



Alignment of national frameworks with the “Bologna framework”

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*Referencing the NFQ to the EQF
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Background to “EHEA framework”

- Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (“Bologna Framework”, “EHEA Framework”)
- Purposes: International transparency, international recognition, international mobility
- Adopted by Ministers of the Bologna Process in May 2005, for higher education qualifications
- Valid for all 46 members of the EHEA, EU and non-EU
- Overarching framework within which the HE elements of NFQs in these 46 countries will be developed
- Represents the “face” of European higher education qualifications towards the rest of the world



Verification of national frameworks against EHEA Framework

- Ireland, 2006
- Scotland, 2006
- Germany, 2008
- England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 2009
- The Netherlands, 2009
- Flanders (Belgium), 2009
- All frameworks in 46 countries to be verified and aligned in due course, using the criteria and procedures for self-certification, as agreed by EHEA Ministers in 2005



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Criteria for self-certification

- The national framework for HE qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for HE
- 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 HE 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



Procedures for self-certification

- 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



Verification of compatibility with EHEA framework - Ireland

- two pilot cases of self-certification: Ireland and Scotland
- steering committee – Qualifications Authority, awarding bodies (Higher Education and Training Awards Council, universities, Dublin Institute of Technology), plus two international experts, established February 2006
- draft report for consultation published, June 2006
- information sheet on European framework developments, Sept 2006
- stakeholder workshop, 3 October 2006
- completion, November 2006



Irish Award-types and the Bologna cycles

<i>Bologna cycle</i>	<i>Award-type</i>	<i>Irish level</i>
Short Cycle (within the first cycle)	Higher Certificate	6
First Cycle	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	7
	Honours Bachelor Degree	8
	Higher Diploma	8
Second Cycle	Masters Degree	9
	Postgraduate Diploma	9
Third Cycle	Doctorate	10



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Issues from award-types and cycles

- higher education short cycle qualification included (Higher Certificate)
- ordinary bachelors degree and honours bachelor degree – both first cycle qualifications but at different levels in the national framework, giving different access to second cycle programmes in Ireland
- two kinds of masters programmes at the same level in the national framework (research and taught)



Verification of compatibility with EHEA framework - Germany

- Federal structure of HE means multiple levels of ownership and responsibility
- Steering group mandated in 2008 by National Bologna WG, included 2 international experts (Austria and Ireland)
- Secretariat provided by German Rectors' Conference and German Accreditation Council
- Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education
Qualifications compatible with EHEA Framework
- German HE QF reflects specific features of the German higher education system, e.g. issues around integrated programmes leading to Master's level, and number of ECTS for these
- Verification process and report (published January 2009) also useful in identifying reform challenges in German HE



Verification of compatibility with EHEA framework - England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) developed 2001
- FHEQ review and feedback, March 2003 - June 2008
- Second Edition published August, 2008
- Higher education credit framework for England, August 2008
- QAA is responsible for development and maintenance of FHEQ and undertook the self-certification on behalf of ministers
- Advisory group (19 members, 4 international) established in Autumn 2008
- Report published, February 2009



EWNI conclusions

- **Foundation Degrees (for example, FdA, FdSc) and by extension the Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) and Higher National Diplomas (HND) are intermediate qualifications within the first cycle**
- **bachelor's degrees (non-honours degrees) are compatible with the first cycle descriptor. Holders of this degree can gain access (but not necessarily immediate access) to programmes within the second cycle**
- **bachelor's degrees with honours (for example, BA/BSc Hons) are compatible with completion of the first cycle**
- **master's degrees (for example, MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc) and by extension integrated master's degrees (for example, MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm) are compatible with completion of the second cycle**
- **doctoral degrees (for example, PhD/DPhil [including new-route PhD], EdD, DBA, DClinPsy) are compatible with completion of the third cycle within the overarching FQ-EHEA.**



Verification of compatibility with EHEA framework - The Netherlands & Flanders

- Two frameworks - Dutch and Flemish
- Shared quality assurance - Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) - organised verification on behalf of ministries
- Verification Committee (1 Dutch, 1 Flemish, 1 Finnish, 1 US, 1 Irish chair, & Dutch secretary) carried out verification in October-November 2008)
- Committee met directly with range of national stakeholders - ministries, NVAO, students, HE institutions and social partners
- Remit included advising on further development of the NFQs as well as verification
- Reports published, February 2009



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Recommendations - The Netherlands

- Further communications for main stakeholders and public
- Progression issues raised
- Academic masters to be more accessible beyond academic bachelors graduates
- The (experimental) honours programme should be recognised
- Short and non-degree programmes to be recognised
- Binary system to be explained to international audiences
- Diploma supplement implementation requires further work



Recommendations - Flanders

- Further communications for main stakeholders and public
- Further attention to the implementation of Lisbon Recognition Convention, especially by HEIs
- The 60 ECTS masters to be examined
- Short cycle qualifications may be added to framework
- Binary system to be explained to international audiences
- Diploma supplement implementation requires further work



Issues from verification exercises

- International members ask awkward questions - this is a good thing!
- The “Bologna model” has not erased national differences in qualifications
- First cycle qualifications are diverse
- “Three cycles” is an over-simplification
- Academic and labour market progression and perceptions matter as well as learning outcomes
- Data on international mobility and recognition are poor



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EHEA Framework and EQF (1)

- EQF formally adopted by the European Union in April 2008, covering all levels of education and is valid for EU countries, EU accession countries and countries of the European Economic Area
- EQF, developed after the EHEA Framework, does not use the same wording for the higher education qualifications in the framework, leading to impression that there are two distinct overarching frameworks for HE in Europe
- While the wording is not identical, there are no major differences between the two, and that it is perfectly possible to develop national qualifications framework that are compatible with the EQF as well as with the EHEA Framework, as recognised by EHEA Ministers in 2007



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EHEA Framework and EQF (2)

- **Similarities and contain overlapping areas:**
 - Both are overarching frameworks which provide a mechanism for relating national frameworks of qualifications to each other
 - Both cover a broad scope of learning and are designed to improve transparency with regard to qualifications in Europe
 - Both have clear aspirations to support lifelong learning and labour mobility
 - Both associated with quality assurance and use the concept of 'best fit' to determine how national qualification levels relate to the overarching framework
- **To acknowledge these similarities and overlaps, and to ensure that the two overarching frameworks do not develop in isolation, EC Recommendation establishing the EQF asserts that the Bologna Framework and EQF are compatible**
- **Learning outcomes of certain EQF levels correspond to the cycle descriptors of the Bologna Framework. Specifically, there is a clear cross-reference between the cycle descriptors and the descriptors at Levels 5 to 8 of EQF**



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EHEA Framework and EQF (3)

- **Outstanding issues in relating both meta-frameworks**
 - Differing national boundaries around “higher education”
 - Varying approaches to the implementation of credit – ECTS and ECVET are formally compatible but there is very little experience in the implementation of ECVET compared to ECTS, and ECTS itself is still subject to contested understandings
 - Governance varies between the two systems both at national and European level
 - Qualifications systems rely on robust quality assurance systems – these have developed at different paces in the two sectors and in different countries – this limits the zones of mutual trust, including the extent to which trust crosses the VET/HE line



EHEA Framework and EQF (3)

<i>Bologna cycle</i>	<i>EQF</i>	<i>Irish level</i>
Short Cycle (within the first cycle)	5	6
First Cycle	6	7 8
Second Cycle	7	9
Third Cycle	8	10



Links

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