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WORKING GROUP TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROADMAP FOR SAN MARINO'S ACCESSION TO THE EHEA

Hosted by San Marino, Second meeting
10-11 November 2021

Minutes

List of Participants

No.	Country	Name	Last Name
1	Andorra (Co-chair)	Jordi	Llombart
2	Council of Europe	Sjur	Bergan
3	ENQA	Maria	Kelo
4	Finland (Co-chair)	Maija	Innola
5	Holy See	Melanie	Rosenbaum
6	Italy	Paola	Castellucci
7	Liechtenstein	Daniel	Miescher
8	San Marino	Maria Elena	D'Amelio
9	San Marino	Remo	Massari
10	San Marino	Monica	Cavalli
11	San Marino	Laura	Gobbi
12	San Marino (translator)	Marina	Volpinari
13	UniRSM Rectors (Guest)	Corrado	Petrocelli
14	UniRSM Rectors (Guest)	Guido	Capaldo
15	UniRSM QA expert (Guest)	Leonardo	Tagliente
16	UniRSM General Director	Isabella	Bizzocchi
17	UNIRSM Department coordinator	Paula	Cenci
18	UNIRSM Head of Students' Office	Marica	Montemaggi
19	UNIRSM Administrative staff representative	Maddalena	Lonfernini
20	UNIRSM Student Representative	Giacomo	Malasoma
21	UNIRSM Student Representative	Vittorio	Peretti
22	BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Enida	Bezhan
23	BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari

1. Welcome and presentation of the participants

The Co-chairs welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the 2021-2024 work period, emphasizing the importance of this meeting as an opportunity for members and stakeholders to exchange information on the EHEA, the BFUG, and the main issues outlined for this meeting. All of the participants gave their introductions and explained their roles within the institutions/organizations they represented. The meeting's agenda was approved with no revisions.

For more detailed information, please see [WG SMR SI AM 2 Draft Agenda](#).



2. Overview of the EHEA commitments, the San Marino Roadmap and WG tasks

Maija Innola (Co-chair) presented an outline of the Bologna Process as well as the EHEA's objectives, commitments, and priorities. Jordi Llombart (Co-chair) further elaborated on the structure of the EHEA, as well as on the development of the WG on San Marino Roadmap and its respective tasks. The importance of the *Roadmap* was highlighted as the new standard for assisting new nations in implementing the EHEA policies and commitments.

3. Presentation of the University of San Marino – implementation at the university level

3.1. Strategy of the university

Prof. Corrado Petrocelli (UniRSM Rector) provided an overview on the structure and foundations of the University of San Marino. He underlined that, although the university was founded in 1985, the New University Law was enacted in 2014, bringing about significant alterations and improvements in accordance with European HE standards. Prof. Petrocelli stressed the importance of transparency as a fundamental principle of the university, with minutes of meetings and financial information of the Board of Directors and Academic Senate available online. Furthermore, he emphasized that teachers/researchers are chosen solely through public competition. In addition, new degree programs, student services, and exchange programs have been introduced, and the number of students enrolled at the institution has increased from 240 to over 1000. To support institutional activities, agreements and collaborations with ministries of the Republic of San Marino and public and private stakeholders have been formed. Significant projects and activities based on social issues (e.g., environmental sustainability, attention to marginalized/underprivileged populations, etc.) are being promoted inside the university. Prof. Petrocelli concluded his presentation emphasizing the next fundamental steps, which include putting the New University Law into effect in 2022 and having the UniRSM QA System validated by an external QA agency.

It was indicated that there are bilateral agreements between the state of San Marino and Italy on the recognition of the same condition of studies between San Marino students who study in Italy and vice versa. A discussion followed on the current review of legislation, with the autonomy of the university as one of the areas in which the new legislation will bring changes. The San Marino representatives were advised to consider the challenges in regards to autonomy, as well as academic freedom. On another note, for the election of the rector, the university indicates one or more names and the Parliament will choose among the names indicated by the university. With regard to the board of directors, it should be possible to have external representation but the majority should be from UniRSM in order for the university to be more autonomous, as well as accountable.

Transportability of scholarships was discussed, to which it was clarified that the students of San Marino receive scholarships to study in San Marino and abroad. Further, the university provides the necessary funding to encourage student mobility, as no funding from the EU is received. This is a challenge that the university hopes to overcome, to which it was suggested to explore opportunities with other agencies or through Erasmus funding.

3.2. Quality Assessment

Prof. Guido Capaldo provided an overview of the UniRSM QA System by the Independent Assessment Body (IAB). The members of the IAB of the UniRSM were identified, as well as the IAB's roles and functions. In addition, an outline of the UniRSM's Internal Didactics QA System guidelines was presented. The QA System's requirements included the utilization of a variety of methodologies, as well as an emphasis on improvement and active student participation. The internal didactics QA system's dimensions and evaluation criteria were also presented.



Prof. Capaldo added that questionnaires were sent to students to acquire their perspective on the establishment of new courses of study. Furthermore, the IAB report was emphasized as a periodical report which is submitted to the academic senate during a hearing and contains: evaluation criteria results, strengths and weaknesses of educational processes, criticalities relating to student opinions, and suggestions and recommendations for improvement actions.

The External Quality Assurance Agency (AVEPRO) was indicated as the potential QA agency to assess the QA of the UniRSM. AVEPRO aims to promote the quality of research and teaching and evaluates the achievement of adequate international standards by the academic institutions of the Catholic Church. The activity of AVEPRO is compliant with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and with other international agreements concerning the standards and procedures of quality assessment in higher education. Self-assessment, external evaluation, quality improvement plan, and strategy plan were all included in the scope of AVEPRO's QA assessment process. It was suggested that the focus be on the usefulness of internal criteria that are compatible with San Marino's domestic culture and system, as well as the content rather than the methodology, as the UniRSM's quality evaluation might be performed by another agency in the future¹.

4. Exchange of views with University staff and students

A group of UniRSM stakeholders (academic staff and students) shared their perspectives on the university's work. The student senate representative emphasized the importance of forming a student committee to allow students to collaborate with the university's secretariat and administrative parties. The university is very student-centered: it emphasizes the relationship between students and teachers; provides economic support; students have direct contact with the secretariat and the rector. Other important focus areas include culture and collaboration between university and the labor world (possibility of part-time work for students, apprenticeship within the university). The UniRSM department coordinator explained that the key decisions are taken within the department council, together with the promotion of educational and research activities. In terms of funding, the department coordinator added that companies approach professors to provide professional counselling, and in turn give funding to the university. Each department is in charge of promoting its own courses and degrees through the university website, exhibitions, etc.

The student representative within the Academic senate emphasized that due to the small size of the university, the staff can perform roles across different departments rather than follow single roles. This has proved to be very enriching as the staff can use their training to perform different functions and mix competences that enable them to perform various tasks and organize diverse activities. At the moment, the university is working on projects aimed at training the administrative and technical staff, professors and students through the organization of seminars, etc.

With the University New Law (2014), a student office was established offering career counselling, professional activities (internships) and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the student office aims to support students through providing: economic benefits for disadvantaged groups; contribution for international mobility; collaboration with students; scholarships; psychological counselling.

The territorial pact was highlighted, as an arrangement where the needs of the community are discussed in the university. The Sammarinese companies, national associations and the workers union are involved in this pact that offers the community the possibility of expressing what is needed from the university. The representatives of San Marino proposed that after this meeting, they will inform the community through the territorial pact on the current developments in the country, the EHEA and the possible points of action that can be taken. The co-chairs underlined that, within the EHEA, the participation of students and staff in governance and QA is being promoted. Consequently, they asked whether the UniRSM has had any issues/challenges that would like to improve regarding the student and staff participation in terms of giving

¹ At the BFUG Meeting 78, held in Slovenia (December 1-2, 2021), it was advised to consider, apart from AVEPRO, EQAR-registered agencies as potential QA agencies for San Marino.



feedback, planning systems, criteria and strategies. The university representatives explained that no challenges of this nature have arisen as the students have not been involved in the active participation in the works of the university. Nonetheless, emails on events and activities going on in the university are sent to students on a daily basis to keep them informed on the recent developments of the university. Moreover, although the quality assessment process is still in its early stages, the university staff said that they would be more than willing to discuss the decisions to be adopted with the students. Moreover, in cases of complaints, concerns or other educational related issues, the students can contact the rector directly. It was advised that a more formal structure is needed to approach these situations.

5. ESG principles for QA and overview of the QA in the EHEA

Maria Kelo (ENQA) presented an overview of the European QA Framework and the ESG. She stated that quality assurance has been one of the key action lines in the Bologna Process since the beginning in 1999. Thus, it was put on the list of the three Key Commitments and since then there has been a lot of demand for QA related activities. QA is examined in an internal, external and system level. Established in 2000, ENQA is the network of the QA accreditation agencies in Europe. Further, it is the main European body that coordinates the agency reviews in order to verify that all institutions are in compliance with the ESG. In 2015, the ministers adopted the European approach for QA of joint programs. The QA standards and guidelines within the EHEA were written by the stakeholders, as the involvement and high level of engagement of stakeholders is a true characteristic of the European system. This QA framework is generic in order to allow for diversity and to provide a solid basis for mobility and recognition. The principles of this framework in the EHEA consist of primary responsibility by HEIs, diversity, development of quality culture and the needs and expectations of students. It was underlined that external quality assurance has to be conducted by an independent QA agency. The Sammarinese representatives were advised not to invest in a national agency, as it is essential for a small country to have its own internal QA agency. The internal QA system has to be in alliance with the ESG and externally reviewed on a regular basis. Conclusively, this framework is an important baseline for facilitating knowledge transfer between European countries by referring to the same system for recognizing credits and ensuring student mobility.

6. National qualification frameworks compatible with QF-EHEA

Sjur Bergan (Council of Europe) provided an overview of the National and European Qualifications Frameworks. The historical background of Qualifications Frameworks (QF) within the Bologna Process was outlined. Additionally, the three frameworks were expounded.

- The National Framework, owned by the national system, is closest to the operational reality and it ultimately determines the qualifications that learners will earn.
- The Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA), also referred to as 'Bologna Qualifications Framework', facilitates movement between systems and provides the broad structures within which national qualifications frameworks will be developed ("outer limits" for diversity)
- The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), developed by the European Commission after the QF-EHEA had been adopted, covering all levels and strands of education and applicable to all EU countries and countries participating in specific EU education programs (currently 37, all of which as also EHEA members).

Mr. Bergan highlighted that, at the end of the process, a country is expected to achieve self-certification, which involves a country undergoing a certain procedure that indicates that their respective QF is compatible with the overarching framework of the respective region and responding to all the criteria. Moreover, the self-certification process should involve (2) foreign experts and national stakeholders. It was advised that the country be open about critical issues in order to build credibility and provide opportunities for students from various to get to a common point.



The Ministry is in charge of the QF as it concerns their national education system. Other parties that should be involved include students and staff (on an institutional level), as well as employers and the civil society. These parties should work on accomplishing 4 main purposes of education: preparation for the labor market; preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies; personal development; broad and advance knowledge base. In addition, it was advised that one of the foreign experts to be involved in the self-certification process should not be Italian, because the Italian and Sammarinese HE systems are too similar and the Italian experts may not ask some questions that will be asked by those further removed from, and with less knowledge of, the Sammarinese system. To conclude, it was highlighted that although the three Key Commitments (Qualifications Framework, Lisbon Recognition Convention, Quality Assurance) are standards, they should also be seen as guides to good practice.

7. Presentations of NQF and QA

7.1. Case Liechtenstein

Daniel Miescher provided an overview of the implementation of QF and QA in Liechtenstein. Initially, a brief presentation of the country was provided, followed by an introduction of the higher education legislation. Cooperation in the higher education system is regulated/assigned by the Law on Higher Education (2004) and the law also entrusts the government with implementing the national QF. The University of Liechtenstein Law (2005) also focuses on the institutions' organizational structure, facilities, funding and governance. The key steps in Liechtenstein's quality assurance procedure were outlined, with Mr. Miescher adding that an audit by an EQAR accredited agency is conducted at least once every six years. He also stated that the Office of Education has formed a working group to develop the NQF while keeping a QF-EHEA oriented approach. Further, an expert group (Germany, Switzerland, Ireland) was assigned to evaluate the self-certification process in Liechtenstein. Overall, the NQF comprises of 3 main components: General education, NQF Compulsory education and NQF Vocational education.

7.2. Case Holy See

Melanie Rosenbaum gave a presentation of the Holy See NQF and QA systems, indicating that there are two types of institutions within the national system: Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties; Catholic Universities. Ecclesiastical universities are governed by a global, uniform academic legislation. As a result, they are automatically recognized as: necessary qualifications for regulated professions of the Church globally; necessary academic condition to enroll in further studies. The Congregation for Catholic Education houses the Holy See's only international center for recognition (ICR). In terms of the recognition process, the institution makes the initial decision, with more complicated cases going to the ICR and then to the Congregation (3-tier structure). AVEPRO is the Holy See's agency in charge of quality assessment and promotion. AVEPRO is an ENQA member, and underwent a second ENQA Agency Review in 2020. It complies with the ESG and has a 5-year HEI evaluation period. AVEPRO does not levy any fees on institutions because education is regarded as a public good and quality as a necessary precondition. As part of their responsibilities for the educational process and its quality, professors and students are urged to participate in commissions. Finally, the QA process was presented, including internal and external evaluation reports and the development of a strategic and quality improvement plan for the upcoming evaluation cycle.

7.3. Case Andorra

Jordi Llombart presented an overview of Andorra's higher education system, beginning with the legislative framework and a list of public and private HEIs. Mr. Llombart advised the Sammarinese representatives on issues to consider in the establishment of a new institution and the challenges that may arise, emphasizing the importance of planning a thorough procedure. He also highlighted factors to consider in the event that



universities must close. Because the curricula of primary, secondary, and high schools were not articulated in competences but in objectives, Andorra only published the NQF for higher education in 2010. It required ten years to get the indicated levels' courses described in competencies. Andorra issued the revised NQF in July 2021, which includes general education, vocational training (non-higher education), vocational training (higher education, short cycle inside first cycle), Bachelors, Masters, and PhD studies. The official diploma accreditation process was described as a two-step process: The first phase involves including important stakeholders (ministries, university representatives, professional associations, and foreign lecturers) and the formulation of the diploma. The competencies of a diploma are decided by relevant stakeholders. The Council of Ministers then approves the diploma's creation and issues a decree making it public. The second step concerns the program at each university, which is based on the substance of the decree of the creation of diploma. Each university specifies the skills' learning outcomes and submits the program to the National Quality Assurance Agency for approval. The program is approved by the Council of Ministers and published through a decree after the QA Agency has accredited it. The country has invested in its own national quality certification organization, AQUA, which was established in 2006. Since then, new regulations have been put in place to update this institution and keep it in line with the ministerial communiqués' objectives. The funding for the QA agency is received from the Andorran Parliament, donations by public or private institutions and even individuals.

The university of Andorra fosters a democratic culture by incorporating students in many areas such as the university council, quality council, research commission and PhD commission, among others. To further develop this culture, several volunteer projects, Buddy programs, mentoring sessions, and knowledge/experience exchange events are performed.

7.4. Q&A

The Holy See further elaborated on the accreditation process, highlighting that the initial step involves the accreditation of institutions. The Congregation for Catholic Education was stated to be in charge of program accreditation once the institution offers a program that must comply with the Higher Education Act. However, for regional cohesion, Bishops' Conferences are involved in creating a framework rule that falls under their jurisdiction. Andorra has been a pioneer in Europe, not only because its ministers are dedicated to the entire QA and QF processes, but also because it is the first country to integrate this framework into its teacher education program. The QA agency's funding was discussed, including the fact that some of the donations originate from public and private HEIs. It was asked how this is regulated so that there is no issue in the perception of the donation as a way for institutions to receive accreditation. It was explained that this process is governed by law in order to avoid any debauched circumstances. It was stressed that while each system is unique, it is critical to maintain contact with stakeholders while being autonomous.

8. Feedback from the peer-learning and stakeholder discussions

Members were requested to submit feedback on the peer-learning activities (PLAs) and discussions that had taken place so far. Members were also asked to indicate areas where the PLAs should continue, as well as useful approaches for future work, in order to prepare for next steps. All of the presentations, according to the members, were beneficial in providing insight into each organization's work and methods. The university's presentation gave a comprehensive image of the institution, its structure, as well as its distinct purposes and profile. It was critical to understand the university's goals and to acknowledge that the university's societal role is a strong point. Furthermore, the case studies were very valuable in demonstrating not just the technical parts of the processes but also each national system, which was very useful for the San Marino members. The territorial pact and the governance aspect were suggested as two additional elements that should be investigated further. The co-chairs noted that if there is a need to convene a peer learning session for a more in-depth discussion on QA, it can be arranged. The co-chairs



suggested that San Marino officials conduct a similar feedback process with visitors and stakeholders, highlighting any beneficial remarks and outcomes or suggestions for future work.

9. Progress report: Roadmap Implementation and the first draft of San Marino's NQF

The first draft of the law was to be presented in November 2021², according to the timeframe agreed upon by all members. The UniRSM is linked to various Italian universities, thus it has already implemented a QF focusing on the 3 levels of education. In addition, because the majority of Sammarinese secondary school students choose to study in Italy, both systems must be in regular communication in order to function correctly. The actual NQF, which has been in use since the university's inception, is being formalized, and attention is being paid not just to the three cycles, but also to the eight levels of study. Despite not being in the EU, San Marino is considering whether to self-certify/reference its NQF both the QF-EHEA and EQF. The San Marino NQF is in the works, and a draft for referencing the framework throughout the San Marino educational system is available. The ministry will handle the application for this draft law.

It is important to underline that that legislation must explicitly describe what needs to be accomplished in San Marino. Clear direction and progress should be demonstrated by taking into account the entire education system, including which stakeholders and bodies should be involved and what processes should be followed. San Marino should also investigate alternative pathways and possible flexible learning paths to HE before finalizing the regulation. According to the San Marino delegates, students can access any type of degree, whether they have completed general education or vocational training. As an alternative pathway for dropouts, it was suggested that a compressed program be organized. Furthermore, the notion of learning paths should make it possible for people to change course without having to go initiate their studies from the very beginning.

There was a discussion about how to design the process (i.e., communication with the broader public, involvement of foreign experts, education levels and competences). The co-chairs proposed to consider of including more specific aspects in the educational levels. Degree objectives, focus on communication skills, foreign language requirements for each level/cycle, sub-frameworks with disciplines, and a full description of the country's system were all presented as examples from other countries. It was suggested that foreign experts be brought in from the start of the process. San Marino representatives were recommended to identify specific concerns in their educational system and present the issues to the foreign expert(s) in order to demonstrate the issues from a foreign system's perspective. It was recommended that the foreign expert election process be conducted in the most autonomous manner possible.

Further, it was suggested to demonstrate a systematic understanding of key aspects in the field of studies and in the investigation techniques. Members suggested that national consultations with key stakeholders be held early in the process to ensure that they are on board. This is crucial because if the NQF is constructed in such a way that employers are unable to relate to it, difficulties will arise. It was suggested that stakeholders be involved using a number of methods. To begin with, some of them may be included in the first draft. Then, to demonstrate other stakeholders what has been accomplished thus far, a presentation may be given, and lastly, a formal consultation can be scheduled with them to discuss the final text.

San Marino representatives provided also some specifics on legislation revision process concerning the reform of the university law stating that they will be working with rectors on the new text, which is expected to be adopted by the end of the year.

² The first draft of the National Qualifications Framework law was presented in November 2021 to the Minister of Education, but not yet shared with the government.



It was suggested that there might be a clear indication of legislation and policies on an institutional and system level. This distinction is not evident yet in San Marino. This can prove beneficial in cases where someone wants to set up a HEI in San Marino. As a result, a legislative framework and policies should be in place to address the prerequisites/requirements for establishing a HEI.

In Europe, two main governance approaches are developed in selection of university rector. The first model follows a more traditional approach, in which candidates are chosen from within the academic community, and the rector is elected by the academic community. The second strategy focuses on hiring a rector and invites applications from both within and outside of the institution. Despite the fact that one model involves more academic community input and the other model focuses more on the university council's decision, one emphasizes competence in the main missions of higher education and the other more managerial competence, both models share the fact that the decision belongs to the institution.

To conclude, it was agreed that a separate peer-learning session on the governance models of universities could be organized to support the preparation of a new university law. Further, the co-chairs said that it is very positive that students and staff will have a significant impact on the legislation. They also applauded the San Marino members for emphasizing the need of enhancing the university's autonomy as a whole, since it is a highly valuable factor.

10. Wrap-up of the meeting and next steps

The co-chairs provided a summary of the meeting, highlighting the main themes that were covered during the two days. They stressed the country case studies as good practical examples aim to aid in the finalization of the national qualification framework and other reforms. In addition to regular WG meetings, it was agreed to organize early next year two separate peer-learning activity meetings between Sammarinese authorities and relevant experts on the governance structures and quality assurance. The co-chairs requested that the next meeting be held in spring/March online

The BFUG meeting, which will take place on December 1-2, 2021, was discussed, particularly how to communicate the work and progress made so far by this WG and San Marino. It was determined to prepare a report based on the previously defined timetable, this meeting's foundation and the lessons learnt from the meeting. The co-chairs and San Marino representatives agreed to have a dual presentation at the BFUG meeting to report on their progress.

11. AoB

Maria Kelo informed the working group that her affiliation changes from ENQA to EUA next year. The WG unanimously agreed that the best option would be that Maria Kelo continues as a member of this working group despite of the change in her position. It was decided that this change in composition will be brought for the BFUG for approval.

The Head of the Secretariat, Enida Bezhani, announced that she has resigned her post. Ms. Bezhani expressed her gratitude to all the colleagues for their continued support and cooperation. She informed the group that a new Head of the Secretariat is expected to be appointed soon due to an accelerated recruitment process by the ministry. The Working Group expressed great appreciation of Ms. Bezhani's work. No further business was discussed, thus the co-chairs thanked everyone for their participation and concluded the second meeting of the WG on San Marino Roadmap.