

Notes from 4th Qualifications Frameworks Working Group meeting 15 December 2006. Copenhagen

Present: Mogens Berg – Chair (Denmark); Marlies Leegwater – ML(Netherlands); Vadim Kasevitch – VK (Russian Federation); Eva Gönczi – EG (Hungary); Laureano González-Vega - LGV (Spain); Sjur Bergan –SB (Council of Europe); Colin Tuck – CT (ESIB); Michael Gourie - MG (EUA); Seán Ó Foughlú – SO / Bryan Maguire – BM (Ireland); Gerard Madil –GM (Scotland); Robert Wagenaar- RW (Netherlands) and Louis Ripley- LR (Secretariat –notes).

Apologies: Nadezda Uzelac (the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”); Andrejs Rauhvargers (Latvia); Peter Van Der Hijden (European Commission); Séamus Puirseil (ENQA); Christoph Anz (UNICE); Ingrid Stage? (Education International); Allan Runcie (Scotland).

1. Adoption of the Agenda

Documents: Draft Agenda.

There were no comments and the Agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of the last meeting 19 September 2006 Madrid

Documents: Minutes of 19 September 2006 meeting.

It was confirmed that the draft note (Criteria 5 on page 5) was correct. Text to be amended.

ML said that the note on the Hague workshop (page 5) needed a short conclusion.

3. Information about the Copenhagen process for VET

Documents: The Helsinki Communiqué,
Commission Staff Working Document: European Credit System for VET.

The Chair introduced this item and said that the Commission’s paper had made no reference to ECTS and this should be noted in the working group’s Report. He asked for comments from the group.

In discussion the following points were made:

- Ireland said that they had had an input on a late change on page 7 regarding implementation at national level with tools. However no more should be brought into this.
- MG- It was not that clear yet what the effects of VET would be and

there was a possibility it might not affect higher education.

- VET as a separate credit system was something of a contradiction to the EQF. Two credit systems could cause difficulties in higher education. Also there had been little input from lifelong learning and previous experience had not been built upon.
- The two systems were not the same but were not necessarily incompatible. It was not clear what the working group could comment on regarding ECVET when it was not about higher education.
- The Chair said that the Report should include a comment to the effect that ECVET is inconsistent with the EHEA framework.
- It was suggested that it might be helpful if the group's concerns could be relayed on to the Commission. As the ECTS had a reference to lifelong learning it might be helpful if ECVET did the same.

It was agreed that:

The Report should include a section with a comment to the effect that the group had concerns about the introduction of ECVET and appropriate suggestions as outlined in the discussion.

4. Report from the Working Group to BFUG

Documents: Draft Report of December 2006

It was agreed that the group would provide comments on the draft report on a Chapter by Chapter basis.

In discussion the following points were made:

Chapter 1

- There were no comments and this chapter was adopted.

Chapter 2

- The Chair explained that Chapter 2 had been rewritten several times. He thought that the EHEA and EQF frameworks could live together but countries outside Europe in particular would need to be based on Bologna Principles.
- The above comment should have been emphasised more and the Report should include a note that it was with regret that there had to be two frameworks. Also the first two paragraphs in the Chapter were fine but the third one needed rewording.
- The Chair thought that it would be quite difficult to intervene at this

stage and it might be better to just acknowledge that the frameworks are for different purposes and accept this as a fact of life.

- The two frameworks should not have happened in the first place, now a similar situation was arising with ECVET. The HE Dublin Descriptors were little more than a footnote in the EQF and it was not clear what status they had.
- The wording in Chapter 2 was the most problematic. It was possible to link national frameworks with the EQF and EHEA but having two frameworks caused confusion both within Europe and outside. The last paragraph of Chapter 2 was misleading and needed to be reworded to the effect that *the promotion of the EHEA framework outside Europe was necessary to avoid problems*. The Chair agreed.
- To avoid confusion there was a need to promote the EHEA framework within higher education. The differences needed to be made clear in that whilst the EQF included higher education it was more of a generic Meta framework.
- Some comments were a little unfair on the EC as there had been Bologna input into the higher education part of the EQF and also cross references to Dublin Descriptors. It was better to live with the situation as the frameworks can sit side by side.
- A pragmatic approach was needed regarding the two frameworks. It was better to – as in the report – explain how the descriptors and scope relate to each other. Plus include this in the footnotes.
- It had not been obtained in writing from the EU Chair that the EHEA framework would be promoted but the Report ought to include an explicit statement to this effect. Something like “the EU welcomes the facilitation of the EHEA framework within the EQF and the latter will encompass higher education.”
- The Report needed to be more explicit when referring to frameworks.
- What had been done could not be undone and applying Dublin descriptors where appropriate was a good way forward. In Hungary there had been problems with linking the short cycle to higher education.
- It had to be accepted that there were two frameworks in place but the issue was now about the EQF taking into account the existence and purpose of the EHEA framework. An effective communications strategy was needed to address this.
- Regarding the last comment it would not be enough just to ask the EU to look into this.

- The cross referencing was not explicit enough. The two frameworks were already causing confusion in a number of countries and some non EU countries were adopting the EQF.
- The Chair said there was a need to stress that the Bologna Process and national qualifications frameworks would go on but these would have to be compatible with both overarching frameworks.
- The group should not formally express regret at a process it could not stop. The group's Report was for the Bologna Process and they were not in a position to instruct the EC. It was important to make the best of the situation and stress the autonomy of the Bologna Process.
- There was a need to promote the EHEA framework, particularly outside Europe where higher education systems needed to link to it.
- The Dublin Descriptors were essential for higher education institutions but at national level both frameworks needed to be taken into account. The Chair agreed stating that national frameworks do need to link to both the EHEA and EQF.
- The onus was on the working group to show the relationship between the two frameworks. More text was needed in the Report on this, perhaps with examples to help reduce potential confusion as others – with less knowledge - would read the report.
- Other international frameworks were not necessarily integrated and it was up to individual countries to organise their own national systems. Some countries might decide that with the EQF they did not need to do something separate for higher education and vice versa.

On Chapter 2 It was agreed that:

The first two paragraphs did not need any amendments.

The third paragraph needed some rewording and needed to further stress the implementation of the Bologna framework.

The paragraph beginning "The third reason" (fifth paragraph at the bottom of page 5) was wishful thinking and it was better to say that the Descriptors were compatible rather than integrated.

An explanation on why there were four paragraphs of reasons to explain the co-existence of the two frameworks was necessary. (Analysis of differences).

The wording of 'may well' in the fifth italics paragraph on page 5 would be better removed.

A new section on credit systems would be helpful.

It might be helpful to include a comment on ECVETS.

The last paragraph on page 6 needed rewording, (see SB's comment. May wish to check wording with him).

The wording of the first sentence of the sixth paragraph (second reason) might be better changed. Remove are not in competition and replace with have different applications.

The 'reasons' paragraphs could include a greater emphasis on the promotion of European and non European higher education through the Bologna framework. Also (fourth reason) it might be helpful to emphasise that although they differ in scope they do not differ in purpose.

Some text on national frameworks (fourth reason) might be helpful.

The Chair asked the group to send any requested text changes to him.

Chapter 3

- Despite earlier scepticism this section had value. It might be helpful to soften the wording of the fourth paragraph.
- A new section should go in on credits.
- The first few sentences in the final paragraph contained several typos. 'Frameworks' needed to have the final's' removed.

Chapter 4

- The details of the participants attending the workshop at The Hague were incorrect and 26 people had attended.
- It would be helpful if the end of the second paragraph could be amended to include a reference to the participation of the Balkan countries. Something to the effect of "Including informal Ministerial Conferences for the Western Balkans and the countries that acceded to the Bologna Process in 2005.
- The "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" should be referred to in all documents as stated here.

Chapter 5

- The step ladder had previously been criticised for not being sequential. However the sequence of events did not need to be the same in all countries. The Chair agreed on this point.
- It was suggested that two changes could be made on page 14. In the

first line of the first paragraph after the bullet points on “E. Self-certification” the word survey needed to be replaced with summary and in the last line of that paragraph the word problems could be changed to issues.

- On page 15 the Chair thought that was a need for monitoring but rather than a working group progressing this it would be more appropriate for the Council of Europe, ENIC and NARIC and ENQA to take this forward.
- The budget for this was modest and the emphasis would need to be upon assisting countries in developing their national frameworks. Referring to recent Council of Europe events he added that Azerbaijan and Moldova had been unable to attend and it would be beneficial for countries to develop a better understanding of qualifications frameworks.
- The Chair suggested that a pool of individual experts might be set up to advise on self certification, funding however could be an issue. SB said it would be useful to develop a common understanding of the issues around funding.
- On page 15 in the second paragraph the word desperate should be replaced by strong.
- In the fourth paragraph SB pointed out that the Council of Europe was part of the co-secretariat for the ENIC and NARIC network, not the sole secretariat. He added that the Council of Europe’s role was more facilitatory and self certification reports were published on the Council of Europe’s website. It might be helpful to add a note to this effect.
- BM suggested that that it might also be helpful if the last paragraph included a mention of the role of other stakeholders such as the World Bank and the European Commission. The Chair asked BM if he would draft some lines on this.

Chapter 6

- On the second and third paragraphs. ML and BM said that Ministers had adopted the overarching framework not self certification. The Chair said that at BFUG8 it was agreed that self certification should be adopted. Prior to this the Board had made an interpretation of the word “comparable.” The Chair agreed that a reference to this effect would be helpful, perhaps added to the last sentence of the second paragraph.
- The second sentence in the first paragraph on page 17 needed to have the word group inserted after the word working.
- It might be helpful to reword the sixth paragraph on page 17 to explain

that verification referred to “verification of self certification” for the lay reader.

Chapter 7

- On the “Lessons Learned” section it was recognised that whilst the self certification process does take time and the process should not be rushed, countries seeking to implement self certification should not feel bound to necessarily take the same length of time as the pilots.
- On the last paragraph of page 19 it was suggested that it might be helpful to add that the Scottish and Irish pilots were not just theoretical but were feasible, had been tested, demonstrated and widely consulted upon prior to self-certification.
- It was important to send clear, consistent messages to those carrying out self certification of their national frameworks.
- At the end of the last sentence of the third paragraph on page 20 it was suggested that a line might be added to the effect that “and or involve external peers from such countries in their verification process.
- There were two comments on the fourth paragraph on page 20. There was a typo in the first sentence where in place had been written twice. Also the word together in the first “bold” sentence might be removed or replaced.
- In the large paragraph on International Experts on page 21. The Chair thought that the sentence that began “One way to do this could be to have a panel of expert“should include the word during rather than afterwards. Others thought it would be better if this sentence was deleted as it detracted from the “self” aspect of self certification.
- RW suggested that experts’ help should be in terms of the international context.
- It was suggested that the word “pool” in terms of the experts might not be the most appropriate word and it would be better to have an open list. This would help when the Council of Europe became more involved.
- It was suggested that the first bullet point in the second paragraph on page 21 could be made clearer.
- The third bullet on page 22 could also be clearer and an additional bullet on the financing of experts might be helpful.

Chapter 8

- SB asked for the references to ENIC/NARIC starting on page 23 (and on subsequent pages) be changed to ENIC and NARIC.
- ML asked if a statement to the effect of “including entrance to higher education” might be included at an appropriate place in the second paragraph on page 24.
- It was commented that David Bottomley would be providing a line to the effect that a degree did not necessarily leading to honours in Scotland for page 24.
- Page 25, first paragraph contained the word exemplars when the word examples was probably intended. The last sentence in the second paragraph included the words evidence is presented whereas this is addressed would be more appropriate. This would also mean that of this at the end of the sentence could be deleted.
- The sentence that ends made in Ireland in the last paragraph on page 26 might be improved by instead saying made to learning on programmes based in Ireland.
- EG suggested that the second bullet point on page 30 should go into Criterion 5 on Page 27.
- BM said that it might be better if the Report was not too explicit about others’ systems. Third paragraph page 27. The Chair suggested that wording to the effect of “if the review of QA is finished later than the self certification there should be an additional notification” should be added.
- ML suggested that Criterion 1 on page 28 should include the full text quoted earlier in the Report.

Chapter 9

- It was agreed to remove the slide on page 30.
- ML suggested that the first paragraph on page 31 (begins “In the Bergen Communiqué) should be the principle question and should be included in the introduction of the Report.
- It was suggested that for feasibility purposes a review might be helpful when twenty to thirty countries have completed their self certification process.
- The Chair said that he would rephrase and elaborate the wording of the last bullet points on page 31.
- Page 35 bullet point 3 needed to include the word regional before workshops.

5. Contribution to the Communiqué Drafting Group

Documents: Draft contribution tabled at meeting.

There were a number of suggestions on the rephrasing the text of the contribution. These were noted separately by the Chair.

6. Any other business:

The Chair asked the group to forward any further comments on the day's events they may have to him as soon as they were able.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.