

Draft
Report from Bologna Working Group on
Qualifications Frameworks

February 2007

BFUG Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks

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Executive summary

The Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks was mandated, as its main tasks, to consider what further development of the EHEA-framework may be required particularly the linkage between the national frameworks and the EHEA-framework, monitor the development of the EU “European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning” and provide assistance to member countries working to introduce national frameworks.

The working group has conducted four regional workshops on developing national qualifications frameworks and supported especially new Bologna members through participation in conferences and meetings. It has overseen the completion of two pilot projects in Ireland and Scotland on verification on the compatibility of national qualifications frameworks with the overarching EHEA-framework.

The main findings of the Working Group are:

The overarching Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and the procedures and criteria for verification of compatibility of national qualifications framework with the overarching framework, as adopted by Ministers in Bergen, are adequate and serve their purpose. No amendments to the EHEA-framework is therefore required.

The workshops and the stocktaking have made evident that more than half of the member countries are in the beginning of the process of developing national qualifications frameworks. The workshops also underlined the need for countries to offer and receive mutual support in the elaboration of their national qualifications frameworks.

Facilitating experience sharing and mutual support is not a task for a new working group, but should be vested in a permanent international organisation with own resources. The Working Group propose that this task is entrusted the Council of Europe, which already carries out the role of co-secretariat for the ENIC Network (with UNESCO-CEPES) in the field of recognition and to which notification of self-certification of national qualifications frameworks is given.

We are satisfied that national qualifications frameworks compatible with overarching EHEA-framework will also be compatible with the proposal from the European Commission on a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. It is incomprehensible for us that the ECVET proposal does not relate to ECTS. The group therefore recommend that the EU-member-states ask the European Commission to revise its proposal for ECVET in a way that builds on or relates to ECTS.

In order to avoid confusion by the existence of two overarching frameworks it is important that the promotion of European higher education in a global context should build on the overarching EHEA-framework.

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Part I – Role of the Working Group

Chapter 1- Introduction to the work of the Working Group

Bergen Communiqué

On 20 May 2005 in Bergen Ministers responsible for higher educations within the European Higher Educations Area (EHEA) agreed:

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

We commit ourselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010, and to having started work on this by 2007.

We ask the Follow-up Group to report on the implementation and further development of the overarching framework.

We underline the importance of ensuring complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing general education as well as vocational education and training as now being developed within the European Union as well as among participating countries. We ask the European Commission fully to consult all parties to the Bologna Process as work progresses.

We charge the Follow-up Group with continuing and widening the stock-taking process and to continue in the fields of the degree system,

.....

In particular, we shall look for progress in:

-*
- implementation of the national frameworks for qualifications;*

The Working Group

In its meeting in Manchester on 12-13 October 2005 BFUG approved the establishment of a working group to consider and report on the implementation and further development of the overarching framework.

Members of the Working Group were BFUG-representatives from the following countries:

1. Denmark (N-Europe), chair (continuing)
2. Netherlands (NW-Europe, substituting Ireland)
3. Russia (NE-Europe, substituting Latvia) (non EU)
4. Hungary (Central Europe, continuing)

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5. Spain (SW-Europe, substituting France)
6. “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (SE-Europe, new seat) (non EU)
7. Chair of the WG on Stocktaking
8. Bologna Presidency (UK-AT-FI-GER)

The Working Group could draw on expertise and commission research, as it feels appropriate and it called for expertise from consultative organisations as well as national experts on qualifications frameworks.

BFUG asked the Working Group to

1. *consider what further development of the framework may be required, particularly the linkage between national frameworks and the EHEA-framework; the Working Group may invite member countries to participate in pilot projects of self-certification of national frameworks; it may conduct a survey on how credit ranges and credits are defined in national legislation.*
2. *support the Working Group on Stocktaking in the stocktaking exercise of implementation of national frameworks.*
3. *monitor the development of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning with the aim of ensuring complementarity between that framework and the EHEA framework and advise BFUG on the matter.*
4. *provide assistance to member countries working to introduce national frameworks.*

The two principal questions thus to be answered in this final report are:

- Is the Bologna Framework as adopted in Bergen adequate to fulfil its purposes of international transparency, recognition and mobility?
- Are the criteria and procedure for alignment sufficient enough to secure trust and make more efficient the recognition of foreign qualifications within EHEA.

The Working Group has had meetings in November 2005 and in February, September and December 2006.

It has conducted four regional workshops on developing National Qualifications Frameworks (June and September 2006) and supported especially new Bologna members through participation in conferences and meetings. The Council of Europe has generously supported the participation of representatives from new member-countries in the workshops.

It has overlooked the completion of two pilot projects on verification on the compatibility of National Qualifications Frameworks with the EHEA-framework

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It has asked the European Commission to bring the question on how credit ranges and credits are defined in national legislation to the ECTS-counsellors.

The Group has submitted progress reports to BFUG and the Board and submits this final report of its findings to the London Conference through BFUG.

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Part II – Bologna Framework and the European Qualifications Framework and other aspects of the Bologna Process

Chapter 2 Bologna Framework and the European Qualifications Framework

At present there are two overarching qualifications frameworks processes going on in Europe: One within the Bologna Process for higher education for the 45 Bologna member-countries and another one proposed by the European Commission for lifelong learning for the 25 EU-member-states. The questions discussed in the Working Group and elsewhere were whether this situation is satisfactory as regards transparency and whether there are complementarities between the two frameworks.

The Bologna frameworks consist of national qualification frameworks embracing higher education qualifications for each member-country linked together by an overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. The overarching framework was adopted in Bergen in 2005 and at the same time agreed that work on national qualifications frameworks should have started by 2007 to be completed by 2010.

The implementation of the Bologna Framework for Qualifications is going on in many member countries and will thus continue as planned and decided in Bergen. Progress in the development of national qualifications frameworks is part of the stocktaking exercise prepared for the London Conference 2007. The preliminary results show that almost all member countries have started developing national qualifications framework but most countries are in the beginning of the process.

The European Commission proposal for a recommendation on the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning issued in September 2006 is based on a European Commission consultation paper that was discussed intensively in the EU-member states and at a conference in Budapest in February 2006. It aims to cover the entire education and training systems of the EU-member-states.

It is the overall opinion of the Working Group that the two frameworks will co-exist. The group takes note that they have different scope and purposes and use a different methodology.

First, the geographical scope of the two overarching frameworks is different. The EQF/LLL encompasses only the 27 EU members whereas the Bologna framework embraces all the 45 Bologna members.

Second, that the purposes are different. The EHEA framework aims at embracing higher education qualifications at the national level and facilitate transparency, recognition and mobility among higher education degree holders. The EQF/LLL and its possible national counterparts that are not mandatory aim at connecting the different parts of the education system into a comprehensive framework.

Third, that the sets of level descriptors have different applications. The descriptors in the EQF/LLL are not higher education descriptors but generic descriptors that can be used to describe all types of learning. They are more general compared to the more

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specific Bologna cycle-descriptor for higher education, especially in the final proposal from the European Commission compared to the descriptor in the Commission discussion paper that was issued in 2005 for consultation.

Fourth, the two frameworks are linked together: The EQF-descriptors for the upper levels (level 6, 7 and 8) are general for all kinds of qualifications but for HE-qualifications there is a reference to the descriptors used in the Bologna framework. These have to be used for as a European reference for higher education qualifications.

The differences in scope and purpose make it clear that the two frameworks can't substitute each other but the group is satisfied that national qualifications frameworks compatible with overarching EHEA-framework will also be compatible with the proposal from the European Commission on a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

In order to avoid confusion by the existence of two overarching frameworks *the working group recommends that the promotion of European higher education outside Europe should build on the overarching EHEA-framework, which include the Dublin descriptors.*

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Chapter 3 – Qualifications frameworks and other aspects of the Bologna Process

Sectoral/profile developments and the framework of qualifications

The Report for Bergen from the previous Working Group noted the centrality of fields of learning in the European tradition of higher education. Attention was drawn to work such as that of the Tuning project to enhance the European Higher Education Area by developing mutual understanding within communities of scholars of the scope and ambitions of higher education programmes within their fields of learning.

The instruments of the framework and in particular the Dublin Descriptors have stimulated further collaborations within disciplines. The Joint Quality Initiative at a meeting to review the development of the Dublin Descriptors in October 2006, heard from representatives in fields such as music, chemistry and engineering. Discipline-specific descriptors have been elaborated that either build on the Dublin Descriptors directly or have been compared to them. In some cases these have been put forward as possible bases for programme accreditation.

These developments can be helpful in promoting recognition and mobility. International disciplinary and sectoral networks are an indispensable feature of a dynamic higher education system. These networks are encouraged to examine how their disciplines intersect with the features of the overarching framework, such the Dublin Descriptors. The development of shared understanding can help to promote quality, for example through mutual participation in benchmarking activities. Nevertheless professional profile is a national matter. Developments within disciplines cannot supplant the competent national responsibility for standard setting. Accreditation is likewise a national prerogative to be performed within the appropriate national legal and educational tradition.

Disciplinary and sectoral associations also have a role in the formulation of national frameworks. The working group encourages them to use their voices, drawing on their connections with transnational networks, to inform national discussions. However individual disciplinary concerns, even with the purported weight of European sectoral positions behind them, are only one source for consideration in the development of national frameworks of qualifications. It is important that each national framework reflects a consensus that meets a range of national needs and objectives.

Credit Systems

The Bologna Framework adopted in Bergen incorporates the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) as a key instrument, informing the credit systems that operate within the national frameworks of the EHEA. This is reflected in Criterion 3 for the alignment of national frameworks. The experience of operating ECTS since the adoption of the revised handbook in 2005 and the alignment of the Scottish and Irish national frameworks with their respective credit systems demonstrate that ECTS continues to be fit for purpose. The technical questions that persist, for example around the link between workload and learning outcomes, are best resolved through ongoing practical implementation activities of institutions and national agencies, rather than by means of premature solutions imposed from above. Such a combination of a minimum but adequate superstructure and extensive localized cooperation reflects the genius of the EHEA. The mooted survey of national variations in credit ranges has not emerged as a urgent priority during the period of operation of the working group.

The European Commission has recently issued a consultation document on the development of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). This Commission Working Document is subject to consultation in the first part of 2007.

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Although the EQF-LLL embraces the Bologna Framework, as discussed in Chapter 2, the ECVET proposal makes no substantive reference to ECTS, the credit system associated with the Bologna Framework. This is a missed opportunity.

The higher education qualifications within in national frameworks that are to be referenced to the EQF-LL will have ECTS compatibility. Typically there are credit systems associated with these national frameworks. Countries will expect that their credit systems facilitate recognition between Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education sectors. The design of the ECVET should reflect this ambition by explicitly linking to ECTS.

The Working Group recommends that the EU-member-states ask the European Commission revise its proposal for ECVET in a way that builds on or relates to ECTS.

Recognition

One of the principal purposes of the overarching framework of qualifications is to enhance the international recognition of qualifications. It does this by providing a common understanding of the outcomes of qualifications rather than mere assertion of comparability. This shift facilitates recognition across a range of recognition purposes, including access to employment and continuing education. This in turn enhances mobility of learners and citizens in general.

The introduction of national frameworks and the cumulative alignment of national frameworks to the overarching framework will have implications for recognition practices in Europe. The ENIC/NARIC networks are the repository of the self-certification statements. The network has been entrusted with this responsibility in acknowledgement of the central function it plays in recognition activities in Europe. It is important that members of the network, as well as other actors in recognition activities, including the higher education institutions themselves, should have regard to the information about learners' qualifications contained or implied in the position of the qualifications in national frameworks. In time this will lead to more efficient and accurate recognition processes that do not rely on detailed evaluation of individual qualifications by foreign agencies, but instead place confidence in the position of quality assured qualifications in a national framework that has itself undergone a rigorous alignment process.

The working group recommends that agencies and institutions develop their qualifications recognition practices to exploit the framework.

External dimension

As the Bologna Process has gathered momentum and concrete examples of its impact are noted, particularly in the area of the three-cycle system of qualifications and the emerging qualifications framework, increasing attention is being paid to the external dimension. The external dimension has been the subject of three official Bologna seminars in 2006.

The new qualifications system, summarised in the Bologna Framework, is seen as one of the features that enhances the attractiveness of the EHEA. It makes European higher education more coherent and comprehensible to learners and institutions within and outside Europe. One question for an emergent EHEA strategy on the external dimension is how to make the most of this achievement. While there is considerable uncertainty about the way forward for the institutionalisation of the EHEA, the proposal from the Oslo seminar that a Bologna Portal be developed is supported.

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The group advises that information on the EHEA framework of qualifications form a central plank of a future Bologna information portal.

The Oslo Seminar on the external dimension also encouraged UNESCO to continue its work on revising the regional conventions on recognition of qualifications. The experience of the Bologna Process in developing national frameworks of qualifications and an overarching framework of qualifications, based on learning outcomes, and linking these to transparent quality assurance systems may be of relevance to these revisions. Developments based on similar principles will enhance the possibilities for recognition across regions also. This is particularly important in the context of transnational higher education provision. Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, which belong to national frameworks aligned to the Bologna Framework, are delivered to learners outside the EHEA also. Full recognition for these EHEA qualifications depends on understanding of the EHEA framework by competent authorities outside the region.

Conclusions to part II

In relation to qualifications frameworks and other aspects of the Bologna Process the Working Group recommends

- *that the EU-member-states ask the European Commission revise its proposal for ECVET in a way that builds on or relates to ECTS.*
- *that agencies and institutions develop their qualifications recognition practices to exploit the framework.*
- *that the promotion of European higher education outside Europe should build on the overarching EHEA-framework, which include the Dublin descriptors*

and advises

- *that information on the EHEA framework of qualifications form a central plank of a future Bologna information portal.*

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Part III – Support for the Development of National Frameworks of Qualifications

Chapter 4 Summary of the workshops and other activities

The working group was of the opinion that the best way to assist member countries in framework development was to create fora for mutual exchange of experiences and good practice and to facilitate networks of people involved in framework development. The Working Group decided then to organise workshops across Europe for these purposes.

In addition to the workshops members of the Working Group have given presentations at seminars and conferences organised by the Council of Europe including informal Ministerial Conferences for the Western Balkans and for the countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005.

Four workshops were organised for different parts of Europe. The workshops were located in The Hague, Budapest, Athens and Madrid/Alcala. Around 100 experts representing 32 Bologna countries attended the workshops.

To the first workshop in **The Hague** on 30 June 2006 representatives from the following countries were invited:

Belgium
Denmark
Finland
Germany
Iceland
Ireland
Liechtenstein
Netherlands
Norway
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom

The workshop had 26 participants. Some of the countries had already a qualifications framework in working and many of the others were in the middle of the development process. Presentations of work in progress were given by Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Flanders and Ireland. The discussions focused on specific issues from national developments and the demands rose in the self-certification process such as how to reflect different profiles, integration of existing frameworks, administration of frameworks, organisation of a self-certification process and questions raised by the EQF and sectoral frameworks.

To the second workshop in **Budapest** on 4 September representatives from the following Central- and NE-European countries were invited

Austria
Czech Republic
Estonia

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Hungary
Latvia
Lithuania
Moldova
Poland
Russian Federation
Slovak Republic
Slovenia
Ukraine

The workshop had 19 participants. Of these countries only the host country had any experiences with qualifications frameworks. The host gave a presentation of the process of developing a Hungarian Qualifications Framework and of the special project of implementing descriptors of learning outcomes at Hungarian universities. The discussion then focuses on how getting started and the design of a national qualifications framework.

To the third workshop in **Athens** on 11-12 September representatives from the following countries were invited:

Albania
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Bosnia-Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Georgia
Greece
Romania
Serbia
Montenegro
“the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”
Turkey

The workshop had 25 participants. None of these countries had any experiences in framework building and the workshop then concentrated on how to get started and on exercises in framework design

To the forth and last workshop in **Madrid/Alcalá** on 18-19 September representatives from the following countries were invited:

Andorra
Belgium (Communauté Française)
France
Italy
Holy See
Luxembourg
Malta
Portugal
Spain

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The workshop had 23 participants. The represented countries were just going to start or had just started the development of a qualifications framework. The host gave a presentation of the higher education reform to be launched the next day and most of the discussion took this as a starting point for the theme reform agenda and qualifications framework.

The overall impression from organising the workshops were:

32 of the 45 Bologna members did send representatives to the workshops. This is a fairly good share but many countries were missing that could have contributed to the exchange of ideas and experiences.

The level of representation in the workshops was quite diverse. Some countries send representatives from ministries, others from agencies (quality assurance or recognition) or from HEI/Rector's Conference.

The experience from the quality assurance area shows that real progress is only obtained if there is knowledge and understanding of the subject area at both national and institutional area.

The Working Group finds it important that expertise in framework development within the country is available at all levels and recommends that this expertise be developed as well in the ministries and agencies (QAA, ENIC and NARIC) as at the institutional level in Rector's Conferences and student organisations.

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Chapter 5 Result of the Work

For the purpose of assisting the Stocktaking Group in monitoring the progress of establishing national qualifications frameworks the Working Group developed the following “step-ladder” from start of work to certification of a national framework.

Establishing National Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education in Bologna Member States. Steps/stages:

1	Decision to start	Taken by the national body responsible for higher education (minister?)
2	Setting the agenda: The purpose of our NQF	WG-Report nr. 1 (section 2.3)
3	Organising the process	Identifying stakeholders; setting up a committee/WG
4	Design	Profile Level structure Level descriptors (learning outcomes) Credit ranges
5	Consultation	National discussion and acceptance of design by stakeholders
6	Approval	According to national tradition by Minister/Government/legislation
7	Administrative set-up	Division of tasks of implementation between HEI, QAA and other bodies
8	Implementation at institutional/programme level	Reformulation of individual study programmes to learning outcome based approach
9	Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF	Accreditation or similar (cfr. Berlin Communiqué)
10	Self-certification of compatibility with the EHEA framework (Alignment to Bologna cycles etc.)	WG Report nr. 1 Pilot projects

The sequence of steps needs not to be identical in the different countries.

The stepladder was used by the Stocktaking group in a simplified form for the scorecard on progress on qualifications framework.

The “step-ladder” also served as a basis for organising the four workshops on national qualifications frameworks that was the main instrument in the Working Group’s attempt to assist member-countries working to introduce national frameworks.

The purpose of the workshops was to give the participants possibilities to share experiences and discuss problems and questions concerning frameworks.

The workshop in Hague had its own agenda as mentioned in the previous chapter.

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At the other workshops the presentations and discussions were divided into several themes:

A. Organising the process

- Initial decision
- Purposes
- Identifying stakeholders
- Setting up a committee/working group

The point for discussion here were how to get the process started: who should take the decision (Parliament, minister or a board concerned). Should the framework be part of a higher education reform agenda or should it just reflect status quo? Who should be responsible for and involved in the project and would the project need a staffed project organisation or would a working group be sufficient?

In most countries the decision to start would be taken by the minister in charge of higher education and the framework be part of a higher education reform agenda. There was broad consensus about having stakeholders from all areas of higher education including labour market organisations represented in a working group or steering committee.

B. Design of Framework

- Cycles and levels
- Profiles
- Award types
- Learning outcome/Output descriptors/Dublin descriptors
- Credits and Workload

The points for discussion under this item were the number of levels needed in the participating countries. How profiles could or should be reflected in binary systems. Could award types be the building stones in the framework or would you like to go further down to clusters of subject areas? How learning outcome could be described in generic terms. Would a translation of the Dublin Descriptors fulfil the purpose? Should the framework at all levels include credits?

Many of the countries expressed the opinion that they would need more than three levels first and foremost because they had short cycle programmes within their higher education. Those countries with binary systems intended to have different award types but there were exceptions: The binary system of Hungarian higher education was not reflected in the Hungarian framework and this was agreed by universities and professional schools to have the same award types and outcome descriptors. Hungary and Romania experimented with descriptors for clusters of subject areas but most countries stuck or would stick to award types as basic elements of their framework. The Dublin Descriptors was developed as common denominators for award descriptors in the member states of the Joint Quality Initiative. National descriptors could be more detailed and encompass other dimensions than those included in the Dublin Descriptors. Few countries had any experiences on credits integrated in their frameworks.

C. Consultation and approval

- Broad consultation to reach all that are later involved
- Formal approval

These points did not give much occasion for discussion. It was generally agreed that the consultation on the proposal for a national qualifications framework should at least

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involve those stakeholder that would take part in the implementation of the framework. The formal approval would be in accordance with national practice and normally the same that has taken the initial decision.

D. Administrative set up

- Which bodies are involved
- Distribution of functions
- Inclusion of qualifications into the framework
- Implementation at institutional level

If an adopted qualifications framework has to be an entity in public life and not just another piece of paper it has to be decided which bodies are going to use the framework and what their specific tasks should be. It is of equal importance to decide how new qualifications are connected to the framework. And of no less importance is the question of how the framework and the learning outcome approach are implemented at higher education institutions.

The bodies most likely to be involved at the national level apart from the ministries and related agencies would be the academic recognition information centre (NARIC) and the quality assurance agency. Some countries would in addition to that have an accreditation body with a role to play.

The procedures for inclusion of new awards or award types in the framework is crucial for the trust other countries might have in the right placement on awards on the appropriate level. The procedure must be transparent and documentation available.

Implementation of the award type descriptors at institutional level in the programme descriptions is certainly the most challenging part of the process. Denmark could offer experiences of results from a non-mandatory implementations process and at the Budapest workshop Hungary explained how a project has been developed at Hungarian institutions of higher education.

E. Self-certification

- Verifying the compatibility of national frameworks of qualifications with the framework of qualifications of the EHEA
- Criteria
- Procedures

At each of the four workshops a summary of the Irish and the Scottish self-certification processes were given. Many questions were raised such as the role of quality assurance agencies, of international experts and the relations between the Dublin Descriptors and the outcome descriptors in the national frameworks. For a more detailed discussion on these and other issues see the next three chapters on the pilot studies.

The main lesson from the pilot studies was that the criteria to be met in the self-certification process have to be taken into account at the very beginning of the framework developing process.

Conclusions

The workshops have been efficient fora where a lot of basic questions being asked and where sharing of experiences could take place. Many countries were still (September 2006) at a stage considering how to get started.

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The basic information source was still the report from the previous working group on qualifications framework but web sites and documents from countries that have already introduced QF may be useful to consult.

There seems to be a strong need to share experiences in order to assist national development.

The Working Group recommends that these experience-sharing meetings continue on a regional basis as workshops or conferences and that an appropriate international organisation or network secure the facilitating of the meetings.

The international organisation to be given this task has to encompass all the Bologna countries and have its own financial resources. The Council of Europe fulfils these requirements and is as co-secretariat for the ENIC and NARIC Networks already involved in the recognitions of foreign qualifications, which is closely connected to the idea behind the overarching qualifications framework. The Council of Europe is also keeper of the evidences from the self-certification processes and the self-certification reports are published on its website.

The Working Group recommends that the tasks of promoting and facilitating information and experience sharing activities are given to the Council of Europe and when appropriate in cooperation with ENIC and NARIC Networks, ENQA and other relevant organisations.

Conclusions from part III

In drawing conclusion from the regional workshops the Working Group finds it important

- *that expertise in framework development within the country is available at all levels and recommends that this expertise be developed as well in the ministries and agencies (QAA, ENIC and NARIC) as at the institutional level in Rector's Conferences and student organisations*

It also recommends

- *that these experience-sharing meetings continue on a regional basis as workshops or conferences and that an appropriate international organisation or network secure the facilitating of the meetings, and*
- *that the tasks of promoting and facilitating information and experience sharing activities are given to the Council of Europe and when appropriate in cooperation with ENIC and NARIC Networks, ENQA and other relevant organisations.*

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Part IV – Verification of the Compatibility of National Frameworks to the Bologna Framework – Outline of Pilot Verifications and Lessons Learned

Chapter 6 – Summary of Completion of Work in Scotland and Ireland

Introduction

The way in which national frameworks are aligned to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is of utmost importance. For the functioning and reputation of the EHEA Framework it is vital that there are clear and demonstrable national processes in place for aligning national frameworks with the Bologna Framework.

Thus, when Ministers met in Bergen in May 2005, they adopted criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of national frameworks with the Bologna Framework, which had been proposed to them in the report of the Working Group. The criteria that were adopted set out the minimum requirements that a national framework must fulfil before it, and its compatibility with the Bologna Framework, are considered acceptable to its peers in other signatory states and by other stakeholders in the European Higher Education Area. The procedures that were adopted set out the various stages that each country should undertake in the verification process.

Scotland and Ireland were both invited by the chairperson of the Bologna Follow-Up Group Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks to undertake pilot projects of the self-certification of the Compatibility of their respective National Frameworks of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. It is important to note that while the two verification processes are pilot projects from the point of view of the working group they are full and complete processes for Scotland and Ireland and now that they have been completed the Scottish and Irish Frameworks are aligned with the Bologna Framework.

The aim in inviting Ireland and Scotland to undertake these initial verification processes was that the processes could be implemented in a way which provided the Working Group to review the effectiveness of the processes and to look at any issues arising from the processes for the effectiveness of the criteria and procedures and for whether it would be necessary to develop the criteria and procedures further for future verification processes.

Summary of Scottish Process

QAA Scotland Committee is the competent national body, as designated by the Scottish Executive, responsible for the maintenance and preservation of standards within the framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland. QAA Scotland Committee asked the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA) to undertake the verification process and to report back and make recommendations to QAA Scotland Committee.

SACCA is a committee constituted jointly by QAA Scotland and Universities Scotland. The latter is the autonomous voice of higher education institutions in Scotland, and, with QAA Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Association of Scotland's Col-

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leges and the Scottish Executive, forms the development and implementation partnership for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

SACCA therefore convened the working group to take the verification process forward. The working group was chaired by the current chair of SACCA (Professor John Harper, Vice-Principal, Robert Gordon University), and was composed of senior representatives from a wide range of Scottish Higher education institutions, a student and two international experts. The two international experts were Ms Eva Gonczi, Hungarian Ministry of Education and Dr Aune Valk, Head of the Open University Centre, University of Tartu, Estonia.

In August 2006 a consultation seminar took place involving a wider group of stakeholders. At the seminar these organisations had the chance to comment on the report and the verification process.

The report was then finalised by SACCA and submitted to the QAA Scotland Committee, which then signed off on the report.

Summary of Irish Process

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland established a steering group for the verification process, chaired by the Authority, with representatives of the Irish Universities Association, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology. In addition, following consultation with the Chairperson of the Bologna Qualifications Frameworks Working Group, Robert Wagenaar and Sjur Bergan joined the group. Robert Wagenaar of the University of Groningen is the joint co-ordinator of the Tuning project. Sjur Bergan is the Head of the Department of Higher Education and History Teaching at the Council of Europe (Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education Directorate General IV - Education, Culture and Cultural Heritage, Youth and Sport).

The steering group drafted a report, which was published in June 2006. Submissions were invited on the draft and a workshop was held on 3 October with a wider group of stakeholders, including representatives of higher education institutions, students the Department of Education and Science, the Higher Education Authority, the Irish Universities Quality Board and social partners (including employer and trade union representatives). Following this the steering group finalised the report and the report has now been agreed among the Authority, the Irish Universities Association, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the Higher Education Authority and the Irish Universities Quality Board.

The summary of the verification report is being translated into a number of European languages.

Summary of Scottish Outcome

The Scottish verification report summarises the outcome of the process as follows:

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EHEA qualification Cycles	Qualifications within the Scottish FQHE
First cycle qualifications	Scottish Bachelors Degree with Honours Scottish Bachelors Degree
Short cycle qualifications within or linked to the first cycle	Diploma of Higher Education
Intermediate awards within the first cycle	Certificate of Higher Education Graduate Certificate Graduate Diploma
Second cycle qualifications	Masters Degree Integrated Masters Degree MPhil Degree
Intermediate awards within the second cycle	Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate
Third cycle qualifications	Doctoral Degrees including Doctorates by Research

The Scottish verification report is available on the web here:

http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/QF-Scotland_en.pdf

Summary of Irish Outcome

The Irish verification report summarises the outcome of the process as follows:

- “The Irish Higher Certificate is an intermediate qualification within the Bologna first cycle.
- The Irish Ordinary Bachelor Degree is compatible with the Bologna first cycle descriptor. However, holders of Irish Ordinary Bachelor Degrees and their equivalent former awards do not generally immediately access programmes leading to second cycle awards.
- The Irish Honours Bachelor Degree is compatible with completion of the Bologna first cycle.
- The Irish Higher Diploma is a qualification at the same level as completion of the first cycle, and is a qualification typically attained in a different field of learning than an initial first cycle award.
- The Irish Masters Degree is compatible with completion of the Bologna second cycle.
- The Irish Post-Graduate Diploma is an intermediate qualification within the Bologna second cycle.
- The Irish Doctoral Degree is compatible with completion of the Bologna third cycle.

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It is of note that there is an apparent inconsistency or paradox in the treatment of both the Ordinary Bachelor Degree and the Honours Bachelor Degree as first cycle qualifications compatible with the Bologna first cycle descriptor. The compatibility of both with the Bologna first cycle descriptor has been demonstrated in terms of the comparisons of the learning outcomes. Notwithstanding this, these awards are included at two different levels in the Irish framework, with different descriptors, and the Ordinary Bachelor Degree does not typically give access to Masters Degree (second cycle) programmes at present in Ireland.

Furthermore, it is considered that the Irish authorities should review this verification in the light of the implementation of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area by other countries, particularly in the context of new progression arrangements being put in place. It is anticipated that such a review might take place when at least 20 countries have aligned their national frameworks to the European Framework.”

The Irish verification report is available on the web here:
http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/QF-Ireland_en.pdf

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Chapter 7 – Lessons Learned from Process and Procedures

Introduction

This Chapter covers issues relating to the process and procedures in general. Procedures for verifying that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework were set out in the report to Ministers in Bergen as follows:

- “The competent national body/bodies shall certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework.
- The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process
- The self-certification process shall involve international experts
- The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out
- The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process
- The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.”

The Working Group considered that it was not necessary to work through the procedures one by one as the procedures are related to one another.

Nature of Frameworks in Scotland and Ireland

Both Scotland and Ireland are relatively unusual in the Bologna process in that both countries have had Frameworks in place prior to the adoption of the Bologna Framework in 2005. Thus while the alignment process has now been completed subsequently, it was not something that was taken into account in the development of the Scottish and Irish Frameworks. The approach is likely to be quite different for most other countries engaged in the Bologna process as these will be developing National Frameworks having regard to the Bologna Framework that is already in place. Thus issues concerning alignment of National Frameworks and the Bologna Framework are likely to be part of the development of National Frameworks in most countries and, in some cases there may not need to be detailed additional consultation on alignment after the formal adoption of a National Framework in such countries. *The working group recommends that in developing their National Frameworks, countries should be have a eye on the need to align the National Framework to the Bologna Framework while noting that the Framework development process and the subsequent alignment are separate processes.*

However, for both Scotland and Ireland, there have already been extensive consensus-building exercises in the development of their Frameworks. This has not been the case in many other countries to date and thus both Scotland and Ireland were in a position to build upon their existing consultative processes in the alignment process. For other countries they will need to develop their own consultative processes in the design of the own

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National Frameworks and the experience in Scotland and Ireland demonstrates that this is not an exercise that can be speedily undertaken as it involves trust-building.

In addition, the Scottish and Irish Frameworks are not merely theoretical entities but have been proven to be feasible in practice, while elements of implementation are still continuing. *The Working Group considers that countries should ensure that there is some element of testing or implementation of a national framework before the process of aligning it to the Bologna Framework is completed.*

Also, both Scotland and Ireland have already been working together for a number of years. This has been the case on a bi-lateral basis and in context of links between the United Kingdom and Ireland which have led to the establishment of linkages between the Scottish and Irish Frameworks. Also, Scotland and Ireland have been involved in the development of the Bologna Framework and in the development of the European Qualifications Framework. A high level of mutual respect and trust has been built up between the two countries and they have worked together in undertaking their separate, but linked, verification processes. *The Working Group would suggest that it might be helpful for small groups of countries to co-operate in undertaking alignment processes.*

The Frameworks in place in Scotland and Ireland are different: the Irish Framework has a statutory basis while the Scottish Framework has not been developed on such a basis. In both cases there is an overall National Framework of Qualifications in place for all learning. In Scotland this is also a credit framework.

For both Ireland and Scotland there are international qualifications recognition agreements in place, for example, with China. The Scottish agreement is in the context of a UK-wide agreement with China. Also, both Ireland and Scotland have strong traditions for student mobility, and indeed labour market mobility generally, with neighbouring countries. Thus Irish and Scottish qualifications are well known in some neighbouring countries. It is not always the case that these strong traditions of mobility will be in place. It can also be the case that there is a tradition of mobility for learners between two countries that are not geographical neighbours. *The working group notes that some countries have qualifications recognition agreements with other countries, sometimes outside of Europe, and suggests that consultation be undertaken by a country aligning a national framework to the Bologna Framework with any such country with which it has a qualifications recognition agreement. Furthermore, countries with a tradition of having award holders move to other (perhaps neighbouring) countries may also wish to discuss any alignment process with those countries or perhaps involve peers from such countries in their alignment process.*

Nature of Verification Processes

Slightly different verification processes were put in place in Scotland and Ireland. However, in both cases they provided for a small expert group to develop detailed proposals and an opportunity for wide discussion with stakeholders in these proposals in advance of the finalisation of them. *The Working Group considers that the small steering group model, together with consultation with stakeholders on a transparent basis is a good model for all countries. At the same time, the Working Group recognises that different models may work well for other countries.*

Quality Assurance Bodies

One of the procedures is that the self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process. This was written in the context of developments prior to the Ministers

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meeting in Bergen in May 2005 and the report of the working group that recommended the Bologna Framework noted that while the precise outcomes of the ENQA work at the time had yet to be determined, it was envisaged that a peer-review process was to be put in place which would identify national quality assurance bodies and that all such quality assurance bodies should be involved in the verification process. In Scotland there is a single such body and in Ireland there are a number of such bodies. A key issue in the verification processes in both Scotland and Ireland has been that the arrangements for requiring the stated agreement of certain stakeholders have been clear from the start of the verification process and have been appropriately completed. *The Working Group considers it important that there is clarity on this issue when a verification process is initiated.*

International Experts

The issue of the engagement of international experts in the process is important. In particular, it is helpful to note the purpose of engaging the international experts in the process in terms of their expertise, credibility and the way in which they add an external dimension. Such experts, while bringing an independence to the verification process, also need to have an understanding of the complexities of the national framework whose Bologna Framework compatibility is being tested. It is considered by both Scotland and Ireland that the areas of expertise of the experts across international recognition, international accreditation and international standard setting as well as their having differing experiences is very helpful. It is felt by both countries that the engagement of the international experts in the processes has been very helpful. In both cases two international experts were involved in the detailed preparatory work and had an opportunity to take part in the wider consultation with stakeholders. *The Working Group considers that the manner in which Scotland and Ireland have involved international experts in their work through membership of the steering group has been exemplary. The Working Group also considers that there are issues that will need to be addressed in the future about the availability and financing of experts to assist countries in their verification processes. There will be linguistic challenges, particularly where a verification process is undertaken in a national language whose use is not widespread across Europe and, certainly at this stage in the development of national frameworks, there is not a significant number of potential experts available. One option which the working Group suggests could be explored is that the Council of Europe might assist some countries in the identification of potential international experts for national verification processes.*

Evidence

An important element in both processes has been the publication of a detailed report addressing each element in the criteria and procedures in turn as well as providing succinct background analytical and systemic information, initially on a draft basis and, following consultation and further amendment, as part of the final report. *The Working Group considers that the format of the two reports can act as exemplars for the formats of the reports of other countries. Indeed the working group notes that there is a need for two outcomes from the process:*

- *The first is the detailed verification document analysing in detail all issues and addressing each of the criteria and procedures*
- *The second is a simple summary of the outcomes for communication to the general public.*

Number of Alignments Completed

There have now been two alignment processes completed and it is hoped that many further such processes will be undertaken in the coming years. Further information will

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emerge over time as new alignment processes taken place. *The Working Group considers that all future alignment processes should take note of any alignment that has been completed.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Working Group considers that the procedures established for the verification process have been effective in providing for a transparent process. The Working Group makes the following findings and recommendations in relation to the continuing implementation of the procedures by countries:

- *In developing their National Frameworks, countries should have a eye on the need to align the National Framework to the Bologna Framework while noting that the Framework development process and the subsequent alignment are separate processes.*
- *countries should ensure that there is some element of testing or implementation of a national framework before the process of aligning it to the Bologna Framework is completed*
- *it might be helpful for small groups of countries to co-operate in undertaking alignment processes*
- *while some countries have qualifications recognition agreements with other countries, sometimes outside of Europe, and the Working Group suggests that consultation be undertaken by a country aligning a national framework to the Bologna Framework with any such country with which it has a qualifications recognition agreement. Furthermore, countries with a tradition of having award holders move to other (perhaps neighbouring) countries may also wish to discuss any alignment process with those countries or perhaps involve peers from such countries in their alignment process.*
- *the small steering group model, together with consultation with stakeholders on a transparent basis is a good model for all countries. At the same time, the Working Group recognises that different models may work well for other countries.*
- *It is important that there is clarity on the arrangements for requiring the stated agreement of certain stakeholders of the verification when a verification process is initiated.*
- *the manner in which Scotland and Ireland have involved international experts in their work through membership of the steering group has been exemplary*
- *there are issues that will need to be addressed in the future about the availability and financing of experts to assist countries in their verification processes. There will be linguistic challenges, particularly where a verification process is undertaken in a national language whose use is not widespread across Europe and, certainly at this stage in the development of national frameworks, there is not a significant number of potential experts available. One option, which the working Group suggests could be explored, is that the Council of Europe might assist some countries in the identification of potential international experts for national verification processes.*
- *The format of the Scottish and Irish reports can act as exemplars for the formats of the reports of other countries.*
- *that there is a need for two outcomes from each self-certification process:*
 - *The first is the detailed verification document analysing in detail all issues and addressing each of the criteria and procedures*
 - *The second is a simple summary of the outcomes for communication to the general public*
- *all future alignment processes should take note of any alignment that has been completed.*

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Chapter 8 – Lessons Learned from Criteria

Introduction

This Chapter covers issues relating to the criteria in the alignment of national frameworks to the Bologna Framework. Criteria for verifying that national frameworks are compatible with the EHEA framework were set out in the report to Ministers in Bergen as follows:

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

The Working Group considered that it was helpful to work through the criteria one by one.

Criterion 1 – The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.

There were not any particular issues arising for Ireland and Scotland in relation to the designation of the body with responsibility for the Framework in each country. However, *the Working Group notes that this could be an issue for other countries. For such countries, the national actors who initiate Framework development may not be the same as the body ultimately responsible for the Framework. For example it may be initiated by students or the rectors’ conference, but pass formally to a Ministry or an existing or new, ad hoc, agency. This is a natural development and does not undermine the ultimate legitimacy of the Framework which will eventually need to be adopted in a formal way in each country.*

Criterion 2 – There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework

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The second criterion has proved to be the most important one in the verification process in both Scotland and Ireland. This refers directly to cycle descriptors and does not refer to the associated progression issues which are referred to in the Bologna Process. In both countries there had been a detailed analysis of learning outcomes issues with solid pieces of work undertaken in both countries. The analysis essentially involves two stages: first, the structures and technical bases of the National Frameworks and the Bologna Frameworks were analysed and compared – for example, a comparison is made of the strands of learning in descriptors; then a detailed comparison is made between the actual descriptors that define the cycles/levels in each framework.

Relationship between descriptors for national frameworks and those for Bologna Framework

An important issue in relating awards to national frameworks in the first instance is one of how to make judgements on the links between National Frameworks and the Bologna Framework. In the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the concept of substantial difference has been developed. The concept of substantial difference has to date related to comparing two individual qualifications, or to comparing an individual qualification to a generic type of qualification. Thus far, the concept has not generally related to comparing two generic descriptors for types of qualifications. However, it is considered that this concept of substantial difference is relevant to the consideration of the clear and demonstrable link between qualifications and national frameworks and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework. Accordingly, in both Scotland and Ireland it has been set out that there are no substantial differences between certain descriptors for major award-types in the National Frameworks and the cycle descriptors. This is also in line with trying to get a ‘best fit’ in relating national frameworks to the Bologna frameworks. Both countries have worked on this basis in defining the clear and demonstrable link.

The Working Group recommends that the work of the ENIC and NARIC networks in examining issues relating to the concept of substantial difference be informed of issues arising in the verification process and that consideration be given to the development of formal linkages to this work.

The concept of ‘best fit’ is a crucial one. This is true both in practical terms and in terms of public perceptions of the role and purposes of qualifications frameworks. It is highly unlikely, even undesirable, that there will be a perfect match between different national frameworks of qualifications, even those with high degrees of mutual mobility and it is even more unlikely that there will be a perfect match between a national framework of qualifications and the EHEA Framework, given that they serve different purposes. In the case of both pilots, the descriptors of the national framework of qualifications are considerably more detailed than those of the European framework. However, the reports demonstrate that there is a compatibility, or consistency, between the descriptors of the national frameworks and the EHEA Framework. This is an extremely important concept, as it is a principle of the Bologna Process that it is about seeking broad convergence, not about forcing uniformity.

Progression

A further major issue highlighted in both the Scottish and Irish processes has been that there is a difference between qualifications per se based on learning outcomes and the linked issue of programmes of higher education and transfer and progression between programmes and cycles. It was noted that in both countries there were not detailed prescriptions on the nature of programmes but rather there may be typically understood arrangements and that these are set out in relation to credit and progression routes, for example. Furthermore, the Bologna cycles are understood within the context of progression

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being facilitated from the first to the second cycle and from the second cycle to the third cycle. Both countries have gone into some detail in their verification reports about the typical progression routes in their countries. *The working group recommends that in making report all countries should seek to address progression issues.*

Levels in National Frameworks

In both countries there are examples of more than one level in a National Framework within a cycle. This is the case for the first cycle in both countries. There are also more than one typical type of award, or award-type, in at least two of the three cycles for both countries. Both countries have intermediate qualifications and these intermediate qualifications are in place at both the first and second cycles. While some of the intermediate qualifications are common to both countries, they are not all the same across the two countries and reflect differences in the systems in the two countries.

Both countries decided to include in the verification process the alignment with the higher education short cycle (as an intermediate qualification signalled by Ministers) and its descriptor given that the descriptor has much agreement across Europe in the context of the work of the Joint Quality Initiative and the recommendations of the Bologna working group. It is of note that the descriptor is now also included in the European Qualifications Framework. Both countries also identified intermediate qualifications in the second cycle. *The Working Group recommends that countries should identify intermediate qualifications in their verification processes and examine the possibility of aligning any first cycle intermediate qualifications with the Joint Quality Initiative's descriptor for the higher education short cycle.*

In both countries there are particular issues with the Ordinary Bachelor Degree. These relate to the different traditions in both countries. While in Ireland, there is a typical (but not absolute) progression route from this to an Honours Bachelor degree, in Scotland this is not generally a stepping stone to an Honours Bachelor degree. In relation to accessing second cycle programmes with the Ordinary Bachelor Degree generally, while it is not typical in either jurisdiction, it is not ruled out and there can be access with some work experience to Masters programmes. Also, in both countries, the Honours Bachelor Degree provides admission in certain cases to the third cycle. In other countries it is likely that similar issues will also arise.

The working group considers that there will be issues for many countries in terms of having more than one level in a National Framework relating to a Bologna cycle and of having intermediate qualifications and levels. The Working Group considers that the approaches undertaken in the Scottish and Irish Reports, in terms of identifying these can act as examples for other countries which have intermediate qualifications and levels.

Labour Market Relevance

The working group notes that the Bologna declaration sets out that "The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification." While this was clearly taken account of in the drafting of the Bologna Framework and in the descriptor for the first cycle, the issue has been raised in the national reports. In both Ireland and Scotland the two levels of Bachelor degrees have a tradition (which can be tracked on an evidential basis) of relevance to the labour market. For countries where a first cycle qualification or qualifications are new constructs, this will not be the case and *the Working Group considers that there is a need to ensure that*

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national verification reports address the issue of labour market relevance of first cycle completion.

International Mobility

In both reports the recognition of qualifications for holders of Scottish and Irish qualifications within Europe and on a wider international basis were identified as an issue. In both cases, it was difficult to find information. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that, of course, there are not National Frameworks in many countries to date and thus there is very little experience to go on. It is also of note that there are extensive profile issues arising internationally in Europe in the consideration of the compatibility of Frameworks from other European countries with the Bologna Framework. It is unclear at this time what decisions will be made on the verification process by these countries. Thus, at this stage it is not possible to be certain of the recognition of Scottish and Irish qualifications by higher education institutions in other countries and, vice versa, of the recognition of other countries awards by Scottish and Irish higher education institutions. Indeed, the working group notes a likelihood that there will be different types of qualifications within cycles in a number of European countries, perhaps with different profiles. The working group notes that it has been very difficult for Scotland and Ireland to address such recognition issues given the state-of-play in the implementation of the national frameworks incorporating the Bologna cycles. Nevertheless, the Group considers that given that this is one of the key aims of the Bologna Framework, it is important that all countries endeavour to seek appropriate information in this regard as part of their verification work. The Group considers that this is an area where the ENIC and NARIC Networks can be of assistance.

In both country reports it has been noted that National Frameworks are subject to review and to potential change arising from any such review. The Working Group considers that all countries should provide for the review of the verification of the alignment of their National Framework to the Bologna Framework where there have been any major amendments to their National Framework.

Legacy awards

The issue of legacy awards (awards that will no longer be made but which are important as there will continue to be many holders of such awards) was raised in the context of both national reports. This is an important issue as, if the relationship between such awards and new awards in national frameworks are not defined, there can be a lack of clarity for the meaning and relevance of such awards. Furthermore, it will take some time for the new awards in Frameworks to be made and the vast majority of European citizens hold such legacy awards. While such legacy awards may not have been designed in the same way as new Framework awards (based on learning outcomes) it should be possible for national frameworks to include them on a best-fit basis. *The working group considers that it is important that legacy awards (awards that will no longer be made but which are important as there will continue to be many holders of such awards) are included in, or related to, National Frameworks as they are being developed and implemented and that these are taken into account in the verification of the alignment with the Bologna Framework.*

Criterion 3 – The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits

There were not any major issues arising under this criterion in the Scottish and Irish reports. In Scotland the credit arrangements were in place in advance of the ECTS system

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and are now compatible with this. The Scottish arrangements also include credit in vocational education and training. There are typical credit arrangements in terms of award-types and links to learning outcomes put in place for both Frameworks. Indeed, the outcomes approach in both Frameworks results in there being variations in the duration of programmes rather than the development of typical durations. Thus both national frameworks either refer directly to credit or set out typical credit arrangements and do so not just for higher education but also for vocational education and training and facilitate links between the two. The learning outcomes contained in the national frameworks are essential to the process of aligning the national framework with the EHEA framework. While ECTS makes reference to learning outcomes, these are contained in the relevant qualifications frameworks.

Criterion 4 – The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent

It is of note that procedures for inclusion of qualifications could mean procedures for the inclusion of individual awards against the types of qualifications in the Framework or indeed the development of new types of qualifications. The criterion refers to the location in the Framework of awards and the validation of programmes linking to these awards.

An issue arises in relation to legacy awards is referred to above under criterion 2. The issue of how to deal with such legacy qualifications will arise in all countries in the Bologna process.

A further issue arises in relation to awards made to learners in one country by awarding bodies based in other countries. The typical way to recognise such activity in many countries is to seek to recognise such activity on a cross-country basis in line with the Lisbon Convention. However, in Ireland, the Framework allows for these awards to be aligned with it. A recent policy provides for the alignment of such awards on the basis of best fit of learning outcomes to levels or award-types in the Irish Framework. Criteria include legal authority to make the awards in the home country; inclusion in the national Framework or equivalent in the home country; and external quality assurance in the home country which is also applied to such awards made in Ireland by awarding bodies from other countries where the learning programme was provided in Ireland. The development of this policy arises from a desire in Ireland to be proactive and seek to develop a full picture of all of the non-Irish awarding bodies and institutions operating in Ireland. The issue of how to deal with such qualifications will arise in most countries in the Bologna process as transnational provision of courses and qualifications increases.

Criterion 5 – The national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process

When Ministers met in Bergen in May 2005 they adopted *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. In order for there to be absolute clarity about whether all of the quality assurance arrangements in the Bologna Process have been implemented in quality assurance, it is arguable that there needs to have been published reports on the completion of external peer reviews of agencies in line with the standards and guidelines. It was considered by the Bologna working group in an early clarification as the verification processes were underway that it is not appropriate that this be required in the verification process. To make it a requirement would require there to have been reviews of the application of the European quality standards completed for all

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relevant quality assurance agencies in advance of the completion of the verification process.

Notwithstanding this, the approach undertaken in both countries was to note the incorporation of the European standards in institutional and agency approaches to quality assurance. In the Irish case, this has been subject to review for the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the quality assurance agency in the non-university sector. Thus the key issue for both countries is that there is a cross-reference between the quality assurance systems and the Frameworks. Indeed, such a cross-referencing would demonstrate that there is an interdependence between the Frameworks and quality assurance at the three relevant levels – the level of the programme, institutional level and national level.

The working group recommends that in the implementation of the verification process countries should demonstrate that their national systems – at institutional and agency level – are deliberately seeking to implement the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and that the state-of-play in relation to reviews in line with the Standards and Guidelines should be set out while at this time such review need not to been undertaken. The working group notes that it is the intention of many countries to implement the standards and guidelines within the next four years and considers that any verification report should be added to and the Council of Europe notified where a review in line with the Standards and Guidelines has been completed. Additionally, the Working Group recommends that for any self-certification process underway after 2010, it should be a requirement that agency reviews in line with the standards and guidelines are completed in a satisfactory way prior to the completion of any self-certification process.

It is also of note that quality assurance arrangements will change overtime and that this may relate both to the approaches to quality assurance and indeed to the agency structures.

Criterion 6 – The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements

There were not any major issues arising under this criterion in the Scottish and Irish reports.

Criterion 7 – The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published.

There were not any major issues arising under this criterion in the Scottish and Irish reports.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Working Group considers that the criteria established for the verification process have been effective in providing for a transparent process. The Working Group makes the following findings and recommendations in relation to the continuing implementation of the criteria by countries:

- ***Criterion 1 – The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.***
 - *that while there were not any particular issues arising for Ireland and Scotland in relation to the designation of the body with responsibility for the Framework in each country, this could be an issue for other countries. For such*

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countries, the national actors who initiate Framework development may not be the same as the body ultimately responsible for the Framework. This is a natural development and does not undermine the ultimate legitimacy of the Framework which will eventually need to be adopted in a formal way in each country.

- **Criterion 2 – There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework**
 - *that the work of the ENIC and NARIC networks in examining issues relating to the concept of substantial difference be informed of issues arising in the verification process and that consideration be given to the development of formal linkages to this work.*
 - *that in making report all countries should seek to address progression issues.*
 - *that there will be issues for many countries in terms of having more than one level in a National Framework relating to a Bologna cycle and of having intermediate qualifications and levels and that the approaches undertaken in the Scottish and Irish Reports, in terms of identifying these can act as examples for other countries which have intermediate qualifications/levels.*
 - *The Working Group recommends that countries should identify intermediate qualifications in their verification processes and examine the possibility of aligning any first cycle intermediate qualifications with the Joint Quality Initiative’s descriptor for the higher education short cycle.*
 - *The concept of ‘best fit’ is a crucial one. It is not expected, nor is it desirable, that there will be an exact match between descriptors of different frameworks, which will have different purposes and contexts. The pilots showed that many qualifications will have elements which fit to a higher or lower level of the framework than the level at which the qualification as a whole is placed. The purpose of frameworks is to help understand both similarities and differences between different qualifications which do not have exact matches or equivalences.*
 - *there is a need to ensure that national verification reports address the issue of labour market relevance of first cycle completion.*
 - *The working group notes that it has been very difficult for Scotland and Ireland to address such recognition issues given the state-of-play in the implementation of the national frameworks incorporating the Bologna cycles. Nevertheless, the Group considers that given that this is one of the key aims of the Bologna Framework, it is important that all countries endeavour to seek appropriate information in this regard as part of their verification work. The Group considers that this is an area where the ENIC and NARIC Networks can be of assistance.*
 - *that all countries should provide for the review of the verification of the alignment of their National Framework to the Bologna Framework where there have been any major amendments to their National Framework.*
 - *that it is important that legacy awards (awards that will no longer be made but which are important as there will continue to be many holders of such awards) are included in, or related to, National Frameworks as they are being developed and implemented and that these are taken into account in the verification of the alignment with the Bologna Framework.*

- **Criterion 5 – The national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Com-**

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muniqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process

- *that in the implementation of the verification process countries should demonstrate that their national systems – at institutional and agency level – are deliberately seeking to implement the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and that the state-of-play in relation to reviews in line with the Standards and Guidelines should be set out while at this time such review need not to been undertaken. The working group notes that it is the intention of many countries to implement the standards and guidelines within the next four years and considers that any verification report should be added to and the Council of Europe notified where a review in line with the Standards and Guidelines has been completed. Additionally, the Working Group recommends that for any self-certification process underway after 2010, it should be a requirement that agency reviews in line with the standards and guidelines are completed in a satisfactory way prior to the completion of any self-certification process.*

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Part V - Conclusion

Chapter 9 Findings and recommendations

Principal questions on the further development of the EHEA-framework

In the Bergen Communiqué BFUG was asked to report on the implementation and further development of the overarching framework and this task was given by BFUG to the Working Group in its mandate. As the implementation is part of the Stocktaking Process the Working Group on Qualifications Framework will focus on the need for further development.

The two principal questions to be answered in the final report are:

- Is the Bologna Framework as adopted in Bergen sufficient to fulfil its purposes of international transparency, recognition and mobility?
- Are the criteria and procedure for alignment sufficient enough to secure trust and make more efficient the recognition of foreign qualifications within EHEA.

The two principal questions have to be positive answered:

The overarching framework has in the pilot project of verification shown to be a useful instrument for comparison and analysis. In addition it has been of inspiration for the countries developing national frameworks. Even if many countries regret the omission of the short cycle in Bergen the working group have no basis at the moment for proposing amendments or changes to the framework.

A similar answer has to be given concerning the criteria and procedures for alignment that is part of the Bologna Framework. The Working Group considers that the procedures established for the verification process have been effective in providing for a transparent process and it considers as well that the criteria established for the verification process have been effective in providing for a transparent result.

The specific recommendations from the parts of the report are:

Conclusions from part II

In relation to qualifications frameworks and other aspects of the Bologna Process the Working Group consider that there are problems to be solved and recommends

- *that the EU-member-states ask the European Commission revise its proposal for ECVET in a way that builds on or relates to ECTS.*
- *that agencies and institutions develop their qualifications recognition practices to exploit the framework.*
- *that the promotion of European higher education outside Europe should build on the overarching EHEA-framework, which include the Dublin descriptors*

and advises

- *that information on the EHEA framework of qualifications form a central plank of a future Bologna information portal.*

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Conclusions from part III

In drawing conclusion from the regional workshops the Working Group finds it important

- *that expertise in framework development within the country is available at all levels and recommends that this expertise be developed as well in the ministries and agencies (QAA and ENIC/NARIC) as at the institutional level in Rector's Conferences and student organisations*

It also recommends

- *that these experience-sharing meetings continue on a regional basis as workshops or conferences and that an appropriate international organisation or network secure the facilitating of the meetings, and*
- *that the tasks of promoting and facilitating information and experience sharing activities are given to the Council of Europe and when appropriate in cooperation with ENIC/NARIC, ENQA and other relevant organisations.*

Conclusion from part IV

In conclusion, the Working Group considers that the procedures established for the verification process have been effective in providing for a transparent process. The Working Group makes the following findings and recommendations in relation to the continuing implementation of the procedures by countries:

- *In developing their National Frameworks, countries should be have a eye on the need to align the National Framework to the Bologna Framework while noting that the Framework development process and the subsequent alignment are separate processes.*
- *countries should ensure that there is some element of testing or implementation of a national framework before the process of aligning it to the Bologna Framework is completed*
- *it might be helpful for small groups of countries to co-operate in undertaking alignment processes*
- *while some countries have qualifications recognition agreements with other countries, sometimes outside of Europe, and the Working Group suggests that consultation be undertaken by a country aligning a national framework to the Bologna Framework with any such country with which it has a qualifications recognition agreement. Furthermore, countries with a tradition of having award holders move to other (perhaps neighbouring) countries may also wish to discuss any alignment process with those countries or perhaps involve peers from such countries in their alignment process.*
- *the small steering group model, together with consultation with stakeholders on a transparent basis is a good model for all countries. At the same time, the Working Group recognises that different models may work well for other countries.*
- *It is important that there is clarity on the arrangements for requiring the stated agreement of certain stakeholders of the verification when a verification process is initiated.*
- *the manner in which Scotland and Ireland have involved international experts in their work through membership of the steering group has been exemplary*
- *there are issues that will need to be addressed in the future about the availability and financing of experts to assist countries in their verification processes. There will be linguistic challenges, particularly where a verification process is undertaken in a national language whose use is not widespread across Europe and, certainly at this stage in the development of national frameworks, there is not a significant number of potential experts available. One option which the working*

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Group suggests could be explored is that the Council of Europe might assist some countries in the identification of potential international experts for national verification processes.

- *The format of the Scottish and Irish reports can act as exemplars for the formats of the reports of other countries.*
- *that there is a need for two outcomes from each self-certification process:*
 - *The first is the detailed verification document analysing in detail all issues and addressing each of the criteria and procedures*
 - *The second is a simple summary of the outcomes for communication to the general public*
- *all future alignment processes should take note of any alignment that has been completed.*

In conclusion, the Working Group considers that the criteria established for the verification process have been effective in providing for a transparent process. The Working Group makes the following findings and recommendations in relation to the continuing implementation of the criteria by countries:

- ***Criterion 1 – The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.***
 - *that while there were not any particular issues arising for Ireland and Scotland in relation to the designation of the body with responsibility for the Framework in each country, this could be an issue for other countries. For such countries, the national actors who initiate Framework development may not be the same as the body ultimately responsible for the Framework. This is a natural development and does not undermine the ultimate legitimacy of the Framework which will eventually need to be adopted in a formal way in each country.*
- ***Criterion 2 – There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework***
 - *that the work of the ENIC and NARIC networks in examining issues relating to the concept of substantial difference be informed of issues arising in the verification process and that consideration be given to the development of formal linkages to this work.*
 - *that in making report all countries should seek to address progression issues.*
 - *that there will be issues for many countries in terms of having more than one level in a National Framework relating to a Bologna cycle and of having intermediate qualifications and levels and that the approaches undertaken in the Scottish and Irish Reports, in terms of identifying these can act as examples for other countries which have intermediate qualifications/levels.*
 - *The Working Group recommends that countries should identify intermediate qualifications in their verification processes and examine the possibility of aligning any first cycle intermediate qualifications with the Joint Quality Initiative's descriptor for the higher education short cycle.*
 - *The concept of 'best fit' is a crucial one. It is not expected, nor is it desirable, that there will be an exact match between descriptors of different frameworks, which will have different purposes and contexts. The pilots showed that many qualifications will have elements which fit to a higher or lower level of the framework than the level at which the qualification as a whole is*

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placed. The purpose of frameworks is to help understand both similarities and differences between different qualifications which do not have exact matches or equivalences.

- *there is a need to ensure that national verification reports address the issue of labour market relevance of first cycle completion.*
 - *The working group notes that it has been very difficult for Scotland and Ireland to address such recognition issues given the state-of-play in the implementation of the national frameworks incorporating the Bologna cycles. Nevertheless, the Group considers that given that this is one of the key aims of the Bologna Framework, it is important that all countries endeavour to seek appropriate information in this regard as part of their verification work. The Group considers that this is an area where the ENIC and NARIC networks can be of assistance.*
 - *that all countries should provide for the review of the verification of the alignment of their National Framework to the Bologna Framework where there have been any major amendments to their National Framework.*
 - *that it is important that legacy awards (awards that will no longer be made but which are important as there will continue to be many holders of such awards) are included in, or related to, National Frameworks as they are being developed and implemented and that these are taken into account in the verification of the alignment with the Bologna Framework.*
- ***Criterion 5 – The national quality assurance systems for higher education refer to the national framework of qualifications and are consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqué agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process***
 - *that in the implementation of the verification process countries should demonstrate that their national systems – at institutional and agency level – are deliberately seeking to implement the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and that the state-of-play in relation to reviews in line with the Standards and Guidelines should be set out while at this time such review need not to be undertaken. The working group notes that it is the intention of many countries to implement the standards and guidelines within the next four years and considers that any verification report should be added to and the Council of Europe notified where a review in line with the Standards and Guidelines has been completed. Additionally, the Working Group recommends that for any self-certification process underway after 2010, it should be a requirement that agency reviews in line with the standards and guidelines are completed in a satisfactory way prior to the completion of any self-certification process.*

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Annexes (in the final report)

1. Terms of reference of the Working Group
2. Members of the Working Group
3. Programmes and participation lists from the workshops
4. Reports of pilots projects