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CLUSTER "MODERNISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION"

**Summary report of the Peer Learning Activity on
Implementing EQF / NQF in Higher Education**

Sofia, 8-10 October 2007

Report approved by the Cluster.

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1 Introduction

A Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was organised on 8-10 October 2007, in Sofia, Bulgaria, on the topic of **implementing EQF / NQF in Higher Education**. This PLA was organised in response to the needs of participants in the Cluster on “Modernisation of Higher Education” within the framework of the implementation of Education & Training 2010. The meeting was hosted by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, and the organising committee was made up of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain and the European Commission.

In addition to the host country of Bulgaria, eight other countries participated in the PLA: Belgium (FL), Iceland, Spain, Norway, Slovenia, Slovakia, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

Each country participating in the PLA had appointed two delegates: one governmental representative and one HEI representative. These were considered to be of influence within their respective work surroundings and able to disseminate the outcome of the PLA.

In preparation for the meeting, participants were asked to provide a brief national report on a simple template covering the issues of:

- Self-certification
- Learning outcomes
- Stakeholder engagement

For each theme the PLA explored both policy and practical issues of implementation.

All countries produced reports on the state of play for each of issues set out above. The summary of the national reports is appended.

This report is composed of the three following sections:

The first section outlines the key issues on the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, describing the elements of the EQF and also the policy background.

The second (Peer Learning Activity) is about the PLA programme and provides outlines of the presentations, both from the Hosts and from the PLA group and the outcomes of the follow up discussions. All the visits are summarised in this section.

The final section gives the reflections and conclusions of the PLA group following the PLA activity.

2 Key issues on the implementation of the EQF / NQF

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was called for as a means of supporting greater mobility and to contribute towards an efficient labour market. It aims to provide a common language to describe qualifications, thereby increasing transparency, improving comparability and facilitating the recognition of different qualifications acquired under the various EU Education and Training Systems.

The EQF consists of three main elements:

- The core is a set of common reference points – referring to learning outcomes located in a structure of 8 levels
- These reference levels are supported by a range of tools and instruments addressing the need of individual citizens
- A set of common principles and procedures providing guidelines for co-operation between stakeholders at different levels – in particular focusing on quality assurance, validation, guidance and key competences

In support of the EQF, the proposal to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union¹ called for the Member States to do the following:

- Use the EQF as a reference tool to compare qualification levels of different qualification systems within a lifelong learning perspective
- Relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010
- Adopt measures so that by 2012 all new qualification certificates, diplomas and “europass” documents issued by competent authorities contain clear reference to appropriate EQF levels.
- Use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- Promote and apply the principles for quality assurance in education and training
- Designate national coordination points to support the process (tasks include guidance to stakeholders and encouraging participation of stakeholders in the process)

The London Communiqué² also highlights the importance of qualifications frameworks in achieving comparability and transparency within the EHEA and facilitating the movement of learners within, as well as between Higher Education Systems. The Ministers are committed to fully implementing national qualifications frameworks certified against the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA by 2010. The Communiqué also stresses that NQFs which are compatible with the EHEA Frameworks will also be compatible with the EQF.

¹ Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning: Brussels 30 October 2006

² Communiqué of the ministerial Bologna-conference: *Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World*, 18 May 2007.
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/London-Communiqué-18May2007.pdf>

The “Modernisation of Higher Education” Cluster was created within the framework of the implementation of Education & Training 2010. The first Council / Commission Joint Report on the implementation of E&T 2010 established the priority fields of action to enable the education and training sectors to contribute to the success of the Lisbon Strategy. All EU and EEA/EFTA-countries are currently implementing NQFs and working with the EQFs and the overarching framework for Qualifications of the EHEA. This topic was chosen by members of the cluster as one which they would benefit from discussing in more detail through a PLA: it is for this reason that the PLA in Bulgaria focused on these issues. The PLA first and foremost brought together its members to reflect on the issues of the EQF / NQF. These participants also benefited from presentations in respect of the experiences of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, Higher Education institutions and a broad range of stakeholders. The Bulgarian experience was further illustrated by a number of site visits to HE institutions.

3 The Peer Learning Activity

The Peer Learning Activity was opened by Dr. Rossitsa Velinova, director of European Integration and International Co-operation Directorate and Ms Elka Dobрева, director of Policy in Higher Education Directorate. Sessions were chaired by Jurgen Rienks, of the European Commission.

The format for the PLA comprised:

- Presentations from the Bulgarian Hosts on issues relating to (EQF / NQF)
 - Day one focused on policy, with presentations from the Ministry of Education and Science
 - Day two focused on practice, with presentations from the HEIs
 - Day three focused on the actors, with presentations from key stakeholder groups
- Presentations from the participants, based on an example selected from the country reports provided prior to the PLA.
 - Day one focused on self-certification (Iceland , Norway, United Kingdom)
 - Day two focused on learning outcomes (The Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia)
 - Day three focused on stakeholder engagement (Spain, Flemish Community of Belgium)
- Participant discussion time – in response to issues raised by the host presentations and the PLA participant presentations.
- Site visits:
 - Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski - Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics
 - National Academy for Theater and Films Art “Krastio Sarafov”
 - Faculty of German Engineering Education - Technical University of Sofia
 - New Bulgarian University

At the start of each day a summary of the key conclusions of the previous day was produced (based on the “blank questionnaire” approach as developed in previous PLAs) to re-focus the discussions and provide the starting point for the following activities. These were cumulative and resulted in the final conclusions and reflections outlined below.

3.1 Self-certification

One of the key features of the Bologna process indicates the development of a national qualifications framework in each country, and the development of criteria and procedures to be used by each country to verify that its national framework is compatible with an overarching Qualifications Framework for the EHEA³

The framework for the EHEA consists of three main cycles. Each cycle has a generic descriptor of the typical abilities and achievements associated with completion of that cycle.

Addressing the criteria and procedures for verification allows each country engaged with the Bologna process to illustrate both the robustness of their quality assurance

3

http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Framework_qualificationsforEHEA-May2005.pdf

systems and the links between the qualifications which comprise their national framework and the three EHEA qualification cycles. The process is one of **self-certification** by each country.

The target is that verification of compatibility with the EHEA will be completed by all Bologna countries by 2010. Completion of national self-certification will be noted in the European Diploma Supplement and at the European National Information Centres - National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC) website⁴

3.1.1 State of play in participating countries

Exhibit 1 Self-certification in participating countries

	BG	BE (FL)	ES	IS	NL	NO	SI	SK	UK
At the beginning of the process		√	√				√	√	
Currently working towards implementation				√					√(*)
Self-certification is progressing well and we plan to have it in place in the next year	√				√				
Self-certification is in place									√
Other						√			

(*) In place in Scotland

The PLA countries show great variation in the stage of implementation of self-certification, (even within the countries itself in the case of the UK). However, this is a timely issue, as those countries that have not yet implemented self-certification are all about to do so. There has been activity in comparing descriptors (FL, NL), and in the Netherlands the draft NQF has been produced and sent by the minister to the boards of all HEI in the Netherlands (publicly and privately funded). A national seminar is scheduled for the end of October 2007. Norway is also currently working on a proposal for their NQF which has been sent to stakeholders for consultation with a deadline of the beginning of November 2007. In Spain there is a new national committee and a working group for developing the qualifications framework, both of which will meet for the first time in October 2007. In Iceland, self-certification on the whole process is ongoing and based on the new law for Higher Education which has come into play.

As one of the pilot countries for self-certification Scotland completed its Framework in 2001 and self-certification itself in 2006. It therefore brings experience of the benefits of working extensively with stakeholders in the development of the framework and finally its self-certification. Bulgaria is in the process of harmonising its degree structures with the European standards and practices and the self-certification process in the QA context is set by the Institutional Quality Evaluation and Assurance System (IQEAS) which are designed and operating in 50 of the 51 HEIs. The grounds for self-certification of these institutions are set by the HEI for each programme and these documents provide the framework of expected Learning Outcomes. Self-certification is an issue which is difficult to untangle from progress in Learning Outcomes and therefore the two topics will cover some of the same issues.

⁴ www.enic-naric.net/index.asp?display=qf

3.1.2 Overview presentations - Host

There were three host presentations on morning session of the first day of the PLA.

NQF for HE in Bulgaria: Ms Svetomira Kaloyanova, of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, described the elaboration of the Bulgarian NQF and the progress so far achieved. Ms Kaloyanova noted the introduction of new qualifications (e.g. ‘professional bachelor’ in ...) as part of meeting the challenge of social, economic and technological change. There were further challenges in implementation of the NQF, not least in the financial aspects of quality assurance.

Academic recognition: new ideas for the EHEA: Dr Rossitza Velinova indicated some of the challenges facing Bulgaria in the international transparency of academic qualifications. The presentation noted the need to continue to adapt legal frameworks to the new requirements, and noted also that work continues on the development of the learning outcomes approach to be adopted.

External Quality Evaluation in Bulgarian HE: Acad. Evgeny Golovinsky, of the National Evaluation and Accreditation agency, gave an historical overview of the structural change in Bulgarian HE, noting the proliferation of HE institutions following politico/economic liberalisation. The quality of HE, said Acad. Golovinsky, depends crucially upon the nature and the quality of the interaction between all the actors and stakeholders.

3.1.3 Overview presentations - Thematic

On the specific self-certification theme, brief presentations were made by representatives from Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Iceland

Dr Rosa Gunnarsdottir described how the operational team in which she works was striving within the ministry to change many things. Despite the fact that the system itself is small, the challenges and workload are considerable.

Key points:

- The HE sector in Iceland has 18,000 students in 8 institutions
- The requisite legal framework, reflecting the Bologna process, is either in place or in hand. The 2006 law is due for implementation in 2008
- Each institution has a performance contract, with key performance indicators.
- The accreditation process is in train for all universities – half have already been started. Accreditation is being done by field of study. Only one institution so far has achieved accreditation – that is the Academy of the Arts
- There is some tension between the mushrooming private HE institutions and the traditional HE sector
- While it is relatively easy, in such a small system as Iceland’s, to maintain effective collaboration with institutions, the need for mutual trust and credibility cannot be overstressed

Norway

Ms Etelka Tamminen Dahl described the approach taken by a Task Force, specially appointed in 2005, to develop an NQF for Norway.

Key points:

- The Task Force worked with 2 reference groups to examine a number of ideas and models in the light of the Bergen meeting of ministers in 2005 and the EQF adoption in 2006
- The Norwegian NQF has been designed with clear links with the EHEA QF and the EQF descriptors. Other models considered were those of Ireland, Scotland, Finland and Belgium (FI)
- In order better to understand learning outcomes, the Task Force had to learn more about learning theories
- There also needed to be a better understanding of curriculum development
- Challenges included the fact that, by law, HE teaching in Norway must be research-based
- There is a challenge too in respect of the inclusion of non-formal/informal learning within a qualifications framework
- On reflection, the Task Force should have included more HE teaching practitioners

United Kingdom

There was a joint presentation from the UK, reflecting the structure and management of the HE sector in the context of devolved administrations. Dr Jayne Mitchell referred to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Mr Bill Thomson described the process in Scotland.

Key points:

- Self-certification in all administrations is progressing well, Scotland having completed the process in 2006 and England, Wales and Northern Ireland having a completion target of November 2008
- The approach to NQFs in the UK has harnessed bottom-up momentum with high-level strategic leadership and direction
- The development of the NQ framework does not lead to a definitive product, but is a continuous process subject to review, revision and evaluation
- Consistency of a common nomenclature needs to be promoted, particularly as UK HEI degrees are not national qualifications
- The NQF (and self-certification) process is indivisible from the quality assurance of standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities
- Self-certification itself is a technical exercise, requiring strong stakeholder support and 'buy-in'

Site visits – Day 1

The PLA was invited on the first day to visit both Sofia University (Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics⁵) and the National Academy for Theater and Films Art “Krastio Sarafov”.

Sofia University – Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics

The PLA was warmly welcomed by the dean, Assoc. Prof. Ivan Soskov, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Roumen Nikolov. Presentations were given on changes in the faculty and its approach to curriculum development. The University redesigned the Software Engineering curricula 5 years ago and went through a process of:

- Analysis – looking at European initiatives, industry needs and standards
- Design - a new template for courses, documentation and relationships between modules
- Evaluation – from students, industry and the University.

Changes to the curricula included new modules, the addition of cooperative learning, project-based learning, interactive learning environments and the use of learner-centred pedagogies. All courses have ECTS equivalents (introduced in 2004) allowing for transferability of credits across Europe; also students obtain a diploma supplement at the end of their study period.

Being part of the European Union has brought both opportunities and challenges. Opportunities include:

- More cooperation - The university has more than 50 projects related to the European Higher Education Area, FP4, FP5, FP6, FP7, Tempus, Leonardo, Phare, etc
- Global perspective on education and the needs of industry⁶
- To become a national and regional centre of high technology, innovation and entrepreneurship

Challenges include

- Tougher competition – with some of the best universities in the world
- New models of education and roles for universities
- Retention of graduates for industry who tend to find jobs abroad
- Retention of graduates for research leading to an ageing faculty
- A comparative lack of money

The National Academy for Theater and Films Art “Krastio Sarafov”.

The PLA was welcomed by the Rector Prof. Dr. Stanislav Semerdjiev. The National Academy for Theatre & Film Arts (NATFA) has faculties for Stage and Screen Arts. It admits around 120 students per year and has around 20 international students. The Academy has an excellent reputation and provides courses across all three cycles. It also cooperates in a number of international programmes and projects including through Erasmus and Tempus.

The Academy also strives to provide lifelong learning opportunities through shorter courses but there is little take up outside of the academy. Some of the challenges faced by the academy include finding industry placements and jobs after graduation, leading to a problem in the retention of good graduates in the Bulgarian work force. There are also financial constraints as the budget is based on the number of students, which is regulated by the State for all public higher education institutions in Bulgaria.

3.1.4 Reflection and discussion

Following the presentations issues were raised for clarification, for further information and discussion. There were a number of threads and themes that emerged from the first day on self-certification.

⁵ <http://www.uni-sofia.bg/faculties/fmi/about.html>

⁶ Stronger links with industry – students’ internships, training, cross-sector mobility, innovations, technology transfer, entrepreneurship, start-ups, joint projects, etc. Cooperation with: SMEs, Intel, Cisco, HP, Oracle, Microsoft, SAP, etc

The nature of the change involved in HE reform

The 3 Bulgarian interventions had indicated the scale and depth of the change faced in the host country by HE institutions in adjusting to the new social economy and the demands of the knowledge society. Challenges were presented to the system by the up-and-coming private sector providers, and by the additional costs of effective quality assurance. Other participants had described the introduction of the principles of the market economy into the HE sector.

Trust, credibility and ownership

Several participants had stressed the need for qualifications to be completely trustworthy and well-understood and accepted both within institutions and in the world outside. The Norwegian example had illustrated the desirability of the substantial involvement of, for example, academic staff in developing the NQF itself. Iceland had said how the importance of trust could not be overemphasised.

Nomenclature and concepts

The importance of having an agreed conceptual framework, reflected in consistency of terminology, was accepted by participants. In some cases terms such as 'degree' are legally protected, but other terms may be open to misinterpretation unless there is a commitment to clarification and consistency. In the UK, for example, the agreed nomenclature is reinforced by the audit and review process.

NQF - Product or process?

Scotland in particular was insistent that the development and articulation of an NQF was not a one-off definitive activity, but, rather, should be perceived as a work in progress. As such it is linked to continuous enhancement of learning and teaching methods, curriculum development and systems of quality assurance. Within this, self-certification is a relatively straightforward technical activity.

3.2 Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes represent one of the essential building blocks for transparency within higher education systems and qualifications. They have applications in a number of settings:

- The individual institution (for course definition)
- The national level (for qualifications, Quality Assurance and recognition of prior learning)
- The international level (for mutual recognition and mobility)

There are various ways in which higher education institutions (HEIs) are in the process of designing learning outcome oriented courses and study programmes. There is also the interplay between the institutions, the QA agencies and the role of the policy maker to consider. Qualifications Frameworks are central in building learning outcomes and they should facilitate the process for HEIs in developing modules and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits⁷.

Learning outcomes are extensively referred to in various Bologna-related documents, many of the official seminar reports and the Berlin Communiqué. However there is

⁷ London Communiqué.

still confusion and a poor level of understanding associated with them and their practical implementation across Europe. At the European level, Tuning Education Structures in Europe project aims to offer a concrete approach to designing, developing and implementing study programmes across each of the Bologna Cycles. According to Tuning, learning outcomes are expressed in terms of the level of competence to be obtained by the learner. Tuning also draws attention to the role of quality in the process of design and has developed a number of tools which can help institutions boost the quality of their study programmes⁸.

3.2.1 State of play in participating countries

Exhibit 2 Progress – Are Learning Outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

	BG	BE (FL)	ES	IS	NL	NO	SI	SK	UK
Not at all									
To some extent	√								
To a greater extent		√							
Fully embedded				√	√	√			√
Other			√				√	√	

Of the PLA participating countries, the Netherlands, Norway, Iceland and the UK have fully embedded Learning Outcomes in their NQFs. Spain will have completed this programme in 2008. There are a number of different types of processes that have been undertaken to facilitate the introduction of Learning Outcomes including variations on the following:

- Top down from Ministry and Stakeholder consultation
- Quality Agency led
- Pilot projects
- Direct institutional implementation

A number of these approaches were discussed during the second day.

The day's proceedings were opened with some remarks by Christian Tauch upon the day's theme. Referring to the Tuning project, he emphasised how new an approach Learning Outcomes was, and that the tradition of a professor-led learning objectives approach was now being transformed throughout the EHEA.

3.2.2 Overview presentations - Host

There were three host presentations in the morning session and two in the afternoon of the second day of the PLA, covering:

New Programmes in ICT in the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics at Sofia University: Associate Professor Roumen Nikolov, described the features of Sofia University

- Over 35,000 students
- 80 Bachelor's and over 200 Master's degree programmes

⁸ Tuning Educational Structures in Europe: Universities' contribution to the Bologna Process: An Introduction 2006.
http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/template/General_Brochure_final_version.pdf

- Over 3,000 teachers and researchers
- 17 Departments (Faculties)

Professor Nikolov stressed the very important role which the university had to play in the development of the country while facing the challenges of, for example, economic and social changes, new models of education, the new role of universities, and the brain drain.

One particular objective was for Sofia University to become a National and Regional Centre of High-Technologies, Innovations and Entrepreneurship. While fully embracing its place in the EHEA (ECTS has been legislatively introduced in 2004), the university was also looking elsewhere for models of best practice and achievement, notably in the United States.

EQF/NQF –mobility of students: Ms Andriana Kostadinova, of the Human Resource Development Centre, described Bulgaria's experience of the Erasmus Programme over the last 20 years. Ms Kostadinova went on to describe the progress made in Bulgaria on the development of the content of the National Qualification Framework, following the Bologna process and within the context of a globalised EHEA.

EQF/NQF - technical universities' experience: Professor Dr Kamen Vesselinov described the Bulgarian experience in respect of engineering qualifications, commenting on the present system extending (but not necessarily progressing) from the professional bachelor qualification to the doctoral award. Professor Dr Vesselinov suggested that it was difficult at this juncture to predict exactly how any future QF might look in this particular sector.

EQF/NQF and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences: Professor Angel Baltov described the scope of the BAS and its activity in respect of the management of higher degrees. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences unites 52 scientific institutes and other self-governing research units. There are 3,700 scientists working in the 8 scientific fields: mathematical, physical, chemical, biological, earth, engineering, sociological sciences and the humanities. In 2006 BAS had 681 Ph.D. students, whose level of work is harmonised with the standards of the EQF. Professor Baltov described the role and remit of the BAS Career Development Centre (CDC), which undertakes, inter alia, the quality assessment of doctoral theses. The CDC is also concerned to facilitate and promote the direct links between industry and academia through PhD sponsorships.

Financial and Material Subsistence Aspects of the Implementation of EQF in the System of the Higher Education and Science in Bulgaria : Associate Professor Alexander Nikolov, of the Higher Education and Science Trade Union, presented an analysis of the economic position of Bulgaria relative to other countries. Bulgaria is among the countries with lowest levels of enrolment in HE with only 26.9%. The two main reasons being: a) the number of graduates from secondary schools is relatively low, especially amongst minority groups and, b) the alternative sector of the higher education (polytechnics etc.) is almost non-existent in Bulgaria. Only 3.1% of the students in the country are registered in alternative HEI. In countries like the UK, Canada, Australia this percentage is 40. Professor Nikolov went on to argue that Bulgaria needed to improve its educational performance, and there needs to be a

stimulation of the triangular relationship between state, academia and industry in order to participate in the knowledge economy: NQF/EQF can assist in this.

3.2.3 Overview presentations – Thematic

On the specific theme of Learning Outcomes, brief presentations were made by representatives from Slovakia, The Netherlands and Slovenia.

Slovakia

Mr Boris Sloboda from Slovakia presented learning outcomes from the standpoint of his background in lifelong learning. Slovakia is only just beginning to look at learning outcomes at the institutional level and the process of developing an NQF is just beginning. However, the main concept underpinning the NQF will be learning outcomes looking at individuals' knowledge and skills without regard of how they acquired them.

A number of key issues were highlighted:

- The description of the graduate profile used is already very close to a learning outcomes description
- The Diploma Supplement is already implemented in Slovakia but they do not contain learning outcome based descriptions – it is a description of programmes and subjects
- The accreditation body is moving towards developing learning outcome descriptors
- In some ways, the qualifications that describe current professions are sufficient in some sectors in Slovakia
- The main challenge could be the reluctance of higher education institutions to move towards a learning outcomes approach
- It is important to consider how to link industry to the processes of learning outcomes being developed in Higher Education

Mr Sloboda welcomed the concept of “professional Bachelors’ as an outcome of the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Netherlands

Dr Marlies Leegwater described the learning outcomes approach, the definition of descriptors from the Bologna perspective and the simultaneous developments in the Dutch Higher Education System. The Netherlands, together with Flanders, started the Joint Quality initiative (JQI) which brings together eleven countries (national quality assurance agencies and representatives of education ministries). The aim of this network is to ensure comparable levels for the bachelor and master which resulted in the development of generic descriptors for the qualifications attained at bachelor, master and doctor level. A major outcome of the work done by this network is the Dublin descriptors, first published in 2002. These descriptors were later taken as points of reference in the overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

The Universities for professional education and their association HBO-council develop professional education in line with the needs of employers and social

developments at large. They have elaborated the descriptors and developed domain competences.

The Netherlands has been involved in the Tuning educational structures project (devising learning outcomes, together with a restructuring of bachelors, masters and doctoral studies). The degree awarding institutions have the ultimate responsibility for learning outcomes and are accountable via accreditation.

In vocational education at secondary level, sectoral education quality circles are in use as a method for engaging employers in learning outcomes and accreditation. Here the responsibility for the definition of competencies to be acquired lies with employers, in cooperation with educational institutions.

The Higher Education generic “Dublin” descriptors are five lines of abilities:

- Knowledge
- Application of knowledge
- Problem solving
- Communication
- Lifelong Learning

They are aligned with both the national qualifications framework and the EHEA. Learning outcomes are already used in curriculum design, quality assurance and assessment in the Netherlands. There is ongoing effort to work with stakeholders in implementing learning outcomes and raising awareness of their use.

Slovenia

Ms Polona Miklavc Valencic described the reform of HE in Slovenia, with HE legislation adapted to the Bologna process in 2004, working towards a qualification framework based on learning outcomes. In 2006 a government decree for the accommodation of LLL was prepared through inter-ministerial effort.

Key issues:

- There is not yet a single QF document for Slovenia
- Some institutions are defining learning outcomes, though they are predominantly in the humanities, rather than in the natural sciences or engineering
- There is a need to engage the support of academic staff in the articulation of learning outcomes – some currently feel threatened
- The Council of Higher Education is now responsible, in law, for evaluation of HE in respect of quality assurance

Site visit Day 2**The Faculty of German Engineering - Technical University of Sofia**

The Faculty of German Engineering Education and Industrial Management (FDIBA) was founded 1990 with an international contract between the Republic of Bulgaria and the German Federal Republic. It is an interesting example where the Bulgarian Faculty follows the same programme as the University of Karlsruhe and Braunschweig and therefore a diploma is awarded from both Bulgaria and the German Universities. The programmes include Bachelor and Masters in Computer Systems and Technologies (Informatik) and in Mechanical Engineering (Allgemeiner Maschinenbau) as well as a Masters in Industrial Management and an MBA. The funding is provided through the state and also the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). DAAD have funded the laboratories and equipment. All the students have study placements in Germany and there is a high level of employment on graduation. Figures from alumni show that 9% go to work in Germany, 31% gain employment in foreign companies in Bulgaria and 45% in domestic companies in Bulgaria. More than half have management positions.

3.2.4 Reflection and Discussion

Following the presentations issues were raised for clarification, for further information and discussion. There were a number of threads and themes that emerged from the second day on learning outcomes.

Paradigm shift in the relationship between Higher Education and the outside world

The PLA discussions reflected the change in relationship between HEIs and the outside world as a whole ('the outside world coming in'). The rapid rate of economic and social change has meant the HEI have to enter into active dialogue with business, industry, governments and students.

Multiple uses of the concept and language of learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach provides a new language as a tool for accountability in respect of Higher Education and its external environment including stakeholders and economic interests.

The impact of the learning outcomes approach on students.

There is a redefining of the educational transaction with a clear statement of expectations on both sides as a consequence of learning outcomes. This comes back to their multiple use: - as a tool for institutions and for students for their future employability.

The implementation of a learning outcomes based NQF

This illustrates a strong interconnection between the required reforms in curriculum development, learning and teaching styles/methods and in institutional governance.

The need for vocational routes as part of HE

Next to traditional academic routes, higher education should also encompass (short) vocational routes. This would open the HE system to new categories of students and to a new type of providers (in some countries being part of the system for upper secondary education).

3.3 Stakeholder engagement

Qualifications are tools for the promotion of trust, understanding and buy-in between the various parties who use these qualifications. There are many elements that go into building up trust. Historically the stakeholders involved in the designing of qualifications have been narrow, mainly the Universities and some of the more well established professional and occupational sectors. Now, consensus-building mechanisms in the development of frameworks for qualifications may include a number of stakeholders and a number of mechanisms. The proposal on the EQF to the Council of Europe and the Parliament is explicit in

Encouraging the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, in accordance with national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level;

3.3.1 State of play – Stakeholder engagement

Exhibit 3 To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

	BG	BE (FL)	ES	IS	NL	NO	SI	SK	UK
Not at all									
A little									
To some extent	√					√	√	√	
To a large extent		√	√	√	√				√
Other									

Overall, stakeholder involvement is quite high across the PLA countries although the types of stakeholders and the mechanisms for engagement vary considerably.

3.3.2 Overview presentations - Thematic

On the third day of the PLA, and following the site visit to the New Bulgarian University, the participants reconvened at the Ministry of Education and Science, where the day was structured to begin with the thematic presentations by Spain and Belgium (Flemish Community).

Spain

The presentation from Prof. Guillermo Bernabeu and Prof. Laureano Gonzalez-Vega described the current state of place in relation to the Spanish NQFs and the involvement of stakeholders in the current efforts to implement the new legal basis. There is no legal basis for the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education yet, however, the mandate to elaborate the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education appears in the new Universities Law approved in April 2007. A new decree (regulating the new degree/3-cycle structure) will be approved before November 2007. It states explicitly that the new programme studies must fit with the general descriptors of the Qualifications Framework for EHEA. The Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education will cover university degrees, higher VET (as initial part of 'grado') and arts studies.

Key points in terms of stakeholder involvement:

- In the last year, a working group, appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, has already been working on the initial steps for defining the Spanish Qualifications Framework
- A new national Committee (and technical working group) for defining the Spanish Qualifications Framework for Higher Education has been created by a decree and approved July 2007. It will meet for the first time in October 2007
- It will include the full range of stakeholders: Ministries (Education & Research, Labour, ...), Regional authorities competent in Higher Education, Spanish QA Agency, Universities (Rectors), Students, Trade Unions, Employer Organizations, Professional Unions
- The committee and technical working group will take responsibility for the building of descriptors and credits. The results will then be open to national discussion and approval

- It is important to highlight that in order to engage stakeholders there needs to be a common understanding and shared approach to working in order to achieve good results

The Flemish Community of Belgium

Dr Noel Vercruysse from the Flemish Community of Belgium gave a presentation on the what, the why and the how of stakeholder involvement in the process of defining National Qualifications Frameworks. We live in a stakeholder society and we are seeing the emergence of special interest groups due to the speed of information flow. There are also fundamental changes occurring in the relationship between Higher Education Institutions and the environment in which they work. The work done by CHEPS (University of Twente)⁹ speaks of a ‘governance equaliser’ as a way of mapping the types of reform that are taking place in Higher Education. There are 5 parts to this equaliser:

- State regulation
- Academic self-governance
- Market
- Managerial self-governance
- Stakeholder guidance

For reform to take place – in line with new public management principles, the state regulation must decrease and stakeholder guidance must increase for example. However, that said, it can be difficult to engage stakeholders and to use them well.

Overall there is a wide range of stakeholders

- Students
- Academics – teachers – researchers
- Employers
- Trade unions
- QAA
- International organisations
- Professional bodies
- Public authorities: national – regional
- Society at large

The reasons for engaging them include: increasing trust in HE; increasing awareness among stakeholders of the importance of reforms; increasing relevance of HE; transparency; legitimacy; employability; convincing stakeholders of the value of HE for innovation; overall a better understanding. The reasons can also be linked to particular stakeholder groups, for example:

- Students: better informed choice
- Employers: employability – understanding the content and relevance of degrees
- Trade unions: classification of jobs linked to salaries

⁹ http://www.utwente.nl/cheps/about_cheps/the_cheps_team/cv's/boer.doc/

- QAA: Mapping of classifications
- Academics: linking programmes to QF

In Flanders, there are specific methods for engaging with stakeholders depending on the subject matter. This is important as the right tool needs to be used in order to maximise the engagement process.

- For developing new laws: working groups with the range of stakeholders (In Flanders they have to consult with the Educational Advisory Council before passing the bill to the parliament: the council consists also of representatives of all stakeholders)
- For reviewing general issues: review teams with representatives of students and professional bodies
- For testing implementation: pilot projects, such as the one's set up for testing a learning outcomes approach
- General dissemination: conferences and seminars

Site visit - Day 3

New Bulgarian University

The New Bulgarian University (NBU) is one of the private universities of Bulgaria. It was established in 1991 by parliament and provides the full range of academic qualifications from bachelor to doctoral. It has over 10,000 students and around 400 academic staff. It also has a strong research agenda. The University relies on fees and donations for financing. The state regulates the number of students in private Universities as well as in state universities. The group was welcomed by Assoc. Prof. Plamen Bochkov, Vice Rector for Educational Activities and presentations were given by Assoc. Professor. Ludmil Georgiev, Vice Rector of Research Activities concerning the Public Administration Dept's activities in the EQF/NQF context and by Assoc. Prof Boicho Kokinov from the Central and East European Centre for Cognitive Science.

The University is accredited, as with state Universities, by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency. It therefore has to adhere to the same standards, has introduced ECTS and participates in a number of international programmes. However it also has more governance freedom than state institutions, especially in relation to staff selection and retention. The University makes full use of both full-time and contract lecturers (from academia and business) in order to maintain high quality, up-to-date course curricula for their graduates. The graduates also have a wide range of choices. There is also a growing programme of continuing education and part-time courses both for outsiders and for graduates wishing to improve and update their existing knowledge.

3.3.3 Overview presentations – host

This section of the programme comprised several short presentations by Bulgarian stakeholders involved in the QF implementation process

In the first of these, Institutional View of the QFs: Benefits and Challenges, presented by Ms Irina Ravedska of the Rectors' Conference, the progress towards the Bulgarian NQF was illustrated from the standpoint of institutional management. The objectives of the NQF were fourfold: transparency, recognition, mobility, and quality assurance. Each of these objectives was then expanded by way of explanation, together with an indication as to the priority needed for the achievement of each.

Key points included:

- Experience in TEMPUS had helped in the development of the QF
- At each stage, the support of employers had been forthcoming

- The role of the institutions can be defined as assisting in:
 - References to contents of Q-programs;
 - Outcome descriptors;
 - Agreed expected results;
 - National and institutional organization of recognition;
 - Result oriented qualification programs;
 - Clear statement of competencies /understanding, doing, being/

The second presentation was made by Ms Sonya Slavcheva, of the Confederation of Employers and Industrials in Bulgaria.

Key points included:

- HE must work closely with the business community to ensure the relevance of qualifications to the demands of the economy in the real world
- Industry wants, needs and expects a high quality of output from the HE system in terms of graduates who are equipped for the jobs in a competitive economy
- Students themselves need the opportunity to gain practical hands-on experience during their educational courses
- Traineeship programmes need to be developed in a variety of industrial sectors
- It is not always easy for industry and HE to collaborate, but it is very important to persevere in doing so

The third presentation made by Ms Galia Bozhanova, of the Bulgarian Economics Chamber, illustrated the HE system and the VET system in relation to the world of employment and the labour market. Ms Bozhanova's view complemented the preceding intervention in some respects.

Key points included:

- Disparities between state admission quotas for HE and the needs of the economy
- Discrepancy between the structure of state financing and the structure of the economy
- Available equipment is not equal to the technological requirements
- Research activities are not oriented towards business
- There is a need for a permanently-updated system of market intelligence to ensure compatibility between qualifications and the needs of the economy
- HE could profit from the good practices in VET, which is well-adapted to the labour market, also when it comes to training and upgrading of skills

The fourth presentation was by Ms Savina Maneva, representing the Bulgarian National Students Councils. From the student point of view, Ms Maneva suggested that the Bulgarian HE sector had certain traditional weaknesses:

- Lack of clear strategy
- Absence of managerial skills

- Vague qualifications description
- Unconsciousness of labour market orientation

Ms Maneva added that the system was also fragmented and very expensive. To combat all of this there needed to be:

- Establishment of a long-lasting cooperation between educational institutions and the business sector
- Investment in a long-term strategy

Students are demanding clear qualifications and relevant skills, which would involve:

- Enhancing the role of the students in the training process
- Promoting new implementations in the area
- Dialogue between students and university authorities
- Attaining a balanced educational model

The fifth presentation was on the theme of ‘Students on Approbation at the State Administration’, by Simeon Hinkovski from the Policy in Higher Education Directorate. The scheme for giving students an internship in the State Administration, provides them with valuable working experience. At the same time the employer (the State) can profit from getting to know future candidates for open posts within the administration.

The sixth presentation was made by Associate Professor Dr. Antoaneta Dobreva, of the Higher Education and Science Trade Union. Professor Dobreva’s presentation took the form of an identification of the problems inherent in the implementation of an NQF in Bulgaria, together with an indication of possible solutions.

Key points include:

- Policy makers need to be acquainted with the problems concerning the introduction and implementation of the European Qualifications Framework in the system of the Higher education (HE) in Bulgaria and the quality assurance of the higher education and training, and to commit themselves to the solution of such problems
- There needs to be a national information campaign, orientated towards all the stakeholders concerning the advantages of the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, which is compatible with an overarching Qualifications Framework for the EHEA and with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning. This action will contribute to the intensifying of the practical application of the National Qualifications Framework in Bulgaria
- Academic staff need to be consulted and engaged in the implementation of the main features of the Bologna process and of the EQF respectively
- There need to be opportunities for self-selection by students in the determination of their own study curricula, their own path, in line with their creative aptitude and their own vision for future professional development

The final host presentation was made by Professor Dr Angel Popov, of the Scientists Union in Bulgaria. Professor Dr Popov’s presentation referred to the requirements of

HE in respect of the new European knowledge economy, with further references to experience in the USA. He introduced the notion of high-performance ‘elite’ universities for Bulgaria.

Key points included, by way of recommendation:

- There is a clear need for restructuring the Higher Educational and Research Structure in Bulgaria
- Bulgaria should follow the European best practices and EC guidelines
- Bulgaria could also adapt some best practices from the USA research universities, such as Stanford, Harvard, MIT, etc.
- A Bulgarian “Elite University” project should be defined
- A Knowledge Triangle (education, research and innovations) could be build as a single ecosystem around any of the elite universities in Bulgaria
- The research institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and other research organisations should be closely linked with the research universities’ network in Bulgaria;
- The educational and research system in Bulgaria needs substantial investment in building human capacity and in research infrastructure (following some best EU practices, e.g. Ireland)
- A network of science parks and incubators should be build around the Bulgarian elite universities

3.3.4 Main reflections and discussion

Following the presentations, issues were raised for clarification, for further information and discussion. There were a number of threads and themes that emerged from the last day on stakeholder engagement and from the host presentations:

The linking of VET and HE

There is a need to ensure that the NQFs link VET and HE so that lifelong learning is not just a concept but a reality. This involves the engagement of stakeholders from all sectors of education and society in order to facilitate the process. Common concepts such as learning outcomes will help this development.

Understanding the demand for qualifications and relevant skills

Understanding, from the point of view of the stakeholders, what demands the workplace has in terms of skills and competences will help HEIs with a more realistic approach to the implementation of change.

The practical experiences of stakeholders, including students, being used in the policy making process

The language of policy makers and stakeholders may not always be the same, but the reflections and practical experience should be used to inform policy making through the engagement process.

Better explanation of the background to reform

It is often easy to assume that stakeholders have full knowledge and understanding of why certain reforms are taking place. This is not always the case and the way information is disseminated and the methods used for engagement are key to successful outcomes.

4 Conclusions / recommendations

The key issues learned and recommendations from the Peer Learning Activity on 8-10 October 2007 on the implementation of EQF / NQF in HE focus on the following.

4.1 Definitions and concepts, and the learning outcomes approach

This PLA set out to promote a dialogue about the implementation of the NQF and learning outcomes in various countries. The meeting itself worked towards getting a clearer view of definitions of key concepts and terms, such as self-certification and learning outcomes, and their relationship with quality assurance.

- *Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do after completion of a process of learning.*
- *Assurance of quality in higher education is a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations and measures up to threshold minimum requirements.*
- *Certification is the process of formally acknowledging achievement or compliance: it can be used to signify the achievement of an individual, such as a student, or of an institution.*

The Learning Outcomes approach is a fundamental part of a paradigm shift in the relationship between HE and the outside world. The approach provides the basis of a dialogue between, for example, HE and employers, and also provides a tool, and a language, for accountability to the wider society. Furthermore, the approach facilitates the accountability of institutions towards policy makers.

For students, the approach includes a commitment from the HEI in defining explicitly what they can expect to gain in return for what is expected of them: it redefines the educational transaction to benefit all the participants.

For governments and educational establishments, the Learning Outcomes approach in the implementation of the NQF enables clarity and synergy in the development of new models of governance, funding priorities and systems of quality assurance.

Overall:

- It is crucial to use clear definitions of learning outcomes and competences combined with a method (toolkit) for ministries and HEIs to deal with them
- The standards defined by the EQF and EHEA need to be used as ‘languages’ to which the NQF can refer and perhaps incorporate

- In respect of realistic expectations/credibility of LO in relation to ECTS, there are certain key issues
 - Easy transfer of credit between courses and between countries. This affects students and graduate mobility
 - Firm adherence by all parties to the learning outcome principle
 - A shared understanding of how well the credits relate to the learning outcomes and students' workload

4.2 Learning outcomes as a tool

At the operational level, Learning Outcomes are a significant tool for the design and delivery of programmes, from unit or module level to overall programme definition. They support transparency for learners, providers and users of the product of programmes. They facilitate flexibility and transfer/mobility, both within and between institutions.

- There is a need to be conscious of the difficulties which may be associated with defining and articulating learning outcomes, or the criteria of the NQF, across the numerous disciplines (e.g. for Academies of Arts).

For academic staff, the learning outcomes approach represents a new way of working and can provide an important and helpful tool for staff in the development of new curricula and in the revision of existing curricula.

- Academics need to be convinced that the LO-approach addresses the new demands from society towards universities
- The development of a learning outcomes approach requires strategic vision supported by a range of processes to inform and engage programme designers and deliverers
- The definition of learning outcomes facilitates the development of student centred teaching and learning
- National qualifications frameworks (based on learning outcomes) can operate successfully only in alignment with the national quality assurance system
- Assessment practices should meet the requirements of the learning outcomes.
- The use of a learning outcomes approach supports the facilitation of recognition of degrees across Europe and therefore it is important to involve international partners in the process

4.3 The scope and harmonisation of the frameworks

“Helping people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential”¹⁰

- Within lifelong learning it is important to distinguish between access to learning, in the sense of widening participation and inclusion, and continuing professional development
- There is a growing recognition of complementarity between vocational and academic education. Learning outcomes enable clear specification of what learners will be able to know or do at the end of the programme of study. Any

¹⁰ The stated aim of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

process of education, for whatever vocational or academic purpose, will induce change and development if successful.

4.4 Development of NQF

The way an NQF is developed is important for the approach

- already existing NQF to be connected to the new frameworks
- development of NQF using the newly existing European reference frameworks

It is the responsibility of each country to decide what its own NQF should look like, how it connects to the European Frameworks (self-certification), and which stakeholders to involve. The use of the NQF of course indicates how it should appear and who should be involved in its definition (for example, in respect of: mobility, employment, accountability, transferability, flexibility, transparency)

Some of the issues arising:

- How much room should the NQF give to specific domains in order not to mix the definition of a QF with curriculum reform or with the definition of new study programmes?
- What precisely should the NQF document comprise, and with what level of detail?
- What should be the phases in the elaboration of an NQF document?

Some guidance in respect of these issues may be found in the overarching Bologna QF, and in the report of the QF working group which was made available for the London ministers' meeting. (See box below)

The two reports coming from the working BFUG groups on the Bologna QF define clearly the procedure and criteria for the self-certification of an NQF with the one for EHEA.

For those countries with an already established QF for HE it can be very helpful to know if they have followed this procedure and what their position is with respect to the above mentioned criteria (Scotland and Ireland have already made this exercise – see the report of the BFUG working group presented at London)¹¹.

4.5 Implementation of self-certification – the actual process

England and Scotland have historically used bottom up approaches with the engagement of academics in the process of developing the NQFs and learning outcomes. This approach has, however, been matched with senior high level strategic leadership where champions at this level have been crucial to the successful implementation of the learning outcomes approach and NQF.

While the bottom up approach was appropriate in the UK context of relative autonomy of HE institutions, other countries may appropriately adopt a top down approach suited to their particular circumstances, the scale of the tasks involved in the

¹¹National Qualifications Frameworks Development and Certification; Report from Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, May 2007.

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/WGQF-report-final2.pdf>

modernisation agenda, and the role of the higher education sector in the knowledge society. Nonetheless, a top down approach should include a substantial commitment to, and process of, consultation with stakeholders, such as employers, students and academics.

There is a great variation in the state of implementation and new adopters can learn from the front runners and the pilot countries (Scotland and Ireland) to learn in depth about the challenges in the process of self-certification. Again, as stated above, there is clear guidance on the procedures for self-certification within the QF contained in the reports of the BFUG working groups for QF in EHEA.

Some points arising:

- All countries have to both adopt and adapt the European frameworks into their NQF before self-certification. Some countries are already preparing to self-certify their NQFs by comparing descriptors of the NQF with the EHEA and EQF
- The relevance of the self-certification and its added value (in the light of the functioning of well established QA and accreditation) needs to be highlighted in discussion with stakeholders
- Looking at other possible uses of self-certification: Could the self-certification process help to 'sell' the new approaches and reforms to the stakeholders? Involvement of stakeholders can help create a sense of co-ownership of the process

4.6 Linking NQF with learning outcomes

Clear links need to be made between curriculum design and development, development of teaching and learning methods and the use of appropriate assessment methods in the light of adopting a learning outcomes approach. The role and responsibility of teachers should also be clearly defined.

Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to do after completion of a process of learning.

The definition of learning outcomes can be used as a tool in a variety of contexts and at a range of levels. For instance they can be used as building blocks in the definition of descriptions associated with a particular level in the qualifications framework. Or they can be used as a concrete set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are sufficiently generic but domain dependent to define the outcomes of a study programme.

Of course these two possibilities are very closely related. The first one could be used for self-certifying an NQF for HE against the one agreed for the EHEA or the EQF. The second one for verifying (by a competent body) that the study programme (the pathway towards the qualification level) fits with the descriptors corresponding to the relevant level.

The definition of learning outcomes, or the methods used, must depend on the context in which they are going to be applied.

HE institutions in each country are generally free to define study programmes in terms of learning outcomes, but may need to work within certain constraints or examples - like a sectoral QF (e.g. for experimental sciences or for arts programmes).

There is consensus that learning outcomes provide a tool for transparency in HE systems and qualifications. Qualifications frameworks provide a guide for developing modules and study programmes and facilitate mobility, recognition and making more understanding for employers and quality assurance procedures.

- One of the main challenges to address is getting the commitment from academics. Training programmes/support for teachers are needed. Most teachers have learning objectives in mind when teaching, so the formulation of concrete learning outcomes could be the result of engaging in the right dialogue
- Providing training and support for academics in the adoption of the learning outcomes approach is likely to help engender commitment and sense of ownership

4.7 The division of responsibilities

The choices autonomous HE institutions make in respect of the definition and use of learning outcomes have consequences for teaching and learning methods.

Some points arising:

- There is a substantial difference between the policy making in ministries to establish an NQF framework and the concrete and in depth reform of programmes and curricula
- The authority to place a particular qualification at a particular level of the NQF should be exercised by the awarding institution. However, HEIs should demonstrate accountability to stakeholders in respect of the reasons for the placement of particular qualifications.
- The freedom/responsibility dimension of self-certification could be monitored, as in the UK, through a review and audit process
- Responsibility of institutions and repercussions
- Recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning and the QF. One of the aims of the EQF is to facilitate this process
- The HEIs may want to consider how they situate non-formal and informal learning within the NQF, because they need to decide how to assess non-formal and informal learning and how to make curricula flexible so as to enable students to continue from the level they were assessed

4.8 Engagement of the stakeholders

The engagement of the academic staff (not only the universities leaders, rectors, directors and deans) and students is of vital importance.

Implementation of the NQF and the use of learning outcomes should not be presented as 'yet another reform to be tackled'. A comprehensive approach to HE reforms

showing the strong interrelations of the reform areas (curriculum incl. NQF, governance and funding) is needed to gain lasting commitment.

ECTS is widely accepted by professors and teachers in European universities and its usefulness is not put into question. It is important that learning outcomes achieve the same level of agreement.

Providing academics with substantial information about the need for an NQF and a learning outcomes based approach is needed to gain commitment. Information should also include examples of good practice in other countries / sectors / HEIs, such as provided by the Tuning project. This implies the need for more structured dissemination/availability of information.

- In order to promote this, an effort on the part of the Commission and the national competent bodies may be appropriate. For instance the Bologna Experts can play an important role in this.

List of participants

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Appendix A National Reports

A.1 Flanders

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?

At the beginning of the process

Please comment We are in a phase of preparation. We have made a comparison of the national descriptors of bachelor, master and PhD with the Bergen/Dublin descriptors and the EQF descriptors. (see annexe). There are still some issues which have to be tackled: Do we need sub-levels which could be helpful for the accreditation of prior experience and non-formal learning? Another issue is the question whether the specialized bachelor study programmes subsequent to a bachelor programme have to be considered as a distinctive level or sub level? The same question raises about the specialized master study programmes subsequent to a first master programme. Do we have to develop specific descriptors for these subsequent programmes? To what extent are one year master courses different from two year master courses?

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

The ministry of education will take the initiative to start the process. The key players are: the rectors' conferences responsible for the external quality review and the accreditation body(NVAO). Also the HEIs and the students should be involved.

The Accreditation body (the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation – NVAO) is a transnational body responsible for the accreditation of all study programmes in the Netherlands as well as in Flanders. There is a common framework for the accreditation of the study programmes. Therefore policy makers from the Netherlands are also key players.

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

The NQF was based on the Dublin descriptors. The NQF has not been influenced by the EQF. The NQF was already in place before the EQF.

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

What is the goal and the scope of the self-certification? What is the nature of a self-certification process?

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

We have no SQF. The NQF is very general and broad. The NQF covers in general terms what a bachelor stands for, what a master stands for and what a PhD stands for. The NQF is not subject specific.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

I hope to get a better understanding of the scope and the nature of a self-certification process.

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

To a greater extent

Please comment This is a difficult question and the answer is a matter of terminology. We are using the concept ‘descriptors’ for describing the NQF. The concept of ‘learning outcomes’ is used for describing the study programmes. To a certain extent the learning outcomes are a translation of the descriptors in a specific subject.

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

As a part of the Bologna Experts Project we have carried out three pilot projects and we have presented the outcomes of the projects to a wider audience.

We have organised in collaboration with the directors of the fine arts, the performing arts, design and music study programmes study visits to England and Finland.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)

The main challenges are to convince the academics responsible for the study programmes of the added value of the use of learning outcomes. It is also a time consuming process and it is perceived as an extra administrative burden on top of other processes as there are the QA and the accountability process in general. There was already a legal obligation to formulate the learning objectives/goals of each study programme. The scope of the concept of ‘learning objectives/goals’ is broader and more general than the scope of the concept of ‘learning outcomes’. The academics have the general perception that they have to do the work over again.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

Three pilot projects carried out in the framework of the Bologna Experts Project are good examples of the implementation of learning outcomes at the subject level across two cycles (bachelor and master). It was a cross-institutional collaborative approach. Academics of different institutions reach an agreement on the learning outcomes of the study programmes concerned: social work (professional study programme at bachelor level and an academic programme at master level), music and medicine (both at bachelor and master level).

6. What would you most like to learn from this session?

How are the other countries introducing the use of learning outcomes?

What is the link between learning outcomes and the descriptors of the NQF, the quality assurance framework and the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior experiences and learning?

What is the scope of learning outcomes: knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, competences?
Should learning outcomes be limited to statements that can be assessed?

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To a large extent

Please comment

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

The HEIs, the students, the social partners (trade unions and employers).

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

The NQF is a part of the bill implementing the Bologna Process. All stakeholders are represented in the Advisory Educational Council/Board . The minister has to consult with the Advisory Board before passing a bill to the Parliament.

In the preparatory phase there are many formal and informal contacts and consultations with the students, the trade unions and the HEIs.

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

All stakeholders have implemented the Bologna Process without any substantial friction or resistance (transformation of the existing study programmes into bachelor-master study programmes, the implementation of the new quality assurance framework, including the accreditation of study programmes and the establishment of new institutional collaborative organisations between university colleges and universities.

In order to promote the use of learning outcomes we have organized a lot of seminars and conferences involving the academic staff of the HEIs, teachers, students and the stakeholders.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

What are the most common approaches to the engagement of academics?

A.2 Bulgaria

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?

Self-certification is progressing well and we plan to have it in place in the next year

Please comment:

The legislative grounds of the process are set by the Higher Education Act (published, State Gazette, issue 112 of December 27th 1995). The core Bologna reforms have been achieved in BG. The 3-cycle degree structure of the higher education system (Bachelor, Master and Doctor) has been introduced in 1995. State Educational Requirements (SER) for each specialty offered by the HEIs had been existed till 2002. They had set the requirements towards the syllabi, the curricula, and the expected learning outcomes. These SER have already been abolished, and replaced by the Ordinance on the state requirements for acquisition of higher education at Bachelor, Master and “Specialist in..”¹ degree (adopted by Degree № 162 of the Council of Ministers on 23.07.2002, published, SG issue 76 of August 6th 2002, amended and supplemented, SG issue 85 of September 5th 2002, supplemented, SG issue 79 of September 5th 2003). Ordinance on state requirements for admission and for training of doctorands has been adopted by Degree № 222 of the Council of Ministers on 26.10.2000 (published, SG issue 90 of October 3rd 2000, amended and supplemented, SG issue 78 of September 7th 2004). Separated ordinances have been adopted for acquisition of higher education in the specialties, which lead to practicing regulated professions, in compliance with the Sectoral Directives of the EC. They provide the legislative framework for all learning outcomes necessary for acquisition of the corresponding professional qualifications. By this way the degree programmes were harmonized with the European standards and practices for the specialties and professional qualifications related to special regime of recognition. ECTS and the European Diploma Supplement have been introduced in 2004. All these legislative documents have set the basis framework of qualifications and expected learning outcomes at each level² of the higher education system.

The grounds of the self-certification process at the institutional level are set by the qualification characteristics, designed by the HEIs for each offered educational programme / specialty, as well as by the syllabi and the curricula by themselves, including those for post-graduated and further training. These documents provide the framework of expected learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) at the output of the HE system. The self-certification process in QA context is set by the means of the Institutional Quality Evaluation and Assurance System (IQEAS) of the training and of the academic staff, and the students’ opinion, too. IQEAS are designed and are operating at 50 of 51 HEIs total (one is under development). At present, 14 out of 51 Bulgarian HEIs total use IQEAS certified by ISO 9001:2000. As regard the LOs, the self-evaluation report, which the HEI has to submit to the NEAA before starting the evaluation and accreditation procedure should contain information concerning the expected students’ LOs at the input of each HE level, the educational credits acquired during the training, the syllabus’s structure, lists of the compulsory and eligible courses, expected LOs that have to be covered for acquisition of a given educational and qualification degree, as well as with respect to the training in each separated subject or in module of subjects included in the syllabus for a given specialty. Provision of detailed information related to the professional profile and qualification of the academic staff is another NEAA’s requirement for the self-evaluation process at the institutional level, as well as information concerning the teaching methods and the students’ assessment. As regard to the New Bulgarian University (NBU) as a private HEI, the requirement the expected learning outcomes to be defined for each programme offered by the university is set since its establishment. Templates of general and specific learning outcomes (LOs) at Bachelor degree have been already developed in the Bachelors’ Faculty for two professional directions – Anthropology and History. General education LOs have been developed in details — with respect to mastering foreign language, Bulgarian language, ICT skills, Sport and Arts for all 1st and 2nd year students. It is forthcoming the rest of our legislative base to be adjusted in compliance with the most recent changes of the Higher Education Act.

Draft of new National Classifier of the Areas of the Higher Education and of the Professional Directions has been recently developed and currently is at national consultations stage. Its aim is

directly to implement ISCED – 97 within the Bulgarian HE system. The document is based onto the “Education and Training Areas” qualifications methodical handbook issued by the DG EUROSTAT of the European Commission. The draft is expected to be further approved by the Minister and next to be adopted by a Decree of the Council of Ministers. On the grounds of this new Classifier is forthcoming the sectoral qualifications frameworks for all the professional directions to be developed. The overall process is expecting to complete in the coming year.

¹The “Specialist in..” degree had corresponded to the Bologna’s short cycle (Level 4A of the ISCED-97) – vocationally-oriented higher education degree with duration of 3 years (120 ECTS credits). This degree has been recently replaced by the 3-year Professional Bachelor degree (Higher Education Act’s amendments and supplements since May 22nd 2007).

²Exception: the state requirements for admission and for training of doctorands do not set the expected learning outcomes for this educational and scientific degree. Such requirement should be introduced. Doctorands training in BG is currently performing using individual syllabi designed by the research supervisor, other members of the academic / research staff, and with the doctorand’s participation.

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

Please give a brief overview of the players and their involvement in the process. Outline how the policy makers interact with the QA arrangement. Are other stakeholders involved?

The key players in the self-certification process are:

- 1 The policy makers**, including their role in QA: New requirements for QA are introduced by amendments and supplements of the Higher Education Act in 2004 (SG, issue 48 of June 9th, 2004) and in 2007 (SG issue 41 of May 22nd 2007):
 - *at the institutional level*: the HEIs in BG are obligated to use IQEAS of the training and of the academic staff, and the students’ opinion, too;
 - *at the national level*: new requirements for external QA have been set.
- 2 The Council of Rectors** is an independent body that voices the common interests of all the HEIs in front of the state authorities. It issues statements and proposals on problems in higher education.
- 3 The National Representation of the Students’ Councils** voices at the national level the interests of the students and doctorands.
- 4 Sectoral Council for Three-Party Cooperation in Higher Education and Science** has been established by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2006. It aims at guaranteeing transparency and social consensus in the discussion of strategic issues and development of higher education. Its members are deputy ministers of education and science and all national representative organizations of trade unions and employers.
- 5 The National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA)** is a specialized state body for evaluation, accreditation, and quality control of the HEIs’ activity and the activity of the scientific organizations related to training students and improving the qualification of the post-graduated students, as well as in developing the scientific, cultural, and innovation activities. The NEAA is established in 1995, by the Higher Education Act, as an independent agency to the Council of Ministers. The agency is a co-founder of the Central and Eastern Europe Agencies for QA in HE (CEEN). The NEAA recruits international experts for institutional and programme accreditations. It maintains active European cooperation with similar agencies. After BG’s joining into the Bologna process, the NEAA participates in all initiatives for development of the EHEA and for standardizing the evaluation criteria of the European evaluation and accreditation agencies. The NEAA is responsible for verifying the self-evaluation process performed by the HEIs through their IQEAS.

As a consequence, the NEAA has changed the context of its activity in 2004-2005, in compliance with the Higher Education Act’s requirements, the lessons drawn from its working experience and the integration process of the Bulgarian higher education into the EHEA, in order to improve the quality provided with respect to the different educational degrees. Post-accreditation monitoring and control has been introduced, too. New set of criteria and recommendations for external quality evaluation and accreditation at institutional and programme level have been developed and introduced, as well as new criteria and recommendations for post-accreditation monitoring and control. These criteria and recommendations are developed according to the Higher Education Act and to a great extent with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA. They

are based on equal value's principle of the three main activities in the HEI: educational activity, research activity, and management of the institution. With aim to ensure more complete use of the academic staff's capacity, the programme accreditation of educational programmes has been replaced by programme accreditation of professional directions (branch of a given domain of the knowledge, where the specialty falls). The last one is performed simultaneously, by work-schedule, for all HEIs that offer educational programmes in a given professional direction, and in a given scientific direction (for doctoral programmes).

In order to support, to guide, and to orientate the HEIs in their aspiration to assure higher quality of training and higher quality of the academic staff, a new unit for post-accreditation monitoring and control has been established at the NEAA in 2004-2005. Basic guiding principle in its activity is the post-accreditation monitoring and control's commitment with the accreditation assessments and recommendations. Information about desired and necessary improvements in the higher education institutions is provided as a result, as well as information about the forthcoming accreditation procedures. Basic criterion for success in this area is the continuous rising of the training quality, combined by assurance of long-lasting positive trends and tendencies in the three main activities of the higher education institutions, as preconditions for its greater competitive power in order to achieve the common goal – improved quality of higher education Bulgaria.

- 6 **The HEIs and their academic staff:** Members of the academic staff at different levels are involved in the QA process, through the IQEAS. For example, the IQEAS operating in the Technical University of Sofia (TUS) is organized at several levels. There are persons responsible for QA in every department, faculty QA committees and university QA committee. All of them have determined tasks in quality evaluation and assurance process.
- 7 **The students:** The students participate in the self-evaluation process at institutional and at national level. Evaluation of their opinion is a part of the HEIs' IQEAS. Since the Higher Education Act's last amendments and supplements (SG, issue May 22nd, 2007), the students' opinion has to be evaluated at least once per academic year. Students participate in the external QA procedures too, by taking part of the expert groups but not their full members, and also as members of the Accreditation Council without voting rights.
- 8 **The employers and the business:** Involving the business in the self-evaluation process is a current task. For example, in the New Bulgarian University (NBU), the employers are involved by participating in the Programme Councils that are established for each educational programme offered by the HEI.

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

When the Bologna Declaration was signed, BG was one of the few countries which had 3-cycle HE system and had introduced the educational and qualification degrees of Bachelor, Master and Doctor, incompliance with the Qualifications Framework in the EHEA. Clear distribution and differentiation of the requirements exists concerning the syllabi and the curricula at each separate degree. The HE system had been more both input and training oriented few years ago. Permanent efforts have made towards implementation of the outcome-based approach, taking in account the labour market needs as well. The goal is to achieve the right quality balance in the workload distribution for each educational degree. Additional efforts have made in the field of the academic recognition and the recognition of professional qualifications, in order to achieve full comparison and integration of the Bulgarian and European education and qualification systems. In general case, a certificate for academic recognition is issued within 1 month.

Bulgarian National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is legislatively regulated by the Higher Education Act (1995) and (as a consequence) by the Ordinance on state requirements for acquisition of higher education at Bachelor, Master and "Specialist in.." degree (published, SG issue 76 of August 6th 2002, last amended and supplemented, SG issue 79 of September 5th 2003), the Ordinance on state requirements for admission and for training of doctorands (published, SG issue 90 of October 3rd 2000, amended and supplemented, SG issue 78 of September 7th 2004), and by separated Ordinances on the state requirements for acquisition of higher education in the regulated professions, in compliance with the Sectoral Directives of the EC. These state requirements have been adopted by decrees of the Council of Ministers.

The NQF for HE in BG:

The NQF for HE in BG (most recently adjusted by Higher Education Act's amendments and supplements since May 22nd 2007) consists of, as follows:

- o **3-year minimum "Professional Bachelor in.." courses** (requiring 180 ECTS credits minimum, as

10 out of them are acquired for successfully passed state exam or defended diploma thesis), corresponding to *Level 6 of the EQF* and to *Level 5B of the ISCED-97*, and **followed by 2-year minimum Master courses** (120 ECTS credits minimum, as 15 of them are acquired for successfully passed state exam or defended diploma thesis), which corresponds to *Level 7 of the EQF* and to *Level 5A of the ISCED-97*;

- **4-year minimum Bachelor courses** (240 ECTS credits minimum, as 10 out of them are acquired for successfully passed state exam or defense of diploma thesis) corresponding to *Level 6 of the EQF* and to *Level 5A of the ISCED-97*, and **followed by 1-year minimum Master courses** (60 ECTS credits minimum, as 15 of them are acquired for successfully passed state exam or defended diploma thesis) corresponding to Level 7 of the EQF and to Level 5A of the ISCED-97;
- **5-year direct Master courses** (300 ECTS credits minimum, as 15 out of them are acquired for successfully passed state exam or defense of diploma thesis), corresponding to *Level 7 of the EQF* and to *Level 5A of the ISCED-97*. They are provided in some specific areas of knowledge, as for example in Medicine, Dental Medicine, Law, Architecture, etc., only in case when the training is not recommendable to be provided by separated Bachelor and Master courses;
- **Doctoral studies** (after acquired Master degree) corresponding to *Level 8 of the EQF* and to *Level 7 of the ISCED-97*, with duration of 3 years and 4 years in regular and in extra-mural form of training, respectively or in independent training, and
- **Post-graduated studies**, which could or could not lead to acquisition of professional qualification.
- No further provision of "*Specialist in..*" degree (duration of 3 years) corresponding to *Level 5 of the EQF* and to *Level 5B of the ISCED-97*.

The expected LOs for each educational degree are in great extent in compliance with the expected LOs of the QF in the EHEA and of the EQF for LLL. The recent changes in our NQF are influenced by the EQF.

Sectoral qualifications frameworks exist mainly with respect to the regulated professions and in some fields of Engineering. It forthcoming the sectoral qualifications frameworks for all the professional directions to be developed in the coming year.

The Bologna Process as a whole and the curricular reforms as its part have strongly influenced the Bulgarian HEIs in a positive direction. From this point of view, establishing *Joint Degree Programmes* between Bulgarian and foreign HEIs is a factor which effect is considerably important for our HEIs in order to introduce new innovative elements in the curricula. Joint degree programmes are established in 8 HEIs so far, mostly in the Technical Sciences, European Studies, International Relations and Economics. Further development of the national legislation with orientation toward joint degrees recognition is foreseen.

The requirement each educational programme offered by the HEIs in BG to be compared at least with two foreign HEIs is introduced as a NEAA's criterion.

The List of Regulated Professions in Bulgaria has been up-to-dated in 2006. The changes have been adopted by Decision № 925 of the Council of Ministers on December 29, 2006. Most recent changes are forthcoming to be adopted in few days. Information concerning regulated professions in BG can be currently found at the National Information and Documentation Centre's web-site:

<http://regprof.nacid.bg/eng/indexeng.html>.

At present, a draft of Law on Recognition of Professional Qualifications is developed; the national consultation process is completed. It is expected the Law to be approved by the Council of Ministers very shortly, and further to be adopted by the National Assembly.

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

- lack of experience at the institutional level related to this issue with respect to the descriptors in Bologna context (we have accumulated experience in self-certification in QA context);
- opposition from the academic staff;
- shortage of time;
- no sufficient tools and criteria for taking into account the local specificity and the specificity of the subject area – for instance in the field of Arts (e.g. in Stage and Screen Arts).

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

The 3-cycle Bologna-type higher education structure has been introduced in BG in 1995, and most recently adjusted in May 2007. The use of descriptors could be presented as follows:

3-year *Professional Bachelor* courses are more vocationally-oriented with direct access to the labour market. They are provided by the colleges, which are units within the HEIs' structure or are

independent HEIs. Training at Professional Bachelor degree ensures fundamental theoretical knowledge with respect to the corresponding professional direction; specialized, technological and practical knowledge, skills and competences according to the studied specialty; ICT skills and competences. The qualification characteristic of the specialty, designed by the college, must also contain other additional knowledge, skills and competences required. Professional Bachelors could continue their further education at 2-year minimum Master degree, in specialty falling within the same professional direction, in compliance with the rules and the order set by the HEI's Rules of Procedure or by the same requirements.

4-year *Bachelor courses* ensure basic widespread profiled knowledge, skills and competences related to the overall concept of the nature of the professional direction and the specialty, and degree of qualification that provide widespread opportunities for employability and direct access to the labour market by acquiring this qualification. Graduated Bachelors have to master widespread theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and competences; adaptive skills in changeable environment in professional realization context; skills for independent work and for team work as well. Necessary additional and specific knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired for a given specialty is also defined in its qualification characteristic, designed by the HEI. Graduated Bachelor degree could continue their further education at 1-year minimum Master courses or to joint to the labour market.

Master courses ensure extended fundamental training combined with profiled training at a given specialty, in its corresponding professional direction:

- profiled training and extending the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired at Bachelor degree;
- complementary wide-profiled and interdisciplinary training for students that are already acquired Bachelor or Master degree in another specialty.
- extended theoretical training with scientific orientation and specialized training in the specialty and its professional direction;
- mastering the fundamentals of scientific research, scientific-applied and / or creative (artistic) activity.

The first two cases of Master programmes are more labour market needs oriented. Graduated Masters have learnt the grounds of the scientific research, of the applied research and / or of the creative (artistic) activity. They have developed abilities for adaptation in conditions of social, economic and technological changes. Necessary additional and specific knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired for a given specialty is also defined in its qualification characteristic, designed by the HEI. Training in Master courses also ensures different opportunities for mobility of the students, including comparability of the knowledge, skills and competences in international aspect.

Doctorands training is performed using individual syllabus including taught phase (during the 1st year) and research phase. It is performed in scientific specialties, no educational credits awarded. The expected LOs for a given scientific specialty are defined independently by the training institution (HEIs, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the National Center for Agricultural Sciences). These LOs should be in compliance with the programme accreditation obtained for Doctoral training. The doctorands trained in universities must have teaching activity too.

The use of descriptors for example in the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts – Sofia is in progress; the process has started with some disciplines (mostly theoretical ones), where descriptors are more easily implemented.

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

The influence of the Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks, which have been designed with respect to the regulated professions in compliance with the Sectoral Directives of the EEA, as well as for Engineering, has been strongly positive. Their contribution towards the overall implementation of the LOs based-approach in BG is significant.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

- BG would like to learn more concerning the Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks within national and international context;
- BG is interesting in the experience of other countries, which have already have NQFs in compliance with the EQF, as well as in examples of good practices in self-certification at higher education institutional level.

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

To some extent

Please comment: LOs approach in currently embedded in the NQF in BG (see Theme 1, the comments to questions 1, 3 and 5 for more details). More efforts have to be performed in the field of recognition of non-formal and informal learning in higher education.

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

- The Ministry of Education and Science, the NEAA, the HEIs' governing bodies and the key stakeholders are involved in the process of LOs implementation.
- Bulgarian legislation provides good opportunities and clear principles for providing flexible transitions in higher education system. Autonomous higher education institutions have right to develop concrete rules in this aspect and to use them in their practice. Students can continue their higher education in Master programmes, which are different (concerning different areas of knowledge) than bachelor programmes that they have graduated. Training in supplementary subjects besides those listed in the basis training plan is allowed, as well as training in modules of subjects that are different than those studied during previous level of training. At later stage, the credits acquired by this training can be recognized within the system for further training.
- Flexibility with respect to training methods is available by division of a given subject by levels (studied in different semesters), part of which is obligatory for the corresponding educational degree (for example Bachelor, Master) and another part is provided as non-obligatory (chosen by the students or facultative). By this way, student or post-graduated student has opportunity to shape the palette of his / her own training, to set ones or others accents in it that assumes as useful for his / her future professional realization. Flexible learning paths in higher education reveals especially strongly in cases when student has declared his / her desire for partial training in defined range of subjects with defined duration – month, semester, etc. Different universities have rich experience using flexible pedagogic approaches and training methods that are specific for each professional direction or specialty – from use of modern ICT tools till juxtaposing and analysis of personal attainments by audio visual records of concerts, spectacles, etc. mostly related with art specialties.
- Besides the classical scheme for acquisition of higher education and issuing of diplomas for higher education, long-lasting tradition for providing formal further training within the higher education system exists in BG (since 1980) – for specialized and post-graduated training, re-qualification, and variety of qualification courses (for teachers, medical doctors, etc.). At the present moment, these documents are recognized without any problems by corresponding sectors (education, health care), as well as by employers organizations. Also, currently almost all HEIs have functioning units for further or post-graduated training and issue documents for acquisition of corresponding qualification. Currently acting system allows awarding of educational credits acquired by further training, which are recognizable within the higher education system. Further training can be funded as by the post-graduated students by themselves, as well as by private or public organizations or employers.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)

- the Bulgarian HE system had not been LOs-oriented till the recent years, the attention had been drawn more towards the system input and the state within the HE system;
- lack of experience, problems with terminology, with “customizing” the framework and applying it to specific fields of knowledge;
- misunderstanding related to the differences between the Bachelor and Master qualifications is still existing in certain degree within the Bulgarian society, and particularly on behalf of the employers.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

- At the National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts – Sofia (NATFA) the implementation of LOs is supervised by the institutional System for Monitoring, Evaluation and

<p>Enhancement of the Quality of Education. The supreme body of the system is the Quality of Education Advisory Council, which includes representatives of all NATFA's Chairs, the Head of the Academic Affairs Office, and a representative of the Student Council. It is chaired by a Chairperson, elected by the Senate. In 2006 an international peer-evaluation team visited NATFA and conducted an institutional peer review. The Review was carried out as part of the pilot Quality Assurance and Enhancement process developed by the Inter-Artes Thematic Network, under the auspices of ELIA (European League of Institutions of Art). Learning outcomes were one of the key issues discussed throughout the evaluation. The two site-visits as well as the comprehensive review documentation and reports enabled both the visiting experts and the NATFA participants to analyze the Academy's LOs development within the context of the Bologna objectives, to raise specific quality problems and issues, to identify examples of good practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Training in the field of Aeronautics, Avionics, and the Air Traffic Control (provided by the Technical University of Sofia), as well as the training in the field of Marine Engineering (provided by the Technical University of Varna and the Higher Naval School "Nikola Yonkov Vaptsarov" – Varna are also good examples in this context, due to the severe requirements for specific knowledge, skills and competences in these sectors and the close links with the practice. ○ The New Bulgarian University's positive examples in implementing the LOs approach are the Bachelor courses in Visual Arts, Economics, Network Technologies, Informatics, and Psychology. The Master programmes in International Relations and Telecommunications are also good examples. The Doctoral programme in Cognitive Science is a good example too, especially with further professional realization in the USA. ○ The Joint Degree Programmes, provided by 8 Bulgarian HEIs and foreign HEIs; ○ The Public Administration is another good example of successful using the LOs based approach, because clear definitions and requirements are set in this field, related to the appointment of state officials. Similar examples exist in the areas of Power Engineering, Marine and Naval Engineering, Aeronautics, Avionics and Air Traffic Control, Teachers Training and Qualifications, including the qualifications of the academic staff in the HEIs (Bachelors graduated cannot teach in Bachelor and Master courses, as well as Masters graduated cannot train doctorands, for example). ○ Higher Education in Philological and in Pedagogical specialties in BG with practical training, approbation periods, and state exams in the schools; ○ Center for Translations and Redactions is established in the University of Sofia, where the students have practical training in real conditions;
<p>6. What would you most like to learn from this session?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Good practices related to research studies concerning the professional realization of the graduated students at the different educational degrees in LOs context; ○ More Second and Third cycle LOs.

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

<p>1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?</p>
<p>To some extent</p> <p>Please comment:</p> <p>Our objective in this field is to achieve the right balance between the State, the HEIs' and labour market's requirements for improving quality of the education, of the academic and research staff; promoting creativeness and competency of the human factor and the institutions; development of research potential and promotion of cooperation.</p> <p>Measures and concrete activities for strengthening the links between education, research and innovations are foreseen in the draft of the National Reforms Programme of Republic of Bulgaria (2006 – 2009), as for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defining the common principles and requirements on state exams and diploma thesis defending together with related stakeholders; - attracting people from the practice and the business as teachers in higher educational institutions; - participation of representatives from the practice in state exam commissions; - attracting people from the business in expert councils on quality in higher educational institutions; - careers centres' establishment in the HEIs in BG for ensuring effective partnership with

employers by supporting selection of students for work places and approbation positions. Research and consultations at the HEIs' level and at the expert commissions' level of the NEAA have been performed in this direction during the recent biannual period, regarding the EQF for LLL and the QF of EHEA. The work in this direction is foreseen to finish during the next year. Taking in account the top importance of this topic and the forthcoming changes, they will be discussed in details with the stakeholders at national level. This topic is an object of special interest in the draft of our new Higher Education Development Strategy, which consultation process is currently ongoing at national level as well.

Our expectations are the participation of the stakeholders and of the social partners to grow-up in the coming years, and greater responsibilities to be taken towards legislation development, institutional work out and strengthening, mechanisms for evaluation of competences – standards on competences, standards on validation, defining validation beneficiaries and quality assurance in this field.

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

- The Council of Rectors of the HEIs in BG – body for expressing the common interests of higher education institutions to the state bodies. It develops attitudes and propositions related to problems in the field of higher education and science. It provides opinion about draft of the state budget related to higher education and science; about draft of Classifier on Domains of Higher Education and professional Directions. It provides attitudes related to criteria for awarding scientific degrees and titles as well.
- The Sectoral Council for Three-Party Cooperation in Higher Education and Science to the Ministry of Education and Science – established in 2006 as a consultative body with aim to assure transparency and common public consensus in discussing issues of strategic importance and legislative documents related to higher education and science. Members are deputy ministers of education and science and all nationally represented organizations of syndicates and employers;
- Supreme Attestation Commission – institution under jurisdiction of the Council of Ministers, with activity targeted mainly to awarding and recognition of scientific degrees and titles;
- Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, scientific and research organisations;
- National Council on Student Issues (consultative body to the Minister of education and science);
- Students unions and students councils at the institutional and at the national level;
- Employers organisations;
- Business organisations;
- Professional organisations;
- Scientific organizations;
- Trade unions;
- Experts, external evaluators, managers.

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

- Ongoing consultations, regular meetings, research studies, public discussions, liaison with relevant authorities and decision-making bodies;
- Working towards alignment of the NQF with that of the EQF is expected to finish next year. Having in mind the exceptional importance of the upcoming changes, they will be discussed in detail with nationally represented trade unions and employers organizations.

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

First of all, clear legislation exists in the field of higher education in BG, which regulates participation of students (through Student Councils and the National Representation of the Students Councils), syndicates at national level and representatives of the civic society in policy development at national level. Establishment of National Council on Student Issues is foreseen as a consultation body to the Minister of education and science, regulated by Articles 73a and 73b of the Higher Education Act. Second, at the institutional level, collective labour contracts are acting in all higher education institutions. They are registered at the Chief Labour Inspection. These contracts contain mechanisms for participation in governance issues of the higher education institution, through councils for social partnership in every higher education institution, established by rector's order.

Third, the academic autonomy, legislatively regulated by the Higher Education Act, allows to the higher education institutions to establish partnerships with educational, scientific, and business institutions in the country, as well as with foreign higher education institutions. The Higher Education Act defines also the conditions for providing practical training and approbatory periods in the

enterprises. The theme how to improve the practical training in the field of higher education is currently discussed between all key stakeholders. The closer links between the Bulgarian HEIs, the research and the business institutions, establishing by careers centres and high-technological business incubators in the HEIs in the recent few years, are a precondition for introducing innovations in the curricula and, as a result, to more successful professional realisation of the graduated students. Some examples of successful stakeholder involvement include joint projects, student practices, approbatory periods, internships and work placements, as well as consultations concerning drafts of national strategic documents, implementation of the Directives of the EC:

- The programmes in Radiocommunications and Telecommunications (with practical training and approbation periods in Siemens, Globul, Telelink), provided by the Technical University of Sofia and by the New Bulgarian University (with practical training and approbation periods in Siemens) for example;
- The programmes in Computer Engineering (with approbation periods in Microsoft – Bulgaria), and in Aeronautics and Avionics (with approbation periods in aviation companies and in the Air Traffic Service Authority), provided by the Technical University of Sofia;
- The programmes in Informatics and in Computer Sciences (with approbation periods in Hewlett Packard), provided by the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics, St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia;
- The joint degree programmes offered by the Faculty of German Engineering Education, Technical University of Sofia (with practical training and approbation periods in Germany), also the joint degree programmes provided in cooperation with the AUF;
- The programmes in Public Administration with approbatory periods in the public administration sector and possible further appointment there on permanent posts for the best students;
- The New Bulgarian University's Programme Councils, where representatives of the employers, the business sector, and professional organisations participate;
- National consultation process related to the Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7th September 2007 on the recognition of professional qualifications.

System on determining employers' needs of working power with a given qualification is developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2006, by PHARE project. Its purpose is to assist for a good match between training and labour market needs. It is envisaged till the end of 2007 the system to be introduced over all the country and to be used in developing syllabi, determining the professional directions and the state order for accepting pupils and students.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

- Good examples of including the professional bodies;
- More on information-sharing initiatives and on creating a stakeholders' pool and/or cooperative.

A.3 Spain

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?
At the beginning of the process
Please comment
2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A National Committee chaired by the Minister and composed of representatives of central and regional authorities, universities and stakeholders has been established by a formal decree. A working group has been also established for developing the QF. The approval will be made by the National Committee. ○ It is expected that both NC and WG will have first meeting in October.
3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?
For both. The current plan is to develop first the EHEA-QF as the top part of the EQF.
4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?
NA
5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?
NA
6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?
We are planning develop the Spanish QF at 6 big sectoral levels (Engineering, Science, Social Sciences, Education, Health and Humanities)
7. What would you most like to learn from this session?
How other countries are advancing

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?
Other: Not yet
Please comment:
Learning outcomes will be integrated into the curriculum design planned to start next year 2008.
2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?
To understand how other countries are advancing with respect to this issue.
3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)?
Learning outcomes will be integrated into the curriculum design planned to start next year 2008.
4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)
Not yet.

6. What would you most like to learn from this session?

To understand how other countries are advancing with respect to this issue.

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To a large extent

Please comment

All involved stakeholders have been invited to participate into the commission defining the Spanish QF.

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

Representatives of trade unions, students, employers, universities and national and regional authorities

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

They are members of the Nation Committee in charge of approving the QF

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

No yet

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

To understand how other countries are dealing with the participation of stakeholders

A.4 The Netherlands

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?

Self-certification is progressing well and we plan to have it in place in the next year.

Please comment

A draft NQFHE is produced under responsibility of the ministry of Education. It was composed jointly by ministry, national quality assurance agency, branch organisation of universities and of universities of professional education. The draft was further improved by the Bologna process management group, which, apart from the above mentioned participants, also consists of student unions, employers and employees and the chair of the Bologna promoters.

The draft has been sent by the minister to the Boards of all HEI in the Netherlands, publicly and privately funded, and to the organisations of all stakeholders, mentioned above. A national seminar on this is scheduled for 31st October, as a self-certification process within the Netherlands. After this seminar an external review team will be invited for the self-certification process with help of international peers.

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

Please give a brief overview of the players and their involvement in the process. Outline how the policy makers interact with the QA arrangement. Are other stakeholders involved?

Explanatory note:

As levels of qualifications (Dublin descriptors) are included in the accreditation criteria, ECTS 60 credits system and Diploma Supplements are required by law, core elements of the national qualifications framework are in place. The NQF describes the current situation and best practice.

Key players in the self-certification process are:

Main players:

- The national quality assurance agency, which is the supranational accreditation agency NVAO which accredits programmes
- The HEI, including students

Other players

- Employers, employees

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

The NQF is heavily influenced by the EHEA Framework and describes, as requested, the preceding levels that give access to higher education. It is well understood that the EQF-LLL fits with the EHEA Framework

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

The importance of awareness of the NQF at all levels in HEI, certainly at the governance level and at the level of directors of education.

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

The 1st and 2nd cycle descriptors are part of the accreditation framework for accreditation of existing and new Bachelor and Masters. The short cycle descriptor is in use for accreditation of newly proposed Associate degree programmes. The descriptor for the third cycle is comparable to the one laid down in the policy documents the universities adhere to for doctoral level education "Hora est".

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

For regulated professions sectoral qualifications frameworks play a role in the external review of the programme that has to be submitted to the NVAO by HEI before accreditation can be granted.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

How HEI describe programmes in terms of learning outcomes that relate to the cycle descriptors.

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

Fully embedded

Please comment

For accreditation to be granted, programmes have to prove that they are respecting the cycle descriptors. The cycle descriptors are described in terms of learning outcomes, so have the programmes. Required by law is that exam requirements are described by the HEI, hence exam requirements have to be/will be written in terms of learning outcomes.

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

When the Bachelor Master structure was introduced in 2002, it was introduced together with the requirement of accreditation, including the level descriptors for the first and second cycle. At that time (2001 and 2002) a total of ca 42 million € was granted to the universities for transition.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles).

Transition from thinking in terms of input and time onto thinking in terms of outcomes of the learning process.

Time restrictions, priorities at the HEI.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

Examples from University of Groningen are attached.

6. What would you most like to learn from this session?

How to foster engagement at universities.

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To a large extent

Please comment

Aspect of the accreditation of programmes is verification of feed-back of employers on the curriculum and quality of graduates.

Furthermore: Universities of professional education are regionally engaged with employers. Their cooperation, also including lower levels of professional education, is laid down in agreements. The co-operation includes prior applied learning expertise points advising employees that like to progress to the appropriate levels in education institutes.

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

Two ministries have jointly taken an active role in bringing various stakeholders together. The two ministries are: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. They formed a joint Directorate: Project Learning and Working (PLW).

The governmental Directorate (PLW) actively brought stakeholders together and stimulated the Agreements being developed (see above).

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

Further training schemes have increased. In the past years the government has made agreements with employers, education institutes and local authorities in nearly all regions in the Netherlands. The agreements include the number of employees to be trained, in 2007 in total 21.000 learning and working schemes in secondary and tertiary level professional education and 19.000 schemes for prior applied learning of which 8.000 in HE. The pilots with the new short cycle Associate degree programmes are interesting for employees who like to progress to higher education.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

The contribution of employers to the costs of training.

A.5 Norway

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?

Other

Please comment

In April 2007 a working group appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research and Research submitted to the Ministry a proposal for a Norwegian NQF for higher education. This proposal is sent to all stakeholders for consultation and the deadline is 1. November 2007.

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

The self-certification process has not started yet.

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

In May 2005, Norway like the other member countries within the Bologna-process adopted the EHEA Framework and Norway has also given its support the EQF. When developing the NQF, the working group used both frameworks as background material.

The proposed NQF is divided into three cycles as the EHEA Framework.

The proposed NQF presents its framework as the EQF – dividing learning outcomes in three columns.

Regulations Relating to Standards and Criteria for Accreditation of Course Provisions and to Criteria for Accreditation of Institutions issued by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in education demands that the study programmes must state the knowledge, skills and **attitudes** that students shall have acquired upon completion of the programme. Because learning outcomes must be assessable discussions regarding the concept **attitude** have arisen: What does it mean? Is it possible to assess attitude? Thus the working group decided to propose, in addition to knowledge and skills, general competences (TUNING) as heading for the third column.

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

A consultation meeting with stakeholders and experts concerning a future Norwegian NQF was held by the Ministry of Education and Research in early 2006. The opinion of the majority of the participants was that Norway should have one common framework for all higher education i.e. the proposed NQF is not divided in an academic part and a professional part. However, when developing the NQF, the working group also used SQFs as background material.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

We would especially like to know what problems countries have met during the self-certification process, and their experience in such a process.

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

Fully embedded

Please comment

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

In March 2005 a national conference concerning qualification frameworks and learning outcomes for university and university college leaders was held by The Norwegian Association of Higher Education. Stephen Adam from the University of Westminster was invited as keynote speaker with learning outcomes as the topic for his lecture. One other important part of the programme was that the Dublin descriptors were discussed in small groups.

In December 2005, the Ministry of Education and Research appointed a working group in order to develop a proposal for a national qualifications framework for higher education. The working group was chaired by a representative for the Ministry of Education and Research and in addition four other experts from the Ministry participated. The other members were:

- three members appointed among the higher education institutions by the Norwegian Association of Higher Education,
- one member by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
- two students appointed by the national student unions.

Furthermore the Ministry appointed one reference group and the Norwegian Association of Higher Education another to support the working group in their job of describing learning outcomes.

The working group also used literature concerning quality learning in general and especially within higher education as background material.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)

Few Norwegian institutions were familiar with how to describe learning outcomes. The greatest challenge, not only in Norway but also in other countries, is in our opinion probably that implementing learning outcomes is not limited to choosing and describing expected learning outcomes. They must also be in alignment with teaching and assessment methods. This means that implementing learning outcomes is an educational reform, and maybe too little attention has been paid to how to train the academic staff to a new way of developing curricula.

We have no experience as of yet in relation to alignment of institutional programmes with the NQF, but it is apparent that many among the academic staff and even students have problems seeing the value of the NQF.

With regard to common language we realized that it would be difficult to work without common understanding of the terminology. Thus terminology was one of the most important topics when the Ministry of Education and Research invited the stakeholders at the beginning 2006 to a kick-off meeting for the development of a NQF.

However, we believe the greatest obstacle is lack of time. The academic staff at universities in Norway strongly claim that new reforms limit their time for research. It means that it is necessary within the institutions to organise the activities in such a way that the academic staff also have time for new methods of curricula development.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

There is ongoing work in Norwegian institutions. One of the most important aspects is that the academic leadership on all levels of the institution participate actively in this work. Experts within university pedagogy and quality assurance staff must be involved.

6. What would you most like to learn from this session?

How do other countries train the academic staff concerning implementing learning outcomes?

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To some extent

To a large extent

Please comment

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

1. The Ministry of Education and Research
2. The institutions providing higher education
 - 2.1 The academic staff
 - 2.2 The administrators
 - 2.3 Students
 - 2.4 Programme auditors
3. The Norwegian Association of Higher Education
4. The Norwegian Agency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
5. Employers
6. The Employers Union
7. Labour unions and professional unions
8. Students unions

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

All have been consulted by invitation to conferences/seminars and meetings and the proposal has been sent on a broad consultation.

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

Stakeholder representatives were invited to discuss the matter, not only as participants in meetings. Their opinions were also actively sought by the working group.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

How other countries make their students interested in the work concerning Qualification frameworks and learning outcomes.

How does one go about ensuring that the stakeholders see the added value of a QF and feel a sense of ownership?

A.6 Slovakia

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. Current situation in the process of self-certification in Slovakia

Slovakia is at the very beginning of the process.

Within the Bologna Process - whose aim it is to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010, Slovakia is aiming to elaborate national qualification framework by 2010 and this work has been launched in 2007. Self-certification will verify the compatibility of NQF with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The self-certification process will include the stated agreement of the Slovak quality assurance bodies in question recognised through the Bologna Process. The self-certification process will also involve international experts. Our intent is that the completion of the self-certification process will be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between our national framework and the European framework.

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

Since the process is on its very beginning, no relevant information can be presented so far.

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

Intention is that NQF will be fully compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area as well as the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning.

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

Since the process is on its very beginning, no relevant information can be presented so far.

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

Since the process is on its very beginning, no relevant information can be presented so far.

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

Some sectors and branches (IT field, to name one of them) in Slovakia are active and have a complex projection of their needs and concepts being involved into the creation of the National Qualification Framework. Their influence and cooperation will be appreciated.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

To learn about experiences of countries, where this process is in more advanced phase, especially Scotland and Ireland, where self-certifications and verifications of compatibility with the EHEA are already in place.

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

Competent ministries (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family) will create two components of the National Qualification Framework (besides the framework of qualification itself also Nation Framework of Professions.) The main concept on the basis of which qualifications will be distinguished is formed by learning outcomes, i.e. individuals' knowledge and skills without regard of how they acquired them. Systems for recognition of qualifications will be based on recognition of learning and education outcomes independently on ways and forms of education. The aim of the National Qualification Framework is to create a system environment that will support comparability of learning outcomes achieved by various forms of learning and education and to enable recognition of real knowledge and competences independently on the way of their acquiring.

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

See answer above. Since the process is on its very beginning, no further information can be presented so far.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)

The main challenge, as it is viewed nowadays, could be the reluctance of higher education institutions to the process which will enable recognition and certification of real knowledge and competences (higher levels of qualifications as well), achieved also out of the formal, standard and institutionalised system.

Current situation: All higher education institutions in Slovakia have the same legal standing and social function. They provide not only higher education, but also research and artistic activities. Higher education institutions have the exclusive right to award academic degrees. According to the Higher Education Act No.172/1990, they provide education at three levels. The first level leads to the degree of Bachelor; the second level, the complete higher education, leads to the academic degrees of Master, Engineer, Doctor of Medicine etc.; and the third level to the Doctorate /PhD. Slovakia has functioning system of accreditation and within this frame is the study content (recommended study plans) set up. Study plans must correspond with the content of the study field. Study fields contents are defined on the national level and the principle of learning outcomes is hence secured.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

Since the process is on its very beginning, no further information can be presented so far.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

To learn about the situation in other countries. How are they dealing with the problem of reluctance of HEI level identified in our answer No. 3 of this theme?

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To some extent (their involvement is planned and will be fully realised during the process).

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

- Social partners from public sector, private sector a NGO's – associations of employers, chambers of commerce /underlined also involved in so-called *sector councils*/, trade unions etc. and their organisations
- Schools from the primary level to the HEI level

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

Sector council (see above) will be operating during the creation of the National Qualification Framework and will guarantee all outputs. This mechanism is inspired by positive experiences with such a mechanism in the Czech republic and countries of Great Britain.

Advisory team of social partners will be commenting and annotating all relevant aspects and parts of the process of NQF creation. Team will take a part in the creation and development of branch profiles, evaluation standards and certification mechanisms. Team will operate as a non-closed form of institutionalised body.

Advisory team of schools will represent all levels of the schools and HEI's and will be nominated by demand to the non-closed form of institutionalised body. Team will comment and annotate all relevant aspects and parts of the process of NQF creation. Schools involved in this body will be able to take an active part in the process of creation of educational modules for partial qualifications mainly in the lower levels of qualifications. HEI representatives we play a specific role in the referred-to process. Their role will consist not only in the cooperation during the creation of higher level of qualifications included in NQF, but also in the active exploring the pathways for application of principles negotiated during the process of NQF creation in the higher qualification levels.

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful?)?

Some sectors and branches (IT field and automobile industry, to name some of them, which are developing very dynamically in Slovakia) are active and have a complex projection of their needs and concepts being involved into the creation of the National Qualification Framework. Their influence and cooperation will be appreciated and we hope that a few years later it could be presented by us as an example of successful stakeholder involvement.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

To learn about some positive examples of stakeholders involvement and to apply them in our environment, if needed.

A.7 The United Kingdom

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?

Currently working towards implementing self-certification (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Self-certification is in place (Scotland)

Please comment:

A Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) for England Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) was published in 2001. It is one of several nationally agreed external reference points for quality and standards used by institutions in developing, approving, monitoring and reviewing their programmes and by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in its external audits and reviews. The FHEQ is currently under review – a normal procedure for the reference points. The review is the first stage in the self-certification process. A further activity to inform the revisions to the FHEQ is a QAA consultation on doctoral programmes and the implementation of an academic credit framework for England.

The self-certification of the Scottish framework was completed in 2006 as one of two ‘Pilots’ of the process.

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

Please give a brief overview of the players and their involvement in the process. Outline how the policy makers interact with the QA arrangement. Are other stakeholders involved?

In the UK universities and some colleges have degree awarding powers (granted by the Government) and award their own qualifications. While the criteria for granting degree awarding powers are established by the Government, the degrees awarded by universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are not national qualifications although they are recognised nationally.

Bill Rammell, the Minister for Further and Higher Education has asked QAA to lead the self-certification of the FHEQ (EWNI) and the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland and Wales have also agreed to this. The self-certification process is to be completed in November 2008.

Apart from QAA, other stakeholders who are to be involved in the process include UniversitiesUK and GuildHE (the rectors’ conferences), the UK Higher Education Europe Unit, the UK NARIC and the National Union of Students (NUS). QAA is the national quality assurance agency for higher education and has worked with the higher education sector to establish the nationally agreed external reference points for quality and standards in UK higher education: the Code of Practice for the assurance of quality and standards, the Frameworks of Higher Education Qualifications, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Scotland (QAA Scotland) has delegated powers from the QAA Board to develop and implement policy in Scotland. In doing so it adopts some UK-wide policies.

QAA Scotland runs a programme of external reviews of higher education institutions (at institutional or in the case of new institutions, also at subject level). It develops and maintains an ‘Academic Infrastructure’ consisting of a (UK-wide) Code of Practice for all higher education institutions on the maintenance of the quality and standards; UK-wide guidelines on programme descriptors (i.e. guidance to higher education institutions in developing clear statements about the nature, aims and ‘learning outcomes’ of their programmes of learning and qualifications); mostly but not only UK-wide) subject benchmark statements setting out the typical features and outcomes associated with Degrees in subject areas and finally, a national qualifications framework for higher education qualifications in Scotland. Degrees in Scotland are awards of and awarded by the Universities. For these reasons, the two main players in the self-certification are a) the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education - Scotland and the Universities. QAA Scotland is responsible for the development and maintenance of the

Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland

Through a joint Committee with the representative bodies of higher education institutions in Scotland, QAA Scotland Board established a working group of members drawn from Universities and also with representatives from national employer bodies to take forward the self-certification and make recommendations back to the QAA Scotland Board for formal agreement. The process also included an important stage of consultation with the sector, students and employers.

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

The existence of the FHEQ (EWNI) pre-dates the EHEA Framework.

The NQF in Scotland was developed some years ago – in 2001 - and therefore precedes the EHEA Framework. Nevertheless, the NQF in Scotland uses the same principles and concepts as the EHEA framework, as demonstrated through the self-certification.

The NQF in Scotland was developed as part of an overall and intimately linked series of developments for the assurance of quality of teaching and learning, and the maintenance of standards and the provision of public information on the range of learning opportunities and awards. All the developments, including the NQF are based on the fundamental concepts of learning outcomes i.e. the arrangements are designed to provide information about and to quality assure the outcomes associated with programmes of learning and qualifications. It is important to emphasise that all these developments are closely linked and that all are based on 'learning outcomes'.

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

None. There have been no particular obstacles. However, the experience in Scotland demonstrated the importance and benefits of extensive working with the Universities, students and a wider range of stakeholders in, firstly, the development of the framework, in its implementation and, finally, its self-certification.

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

The existing FHEQ (EWNI) uses qualifications descriptors. The use of the FHEQ (EWNI) and other external reference points for quality and academic standards is commented on in institutional audit and review reports. An overview of the use of the framework, qualifications descriptors and their links to other external reference points, based on the findings of 70 institutional audit reports, is provided in a paper in the Outcomes from institutional audit series at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalaudit/outcomes/FHEQ.pdf>

The national qualifications framework for higher education institutions in Scotland includes a 1 page descriptor for each of the main types of higher education qualifications: Doctorates (3rd cycle Bologna); Masters Degrees (second cycle Bologna); Honours Degrees; Ordinary Degrees (both end of first cycle Bologna); Diplomas of higher education and certificates of higher education (intermediate first cycle).

These descriptors were developed following extensive consultation with the higher education institutions and as a **key** part of the higher education qualifications framework for Scotland.

The descriptors provide a reference point for higher education institutions in the design, development, approval and review of their programmes. The use of the descriptors by higher education institutions is one of the matters addressed during the external, QAA review of institutions arrangements for managing quality and standards.

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

None in respect of the FHEQ as it is not subject specific.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

The difficulties that others have faced in respect of self-certification and how they are dealing or have dealt with them.

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

Fully embedded

Please comment

Fully embedded in the FHEQ – ie the framework for higher education qualifications.

Learning outcomes are fundamental to not only the qualifications framework but also to the overall arrangements for quality assurance and the provision of public information.

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

All the nationally agreed external reference points for quality and standards in the QAA's Academic Infrastructure for higher education are outcomes based. The external reference points were developed through consultation with the higher education sector and widespread participation of academics, professional bodies, students and others.

Universities and colleges are responsible for designing and implementing the learning outcomes in their programmes leading to their awards.

The concept of 'learning outcomes' has a long history in higher education in Scotland – with early research work being undertaken by various education researchers. A major programme of work by one of the QAA predecessor bodies (the Higher Education Quality Council) included a number of national projects, involving staff from higher education institutions, to further clarify the concept and potential application of learning outcomes. All the above work was undertaken in relation to and in the context of discussions about more fundamental issues concerning the nature of higher education – e.g. is the focus on teaching and 'handing down knowledge' or should the focus be on the learning process and what it is the students have learnt – what are the intended 'outcomes' of the learning. These discussions extended over a number of years and were given added impetus, and pulled together by a national Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education (a UK-wide inquiry with a separate Scottish Committee and report). Amongst many other things, the reports from the inquiry in 1997 included recommendations concerning the development of clear statements about the outcomes of learning – these statements to be expressed at a high general level by QAA in the qualification descriptors and in the subject benchmark statements and at programme level by HEIs in programme specifications. This was followed by an extensive period of activities to support the adoption by HEIs of the concept of learning outcomes and to support them in the process of their development of specific learning outcomes at the programme levels (it is important to stress that QAA did not work to specify the outcomes of programme – rather they work to support HEIs in understanding how to develop learning outcomes).

Thus, it is important to stress that the development of the concept, the use of the concept by higher education institutions and their work to develop detailed outcomes involved an extensive period of shared thinking and implementation.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)

One of the main challenges is developing appropriate assessment criteria to demonstrate that the learner has achieved the learning outcomes.

The development of a shared understanding and language were definitely issues that were tackled during the period of support – as described above.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

Yes, there is a paper in the Outcomes from institutional audit series that describes the findings about the adoption and use of learning outcomes in 70 institutions at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalaudit/learningoutcomes/pdf>

6. What would you most like to learn from this session?

The extent to which others understand and are making use of learning outcomes.

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To a large extent

Please comment:

Ultimately it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to design the qualifications and the programme of learning to achieve those qualifications.

However, in many areas, ‘professional Bodies (in some cases Statutory Bodies) play a key role in ensuring (accrediting/validating) that qualifications in those areas meet the expectations and requirements of the relevant profession.

More generally, higher education institutions will work to ensure that their qualifications meet the needs of employers.

Similarly, students will be involved in the institutions’ systems and structures for the design and institutional approval of the qualifications and programmes of learning.

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

The stakeholders include universities and colleges, their representative bodies, staff and students as well as some professional bodies. But, within institutions, alumni, employers, external examiners and others may also be involved depending on the nature and subject of the qualification.

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

QAA facilitates a wide range of activities in order to engage stakeholders and secure consensus on and ‘ownership’ of the external reference points for quality and standards which are not legal instruments. These include publicly advertised consultation eg the current consultation on doctoral programmes, conferences and focus groups eg three such meetings have been held in the past three months about the revision of the FHEQ EWNI, the establishment of advisory committees and the publication and

circulation of drafts for comment. For further details and examples of items under for consultation see <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/news/consultation/default.asp>

In Scotland the NQF was developed through a Qualifications Framework Development Group consisting of members from the higher education institutions and was the subject of extensive consultation with the sector, students, employers and professional bodies.

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

Active participation and interest demonstrated by oversubscribed round tables and conferences, significant volume of supportive responses to public consultation and keen interest on being on advisory committees.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

A.8 Iceland

THEME 1: SELF-CERTIFICATION

1. How far along in the process of self-certification is your country?

Currently working towards implementing self-certification

Please comment

2. Who are the key players in the self-certification process and what role is taken by the policy makers?

The key actors in self-certification process in Iceland are the HEI's and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Self-certification on the whole process is ongoing and the main attribute that is adhered to is transparency of the whole process, and the structure of the QA system, with extensive foreign engagement.

The process is based on the attached legal documents, who are just in draft translation.

We do not have an independent qualification agency that issues professional qualification for each profession. The professions that are legally protected few, and the professional certificates are produced in the corresponding ministry, be it Education, for teachers, justice for lawyers and so on.

Academic degrees are awarded by the HEI's who are now being accredited by the minister of Education, Science and Culture, a process that will finish in June 2008.

By that the accredited HEI's will have permission to award degrees within a certain field of study, on levels 1 and 2 of the INQF.

3. To what extent has the NQF in your country already been influenced by the EQF for LLL or the EHEA Framework?

The INQF was constructed by a committee of professionals from HEI, who had the mandate to look at the EQF as well as the EHEA structures and the legal surroundings of Iceland. The law on Higher education no. 63/2006 stipulates that Icelandic HEIs must take up all aspects of the Bologna process, including ECTS, the INQF and more.

4. What have been the major obstacles arising in the implementation of self-certification so far?

What is in our way is really just the implementation phase of the new law, they are from 2006 and will be fully enforced by 1. July 2008

5. Have you any examples of the use of descriptors?

We will be presenting the INQF which are the descriptors of the qualification framework of Iceland in Bulgaria.

See attached INQF

6. What is the influence of Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs), such as for nursing or engineering, on the development of your NQF?

We do not have sectoral qualification frameworks.

7. What would you most like to learn from this session?

More about what the other countries are doing about Self-certification

THEME 2: LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Are learning outcomes currently embedded in the NQF?

Fully embedded

Please comment

2. How has the process of design and implementation of learning outcomes been facilitated at the national level? Who has been involved?

INQF is based on learning outcomes as a framework. This is implemented by accreditation of the fields of study the HEI have to have before 1. July 2008 in order to be able to continue to have performance contracts with the state for funding for both research and teaching.

3. What have been the main challenges in designing and implementing learning outcomes (for example, lack of understanding, common language, lack of compatibility across the three cycles)

This is an ongoing debate in Iceland, we will be reorganising the INQF in 2009 after the accreditation, with extensive discussion with HEI and other stakeholders.

4. Have you any good examples of implementation of learning outcomes at the institutional or national level? (And across the three cycles?)

There are some very interesting developments in all the HEIs, both encouraging and some less encouraging.

6. What would you most like to learn from this session?

State of play with others

THEME 3: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

1. To what extent are stakeholders involved in the development of qualifications in your country?

To a large extent

Please comment

2. Who are the main stakeholder types that are involved in your country?

HEIs and world of work, but mostly the HEIs.

3. What mechanisms are used for the involvement of stakeholders in the preparation of QFs?

Consultation committee

4. Could you give any practical examples of successful stakeholder involvement (in what way were they successful)?

The involvement of the stakeholders in the whole structure of the new law was facilitated by both the formal involvement mechanism that were set in motion, and as well of the informal links that are in Iceland. Informal consultations were often more effective to get honest opinions on the matter in hand than the formal ones.

5. What would you most like to learn from this session?

More about how to get the students involvement to be more structured.