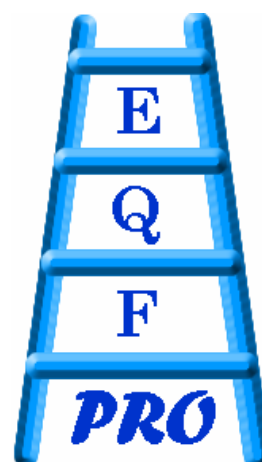


***Articulation between
vocational and academic
learning in University
Education***

Transversal programme KA1
LLP 2007/10336/TRA EQF/BE/EACEA



**FOOTSTEPS AND PATHWAYS
FOR THE LIFELONG LEARNER**

FINAL REPORT

EQF PRO Project

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INTRODUCTION

The decision to apply in 2008 on EQF-projects call of proposal was taken by EUCEN on the basis of our observations and discussions on what was happening in a majority of European countries regarding the feasibility of fluid individual learning and training paths in higher education institutions for learners. If lifelong learning is to become the rule in Europe for all citizens, for the moment it is evident that both young students and adults face a lot of obstacles to organise their learning and training paths, especially when they want to move from one institution to another, from one subsystem to another, and particularly at EQF levels 5 and 6. The discussions in most European countries setting up their National Qualifications Framework show that this issue is actually crucial. The EQF implementation seminar in Brussels in June 2008 has clearly highlighted these debates, particularly in the Workshop 5 that explored **how EQF could be used to build links between different sub-systems of education, including adult, vocational education and training and higher education.**

We are convinced, as the European network for university lifelong learning, that if we want to be successful in the implementation of lifelong learning, we need to ensure **continuity** and **progression** in **learning and training paths** marked by **footsteps** for all European citizens.

For the EQF Pro partners:

- **Continuity** refers to the possibilities provided to individuals to move from one educational subsystem to another one (for instance from vocational education and training to general education of higher education), from one institution to another one, to come back at any time during their personal and professional path in a formal system, their informal and non formal learning being recognised.
- **Progression** refers to the possibilities provided to individuals to move vertically in a qualification system. Progression is more or less facilitated by the openness or the narrowness of entry requirements in subsystems or institutions (access criteria), or by the proximity or the articulation of content between different programmes at different levels (prerequisites), or by prerequisites.
- **Learning and training paths** refers to the articulation of the components of an individual learning process made of periods of formal learning (even those not completed), of training sessions in companies or in another settings, and learning resulting from daily activities at home, at work or in not-for-profit organisations.
- **Footsteps** refer to all the elements of the personal and professional life which contribute to the individual progression (employment, activities,...) and provide opportunities for learning;

On this basis, EQF-Pro's main objective was first to understand what was happening concretely in some countries in higher education institutions at EQF levels 5 and 6, then, to analyse what were the elements likely to explain this situation. The final objective was to elaborate - on the basis of the analysis of qualifications (29) awarded at level 5 or 6 in two sectors, Bank/Insurance and IT - some propositions and recommendations on potential solutions.

We built a partnership based on countries with different “learning cultures” and different higher education systems (Belgium –French community, France, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom and as “silent partner” Russian Federation)

The following documents are the products of our activities:

- A brief presentation of the situation in each partner country on the basis of a common grid and a transversal analysis of these situations;
- A state of play of the European situation regarding qualifications frameworks : the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EQF-EHEA), the European Qualifications Framework for LLL (EQF-LLL) and National Qualifications Frameworks compatible with both EQF;
- 29 case studies;
- A transversal analysis of the 29 case studies;
- A self-assessment by partners via spider diagrams
- A final report
- An executive summary

The project was managed by EUCEN. Interim results and draft recommendations were presented to representatives of employers, institutions and organisations in October 2009 in Lille and in Porto in November 2009.

A short version of this report is also available as an Executive Summary

Detailed information is available on the website <http://www.eucen.org/EQFpro/index.html>

CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

To understand the problematic on which this project is based we have to take into account three key elements:

- The emergence of the notion of qualifications framework in the European education and training landscape;
- The debate (and competition?) introduced by the apparition of two European Qualifications Frameworks: the one promoted by the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) based on the Bologna structure of qualifications and the one promoted by the European Commission, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning;
- The first issues emerging from the discussions on the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks.

1 Why qualifications frameworks?

To classify qualifications awarded in a country is not very new. Some European countries (France, Ireland, Scotland, UK...) have developed over several years frameworks listing qualifications awarded by public and/or private educational institutions in the country and classifying them by levels on the basis of more or less detailed and explicit descriptors. What is new with EQF is first that this preoccupation now has become a European concern, taking into consideration all forms of learning and consequently all forms of “official” recognition of learning outcomes; furthermore, this is considered as a condition for the development of lifelong learning strategies.

The “Commission Staff Working Document: Towards a European Qualifications framework for lifelong learning” provides the European view on this question.

*“Lifelong learning has become a necessity in a Europe characterised by rapid social, technological and economic change. An ageing population accentuates these challenges – underlining the need for a continuous updating and renewal of knowledge, skills and wider competences. The realisation of lifelong learning is however complicated by the lack of communication and co-operation between education and training providers and authorities at different levels. Barriers between institutions and countries not only prevent access to education and training but also prevent an efficient use of knowledge and competences already acquired. **This problem is primarily caused by a lack of transparency of qualifications, by a reluctance to recognise ‘foreign’ qualifications, and by the lack of arrangements that allow citizens to transfer qualifications from one setting to another. It is also caused by the tendency to regard learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings (for example at work) as inferior to learning for formal qualifications delivered in initial education and training. Need for methods and approaches for the identification and documentation of learner’s knowledge and competences”¹.***

¹ European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document: Towards a European Qualifications framework for lifelong learning, 8 July 2005, 45p.

This statement is the result of a long process of recognition by policy makers and stakeholders of the necessity to adopt common references regarding qualifications to make easier credit transfer and mobility. The reasons why qualifications systems should be developed have been clearly stated by OECD²:

- To increase flexibility and responsiveness;
- To motivate young people to learn
- To link education and work;
- To facilitate open access to qualifications;
- To diversify assessment processes;
- To make qualifications progressive;
- To make them more transparent;
- To facilitate review of funding and increase efficiency
- To lead to improvements in the way the system is managed.

In November 2003, the Commission concluded that there was **a need to better integrate vocational education and training and higher education**, and recommended the establishment of an overarching European Qualifications Framework. It appointed a Working Group whose role was to prepare a document to be discussed by member states and later by European institutions.

2 The two European Qualifications Frameworks

The difficulty met for establishing better articulation between educational sectors on the basis of the EQF is partly due to the fact that we have in reality not a single qualifications framework but two (see the document “State of play” produced during the first phase of the project), the one promoted by the European Commission and the one set up by the EHEA. Articulating the two still remains a challenge. Nevertheless, some progress has been achieved over recent years, with borderlines between the Vocational Education and Training sector and Higher Education sector becoming more permeable.

2.1. The specific *demarche* of Higher Education (FQ-EHEA)

In 1999, the ministers responsible for Higher Education in 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration establishing the Higher Education qualifications on a common basis and aiming at a convergence of systems. It was the first step towards developing an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area. This was confirmed by the conclusions of the Berlin Conference in 2003 of the ministers responsible for higher education: *“ministers encourage the member states to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area”.*

² OECD.

The report published by the Bologna Working Group on qualifications frameworks³ identifies clearly the reasons for calling for this framework. *“Primarily it should help the Bologna Process establish real transparency between existing European systems of higher education through the development of a shared basis for understanding these systems and the qualifications they contain. This should improve the recognition of foreign qualifications, enhance the mobility of citizens and make credential evaluation more accurate. The overarching framework should also provide guidance to those countries developing their national frameworks. Last, but not least, it provides a context for effective quality assurance”*.

Although the drive for greater mobility received widespread support, the promoters of the Bologna process have been obliged to explain that this process was not meant to lead to uniformity, for instance by transforming “colleges” into “universities”. Where there were binary systems, the objective was to establish more bridges between sub-systems.

However, if the three-cycle degree structure (bachelor, master and doctorate with a possibility of intermediate qualifications within the first cycle) is theoretically in place, there is not yet a common approach to the two first cycles, and this provokes some difficulty in achieving the objectives of mobility and legibility. The 180 ECTS credits model (three academic years) is dominant but some countries have not changed their previous structure and propose a 240 ECTS credits model (four academic years). In addition long programmes in specific domains still remain (this often applies to regulated professions) and are not in line with the typical Bologna structure. Furthermore, the articulation between vocational education and the first cycle of Higher Education remains a problem, especially in countries where vocational education is organised as a separate system outside the university sector. A comparative study done by EURASHE highlights these difficulties. *“Although a majority of students who have finished tertiary short cycle prefer to join the labour market as soon as they have graduated, an increasing number of them decides to take on degree studies immediately after graduation or at a later stage of life. This definitely facilitated where tertiary short cycle is already integrated in higher education institutions or where there are close links between tertiary short cycle and other HEIs”*⁴.

Students in a number of countries face real difficulties in obtaining academic recognition of their period abroad or when they move from one sub-system to another one. In its annual report “Bologna through students’ eyes”, the European Student Union notes that *“recognition of prior learning is not yet an issue viewed as a university duty by some of the most traditional sectors. In the absence of national provisions for the area, the differences of procedures and purposes given are even higher. It is quite obvious the need for national level guidelines to create a country coherent system. Higher education institutions also need support and assistance to develop their recognition of prior learning procedures in such cases”*⁵.

³ Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, “A Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA”, report written by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, February 2005, 107p.

⁴ Kirsch M., Beernaert Y, Norgaard S., Tertiary short cycle education in Europe, a comparative study, EURASHE, May 2003

⁵ European Students Union, Bologna with the students’ eyes, report 2009

This is confirmed by the recent draft report of the BFUG (Bologna Follow Up Group) “Bologna beyond 2010”. *“While much of the structural reform is already in place, the key challenge is to move from structure to practice. Further work and associate resources will be required to improve understanding of learning outcomes and development of curricula based on learning outcomes. This will involve a better understanding of the nature of learning outcomes as well as a greater focus on subject areas. As a result the way teaching is conducted will change, which in turn will have organisational implications”*. The Bologna process independent assessment of the first decade of working on the EHEA comes to identical conclusions. *“Experience with new degree types has to be built up in higher education systems and in the wider society, especially the employability of new bachelor degrees in countries where only long single-cycle degrees existed before is an issue hardly developed until now”*. The implementation of this new degree structure hides imperfections and leads to different interpretations of learning outcomes and different results of credit accumulation (labour market entry and/or further study) and it concludes that *“the different (hi-)stories behind the reforms in many countries seem to cause losing the overall aims (compatibility, mobility, modernisation for knowledge society) behind the mean (degree structure) out of sight”*⁶.

However, it is clear that the approach developed by EHEA is still more directed to initial education rather than to lifelong learning, to systems and institutions rather than individual learner. Although the lifelong learning perspective is mentioned in EHEA papers, and although EHEA recognises that this *“challenges the traditional boundaries between different levels of education and training..., the nature of institutions, the teaching and learning processes and how learning is valued”*, *“that there is a need for some re-thinking of the nature of qualifications”*, few concrete propositions are emerging for the moment from the EHEA discussions. In the document “Bologna beyond 2010”, lifelong learning is seen in general and the consequences for higher education are not really envisaged. Lifelong learning is envisaged as a parallel (additional) activity and not as a principle organising the educational activity of HEIs. *“The teaching and learning in the institutions of higher education will aim at educating creative graduates able to function in the knowledge society and to profit fully from lifelong learning opportunities through the provision of adequate learning paths”*. In this context *“it is necessary to relate further education qualifications to the three cycles Bologna degree structure and to provide information on their value in a transparent way”*.

2.2. The objectives of EQF for LLL

EQF for lifelong learning was adopted by the Council and the European Parliament on 23 April 2008. EQF is an answer to the demand of different categories of actors (Member States, social partners, other stakeholders,...) calling for a common reference tool to increase the transparency of qualifications, to understand and use the different qualifications systems in Europe, to encourage cooperation between education providers, participants in programmes, employers and society, to facilitate the comparison between traditional qualifications and qualifications awarded by other stakeholders outside national systems, to

⁶ CHEPS, University of Twente, “The first decade of working on the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna process independent assessment”, November 2009

link all forms of qualifications to common references. Three notions drive the approach developed: transparency, comparability and portability (transferability). On this basis, EQF is considered by the European Commission as “central to the fulfilment of the Lisbon Process for Growth and Jobs”. *“Unlike traditional qualifications systems , where entry points, accreditation and equivalence are academically, culturally and socially problematic, the EQF is built on a culture of lifelong learning and is not necessarily bound by time and gender, by age group or by kind of institution”⁷.*

So, EQF is not specifically dedicated to formal education, the European institutions link EQF to lifelong learning, considering EQF as a means of supporting lifelong learning. *“Lifelong learning has become a necessity in a Europe characterised by rapid social, technological and economic change. An ageing population accentuates these challenges – underlining the need for a continuous updating and renewal of knowledge, skills and wider competences. The realisation of lifelong learning is however complicated by the lack of communication and co-operation between education and training providers and authorities at different levels. Barriers between institutions and countries not only prevent access to education and training but also prevent an efficient use of knowledge and competences already acquired. This problem is primarily caused by a lack of transparency of qualifications, by a reluctance to recognise ‘foreign’ qualifications, and by the lack of arrangements that allow citizens to transfer qualifications from one setting to another. It is also caused by the tendency to regard learning acquired in non-formal and informal settings (for example at work) as inferior to learning for formal qualifications delivered in initial education and training”* (Commission staff working document: Towards a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning)⁸. According to this policy paper, the main challenge to make lifelong learning a reality is to offer, at national and European level, the possibility for individuals to make what they have learnt in different settings (at school, at work, at home), legible for themselves, for their employers and all institutions and persons who may be concerned and to organise smooth professional and personal paths. In this perspective *“the main purpose of the EQF is to act as a translation device and a neutral reference point for comparing qualifications across different education and training systems and to strengthen co-operation and mutual trust between the relevant stakeholders”⁹.*

3 National Qualifications Frameworks: the most appropriate instrument?

One of the main results of the discussions and consultations of Member States and stakeholders before the publication of the EQF has been to consider EQF as a “meta framework”, that is to say as a translation device. It is a common reference based on three «classical» descriptors (knowledge, skills and competences –autonomy and responsibility) and eight levels, offering a horizontal legibility making possible equivalences and a vertical progression allowing individual evolution. It is a common language to make easier legibility and understanding of national qualifications between frameworks elaborated independently

⁷ Calleja, J., “Linking VET and higher education. Is the EQF contributing to this issue?”, in the European Journal of vocational training n°42-43, CEDEFOP

⁸ Cf supra

⁹ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the EQF for lifelong learning, April 2008; ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm

by each Member State on the basis of its education and training system, its regulations, its practices, of the existing relationships between education and work. It is a tool, not an integrating instrument. The EQF is not a framework which is imperative for all European countries. The article 14 of the Recommendation stipulates that EQF “does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework does not describe specific qualifications or an individual’s competences and particular qualifications should be referenced to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level by way of the relevant national qualifications systems”.

An Information note from the Commission, published in February 2006, provides the following definition of a National Qualifications Framework:

“A national qualifications framework is a way of showing the relationships between qualifications in a country or education or occupational sector. It is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector for example initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and Internationally”

Again, what is new in the approach promoted by the Commission is the fact that the objective is not to encourage descriptions and classifications of existing qualifications but to establish a framework. This means:

- To describe qualifications but also the **articulations** and **interaction** between them;
- To suggest **learning paths** between them in all directions;
- To describe learning in terms of **outcomes**;
- To identify the implications in terms of programmes, provisions, organisations;
- To establish **new relationships between educational institutions and public authorities**;
- To develop **cooperation between institutions and organisations, between sectors**.

“It is argued, as Bjornavold and Coles stated, that NQFs are necessary to overcome the barriers between different national subsystems of education and training, notably between vocational education and training and higher education and between initial and continuing education and training”¹⁰

The promoters of the EQF Pro project shared this conviction. However, while the principles promoted by qualifications frameworks are suited to reduce barriers in individual learning pathways, the EQF Pro consortium observed that the impact of these instruments on

¹⁰ Bjornavold J, Coles M., “Governing education and training; the case of qualifications frameworks”, in European Journal of vocational training, n°42-43, CEDEFOP

continuity and progression depends on the extent to which European countries accept this perspective. As explicitly pointed out in the second part of this report, Qualification Frameworks were seen as tools likely to encourage and facilitate European mobility of students and workers between countries and treated as powerful tools contributing to the lifelong learning perspective, introducing a common language between all actors involved, and ensuring fluid progression in individual learning paths.

In order to reach these objectives and to come to an agreement on qualifications systems and to the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks, a lot of discussions and vivid debates between authorities, educational institutions and stakeholders is required.

Consequently, National Qualifications Frameworks become de facto a key component of the system, also at the European level, but systematically challenged through two more or less separated processes: the one proposed by EHEA and the one driven by Europe.

The NQF envisaged by EHEA covers only the qualifications included in the three-cycle structure. But the vision developed by the Bologna Working Group on NQFs is encouraging and indicates the key elements of the process. *“National Qualifications Frameworks have a key role in encouraging lifelong learning within countries. Indeed, National Frameworks, and their related features such as the links to credit accumulation and transfer, moving towards a learning outcomes based approach and the recognition of non formal and informal learning that is enabled by a real learning outcomes approach, all facilitate and encourage increased lifelong learning and international research shows that these are important elements of many countries approaches to encouraging lifelong learning”*¹¹ Each country implied in the Bologna process (46 countries) is invited to certify against the overarching Qualifications Framework for the EHEA the qualifications awarded by HEIs. Initially it was scheduled that the self-certification procedures would be completed by 2010, but this was too ambitious. Currently 8 higher education systems have a self-certified NQF, 11 are well advanced in the process of implementation. 2012 now is the objective for full completion.

The 2008 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council¹² invited Member States, on a voluntary basis¹³, to elaborate and adopt their NQF “whether for general and higher education or for vocational education and training”, and to relate these qualifications systems to the NQF by the end of 2010 and to mention on attestations issued after 2012 the relevant EQF level. A recent CEDEFOP report¹⁴ shows that the majority of countries have started to work on their NQF (or to revise it when already existing) and to relate it to the EQF. At the end of 2009:

- 2 countries have established their NQF and have referenced it to the EQF;
- 14 expect to be ready at the end of 2010;
- 11 announce that they will have a NQF in 2011 and 1 in 2013;

¹¹ Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, “A Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA”, report written by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, February 2005, 107p

¹² Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Official Journal of the European union, C111, 6/05/2008

¹³ But finally all Member States decided to follow the Recommendation.

¹⁴ CEDEFOP, The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe, 118p., September 2009

- 4 are not able to give an answer about the availability of their NQF.

The reasons put forward by Member States for developing NQFs can be classified into four categories according to the Document introducing the Workshop 4 of the “Implementing the EQF” Conference in June 2008 in Brussels:

- The ambition to increase the coherence of national qualifications systems by connecting different parts and making the whole more transparent;
- The wish to make components of individual qualifications more portable and transferable,
- The ambition to open up qualifications systems to a broader range of learning experiences, including non formal and informal learning;
- The wish to provide a basis for the exchange, credit transfer and recognition between institutions, regions and countries

More generally, on the basis of the information collected by our analysis of current development of national policies, we can identify four main categories of objectives in the process developed in European countries:

- To make all certifications awarded in a country understandable by students and their families and by employers;
- To describe inter-relationships between qualifications and organise students’ pathways. A NQF has an integrating and bridging function. How to improve the interconnections and articulation between the different parts of the qualification system. This should increase coherence and transferability, open qualifications systems to a broader range of learning activities including non formal and informal learning, and provide a basis for credit transfer and recognition between countries;
- To make easier comparability, compatibility between qualifications in Europe;
- To make lifelong learning possible.

As Member States have been invited to complete the work by 2010, they have now to answer the following question: to what extent can Qualifications Frameworks developed separately by EHEA and the European Commission come together at national level? It is worth noting that in Member States that have started (or finished) the work of NQF development, the elaboration of a NQF leads to huge discussions and provokes deep reflections on the system of qualifications and on the role of educational institutions. Jim Gallacher in a recent article (“National Qualifications Frameworks, instruments of change or agent of change”) considers for instance that the Scottish Qualifications Framework can be seen as an instrument of change.

From the EQF Pro perspective, it is worth noting that we can classify the vocabulary in use concerning the articulation between the EQF and the EHEA frameworks in three categories:

- Regarding educational systems: documents refer to articulation, transition, interconnection, interaction, bridges, permeability, transferability;
- Regarding individuals and potential users: we find learning pathways, continuity, progression;
- And regarding society in general and economic sectors in particular: we find synergy, relationships and cooperation.

4 The emergence of sectoral qualifications frameworks

Under the pressure of sectoral organisations and international companies more interested in sectoral approaches than in national demarches, the European Commission proposed finally a balanced vision of the EQF taking into account the qualifications or certificates awarded by sectors and companies¹⁵. This opportunity offered to sectors could limit the impact of NQFs. Although the European Commission insists on the links between the EQF and NQFs as a tool for mobility, the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks is likely to introduce a competition between a national and a sectoral approach of qualifications and to make the landscape more complex.

There are two types of arguments developed by sectors to justify the developments that they have set in motion. They hope to provide to the companies and employees with a clearer vision of the qualifications awarded at European level linked to their activities and competences, of their objectives and modalities, in order to ensure transparency and facilitate mobility. And they want to provide their members with some guarantees about the quality of these qualifications. But for some sectors the objective is to offer a real alternative to existing qualifications that they consider as no relevant.

This policy has been criticised by numerous Member States on account of:

- The lack of transparency of the sectoral qualifications ;
- The absence of clarity concerning the procedures for developing sectoral qualifications;
- The lack of external evaluation;
- The lack of confidence and trust in these certificates by populations who prefer “official” qualifications;
- The heterogeneity of the developing qualifications in different sectors;
- Their limited applicability and the absence of external recognition.

Finally most of Member States declared that they did not want that sectors refer directly their certificates to the EQF. They consider that this will appear as a way to bypass the national procedures and to detract from the legibility of all qualifications awarded in a country.

However, sectors having already worked on this issue, have not adopted a common and unique position. We observe at least four different strategies for the moment¹⁶:

¹⁵ The article 12 of the Recommendation stipulates that “the European Qualifications Framework should, moreover, enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems”.

¹⁶ A EQF project in 2007, “EQF and compatibility of sectoral qualifications between the countries” (so called SECCOMPAT project), has explored these issues, illustrated the current debates in five countries and produced “Guidelines for the application of national qualifications frameworks and the European qualifications framework in the inter-country comparison of sectoral qualifications”.

1. A group of sectors that chose not to create their own qualifications, but to identify among qualifications awarded in a country those which were relevant for their activities and the competences needed by the sector and to give them a European legibility for their members;
2. A group of sectors that chose to refer their qualifications to the National Qualifications Frameworks, relying on the articulation of NQFs to the EQF to ensure the legibility and portability of the qualifications that they award at European level.
3. A group of sectors that position the sectoral qualifications directly in the EQF;
4. A more radical group of sectors that would like to elaborate their own qualifications framework and to refer these Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks to the EQF. If this process is accepted by the Commission we might have at the end a double process of referencing, one based on NQFs and one based on SQFs, when they exist.

RELEVANT TOOLS

As soon as the implementation of the Bologna structure, and especially at the two first levels, was decided, it became clear that it was necessary to provide to decision makers at national level and to HEIs some reference points and also tools to revise their programmes. One was the introduction of the **ECTS** (European Credit Transfer System), both as a transfer and accumulation system to promote comparability and compatibility between higher education qualifications in Europe, to make them more legible and transparent for all potential users, and to facilitate mobility between programmes, institutions, subsystems and countries. The second was the increasing reference to **learning outcomes**. Learning outcomes as results expected from a learning process are necessarily linked to descriptors of levels, and to qualifications frameworks as conditions for making possible learning pathways in a lifelong learning perspective.

1 Learning outcomes

The Bologna Declaration in 1999 did not mention “learning outcomes”. This notion appeared in the second Communiqué of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin in 2003 and was linked to the establishment of a qualifications framework. *“Ministers encourage the Member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, **learning outcomes**, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area”*. This was confirmed in Bergen two years later. *“We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles”*. These efforts have been strongly supported by the Tuning project which has developed its own classification of generic learning outcomes expressed in instrumental (capacity for analysis and synthesis), interpersonal (critical and self critical abilities) and systemic (capacity to apply knowledge in practice) competences.

“Learning outcomes represent one of the essential building blocks for transparency within higher education systems and qualifications”¹⁷ but are used with different meanings in higher education institutions, however in all cases they are related, as stated by the Tuning project, **to what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do at the end of the learning experience**. The learning outcomes approach leads to a paradigm shift from teaching to learning, from input, content, programme to outcomes and results. Although it is a long and difficult way for a full and powerful implementation in all HEIs, it is a necessity now. As Stephen Adams states in a recent report, *“credits expressed in terms of learning outcomes are a powerful way to recognise and quantify learning achievements from different contexts; they also provide an effective structure for relating qualifications to each*

¹⁷ Bologna working group on qualifications frameworks, « A framework for qualifications of the EHEA”, February 2005, 107p.

other”¹⁸. And he adds: *“it has already been established that learning outcomes play an important role in the creation and articulation of national and the Bologna overarching qualifications frameworks. Their main role here is to provide explicit and transparent level descriptors and qualifications descriptors. These in turn guide the curriculum designers and act to help establish standards. Clear descriptors - and common approaches to descriptors based on learning outcomes - aid the process of international evaluation and recognition of qualifications and systems”*.

The process of construction of EQF comes nearly to the same conclusion. The EQF is a meta-framework based on eight common reference levels described in terms of **learning outcomes**. *“The emphasis on learning outcomes is rightly identified with the need to define such outcomes within an inclusive approach to lifelong learning, rather than to be tied to particular kinds and phases of institutions, curricula and qualifications”*¹⁹

The three descriptors adopted - knowledge (factual and theoretical), skills (cognitive and practical) and competences (autonomy and responsibility)-, following the recommendations of the Budapest Conference in 2006 have been written in a way that *“all forms of learning outcomes were covered, irrespective of the learning context or institutional context, from basic education via levels of school education or unskilled workers up to doctorate level or the level of senior professionals”*²⁰.

*“Learning outcomes are not only an isolated tool at the level of curriculum design but also represent an approach that plays a significant role in a much wider context that includes: the integration of academic and vocational and training (VET); the assessment of prior experiential learning; the development of qualifications frameworks that accommodate lifelong learning; the development of credit transfer and accumulation systems”*²¹.

2 Credit systems

To ensure continuity and progression in individual paths, qualifications acquired in some place need to be assessed and recognised in a new working or learning situation in another institution or in another country, in another education system or educational sector. The idea of credit transfer comes from this preoccupation. A system of credits has been identified by the Bologna promoters as one of the first priorities. ECTS is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme specified in terms of learning outcomes. 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time study programme during one year. The main objective of ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) was to facilitate student mobility and international curriculum development. *“A credit*

¹⁸ Adam, S. « Learning outcomes current developments in Europe : update on the issues and applications of learning outcomes associated with the Bologna Process » ; Bologna Seminar : Learning outcomes based higher education : the Scottish experience, 21-22 February 2008; 19p.

¹⁹ CEDEFOP, « The shift to learning outcomes, conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe », 2008, 48p.

²⁰ Markowitsch J., Luomi-Messerer K., « Development and interpretation of descriptors of the European qualifications Framework », in European Journal of vocational training, n°42-43, CEDEFOP

²¹ Bologna working group on qualifications frameworks, « A framework for qualifications of the EHEA », February 2005, 107p.

framework, according to EHEA ²² is a way of valuing, measuring, describing and comparing learning achievements, and credits themselves are a quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workload”²³.

In Bergen in 2005, the Ministers in charge of Higher Education decided, in order to remove barriers to access and progression between cycles and to facilitate mobility, to promote the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and to base these credits on learning outcomes. ECTS improves the transparency of higher education qualifications, facilitates comparability between study programmes, ensures transferability of credit points between programmes, institutions and systems and allows academic recognition. Potentially it is a powerful instrument to ensure continuity and progression whatever the origin of credits. Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or programmes as well as to modules, units, work, placements, or non formal and informal learning. The Bologna Qualifications Framework defines the credit ranges that a learner is required to accumulate in order to receive a qualification corresponding to one of the three Bologna cycles (in principle 180 credits for a Bachelor, 120 for a Master).

“The use of ECTS for lifelong learning enhances the transparency of learning programmes and achievements not only when it comes to the main higher education degrees (bachelor, master or doctorate) but for all types of learning activities provided or learning outcomes recognised by higher education institutions. The fact that all learning achievements are documented and awarded a corresponding number of ECTS credits makes it possible for learners to have this learning recognised with a view of achieving a qualification, when these learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of the qualification”²⁴.

In parallel, in Maastricht in 2004, the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training agreed to give the priority to *“the development and implementation of the European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between learning systems”* (Maastricht Communiqué, December 2004). According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council published on April 2008 and adopted in May 2009, ECVET is *“a methodological framework that can be used to describe qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, with a view to transferring and accumulating learning outcomes. ECVET is based on the designing of coherent and meaningful units of learning outcomes and not on fragmentation of qualifications. ECVET does not aim for or require harmonisation of qualifications and VET systems; it aims instead for better comparability and compatibility”*. ECVET, improves the transparency of qualifications and in particular of learning outcomes, promotes mobility, facilitates comparability between qualifications, ensures transferability of qualifications or partial qualifications (learning outcomes) between institutions and systems and improves the quality of recognition and validation procedures.

²² ibidem

²³ Workload : a quantitative measure of the learning activities that may feasibly be required for the achievement of the learning outcomes (e.g. lectures seminars, practical work, private study, information retrieval, research, examinations)

²⁴ ECTS User’s Guide, 2008)

Immediately ECVET has been linked to EQF. According to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, *“ECVET will complement and build on common concepts and principles with the EQF. Indeed, ECVET uses EQF as the reference level for qualifications”*.

ECTS and ECVET are separated in principle but between the EQF level 4 and level 6 there is an overlapping zone that obliges the VET and Higher Education subsystems to establish now a dialogue.

3 The articulation between the two European Qualifications Frameworks and National Qualifications Frameworks

The current stage of implementation of NQFS does not allow for an analysis of what is happening in Europe. The process which is now at work in Member States, the debates gathering national authorities, the higher education and the vocational education and training sector, and stakeholders introduce some key questions on what is our main concern in this project: the continuity and progression between EQF levels 5 and 6.

The EHEA has adopted a definition of National framework of qualifications for higher education. It is a *“single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between higher education qualifications”*²⁵. Their objectives are:

- To make explicit the purposes and aims of qualifications, by their clear description through the articulation of the learning outcomes;
- To delineate points of integration and overlap between different qualifications and qualifications type, thereby positioning qualifications in relation to one another and showing routes (and barriers) for progression;
- To provide a nationally agreed framework that guide and reflects the agreement of stakeholders;
- To provide a context for the review articulation and development of existing qualifications;
- To provide a context for the design of new qualifications.

EQF is now broadly accepted by national authorities as a translation device, even it is still understood by numerous stakeholders as a framework for all European qualifications, keeping alive some confusion in the role and function of an EQF. The discussions at national level show that the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks is not so easy, particularly in countries where authorities have decided to use this elaboration as an opportunity to revise and modernise the current system of education and training, to encourage better articulation between sectors or between institutions, to create conditions for the development of lifelong learning.

²⁵ Bologna working group on qualifications frameworks, « A framework for qualifications of the EHEA”, February 2005, 107p.

The European Commission and the EHEA initiatives recognise that the establishment of NQFs is necessary. But one of the main areas of discussion in Member States is the articulation between the vocational education and training sector and the higher education sector. Most of countries, under the pressure of EHEA and HEIs have decided to insert in their National Qualifications Framework the Bologna structure for higher education without revision, the three highest levels of their initial proposal being reserved for Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees and Doctorates. So, the debates on the structure of the NQF have been limited in these countries on how to classify "other qualifications".

From then on, three series of problems appear.

First, the positioning of the "Bologna short cycle" in HE or of the post secondary vocational qualifications in the grid of levels as comparable to the first HE cycle leading to a Bachelor. As stated in the document introducing the Workshop 5 in the implementing the EQF Conference in Brussels in June 2008, *"Tertiary Short Cycle education constitutes a very varied and heterogeneous group of programmes and studies. In some countries a part of those programmes are recognised as higher education, in other countries none of TSC education is recognised as higher education. In effect, the same type of education leading to the same professional qualifications can be recognized as higher education within one country, but in another country placed in the sector of postsecondary education without connections to higher education. TSC education can be found at university as well as non-university level and even in secondary schools. This situation creates major problems for both the national and international comparability of programmes as well as for the mobility of students and teachers"*.

Second, the organisation of continuity and progression in HE. The survey carried out by EURASHE in 2003 shows that in some countries continuity is limited by regulations but in most cases it is limited by practices, by institutional resistance, by lack of coordination between ministries, by employers' modes of recruitment, etc. The document mentioned above quotes the Mike Coles' typology of NQFs from the point of view of continuity and progression. Mike Coles identifies four types of frameworks:

- The implicit frameworks, in countries where there is not yet an explicit framework but where users know more or less how the system of qualifications is working;
- The sector frameworks in countries where co-exist without explicit links frameworks covering different education and/or training sectors;
- The bridging frameworks in countries where formal links exist between different education and/or training sectors;
- The integrating frameworks in countries (in fact, one country –Ireland-) where no separate frameworks exist and where all institutions use the same set of descriptors.

Third, one of the key factors of progress or success in this process lies in the existence or not of actors or institutions responsible for the articulation between sectors or for establishing bridges between institutions and qualifications. Some countries (France, Scotland, Ireland, Finland...) have established institutions responsible for the management of the NQF. Identifying articulations and/or the lack of articulation has been the purpose of the EQF Pro Project, and reaching conclusions from the data gathered from the countries involved.

THE LESSONS LEARNT FROM CASE STUDIES

Our objective in this final report is not to make a systematic transversal analysis of the 29 case studies collected. **Our purpose here is to try to identify what are the key contextual and structural issues emerging from the case studies gathered in the ten countries involved in the project that are linked to our analysis of the context.**

Six key issues have been identified:

- The impact of the Bologna process
- The pressure of labour market, professional bodies and employers
- The notions of continuity and progression
- The lifelong learning perspective
- The impact of Bologna tools: learning outcomes and credit systems
- The perspective of larger implementation of validation of non formal and informal procedures

1 The structuring role of university degrees - the BMD (bachelors, masters and doctorates)

The adoption of the BMD structure by Member States and by HEIs has obliged them to question:

- The organisation of their Higher Education model making possible a comparison between countries and opening the road towards a convergence of degree structures;
- The respective responsibility of the different institutions operating on post secondary field.

The introduction of a two-tiered degree structure versus integrated systems inevitably opens up transition points:

- Transition points between higher education institutions, especially between universities and polytechnics in countries where exist binary systems, between higher education institutions and post secondary educational institutions;
- Transition points with the labour market for students meeting some difficulties or willing to stop and possibly to come back later according to the opportunities offered by lifelong learning provisions.

These transition points are still rather theoretical, progression between the first and second cycle being possible mainly in the same field of study and in the same type of institution, institutions adopting a protectionist attitude adapting the admission (selection?) criteria to populations with the backgrounds they are looking for.

However, we are now at a transition point, even if a convergence regarding the two first cycles is progressively gaining space. Some countries have adopted the structure promoted by the Bologna process, 180+120 credits (3+2 academic years), some others have adopted a structure based on 240+60, 90 or 120 credits (4+1 or 2 years), but some are maintaining conjointly different models.

In addition, clearly the Bologna process has not encompassed the post secondary vocational education programmes in most countries involved in this process and linked these programmes to the Bologna structure, and more specifically to the Bachelor's degree level. Nevertheless some are thinking that it is now necessary to develop bridges between the Bachelor's degree level and qualifications awarded by post secondary vocational institutions.

Regarding the Bologna structure, the EQF Pro partner countries have adopted different positions.

1.1 Higher education institutions and the Bologna process

Five countries engaged in the EQFPro project have adopted a structure based on 180 ECTS for the first cycle: Belgium (both Flemish and French communities), France, Germany (even if ECTS are still at a low level of implementation), Portugal and UK.

Three countries have adopted a structure based on between 180 ECTS (three years) and 240 ECTS (four years): Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

Two countries are explicitly over 180 ECTS: Lithuania and Russian Federation.

The situation regarding the second cycle is more diversified.

Four countries have adopted 120 ECTS for Master's degrees: the Flemish community in Belgium, France, Germany and Russian Federation.

The other countries open different possibilities more or less linked to the duration of the first cycle:

- The French community of Belgium they are two options: 60 or 120 ECTS;
- Lithuania, between 90 and 120 ECTS;
- Poland, between 120 and 150 ECTS;
- Portugal, between 90 and 120 ECTS;
- Romania, in principle 120 ECTS but in some cases 90 or even 60;
- Slovenia, between 60 and 120 credits;
- In UK 60, 90 or in some cases 120 ECTS.

In addition in three countries integrated study programmes still exist: Lithuania, Poland and Russian Federation.

More precisely:

In **Belgium (French community)** the Bologna process leads to the adoption of the same model for Universities and “Hautes Ecoles” (vocational oriented HEIs). The terminology has been redefined referring only to Bachelor’s and Master’s degree. In the **Flemish community** the Bologna structure has now replaced the ancient structure in the first and second cycle. Flanders presents a binary system with universities and “hogescholen”. Some hogescholen have established partnerships with universities and are proceeding under the umbrella of a university through “Associations”. Universities award academic Bachelor’s degrees (180 credits and three years study programmes), Master’s degrees (60 credits and one year study programmes) and Advanced Master’s degrees (60 credits and one year study programmes). Hogescholen involved in Associations are allowed to award master’s degrees and Advanced Master’s degrees. Hogescholen award Professional Bachelor’s degrees (180 credits and three years study programmes) and Advanced Bachelor’s degrees (60 credits and one year study programmes).

In **France**, the Bologna process leads to the adoption of a unique structure for all HEIs, including the “Grandes Ecoles” (Schools of Engineering or Business Schools) which offer two-tiered or integrated study programmes and post secondary vocational institutions. Bachelor’s degree is based on 180 ECTS and Master’s degree on 120 credits.

Germany is still on the way of the adoption by all Lander of the Bologna structure. Currently 75% of study programmes have adopted the Bachelor/Master structure. Germany presents a binary system with on one side Universities and equivalent higher education institutions such as Technical universities, theological colleges,... and on the other side Fachhochschulen. The Bachelor’s degree provides the same rights as “Diplom” qualifications obtained at a Fachhochschule, the Master’s degree the same rights as “Diplom” and “Magister” qualifications of universities or equivalent higher education institutions.

In **Lithuania**, to obtain the “bakalaureas” (Bachelor’s degree) 210 to 270 credits are necessary, and 90 to 120 to obtain a “magistras” (Master’s degree). In parallel there are also integrated programmes delivering a professional qualification after 270 credits and a Master after 300 to 360 credits. 96% of the study programmes are now organised according to this structure.

In **Poland**, a new law has introduced the BMD structure which offers a double route to Masters’ degree: one divided in two cycles (from 3 years to four according programmes for the first one and from 2 to 2.5 years for the second one) and one integrated one (from 5 to 6 years). Currently, 90% of study programmes are based on the Bologna structure.

Portugal presents a binary higher education system: the university system and the polytechnic system grouping high schools (escolas superiores) and institutes (institutos superiores) considered as technical universities. First cycles leading to Bachelor’s degrees (licenciatura) are mostly equivalent to 180 credits, but may range between 180 and 240 credits (three or four years). The “bacharelato” awarded by polytechnics after three years is not equivalent to a Bachelor’s degree. Second cycle leading to Master’s degrees (mestrado) ranges between 90 and 120 credits (one or two years), exceptionally 60 credits. Passages from polytechnics to universities are possible at Bachelor level.

Romania introduced the Bologna structure in 2005. The Bachelor's degree is awarded after three or four years with the allocation of 180 to 240 credits, the Master's degree after two years with the allocation of 120 credits. In special cases, Master's degrees can be equivalent to 90 or even 60 credits.

In **Russian Federation**, the system is based on two pathways. The first one follows the Bologna structure that Russia has decided to adopt with a no less than four years Bachelor's degree ("Bakalavr") preceded by an intermediate diploma after two years and followed by a Master's degree ("Magistr") after no less than two years. In parallel, higher education institutions continue to offer "Specialist diploma" awarded after a no less than 5 years programme. Currently 92% of students graduated at this level receive a "Specialist diploma".

Slovenia has adopted in 2004 the Bologna structure. The Bachelor's degree is awarded after three or four years and is equivalent to 180 to 240 credits, the Master's degree after one or two years and is equivalent to 60 to 120 credits.

In **UK**, the higher education system is very open institutionally speaking and provided by a large diversity of institutions. A Bachelor's degree is awarded after a three or four years learning process. Four year degrees are becoming more popular and are roughly equivalent to a three year degree plus a one year master's degree or a three years plus one year in industry. Bachelor's degrees with honours are equivalent to 180 ECTS credits. Integrated Master's degrees are equivalent to 60 credits, but "independent" Master's degrees are equivalent to 90 to 120 credits.

1.2 Post secondary non university institutions and Bologna process

The situation regarding the introduction of the post secondary vocational institutions in the Bologna structure is problematic in several countries, even if the EHEA proposed to give space to short cycle study programmes. In the partner countries we have identified three different situations:

- Post secondary vocational institutions are involved in the process and articulations are defined and clearly announced to students and learners;
- They are not really involved but articulations are theoretically possible, often not well established;
- They are ignored.

In the first group we find: Belgium, France, Germany, Lithuania and UK:

- In **Belgium (French Community)**, the non university institutions operating at higher level are specific institutions: the so called "établissements d'enseignement de promotion sociale" providing to adults and to young over 16 lifelong learning programmes leading to official qualifications that may be positioned in the BM structure. On the other hand, the Walloon Institute for training in SMEs (IFAPME), another institution offering study programmes at higher education level is obliged to find an agreement with the Institutes of adult education to award qualifications at higher level. To have access to "Hautes Ecoles" or Universities students having

obtained a qualification in an Institute of social promotion must attend a specific complementary programme (1 year for Hautes Ecoles and 2 years for Universities). In **Belgium (Flemish Community)**, Professional Bachelor's degrees may give access to some Master's programmes after successful completion of a bridging programme. The study programme will be fixed after an interview taking into consideration individual skills, working experience, qualifications and competences.

- In **France**, post secondary educational institutions offering higher education qualifications are distributed in five categories:
 - Instituts de Technologie: these institutes are part of universities and provide a two years degree, the "Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie" (DUT). This degree is considered as a short cycle degree. The study programme can be part of a Bachelor programme.
 - Lycées professionnels: these institutions which are part of secondary sector offer two years post secondary degrees, the "Brevets de Technicien Supérieur" (BTS). Graduates can be authorised to continue in a Bachelor programme.

These two institutions have also developed during the last years narrow partnerships with universities to propose to students professional Bachelor's degrees.

- Schools and institutions preparing to some medical, paramedical and social professions and offering three years study programmes. Discussions between ministries under the responsibility of the Ministry in charge of higher education and research are on the way to situate the degrees awarded by these ministries in the BMD structure.
- Private and public institutions providing qualifications that are accredited by the Commission Nationale de la Certification Professionnelle (CNCP) at the level 3 of the current National Qualifications Framework, which corresponds to EQF level 5
- Qualifications awarded by professional bodies "Certificats de Qualification Professionnelle", (CQP).

Learning gained in these two types of qualifications can be recognised by universities as part of their study programmes on the basis of common agreements or on the basis of individual assessment.

- In **Germany**, two types of non-university institutions are part of the tertiary sector:
 - "Berufsakademien" (professional academies) combining academic approaches with practical professional training (dual system), leading after three years to a Bachelor's degree equivalent to degrees obtained in higher education institutions and thus provides access to Master's study programmes
 - and "Fachschulen" (continuing vocational education institutions) leaning formal training on subsequent employment and leading after two years to a state-recognised professional qualification.

Since 2002, higher education institutions can credit knowledge and skills acquired outside the higher education sector. This can be applied to up to 50% of a study programme.

- In **Lithuania**, non university institutions award “profesinis bakalaureas” (professional bachelor’s degree) after 180-240 credits. To have access to a Master programme, students having obtained this degree must follow an additional course awarding no more than 120 credits. Permeability is possible between these programmes and university bachelor programmes or integrated programmes leading to a master on the basis of course by course evaluation.
- In **UK**, there is a large diversity of non university higher education institutions providing degree courses and postgraduate qualifications. They are validated in general by external bodies such as local universities or the Open University. Some higher education is also provided by further education institutions which play a very important role. Post secondary technical education is provided by technical colleges, colleges of further and higher education and accredited independent colleges which offer a large range of courses leading to a vocational qualification. The Business and Technology Education council (BTEC) accredits programmes (provided by Further Education Colleges) leading to diplomas at three levels: BTEC First diploma (after one year), the BTEC National Diploma (after two or three years) and the Higher National Diploma (after three years). However, despite (or thanks to) this diversity and scattering, with a well established National Qualifications Framework which positions each qualification regardless of the providers, with a tradition of awarding credits and of credit transfer, with a long standing experience in assessment of prior learning (APL) or prior experiential learning (APEL), UK makes possible individual pathways irrespective of the institutions or qualifications.

In the second group we find: Portugal, Russian Federation and Slovenia

- In **Portugal**, some higher education qualifications which do not cover the full extent of achievement for the first cycle are accessible to students having undertaken this cycle. They are referred as higher education short cycle diplomas. Higher education institutions can also provide qualifications linked to Technological Specialisation Courses (Curso de Especialização Tecnológica, CETs). The main goal of these programmes is to prepare students for employment and also to provide preparation for and access to the first cycle. In this case they receive credits to a first cycle programme. In addition, a decree on March 2006 increased the flexibility of access to higher education for candidates older than 23 not having the standard requirements for access to higher education. Higher education institutions are now allowed to organise access procedures for these students and allocate credits on the basis of formal, non formal and informal learning.
- In **Russian Federation**, two types of non university institutions are part of Higher Education: Tekhnicums offering 2 to 3 years programmes and Colleges providing 3.5 to 4 years programmes. Colleges have appeared after 1989, they are even independent institutions, even part of a University, Academy or Institute. As, historically, higher education institutions had to train workers in narrow fields in specific institutions, there was no space for individual learning pathways. So, even now things are theoretically more open, the transition process to a multilevel system is very slow and not yet completely mastered by institutions and students and their families. The access to these institutions is based on an examination for entrance. In

theory it is possible to move from one sector to another, but access processes are placed under the responsibility of institutions, and there is no statistics about the volume of movements between institutions.

- **Slovenia** opened in 1996 the first vocational colleges. The programmes offered by these colleges lasts two years and deliver a vocational diploma. It is possible in principle for a student graduated with the vocational diploma to have access to the second year of professionally oriented programmes in higher education according to the regulations of the institutions providing this kind of programmes and according partnerships between colleges and universities. Qualifications are also offered at this level by other institutions such as Chambers of Commerce, professional bodies or other ministries, but there is no well established links between these institutions and universities.

In the third group we find: Poland and Romania

- **In Poland**, the post secondary vocational institutions are completely out of the Bologna process and provide degrees which are not recognised by higher education institutions. Possibilities for transferring and accumulating achievements seem to be limited to higher education institutions and students having acquired a degree in these vocational institutions have to re-start from the beginning in higher education institutions.
- **Romania** introduced in 1998 of a short cycle programme provided by university colleges. The main objective was to face the lack of technicians. The university colleges offer two or three years programmes leading to a vocational diploma (“diploma de absolvire”) and providing professional specialisation, but this diploma allow graduates to have access to university programmes with conditions. In parallel they are “Scoala Postliceala” offering from one to three years programmes at the initiative of the Ministry of Education or at the request of companies. They award “certificats de absolvire”. There is not link with higher education institutions. These programmes are not considered; although they are post secondary programmes, as higher education provision.

1.3 The respective responsibility of ministries and higher education institutions

The theoretical approach of BMD developed at national level does not find concrete expression everywhere at institutional level. The decisions about transition and permeability between institutions, especially non university institutions, and between study programmes, due to the increased autonomy given to higher education institutions, are in most countries, in different ways, of the responsibility of each institution.

According to case studies, we may identify three levels of re-partition of responsibilities between ministries and higher education institutions regarding admissions and transition between post secondary institutions and higher education institutions:

- Countries with strong state regulations, with definition of the rules, control and arbitration by the ministries;
- Countries with basic regulation stated by ministries and call for transparency in the processes of decision and publication of information;
- Countries with basic regulation and total autonomy given to institutions about modalities and criteria.

It is sometimes possible to find the same uncertainty and diversity inside higher education institutions, departments, faculties, services developing their own procedures and criteria.

The most frequent procedures that are mentioned by our partners are the following ones:

- Partnerships: for some institutions it is the best way to organise transition between institutions, especially between post secondary vocational institutions and universities or “polytechnics”. Partnerships are way to select the relevant institutions and to impose criteria;
- Definition of admission procedures and of entry requirements: they are based on a combination of one or several of the following methods:
 - Are the subject qualifications obtained in line with the study programme?
 - Grade averages;
 - Aptitude tests;
 - Analysis of work experience;
 - Interview or viva;
 - Entrance exam.
- Additional activity of learning such as preparatory year (s), bridging courses.

However, the debates that this process introduces in all countries oblige them to reflect on their respective structures and on the relationships between types of institutions, programmes and qualifications. The questionnaire that guides the progress reports that the 46 countries having joined the Bologna process have to produce every two years to the BFUG (Bologna Follow Up Group) is interesting from this point of view, because it obliges all countries to update the level of implementation of the BMD structure and to inform about the respect of the objectives. The problem is that this questionnaire is addressed to ministries and not to institutions. It is not often evident that the answers of ministries reflect the real situation in a country, nor do they reflect the diversity of institutional answers.

1.4 Finally, the Bologna process: a decisive role but national systems and provisions are still far away from the objectives

At this stage, the results obtained by the Bologna process appear concretely in as “technical”. But, as described above, the Bologna process has also a “pedagogical” dimension tempting to promote flexibility in study programmes, to open the system, tempting to introduce the notion of individual learning pathways based on a personal and/or professional project and taking into account non formal and informal learning, and tempting to generalise the notion of learning outcomes. The ESU’s report “Bologna with the students eyes 2009” states “that there is little evidence of the introduction of real curricula adaptation and teaching and assessment methods”. Our analysis of case studies confirms

that we are still far away in most countries from these results even we can register some progress.

For the moment, the pedagogical dimension of the Bologna process is focused on the organisation of study programmes as part of the strategic positioning of the institution (in general linked to competition with other institutions at national or international level, or having an eye on international rankings, in particular on Shanghai ranking) and not on the development of students' pathways. The institutions insist on duration (number of contact hours), content, disciplines, quality of academics more than on objectives and learning outcomes. In addition, making possible and organising learning pathways for students is only considered from the point of view of the institution and not taking into consideration the learners' constraints, needs and demand. Articulation with pathways developed by learners in other institutions is in most of cases not taken into account for access. Flexible pathways mixing units or modules or using credits gathered in different institutions or taking into account non formal and informal learning are not at the heart of the higher education institutions strategies.

The Bologna process has launched a movement, but the instalment of the BMD structure has so far led to detached reorganisations of various curricula. In countries where the binary system is well established this leads to the creation of professional master's degrees after bachelor's degrees in "Polytechnics" in parallel with Bachelor's and Master's degrees in traditional higher education institutions. So, two curricula leading to Masters co-exist, one academic, based on fundamental knowledge and understanding and a second one linked to professional activities. To complicate the landscape and perhaps increase the confusion, numerous universities are now developing professional degrees at Bachelor or Master level in competition with "Polytechnics". In countries proposing integrated programmes, two systems remain in parallel, integrated programmes being developed outside the Bologna structure. And finally, as Bachelor's and Master's degrees are identified as "generic" degree level, there is little effect on the degree awarded at the end of the integrated programmes which keep their title and organisation and have only to be presented in reference to this new structure. So the permeability between subsystems remains limited and there is a weak volume of movements of students between subsystems.

However, the BMD structure establishes progressively a general positioning of all the qualifications awarded at higher education level, identifies potential transition points between curricula and institutions and encourages comparability. What is essential is to start a movement. But changes in attitudes and practices will be certainly slow. In countries where the binary system is not strict we can observe some attempts to establish continuity in learning pathways. But it is not organised. It depends of good relations existing between institutions, of the quality of the study programmes offered by these vocational higher education institutions, of the quality of teachers (peer recognition), etc. In general, continuity is based on agreements between institutions and sometimes limited to few programmes.

The major resistance for mobility and progression is coming from traditional higher education institutions against post secondary institutions. Sometimes they are completely ignored. Universities do not know what they are doing, what study programmes they offer. And they are not always ready to have contact with them.

2 Higher education institutions and employers

The project focuses on two sectors calling for high level qualification, Banking and IT. These sectors have in general a proactive approach regarding qualifications. Higher education institutions have developed during these last years numerous study programmes with explicit professional orientations to meet the needs of these two sectors. These two sectors need more and more high level competences and currently the basic competences required are slightly moving from EQF level 5 to level 6. Thus, it is particularly interesting to explore the relationships developed by higher education institutions with employers and professional bodies.

According to case studies, we can identify three main types of relationships.

In some countries, the employers are playing an important role (France, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, and Slovenia). They are participating in the conception of study programmes, having the opportunity to express their needs. They are also participating in the accreditation process being members of national Commissions or bodies responsible for the official recognition of study programmes. Representatives of companies or organisations contribute in study programmes and participate in the assessment process. Generally study programmes imply internship and production of “thesis” dealing with companies’ preoccupations.

In some other countries, higher education institutions have contacts with companies and professional bodies but they consult them only to gather their advices, suggestions, and propositions on study programmes (UK, Belgium). Clearly they want to establish a barrier between the two worlds and are afraid of a too important investment of companies on higher education issues. Staffs from companies are likely to contribute in teaching but they are considered as “guest lecturers”. And assessment remains entirely of the responsibility of academics.

In a third group of countries this “culture” of relationships with companies and professional bodies is not well established (Poland, Romania, Russian Federation). The attitude from higher education institutions is going from ignorance to mistrust or resistance. These attitudes correspond in general to an identical attitude in companies which ignore universities or do not believe that they are able to provide a useful answer to their needs. They are not interested in formal contracts or collaboration. There is no willingness from them to contribute in reflection, conception and development of study programmes.

However, some dimensions of relationships with companies and professional bodies are more or less present or in development in all partner countries:

- Internship
- Scholarship
- Apprenticeship
- Contribution in equipment (principally in IT)
- Sponsorship or financing.

3 Pathways for continuity and progression

Continuity and progression are at the heart of the Bologna Reform. The London Communiqué underlined that “efforts should concentrate in future on removing barriers to access and progression between cycles”. These notions constitute also the foundations of the lifelong learning perspective. Lifelong learning is not possible if no solutions exist to come back to an educational institutions after some time spent at work or at home or in non profit activities and if it is not accepted that people can re-start from where they have left or beyond on the basis of what they have learnt non formally or informally.

However, the last 2009 report from ESU, “Bologna with student eyes” notices that *“progression between cycles remains hindered, especially when a student wants to change its learning paths. Institutions remain protecting the transition of students between cycles within the institutions and more obstacles are created, by tightening the selection procedures and introducing tuition fees in the different levels and cycles”*.

Regarding these perspective, the EQFPro case studies provide two types of answer.

First, continuity and progression are not necessarily welcomed and encouraged either by educational institutions or by employers.

Non-university vocational institutions, educational institutions which are part of professional bodies consider that they offer to students learning pathways leading to a “final” qualification offering access to the labour market. They do not want to be seen as intermediate providers which have to encourage access to another institution. Sometimes this attitude is provoked by the competition between institutions. If you recognise explicitly that you are only one element in a general process and that your students are likely to continue in another institution after having completed the study programme that you offer, you are afraid that perhaps they will be tempted to go directly to this institution if this one is offering an equivalent programme.

The reluctance coming from companies is based on their fear of not finding the professionals that they need at different levels if students are systematically encouraged to continue and to try to get the highest qualifications and if the development of smooth learning pathways is promoted. They aim to link continuity and progression to lifelong learning and not to initial education. But, students’ organisations as well as unions regret that in reality there are few chances in a lot of countries for people engaged in working life to have the opportunity to come back to higher education and to carry on with their learning pathways. Currently, even if it is something that everybody considers as necessary, too many barriers still exist: cost of study, necessity to find money to ensure a salary during this period, selection, administrative and pedagogical obstacles at institutional level, non recognition of experiential learning,...This send us to the need for a general policy in a country offering concrete opportunities to employees or unemployed people.

Second, when continuity and progression exist or are possible, the opportunities and solutions offered are very different from one country to another and even in the same institution. We have identified six scenarios.

First scenario, little autonomy is awarded to higher education institutions. The initiative of higher education institutions are controlled and regulated by law or decrees

Second scenario, continuity and progression are automatic. Credits, numbers of semesters are considered as equivalent. This occurs principally within an institution. This is particularly underlined by ESU which is deeply concerned with this. Proximity makes confidence possible. We observed in our case studies that the confidence of higher education institutions in other educational institutions was decreasing according to the type of institutions. This confidence was high regarding similar institutions, more suspicious regarding educational institutions placed under the responsibility of other ministries than the ministry responsible for higher education. And there was definitely a lack of confidence regarding other institutions, especially the private ones or those placed under the responsibility of professional bodies.

Third scenario, continuity and progression are automatic but limited by quotas. A percentage of students are authorised each year to have access for instance to a Bachelor's degree after a successful learning pathway in a non university vocational institution.

Fourth scenario, continuity and progression are not automatic. To have access to a higher level study programme, students:

- are subject to a selection process based on access requirements. This selection process can take different forms: exam, interview, dossier, etc;
- or have to attend a "bridging" programme which varies in our case studies between one semester to one or two years.

Fifth scenario, continuity and progression are not organised. In the best cases transition points exist between subsystems, but mobility between institutions remains rather theoretical, we observe this in particular in binary systems. In the other cases continuity and progression are not possible. If students want to continue they have to re-start study programmes aimed at from the beginning, what they have learnt outside the institution where they want to enrol is not taken into account.

Sixth scenario, continuity and progression are linked to agreements signed between institutions, for instance a non university vocational institution and a university.

4 The lifelong learning perspective

Lifelong learning is commonly conceived or presented as equivalent to continuing education or to adult education. This is a short vision approach. Lifelong learning is a global construction implying all the ages of individual life and is now recognised as a necessity for all if Europe wants to become "a knowledge based society". This obliges authorities and actors to think our educational system not as a sequential one, based on initial education and followed by continuing education periods but as an integrated one building up in continuity a learning process contributing to individual personal and professional pathways. An individual acquires initial capacities which are reinforced, developed, reconfigured through regular returns between work or professional activity and learning sessions. Each new access to higher education constitutes a phase of formalisation, of reconfiguration, of

reorientation based on “external” learning. This obliges educational institutions, and especially higher education institutions to change their organisational and pedagogical model.

In this perspective, continuity in accumulation of credits and progression through levels of qualifications are essential. This means that individual lifelong learning pathways cannot be linked to a single type of institutions, to a single type of provisions, only to formal learning.

Although the case studies do not provide detailed information on this perspective, it is possible to identify four levels of preoccupation and implementation.

A first category of higher education institutions, few in reality, offers real lifelong learning opportunities. These institutions provide concrete opportunities for adults to come back after some years spent at work or in other activity and to continue their learning pathway in order to get a degree or a higher qualification. In some cases this is linked with a professional pathway, companies encouraging their employees to enter in this process in order to address their new needs in terms of competence and level of expertise. Sometimes, these study programmes leading to qualifications are built in partnership.

In a second category of institutions what is called “lifelong learning provisions” is more or less a synonym for continuing education. The study programmes proposed to adults are not really involved in the higher education institution mainstream. They are provided by continuing education services or units offering specific study programmes, organised separately (evening courses, open and distance learning, etc.) and awarding specific qualifications.

In a third category of institutions, lifelong learning is possible in theory. In principle there is no obstacle, but no strong initiatives are taken to encourage access and participation of “lifelong learners”.

In the last category nothing is happening. It is not possible for people having left to come back later and there is no clear intention to develop this kind of offer.

In countries offering real opportunities for lifelong learning, we can observe a difference between those providing an institutional answer based on guidance and counselling and flexibility in study programmes, helping candidates to build up their lifelong learning pathways and those leaving the responsibility of continuity and progression with individuals.

These trends are confirmed by the weak developments in validation of non formal and informal learning. In countries where some efforts are produced to build continuity and progression, we observe some attention paid for recognition of formal learning. But we have little evidence in our case studies of validation of non formal and informal learning. Belgium, France and UK have now well established national arrangements both for access and validation of part of study programmes (or even for France for awarding full degrees). In some cases, as in Germany, learning gained at work can be recognised to shorten the individual learning pathway. But in most countries validation is not envisaged by higher education institutions. This is still too far away from their “culture” of education and training.

5 The impact of Bologna tools (ECTS and learning outcomes) and of Validation of non formal and informal learning

Credit systems

The importance of establishing a credit system to promote the most widespread student mobility has been introduced by the Bologna Declaration. Later, in their Communiqués, the ministers responsible for higher education confirmed that credit systems were necessary for transfer and accumulation. A credit system is a way of describing study programmes by attaching credits to its components. And ECTS has been defined as “a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, objectives preferably defined in terms of learning outcomes and contact hours”. This makes study programmes easy to read and to compare between institutions, subsystems and countries for all students.

A large majority of case studies announces that study programmes are based on credits. But the definition of credits is variable from one country to another, from one institution to another. Most of credits are defined according to the BFUG recommendations. But Lithuania and UK have their own definition of credits, their system being in place before the launch of the Bologna process. But they have established a translation device between national systems and ECTS. In other countries the credit system is based on national regulations allowing some flexibility for institutions to define the number of credits allocated to each component of a study programme. This means that in some countries credits are not calculated on the students’ workload as recommended by the BFUG but on the prestige of professors (France, Poland), on the volume of contact hours (Poland, Romania) or on the “strategic” dimension, the importance of the content or of the field (near all partner countries).

It is worth noting that all educational institutions offering qualifications at higher level, especially private institutions or organisations linked to professional bodies are providing credits to their students. This practice is rather linked to public institutions.

This means that credits are not yet a currency for accumulation and transfer that could be used in an appropriate way and without restrictions to ensure smooth transition between institutions, between sub-systems and between countries. As states the students unions, “while ECTS should allow flexibility in the way the education paths are built, the type of implementation observed sometimes undermines that possibility, especially at the institutional level”. However the work on credits systems is very useful because it gives opportunities to institutions at different levels and with different status to enter into dialogue to find a common basis for transfer.

Finally, some countries and experts are expecting potential conflicts in the next years regarding transfer and accumulation linked to the development of ECVET (European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training). The promoters of ECVET would like to extend the use of ECVET to all vocational qualifications leading to EQF level 5 by 2012. A creeping

competition appears now concerning higher education short cycles which are not placed under the responsibility of higher education institutions. This is typically the case in France, where the minister responsible for higher education decided that all State post secondary qualifications will be described through ECTS. But this decision is not necessarily well accepted by other ministers, especially the minister of education and the minister responsible for vocational education and training.

Learning outcomes

The policy papers published during the last ten years give year after year more importance to learning outcomes. The objective is to establish with learning outcomes a new language supporting the different activities covering the life cycle of learning, from curriculum development to teaching, learning, assessment and recognition. According to the definition now largely used by actors, learning outcomes describe “what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning”. So, learning outcomes:

- Make the objectives of a study programme more legible and understandable by learners and employers;
- Define credits;
- Are the basis for the assessment procedure, contributing to the definition of assessment criteria;
- Allow to take into account what has been learnt in different contexts, especially non formal and informal learning.

The adoption of learning outcomes indicates that educational institutions are moving from an approach based on inputs towards an approach based on outputs, what a learner is able to demonstrate at the end of a learning process.

According to the data collected by our case studies, learning outcomes would be probably the next step in the production and the management of study programmes and qualifications. It is possible to distribute our ten countries among three groups.

In the first group, higher education institutions announce that they are using learning outcomes (Slovenia and UK).

In the second group, higher education institutions announce that it is an institutional objective and that they are working on it (Belgium, France, Germany, and Romania). During the last years, they have tried to define more precisely the skills and competences that were aimed at by their study programmes. Different circumstances have obliged them to start this process. In France, the decision to establish a national list of all qualifications described on an identical format (the RNCP, Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles) has activated internal work in higher education institutions fearing not to be present on this list which appeared progressively as a list guaranteeing the quality of the qualifications. More generally, the element which obliges institutions to go ahead lies in the participation of employers in the elaboration of study programmes.

In the third group, higher education institutions focus more on content and disciplines (Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation), and announce that this is something on what they will work later.

6 The implementation of validation of non formal and informal learning procedures

The development of a lifelong learning perspective, now largely shared by a large range of actors, has increasingly emphasized on the necessity to identify and recognise learning taking place outside educational institutions, at home, at work or elsewhere. The ministers responsible for higher education, for the first time in Bergen in 2005 encouraged the creation of “opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning”. Recently in April in Leuven/Louvain la Neuve, they promoted the development by European universities of lifelong learning strategies, stating that “successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non formal or informal learning paths”.

However, for the time being, the development of validation of non formal and informal learning, except in France and UK where the first arrangement appeared in higher education at the beginning of the eighties is patchy. Nevertheless, the case studies show that validation is seen as part of the future in universities even if it is not yet widely used or used only in specific courses. The establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks should in the future provides support for building together with formal bridges validation based bridges between university learning and learning that takes place outside the university in non formal and informal as well as other formal settings.

CONCLUSION

According to our analysis of case studies, discussions with our external partners and stakeholders in focus groups and during seminars we can distribute the partner countries in four categories regarding the objectives of continuity and progression.

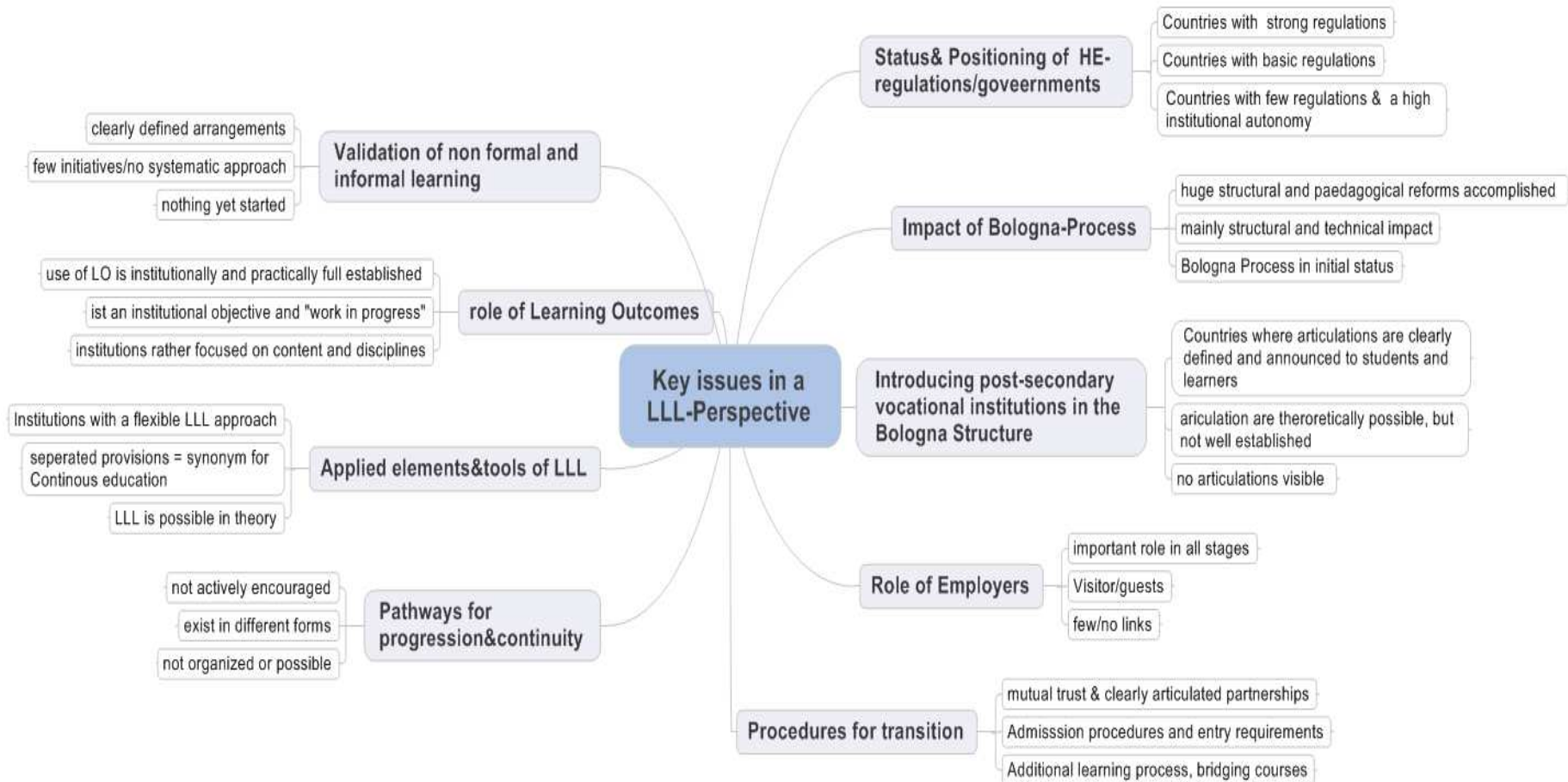
Group 1: Countries (France and UK) where transition and permeability between subsystems are facilitated. Transition is only controlled by selection procedures verifying in general if students have the required level in term of knowledge and understanding.

Group 2: Countries (Belgium, Germany, and Lithuania) where transition is conditionally opened. Transition is possible if students succeed in bridging courses. The duration of this bridging courses is variable according to countries (longer in Belgium – 1 or 3 years - than in other countries – in principle one semester -) and according to disciplines.

Group 3: Countries (Portugal, Russian Federation, and Slovenia) where transition is theoretically possible, but the tubular organisation of higher education and the tradition do not encourage students to move from one subsystem to another.

Group 4: Countries (Poland and Romania) where there is no transition between subsystems. If students want to enrol in universities after a learning path in a post secondary non university institution, they have to re-start from the beginning and to provide the qualification required for access to a university.

The matrix that helps – along with the data collected - to achieve these conclusions is summarised in the following diagram:



THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Although universities are in general reluctant to ensure continuity and progression, we think that there are some drivers of change that will oblige the institutions to evolve and to make some progresses in the future.

Internally there are four drivers of change:

- The generalisation of learning outcomes as a tool helping to the conception of programmes;
- The development of recognition of prior learning for access, for exemptions or for awarding part of a qualification or full qualification;
- The positive impact of students mobility obliging higher education institutions to take into account different “higher education cultures” and to question their own organisation and practices;
- The increasing influence at central level of actors working in continuing education services or departments. The shift from academic programmes to more competences oriented provisions, the development of partnerships with companies, with local or regional authorities, the learner centred approaches promoted by the Bologna process, the diversification of pedagogical approaches,...are familiar to continuing education organisers in universities. The new requirements of the university environment, the new context that they have to face designate them as perfect potential experts to assist the decision makers in universities, to contribute in the internal reflection and to help them for implementation.

Externally we have also identified five drivers of change:

- Demography. The universities face now in a majority of countries a decrease of traditional students. To register more foreigners meets progressively its limits and costs a lot of money. So, more and more universities think about diversification of students and become more ready to attract non traditional students. This obliges them to adapt their programmes to these populations and to their specific needs.
- The changing profile and needs of learners requires to reform the traditional academic processes and to set up arrangements helping to make lifelong learning a reality (validation of non formal and informal learning, flexible learning pathways, guidance and counselling, etc.).
- The employers together with other stakeholders expect from university a real contribution to their needs in terms of competences. This is particularly evident for the two sectors involved in the project. Although in some countries universities and companies are working together, their overall level of cooperation still remains a challenge. In general, this means for universities to be more aware of the employability of their students and to search for ways to reach this objective to establish a more permanent dialogue with companies and sectors.
- There is also an increasing demand from local and regional authorities. They have now understood that universities could contribute effectively to economic and social development of territories.

- The discussions at State level on the elaboration of NQFs provide opportunities contributing to a better dialogue between VET and higher education. Countries having already a NQF are likely to offer to potential users (students and their families, employers) a legible vision of the whole spectrum of qualifications offered by educational institutions, whatever their statutes. To establish a NQF helps to build relationships of better understanding and trust between sectors, subsystems and institutions. Countries working on their NQF recognise that it is a real instrument of change obliging ministries and stakeholders to discuss all together and to come to a consensus. NQFs will be overarching NQFs. They will classify at the same level qualifications awarded by HEIs and by VET institutions. This means that finally the difference will become blurred and that both categories of institutions will learn from each other, identify convergences and divergences, but will no longer coexist on the basis of mutual exclusion.

THE 2020 PERSPECTIVE

The current situation is full of contrasts, but it is worth noting that this issue has come higher on the agenda in numerous European countries during the last period certainly as a result of the implementation of the BMD structure. But the approach developed by the BFUG taking into account only Bachelor's and Master's degrees and Doctorates and degrees awarded in higher education short cycle has not encouraged the inclusion of qualifications awarded by non university higher education institutions in a general reflection on the articulation between all educational institutions working at post secondary level.

The Council of the European Union in its "Conclusion on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training" ("ET 2020") states that the first strategic objective for the next ten years is "Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality". Implementing coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies needs:

- To ensure the development of national qualifications frameworks based on relevant learning outcomes;
- To ensure the establishment of more flexible learning pathways, including better transitions between the various education and training sectors, greater openness towards non formal and informal learning, and increased transparency and recognition of learning outcomes;
- To promote adult learning;
- To increase the quality of guidance systems;
- And to make learning more attractive in general.

This perspective obliges Member States and beyond traditional higher education institutions to think differently their organisation and pedagogical approaches and to work more in partnership taking into account what is done outside their traditional frontiers. This is probably more difficult for some countries because of the history, because of the weight of the academic tradition, because of the different statutes of institutions placed under the responsibility of several ministries or of professional bodies.

But all partners engaged in this project are conscious that such an evolution needs time. And they think that influent actors inside and outside institutions are necessary to help institutions to move on.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations stem from the EQFPro project analysis of the current situation across Europe, particularly with reference to EQF Levels 5 and 6, and the data, observations and conclusions that the project partnership has reached the case studies, focus groups, project meetings and analysis.

Recommendation 1.

In some countries, the regulations, the academic culture, the weight of traditions and habits are obstacles for the implementation of fluid educational pathways between subsystems. However, some initiatives developed by HEIs demonstrate that what it is not possible at national level may be successfully experimented at local level between institutions on a volunteering basis.

So, we could, where it is not forbidden by formal regulations, encourage developing **agreements and partnerships between institutions of different subsystems** to ensure continuity of learners' paths. The case studies identify some options. This could be:

- The development of “bridging qualifications”. As, in some countries, access to a higher level or to universities is commanded by the participation in transition programmes, this could be a way to give an official recognition to these programmes and to position them in a NQF.
- The recognition of credits gained at lower level offering the opportunity to learners to reduce the length of their path in a higher level programme.
- The identification on the basis of regular exchanges or the definition, when designing programmes, of common or equivalent units that would be further more easily recognised

More generally we think that in a lot of universities or HEIs, Continuing Education services or departments have already developed partnerships with other subsystems, with companies, diversifying the entrance criteria to programmes, offering alternative ways for access, recognising prior learning and in particular experiential learning. **We would recommend taking advantage of the best practices and of the expertise developed by these units.**

Recommendation 2

It is necessary to accelerate the implementation of credit systems and the description of programmes in terms of learning outcomes to design progressive learning pathways both for young populations and adults.

For the moment credit systems do not really provide an effective solution. ECTS was established as a tool for mobility allowing transfer and accumulation of credits between HEIs in Europe. It is mainly a way to share students' workload between units in a programme. The transfer is not general but is linked to agreements between institutions or leaders of programmes to facilitate the recognition of credits. It is not yet an accumulation system allowing the construction of individual “coherent” learning pathways irrespective of programmes, forms of learning, institutions, systems and countries. ECVET is still in

development. The process started in 2002, the launching Conference was held in Brussels on 17 & 18 November 2009, and some experiments have been developed or are in progress, some initiatives have been taken in several member states. But, at this stage, it is impossible to use this system as a common tool. And remains the question introduced when ECVET has been launched: the coexistence of the two credit systems. Have the two systems to converge to one system? This is refused by higher education and this option has little chance to be successful due to the difference of conception underpinning the two systems. Have the two systems to cooperate and to establish dialogue in order to facilitate continuity and progression between VET and Higher education? This is encouraged by numerous actors and this is the way explored by the Commission which would like to enhance compatibility and complementarities between systems. The adoption of a learning outcomes perspective is certainly a point of potential convergence of the two systems. Today ECTS insists more than in the past on learning outcomes as a way to describe units and programmes. ECVET stipulates that transfer and accumulation are based on learning outcomes structured in units.

In consequence, our recommendation is to give more emphasis now on the generalisation of the description of learning programmes on the basis of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes must become a common language between programmes, institutions, forms of learning (formal, non formal and informal), subsystems in a country or in different countries, to pull down the current Tower of Babel. Learning outcomes are a powerful tool for dialogue. *“Increasing use of learning outcomes is expected to have profound implications for making systems more learner-centred, organising institutions, curricula and for the roles and training of teachers and trainers”*²⁶. It is a pre-condition to develop successful policies and arrangements for recognition and validation of prior formal learning and experiential learning. On the basis of our observations, we may say that in countries and/or institutions having already developed recognition and validation policies, fluid progression is easier for learners and the obligation to change the traditional approaches of assessment modifies the state of mind and the attitudes of decision makers and teachers in institutions. We think that the recent publication by the Commission of the European Guidelines for the validation of non formal and informal learning would certainly help European countries to integrate this essential dimension for developing progressive and positive individual professional and personal paths in the future.

Recommendation 3

The shift to a learning outcomes approach leads to another shift, a progress towards a learner centred approach in institutions. **This requires building systems likely to facilitate and support personal and professional development through individual learning pathways taking into account what they have learnt in different ways in different settings, their projects, their expectations, their needs.** This supposes:

- To make systems legible and flexible to answer to a diversity of demands and needs;
- To prepare teachers and trainers to adopt other ways of teaching and assessing, and to prepare learners to become lifelong learners which means more independency and of course more responsibility;

²⁶ CEDEFOP, The shift to learning outcomes, conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe, 2008

- To increase the services to diversified learners, to invest in guidance and counselling professional services likely to help lifelong learners to manage their individual learning paths. For the moment these services are more or less well established according countries, and often more dedicated to young populations. In the future we need reinforced and competent services able to attract and support a larger diversity of populations.

Recommendation 4

We strongly recommend using the opportunity offered by the NQF discussions **to question the whole national system from the point of view of continuity and progression in a lifelong learning perspective**. The information that we have collected during this project shows that it is impossible for all countries to follow the same procedures. If the EQF level 6 corresponds to existing qualifications and employments in all countries, this is not the case for EQF level 5. The establishment of a NQF is, as well as the EQF, a stepping stone for continuity and progression. It obliges countries to elaborate an overarching framework integrating and articulating different qualifications frameworks linked to subsystems in order to present a homogeneous system covering more or less all qualifications awarded in a country. It does not mean necessarily to change the structure and the design of each subsystem and of existing qualifications but to make them compatible and to provide an articulated vision to citizens, educational and training institutions and stakeholders.

In some cases this will lead to changes in regulations and statements to avoid dead ends. But in most of cases, the elaboration of a NQF sets up a platform for a dialogue and cooperation between ministries, between ministries and stakeholders, between institutions. The NQFs, in building a general description of all qualifications using the three descriptors (knowledge, skills and competences) irrespective of institutions and subsystems, provide an “independent” way of positioning qualifications on the basis of the level of learning achieved and not on the basis of regulations or reputation. This makes more transparent the respective position of each qualification on the basis of reference points, of broad descriptors using the same general logic at all levels, makes explicit the relationships to each other and opens up progression routes. It is not only to come to an aggregate (as addition in a framework of subsystems framework), or to a compromise (which is certainly a necessary step) but to offer an articulated national qualification system.

Only two countries of the ten in our project already have a Qualifications Framework, the others are at different stages of discussions and implementation, so it is difficult to measure for the moment what will be the impact of the process in reviewing regulations, in encouraging partnerships, in establishing better articulations between subsystems. The CEDEFOP survey published in September 2009²⁷ provides interesting information on the state of play in member states, EEA and candidate countries and underlines the common preoccupation of European countries on articulation issues, in particular in the so-called “grey zone”, the EQF levels 5-6. **It would be useful to regularly update this picture focusing in particular on progress in the improvement in continuity and progression.**

²⁷ CEDEFOP, The development of national qualifications frameworks in Europe, September 2009, 117p.

In some countries, **the creation of independent National Agencies**, working together with ministries and stakeholders, employers and social partners, would help to the elaboration of NQFs, avoiding competition between ministries, mainly the ministry in charge of vocational education and training and the ministry in charge of higher education.

Recommendation 5

We recommend the creation of *Repertoires*, or Registers, describing all qualifications awarded in a country on the same basis, using the same format to avoid confusion in definition of descriptors and to be aware of the coherence between levels, making them more legible to all potential users. The experiments developed in several countries are considered as positive and contributing to a better vision of the “national landscape”, in particular when they are linked to descriptions of job profiles, of professional standards. In addition this process oblige institutions and teachers responsible of programmes to map horizontally and vertically their qualifications that they often consider as “unique and irreplaceable”, in a set of qualifications which are similar or contributing to common well identified learning pathways.

Recommendation 6

The notion of progression is now more widely used at European level by a broader range of decision makers and experts. The September 2009 CEDEFOP together with our observations in 10 countries confirm this trend. Although, each country is responsible for the establishment of its NQF and for referencing it to the EQF, **it is necessary to provide guidelines or examples of good practices. The role of CEDEFOP is here crucial in proposing regularly states of play of progresses at national level.**

Recommendation 7

There is a need for a dynamic approach connected to the future. We are working for the future. Our analysis of the future developments of individual paths shows that these paths will be more and more fragmented with increased obligation to move from one company or organisation to another, to one activity to another, to one region or country to another one. It was clearly stated in the recent document of consultation of the Commission EU 2020. This document underlines the new patterns emerging “where there are several entries in and exits from the labour market during a working life, instead of the traditional sequence (education, work, and retirement), offering more opportunities to people”. This obliges educational institutions and universities in particular to take care of these transition points and to elaborate new provisions lively to offer flexible answers to all people concerned. “Transition between jobs, between training and jobs will have to be managed”. Transition points are becoming the most important moments in the development of personal and professional pathways, “avoiding long term unemployment”, and educational institutions have to take into account what people have learnt from previous activities, assessing and validating this non formal and informal learning and opening new perspectives both on the basis of the results of this learning process and of the personal and professional project of the individuals, the opportunities that are offered to them, the new employments accessible,...In addition this approach must not be seen only from the employability perspective, also from the personal development and citizenship perspective. This is particularly crucial if we want to involve people meeting difficulties for social insertion or persons who are not inserted in the labour market: principally women at home and aged or

retired people. The challenge in our societies is not only to face rapid changes in economy but also in social, community or family life.

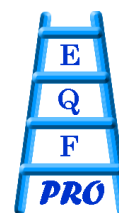
Recommendation 8

We encourage the development of strategies at institutional level based on clear and shared goals, on governance having a vision, allocating properly tasks and responsibilities, organising evaluation and review. Our analysis of case studies demonstrates that the issues regarding progression are dealt at micro level by one or two teachers responsible for programmes, or by groups of teachers, with few contacts with the top management of their university. In most of cases they do their best but without any recommendations or indications on the institutional orientations and perspectives.

Recommendation 9

Finally, **we think that it is necessary to work on a new educational culture**. The lifelong learning perspective is not just a new way of presentation of education and training. Lifelong learning does not result of the addition of local practices dedicated to more diversified populations or offering more flexible learning provisions, lifelong learning is a system which introduces a rupture in the way of thinking, in the institutional culture. This culture is currently more focused on academic approaches than on employability and personal development. The lifelong learning perspective imposes a new organisation based simultaneously on the provision of formal learning pathways (whether or not they lead to qualifications) and on the capture and the formalisation of all forms of learning gained by individuals in different ways and settings.

FOOTSTEPS AND PATHWAYS FOR THE LIFELONG LEARNER THE LEVELS 5 & 6 "GREY ZONE"



ABOUT EQF PRO

Activities

- A brief analysis of the situation in the 10 partners countries
- 29 case studies on qualifications awarded at levels 5 and 6 in two sectors in 10 countries
- 4 workshops in Lille, Barcelona, Versailles and Szczecin
- A consultation Seminar in Lille
- A final Conference in Porto

Products

A number of documents have been published:

- A brief presentation of the situation in each partner country on the basis of a common grid and a transversal analysis of these situations;
- A state of play of the European situation regarding qualifications frameworks : the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EQF-EHEA), the European Qualifications Framework for LLL (EQF-LLL) and National Qualifications Frameworks compatible with both EQF;
- 29 case studies;
- A transversal analysis of the 29 case studies;
- A self-assessment by partners via spider diagrams
- A final report
- An executive summary

All these documents and the full thematic report are available on the website:

<http://www.eucen.org/EQFpro/index.html>

The project was managed by EUCEN, the scientific director was Michel Feutrie, the project director was Oliver Janoschka and the external evaluator was Tom Leney

Partnership

- Université de Liège (BE)
- Universität Oldenburg (DE)
- Université de Versailles (FR)
- Klaipėdos Universitetas (LT)
- West Pomeranian Business School (PL)
- Universidade de Porto (PT)
- Universitatea Aurel Vlaicu din Arad (RO)
- Univerza na Primorskem (SI)
- University of Bradford (UK)
- Chelyabinsk State University (RU)

