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THEMATIC PEER GROUP A ON QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK

18 February 2020

Prague (Czech Republic)

Minutes

List of participants

	Delegation	First name	Family name(s)
1.	Albania	Linda	Pustina
2.	Armenia	Kristina	Tsaturyan
3.	Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova
4.	Azerbaijan	Samir	Hamidov
5.	Belarus	Elena	Betenya
6.	Belgium Flemish Community	Nina	Mares
7.	BFUG Vice-chair	Ann Katherine	Isaacs
8.	Council of Europe	Jean-Philippe	Restoueix
9.	Czech Republic	Tomáš	Fliegl
10.	Czech Republic	Tereza	Neumann Kotásková
11.	Czech Republic	Lenka	Škrábalová
12.	Czech Republic	Ivona	Sobotková
13.	EI/ETUCE	Ole Espen	Rakkestad
14.	Estonia	Janne	Pukk
15.	EURASHE	Michal	Karpisek
16.	European Commission	Klara	Engels-Perenyi
17.	European Commission	Koen	Nomden
18.	Finland	Carita	Blomqvist
19.	Georgia	Ketevan	Panchulidze
20.	Germany	Barbara	Michalk
21.	Hungary	Márton	Beke
22.	Kazakhstan	Banu	Narbekova
23.	Kazakhstan	Amantay	Nurmagambetov

	Delegation	First name	Family name(s)
24.	Malta	Lawrence	Azzopardi
25.	Poland	Jacek	Lewicki
26.	Romania	Antonela	Toma
27.	AEC (observer)	Ingeborg	Radok Zadna
28.	New Zealand (external)	Eve	Mcmahon
29.	BFUG Secretariat	Rocío	Iglesias de Ussel Rubio
30.	BFUG Secretariat	Edlira Adi	Kahani Subashi

Apologies from Andorra, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, ESU, North Macedonia, Serbia, Spain and Turkey.

1. Welcome and address by the host and Co-chairs

The Czech Co-chair welcomed participants at the meeting.

Mr. Tomas Fliegl, Head of the Strategic Unit of the Department of Higher Education at the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports welcomed the participants. He emphasized the fact of this being the last meeting for the TPG A on QF, following the endeavour of 18 months of work on NQF and ECTS. The work carried out in these 18 months consisted on peer support, with not only talking on the topics of the TPG A on QF, but also on concrete steps for each of the participating countries. The work done by the peer group would be relevant on national level. For the Czech Republic it has been a useful time, enabling to move faster on the NQF, which should be finished and adopted. Mr. Fliegl thanked all the partners involved in the work of the TPG A on QF; European Commission (EC), with their funding of the umbrella project, German Rectors Conference (HRK), ESU and the Czech partners. Extended thanks was given to the Czech and Finnish Co-chairs of the TPG A on QF, for their coordination on the work of the entire group.

Finnish Co-chair welcomed participants and explained the agenda for the meeting as per items in the draft agenda. The fact of a very concrete example added to the agenda is very encouraging and interesting, hoping on the feedback from the group.

Participants were informed that the meeting would be recorded by the BFUG Secretariat and that the list of participants would be shared among them, as requested by some participants. There was no objection to the last notification.

2. Reporting from peer group activities:

The TPG A on QF was created to promote implementation of the Bologna Key commitment 1: a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching frameworks of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS. Specific thematic indications include self-certification on the NQF to the overarching QF-EHEA, complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide, short cycle HE, multiple purpose and use of QFs by the stakeholders, study programmes outside of the Bologna three cycle structure and relations between QFs and QA. The TPG had three Co-chairs who prepared the work plan of the TPG. The umbrella project has been prepared by the Czech Republic together with partners – German Rector's Conference and ESU. Each partner organized one PLA. Country action plan of the TPG A was filled in by the members of the TPG A on QF and is available on the [EHEA web site](#). Summer 2019

was the last update of the action plan for each country and Co-chairs asked the participants to check the respective action plan, and in case of any change to send the updates to the Co-chairs. The action plan is the key document of the work of TPG A on QF.. Participants were introduced with a timeline of the work carried out by TPG A on QF. In total, there were three TPG meetings. All had good participation of the members, including the first meeting in Helsinki that was not covered by the umbrella project. Additional key activities for the work of the group that took place since the second TPG A meeting were introduced:

a. ECTS Conference Prague, 3 June 2019

The Czech Co-chair gave a brief summary of the activity. The conference focused on improving the way how ECTS is used in the 48 countries of the European Higher Education Area and what governments should do for that, and covered topics such as ECTS Foundations and development, state of play – the responsibilities of countries and institutions, national credit systems, developing course catalogues and credit recognition procedures, producing grade distribution tables for grade conversion as well as ECTS from the perspective of QA.

b. Self-Certification Workshop Strasbourg, 6 September 2019

The Finnish Co-chair gave a brief summary of the activity. The workshop was organized also in cooperation with the CoE in their annual meeting of National Correspondents of QFs. It focused on the situation in the countries, members of the TPG A on QF, which plan to start or already have started the process of self-certification. In the meeting, representatives of Albania and Georgia presented their NQF and challenges they are facing. The presentations were followed by a discussion with other peer group members who provided feedback.

c. PLA on Qualifications Frameworks Berlin 21-22 October 2019

Ms. Barbra Michalk, representative of the German Rectors' Conference HRK, gave a report of the activity, bringing apologies from Mr. Tauch for not being able to attend the meeting, due to health reasons. The PLA in Berlin focused on the QFs for higher education, concentrated on the case of Germany and comparison with other countries, the process of self-certification of a QF, its promotion among national stakeholders as well as subject/programme specific QFs. Main points of discussion in the PLA were directly connected to the characteristics of the HE on faculty as well as students centered learning, triangle QF-QA-Recognition. Level 5 qualifications were also part of the discussions in the PLA.

At the end of the presentation, there were discussions on the subjects presented at the PLA in Berlin, such as the subject/programme qualification frameworks and what approach in the future is foreseen to bring them to faculty level.

d. Multiple purposes and use of the QF stakeholders Brussels 18-19 November 2019

Since ESU could not be present in person, they suggested to connect via skype. However, due to the bad skype connection, ESU representative could not deliver a report on the PLA.

Co-chairs informed participants that the written report from the ESU's PLA including recommendations for countries is available on the EHEA website.

3. Presentation of Kazakhstan's NQF and the self-certification report

Kazakhstan's representative at the TPG A on QF, Mr. Amantay Nurmagambetov, presented the Kazakhstan QF-EHEA and its self-certification report. The presentation started with an overview of the Kazakh HE system, including number of HEIs, transition to Bologna cycle degrees, as well as the amendments on the law about education in 2018. QA system in Kazakhstan consists of three registers, one of them being the register of agencies with the right to conduct accreditation of educational organizations in Kazakhstan. This register consists of 11 accreditation agencies, four of which are full members of ENQA. Structure of the Kazakh NQF was also introduced, with its specifications. NQF was adopted in 2012 and revised in 2016, based on the recommendations from the international experts' reviews, who have worked with the Kazakh authorities between the 2006-2016 both on NQF and the QF-EHEA. Kazakhstan does not have short cycle qualifications in its HE system, but recently there are ongoing discussions to include the short cycle qualifications as applied bachelors in the HE system in Kazakhstan.

NQF development went through several stages until the current state of play. The work done and measures for each of the stages were presented to the participants at the meeting.

Discussions, following the presentation, raised the issue of transparency in the HE system in Kazakhstan, especially in regard to the types of HEIs and the difference between the three types presented in the report. The issue of the place of QF-EHEA in the NQF of Kazakhstan was also raised, and it was clarified that the work at first stage was done on level 6, 7 and 8, while in the future QF-EHEA will be part of the NQF in Kazakhstan. Participants were informed briefly that students were involved in the discussion during several activities organized by the Kazakhstani national authorities on the stages of work for establishment of the NQF, and unfortunately it is noticed that the students are not active on this process. Academic freedom as defined in the report seems more connected to academic autonomy.

In general, participants very much appreciated the work done by Kazakhstan, recommended to consider participants' suggestions and remarks and encouraged Kazakhstan to proceed with implementation.

4. Feedback from participants – lessons learned and planned next steps in each country

Participants were introduced to the item on the agenda and the rationale behind of how it was designed.

Discussions in small groups

Participants were divided in three groups to discuss following questions:

- Have you achieved any progress in the following areas?
 - self-certification of the NQF against the overarching QF-EHEA
 - complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide
 - short cycle higher education
 - multiple purposes and use of the qualifications frameworks by the stakeholders
 - study programmes outside of the Bologna three-cycle structure
 - relationship between the qualifications frameworks and quality assurance
- Did the peer group help you to achieve the progress?

- What are your planned next steps in the listed areas?

Time allocated to the discussions was 45 minutes and each group selected a reporter who would report on the outcomes of the group discussions.

5. Reporting from group discussions

The **1st group** reported that PLAs and workshops were seen positively as a chance for exchange, getting new ideas and perspectives, even in well-established QF countries. The topics were sometimes broad and sometimes specific. Most participants agreed they understand QFs and the concept of learning outcomes better now, although there are open questions in regard to assessment. When it comes to self-certification, the discussion showed that a lot of work has been going on and its speed depends a lot on necessary political and legal actions. The discussion also showed a need to further discuss short cycle qualifications – they are already implemented in some countries, either as a part of HE or VET, and other countries are now considering introducing them. Countries have defined their steps forwards – roadmaps, strategic plans etc. Countries have different approaches to QF-EHEA and EQF and are working in different speed.

The **2nd group** consisted of countries in which the developments on the NQF are at different level. The group agreed that more communication is needed when it comes to short cycle qualifications as there are more question marks than a way to go. As far as ECTS implementation is concerned, countries have national guidelines and manuals in place or being developed. Participants of this subgroup agreed that the peer approach was helpful and PLAs helped to speed up the QF procedures – several countries are planning to self-certify.

The **3rd group** agreed that the peer group did help them and is a good ways to go forward. The discussion showed that often everything is formally done and ready but in practice there is a lot of work to be done – QF might not be used for when creating new study programs, there might be problems with recognition of credits despite using ECTS, mindset of stakeholders (teachers, students, employers, society) has not been changed yet. The subgroup reported that the peer support approach is useful as it is a place where many issues can be discussed. Concrete and detailed action plans are also very helpful and countries who presented their QF and current state of play appreciated having a chance to get feedback from others.

6. Update on the development within BFUG and the state of play with the Communiqué

The Finnish Co-chair informed participants about the questionnaire on peer support approach sent by the BFUG Secretariat on behalf of the BICG, which should be filled in until 31 March 2020.

BFUG Vice-Chair gave an update on the latest development from the BFUG. She started with a short debriefing of the state of play for the Draft Communiqué and the general feedback on peer groups received until now. BFUG Vice-Chair further informed about the BICG and the TPGs, the Bologna Key commitment, the way forward, the vision for 2030 as well as the future of the TPGs. The work and achievements of the TPGs is something to be proud of, considering that EHEA moved from “shaming” to “sharing”, making the peer work more useful to share knowledge and solutions. The message in the Rome 2020 Draft Communiqué is that the TPGs have proved effective not only in assisting in implementing agreed reforms, but also

in findings solutions to common challenges and sharing good practice. The message reconfirms the commitment to the full implementation of the Bologna key commitments. A report from the BICG, including the reports of the TPGs might be added as an annex to the Communiqué.

7. Reporting to BICG: results and feedback about the peer support approach and its future

The elements for the report to BICG were discussed in a plenary session without participants being divided in small groups. Participants were informed on the content of the Global summit on HE that is going to be organized in Rome following the Rome 2020 Ministerial Conference and the spot given to each of the TPGs to present their work to participants of the summit. Members are welcomed to forward their ideas on the topics to be discussed and presented.

Participants were asked to discuss several questions introduced by the Co-chairs which referred to the questions (at least part of them) taken from the questionnaire of BICG circulated to all TPGs.

Participants discussed their experience with peer group work. There are a number of challenges, considering only two years between the two ministerial conferences. As the time allocated for the peer group work was very short, it is not possible to fully conclude how much the peer support was successful. In some cases, there is a clear idea on how to proceed, while in some others less. There should be more engagement of the academic staff and other stakeholders in the process of implementation, keeping the governments engaged and committed. Format of peer learning was tested successfully and turned out beneficial. Small groups meetings and workshops proved to be very useful as well as PLAs and other activities organized by the TPG under their umbrella project. The discussion showed that countries are now exploring new ways of regional cooperation and potential regional projects, besides the national ones.

8. Closing by Co-chairs

Czech Co-chair thanked everyone for the spirit of cooperation among the members of the TPG A on QF, hoping there will be future cooperation in the same framework.

Finnish Co-Chair emphasized a very interesting and rewarding experience co-chairing the TPG A on QF. She thanked all EHEA countries members as well as consultative members, as well as the great pleasure to work with all members of TPG A on QF, especially the Czech Co-chair.