

Bologna Follow Up Group

BFUG3 5

**Status Report from the Working Group on Overarching Framework of
Qualification for EHEA**

30 September 2004

**Ministry of Science,
Technology and Innovation**

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1 INTRODUCTION

The work was commissioned by the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) as a follow up of the decisions taken by the ministers in charge of higher education at the Bologna Follow Up Conference in Berlin in September 2003 concerning framework of qualifications for their national higher education systems as well as for the European Higher Education Area.

At its meeting in Dublin on 9 March 2004 the BFUG approved the establishment of a Working Group to coordinate the work on the development of an overarching framework of qualifications for the EHEA.

In the terms of reference BFUG asked the Working Group to

1. Identify reference points for national frameworks of qualifications (in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile), which may assist Member States in establishing their frameworks
2. Elaborate on an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area;
3. Establish key principles for frameworks of qualifications, both at national and European levels.

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The Working Group had to take into account other policy areas, including those within the Copenhagen Process and the wider Lisbon Agenda as articulated in "Education and training 2010"

An expert group set up by Denmark, Ireland, UK including Scotland and the chairman of the Lisbon Convention Committee prepared the coordinating work previous to the appointment of the Working Group. The members of the expert group have continued their contribution as experts to the Working Group (appendix xx). The preparatory group had 2 meetings and the Working Group had meetings in Dublin, Copenhagen, Edinburgh and Stockholm and will have its final meetings in Budapest and Riga.

The Working Group has drawn heavily on work done by others especially the Joint Quality Initiative who formulated the Dublin Descriptors and organised an introductory conference in London in January 2004. It has also drawn on experiences in countries having already established qualifications framework for their national higher education systems. The Group conducted a comparative study of existing national framework.

It has consulted other organisations that have contributed to the topic such as the European University Association EUA (as coordinator of ECTS councillors), EURASHE and The European Consortium for Accreditation ECA. Also consulted was the European Commission as coordinator of the Copenhagen process and of the Lisbon process as articulated in "Education and training 2010".

The Chairman has given presentations of the findings of the Working Group at conferences of important European organisations and networks such as ESIB, EURASHE and ENIC/NARIC. Also he has conducted a seminar in Vienna attended by officials and organisations of the incoming Austrian Bologna and EU Presidency (2006). The chair and other members of the Working Group have reported from the Working Group in Bologna seminars in Edinburgh and Santander. Members of and experts to the Working Group attended the Closing Conference on “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Phase 2”

The work will be finished according to the approved work plan.

2 WORK PLAN FOR 2. HALF OF 2004

1 September	Editing group (Dublin)	Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
10 September	WG-meeting (Stockholm) 1. reading of Introduction and Ch. 1 and 2 Discussion of Ch. 3	
6 October	Editing group (London)	
12 October	Reporting to BFUG	
29 October	WG-meeting (Budapest) 2. reading of Ch. 1 and 2 1. reading of Ch. 3, 4 and 5	
2 December	WG-meeting (Riga) 2. reading of Intro. + Ch. 3, 4 and 5 Adoption of the report by WG	

3 REPORT, BOLOGNA SEMINAR AND RECOMMANDATIONS

The report has the following chapters:

Introduction

- 1 Context – Higher education qualifications in Europe
- 2 National frameworks of qualifications
- 3 Framework for EHEA
- 4 Frameworks and the individual
- 5 Frameworks for higher education and for other education areas

The report will be discussed at a Bologna seminar in

Copenhagen on 13-14 January 2005.

Members of BFUG and national experts from member countries will be invited to the seminar.

The report and the conclusions and recommendations from the seminar will then be given to the BFUG, who commissioned the work. It will be available for the ministerial Bologna Conference in Bergen in May 2005.

4 RESULTS FROM THE WORK

4.1 National Frameworks

The study of existing national frameworks and the comparative analysis mentioned above made the diversity in the field obvious to the group. This relates to the area of education covered, the number of levels in the framework, whether credits are included, how qualification descriptors are articulated and to the unitary or binary nature of the national higher education system.

In a LLL perspective the French system of “la validation des acquis de l’expérience” was studied. The concept of learning outcomes implies that the manner of the achievement of an award is not as important as the achievement of the award itself. This is very relevant to recognition of prior learning, which is enhanced by the increasing use of this new concept.

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Credits are increasingly used in the national systems. But ECTS-credits as we know the system today are not related to levels and not at all to learning outcomes. ECTS has to be developed to meet these new challenges in order to be useful to modern qualifications frameworks.

4.2 EHEA-framework

The overarching framework has the purpose of facilitating transparency, recognition and mobility. It has not the capacity to be a regulatory framework but it offers reference points for transparency, recognition and mobility. It has to be robust, simpler and less detailed than national systems. To find the right balance between the diversities of national frameworks and the benefits of a close linkages between them is the main challenge for constructing an overarching framework.

The WG propose a framework of three principal levels following the Bologna cycles (now 3). It use the descriptors developed by the JQI (the Dublin descriptors)

The question of introducing a level equivalent to short higher education in several member states has been very much discussed and the group has consulted EURASHE on the matter.

The problem addressed to EURASHE was that such an EHEA-descriptor might be useful but it might also tend to “standardise” in an unintended way “short higher education”, given the enormous diversity in this field. The alternative was to articulate levels for these kinds of HE-qualifications only inside the national frameworks and offer a level descriptor only as an option for that specific use.

The opinion of EURASHE was that the organisation welcomed the introduction of an EHEA-level descriptor as a reference point expressed in broad terms and

based on most common kind of qualifications from “short higher education” normally after two years of study. It saw no problem of “standardisation” as it will leave open for the Bologna member states to introduce a more detailed system of levels in their national frameworks if appropriate.

The conclusion was that the WG could continue its deliberations on the question of levels in its October meeting in Budapest, and ask the JQI to further develop a single descriptor on qualifications from “short higher education”.

4.3 Bologna, Copenhagen and Lisbon

Few countries have developed comprehensive frameworks covering both higher education and vocational education and training and such a framework does not exist on the European level. The European Commission and the Council of education ministers have expressed the view that the European labour market cannot function effectively and smoothly without a European Framework to stand as a common reference for the recognition of qualifications. They call for the development of such a framework within the Lisbon process.

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The WG has on several occasions invited representatives from the Commission (as coordinator of the Copenhagen and the Lisbon processes) to the meetings of the WG.

The Commission’s view is that there is a need for those involved in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes to get together and that compatibility between the two frameworks under development is necessary. This does not supersede any of the mandates of either the Copenhagen or Bologna processes. The Commission itself has not decided on a final way forward, but considers the linking together of the respective HE and VET frameworks within a lifelong learning perspective to be a logical starting point towards the EQF for lifelong learning. As a first step, a liaison group of those involved in the two processes in framework development will be put in place in October in order to share experience and mutual understanding, and to discuss a roadmap leading to the presentation of a blueprint for the EQF by the end of 2005.

The Bologna WG is willing to enter such a liaison group on the condition that it does not violate the mandate given by BFUG and the provisions in the Berlin Communiqué.