.

Judging from the articles in this report and the discussions at the ENQA workshop in Dublin, it is evident that ENQA member agencies are increasingly aware of, and involved with, the development of qualifications frameworks. At the same time, a lot remains to be done to define the role of the agencies in qualifications frameworks processes that inherently have numerous leading actors.

It was also recognised at the ENQA workshop that the information on qualifications frameworks' national and regional developments could be further improved and disseminated to the wider public. This initiative has already been taken forward on the Bologna Process website for the EHEA framework, supported by the Council of Europe, and which will also include the national self-certification reports (<http://www.bologna2009benelux.org/qf/>).

The workshop also illustrated that the terminology used for qualifications frameworks needed further clarification. The language and terms used should be understandable and relevant. Development of conceptual approaches for describing qualifications was defined as a priority.

NQFs can be used either to establish and/or identify whether specified minimum standards have been met. This applies mostly to countries where the delivery of programmes is formally regulated, such as accrediting countries. The workshop showed that the NQF can be applied in a concrete way in the accreditation process. Also, the descriptors of the NQF can be used to verify whether the outcomes of a programme and the modules or courses of which it is composed are at the appropriate level. However, there is no single model for the application of national frameworks of qualifications within quality assurance.

The workshop presented different approaches to developing NQFs. In some countries the NQF needs to be written into law to actually be implemented. In other countries, a separate authority has been established to create the NQF. Also, the development of NQFs has often coincided with a general overhaul of university programmes and higher education structures.

To be effective, NQFs need to reflect the national 'quality culture' of the HE community and how it addresses the needs of stakeholders. The stakeholder process also grants 'externality' to the NQF, which is essential for credible quality assurance. Regardless of the formal structure, the development of a NQF, by consultation between stakeholders, is a dynamic opportunity for all concerned to reflect on the ways to use the NQF to improve their own activities. This means that quality assurance bodies, by giving their stated agreement to the self-certification process, can contribute and raise their profile in the HE field by actively participating in the creation of NQFs.

Germany has focussed on the “new” degrees in developing qualifications frameworks, and on the equivalences and differences between these and the “old”, existing national degrees. In Romania, for its part, the creation of a NQF has been facilitated by the reorganisation of the entire spectrum of university programmes. In Romania and Hungary the new legislation has helped to introduce the three cycle system. In those countries where academic institutions have autonomous powers, qualification frameworks are used as a ‘point of reference’ for both general guidance and within a quality assurance system in a less prescriptive context.

Both national quality assurance arrangements and positions in the national framework of qualifications are to be referred to in diploma supplements. Such inclusion helps the progress towards the Bologna objective of enhanced recognition for qualifications and the enhancement of mutual trust across the EHEA. Enhanced recognition means that a qualification has a position in a national framework that has been aligned to the Bologna framework by an internationally recognised process. The qualification has also been awarded through an internationally recognised process under a system that is quality assured in accordance with the ESG. This comprehensive architecture eliminates a requirement to consider qualifications on a case by case basis for recognition. Trust grows across the system through the intertwining of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance, and with trust grows mutual recognition.

The close link between quality assurance and qualifications frameworks means that there is a role for quality assurance agencies in the development of national qualifications frameworks. The quality assurance agency, whether or not it has a direct role in programme accreditation, will be involved in helping institutions demonstrate the link between their programmes and the framework. If the framework is to be fit for purpose it should reflect the needs of national accreditation practice. In some countries this may mean a quality assurance agency taking a lead role in developing the framework, and coordinating and articulating the views of other stakeholders in higher education qualifications. In other countries, the ministry or some other agency may have the lead role, but the unique perspective of agencies responsible for external quality assurance still requires articulation. This articulation of agency perspective will be a key responsibility for members of ENQA in the coming years.

# Annex 1: Programme of the ENQA workshop on Quality Assurance and Qualifications Frameworks

**Organised in cooperation with the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)  
7-8 June 2007, Dublin, Ireland**

**Thursday, 7 June**

**09:00 Registration**

**10:00 Opening session: Qualifications frameworks after London**  
Séamus Puirseil, Vice President, ENQA – Chief Executive, HETAC

**10:30 Panel: Roles of the quality agency in framework development – Exploring Chapter 2 of the Bergen framework report**

Achim Hopbach, German Accreditation Council (Chair)

– Frameworks in use/under review, Nick Harris, QAA;

Bryan Maguire, HETAC; Axel Aerden, NVAO

– Frameworks in development, Christina Rozsnyai, HAC;

Sorin Zaharia, ACPART

**11:15 Coffee break**

**11:30 Working groups**

– Working group 1: Quality assurance agency as the lead agency for the framework, Nick Harris, QAA; Bryan Maguire, HETAC (Facilitators)

– Working group 2: Quality assurance agency as a partner, Axel Aerden, NVAO; Karena Maguire, HETAC (Facilitators)

**13:00 Lunch**

**14:00 Panel: Framework implementation and programme accreditation, Emmi Helle, ENQA (Chair); Axel Aerden, NVAO; Karena Maguire, HETAC**

– Strategies for transition from pre-framework to post-framework

– Communicating to institutions

– Training reviewers

– Communicating to other stakeholders

**15:00 Coffee break**

**15:30** Parallel working groups: Framework implementation at programme level and the relationship to European Standards and Guidelines (especially to Chapter 1.2)

- Working group A: Ian McKenna, HETAC (Facilitator)
- Working group B: Karena Maguire, HETAC (Facilitator)
- Working group C: Mary Sheridan, HETAC (Facilitator)

**17:30** End of first day

**19:00** Workshop dinner

## **Friday, 8 June**

**09:00** Panel: Framework implementation and institutional quality assurance, Nick Harris, QAA; Jim Murray, NQAI; Axel Aerden, NVAO

- Frameworks and institutional autonomy
- The role of frameworks in external review
- Reaching the academic staff – influencing learner experience
- Evaluating framework impact

**10:00** Parallel working groups: Integration of frameworks within institutional QA and external review of institutions

- Working group A: Jim Murray, NQAI (Facilitator)
- Working group B: Pdraig Walsh, IUQB (Facilitator)
- Working group C: Mary Sheridan, HETAC (Facilitator)

**11:00** Coffee break

**11:30** Concluding plenary and workshop evaluation, Kurt Sohm, Austrian FH Council (Chair); Séamus Puirseil, HETAC; Nick Harris, QAA; Axel Aerden, NVAO; Sorin Zaharia, ACPART; Christina Rozsnyai, HAC; Jim Murray, NQAI; Bryan Maguire, HETAC (Panelists)

Reports from Theme Rapporteurs

**13:00** Lunch



