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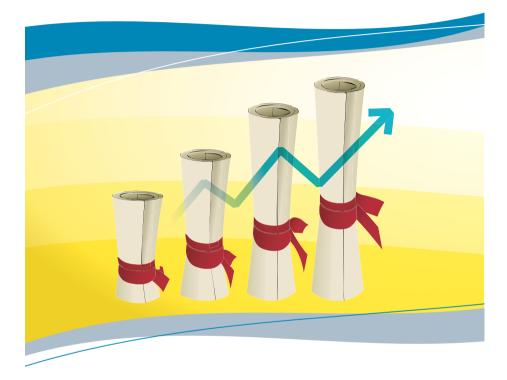Documents for

**FIBAA-Certification of Continuing Education Courses**

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Education and Culture DG

# ECTS Users' Guide

Education
and
Training

# ECTS Users' Guide

Brussels, 6 February 2009

# Contents

# Introduction

This ECTS Users' Guide provides guidelines for implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). It also presents the ECTS key documents. The Guide is offered to assist learners, academic and administrative staff in higher education institutions as well as other interested parties.

The 2009 Users' Guide elaborates on the previous version of 2005. It has been updated to take account of developments in the Bologna Process, the growing importance of lifelong learning, the formulation of qualifications frameworks and the increasing use of learning outcomes. It has been written with the help of experts from stakeholders' associations and ECTS counsellors, and submitted for consultation to stakeholders' associations, Member States' experts and the Bologna Follow-up Group. The European Commission has coordinated the drafting and consultation process and is responsible for the final wording of the Guide.

ECTS[1] is a tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver programmes and award higher education qualifications. The use of ECTS, in conjunction with outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, makes programmes and qualifications more transparent and facilitates the recognition of qualifications. ECTS can be applied to all types of programmes, whatever their mode of delivery (school-based, work-based), the learners' status (full-time, part-time) and to all kinds of learning (formal, non-formal and informal).

In the first section of the Guide, ECTS is placed in the context of the European Higher Education Area, created through the Bologna Process. This section also refers to the role of ECTS in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area[2] (referred to as the Bologna Qualifications Framework in this Guide).

The second section contains the ECTS key features. These constitute a concise overview of ECTS and its main functions, on which there is a broad consensus. The ECTS key features section is also available in a separate brochure.

Section 3 provides a detailed explanation of the key features. Section 4 gives guidance on how ECTS can be implemented in higher education institutions, while section 5 discusses how ECTS complements institutions' quality assurance tools.

The final sections present the ECTS key documents, suggestions for further reading on topics related to ECTS and a glossary of the terms used in this Users' Guide.

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1 ECTS was originally set up in 1989 as a pilot scheme within the framework of the Erasmus programme in order to facilitate the recognition of study periods undertaken abroad by mobile students.

2 Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (2005) A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area; http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

# 1. ECTS and the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process)

ECTS is the credit system for higher education used in the European Higher Education Area, involving all countries[3] engaged in the Bologna Process.[4] ECTS is one of the cornerstones of the Bologna process.[5] Most Bologna countries have adopted ECTS by law for their higher education systems.

Among other objectives, the Bologna Process aims at the *establishment of a system of credits as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility*.[6] ECTS contributes to several other Bologna objectives:

• ECTS credits are a key element of the Bologna Framework for Qualifications,[7] compatible with the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF).[8] According to the Bologna Qualifications Framework, the first and second cycles have their own credit ranges (see section 3.3). Consequently, ECTS credits are used in formulating national qualifications frameworks for higher education, which may contain more detailed national credit arrangements.

• ECTS helps institutions to implement the objective of quality assurance (see section 5). In some countries ECTS is a requirement for accreditation of higher education programmes or qualifications.

• ECTS is also increasingly used by institutions in other continents and thus plays a role in the growing global dimension of the Bologna Process.

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3 In some countries national or institutional systems exist alongside ECTS.

4 The Bologna process currently has 46 signatory countries. For full list see:
http://www.bologna2009benelux.org

5 Website of the Secretariat of the Bologna process Benelux 2009: http://www.bologna2009benelux.org

6 Ibidem

7 For further information see: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf

8 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/rec08_en.pdf), 2008. The three levels of the Bologna Framework and the sublevel for the short cycle correspond to levels five, six, seven and eight of EQF for the higher education sector.

# 2. ECTS key features

## ECTS

ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities.

## ECTS credits

ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks.

Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a full-time year of formal learning (academic year) and the associated learning outcomes. In most cases, student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, whereby one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work.

## Use of ECTS credits

Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or study programmes as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course units, dissertation work, work placements and laboratory work). The number of credits ascribed to each component is based on its weight in terms of the workload students need in order to achieve the learning outcomes in a formal context.

Credits are awarded to individual students (full-time or part-time) after completion of the learning activities required by a formal programme of study or by a single educational component and the successful assessment of the achieved learning outcomes. Credits may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications, as decided by the degree-awarding institution. If students have achieved learning outcomes in other learning contexts or timeframes (formal, non-formal or informal), the associated credits may be awarded after successful assessment, validation or recognition of these learning outcomes.

Credits awarded in one programme may be transferred into another programme, offered by the same or another institution. This transfer can only take place if the degree-awarding institution recognises the credits and the associated learning outcomes. Partner institutions should agree in advance on the recognition of periods of study abroad.

Credit transfer and accumulation are facilitated by the use of the ECTS key documents (Course Catalogue, Student Application Form, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) as well as the Diploma Supplement.

# 3. ECTS key features explained

The ECTS key features give a brief outline of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. This section provides more detailed explanation of concepts and functions related to ECTS. It also shows how these concepts and functions interact with and complement each other and thus enable the core functions of ECTS: accumulation and transfer (dealt with in section 4).

## 3.1. ECTS as a learner-centred credit system

From the key features:
*"ECTS is a learner-centred system"*

ECTS is a learner-centred system because it helps institutions to shift the emphasis in programme design and delivery from traditional teacher-centered approaches to approaches that accommodate for learners' needs and expectations. In traditional teacher-centred approaches, subject requirements, knowledge and the teaching process itself were considered the main elements of educational programmes. Learner-centred learning puts learning at the heart of curriculum design and delivery, and gives learners more choice in content, mode, pace and place of learning.

In such a learner-centred approach, institutions have the role of facilitating and supporting learners in shaping their own learning pathways and helping them to build on their individual learning styles and experiences.

By using learning outcomes and learners' workload in curriculum design and delivery, ECTS helps to place the learner at the centre of the educational process. By allocating credits to educational components it facilitates the creation of flexible learning pathways. Moreover, ECTS, in conjunction with outcome-based qualifications frameworks:

- establishes a closer link between educational programmes and labour-market requirements

through the use of learning outcomes, thus enhancing informed learners' choices

- encourages wider access to and participation in lifelong learning, by making programmes more flexible and facilitating the recognition of prior achievement

- facilitates mobility within a given institution or country, from institution to institution, from country to country, and between different educational sectors and contexts of learning (i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning).

## 3.2. ECTS and learning outcomes

From the key features:
*"Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning."*

Learning outcomes are verifiable statements of what learners who have obtained a particular qualification, or completed a programme or its components, are expected to know, understand and be able to do. As such they emphasise the link between teaching, learning and assessment.

Learning outcomes statements are typically characterised by the use of active verbs expressing knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, etc.[9]

The use of learning outcomes makes the objectives of learning programmes clearer and more easily understood for students, employers and other stakehold-

9 Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (2005) *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, p. 38* http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

ers. They also make it easier to compare qualifications and facilitate the recognition of achievements.

In ECTS, the formulation of learning outcomes is the basis for the estimation of workload and hence for credit allocation. When those responsible for designing educational programmes establish the qualification profile and the expected learning outcomes of the programme and its components, ECTS credits help them to be realistic about the necessary workload and to choose learning, teaching and assessment strategies wisely. Stakeholders, such as learners and employers, may provide useful input to the formulation of learning outcomes.

The successful assessment of learning outcomes is the pre-condition for the award of credits to a learner. Therefore, statements of learning outcomes for programme components should always be accompanied

by clear and appropriate assessment criteria for the award of credits, which make it possible to ascertain whether the learner has acquired the desired knowledge, understanding and competences

Two approaches exist: learning outcomes may be either threshold statements (showing the minimum requirements to obtain a pass), or written as reference points describing the typical (showing the expected level of achievement of successful learners). In any case, statements on learning outcomes must make clear which definition is being used.

Learning outcome-based approaches also enable knowledge, skills and competences gained in contexts other than formal higher education (non-formal or informal learning) to be assessed, to have credits awarded and hence to be recognised for the purpose of awarding a qualification (see section 4.5).

Figure 1 – "Learning outcomes" and "Competences" as defined in European Higher Education contexts:

In Europe a variety of terms relating to "learning outcomes" and "competences" is used with different shades of meaning and in somewhat different frames of reference. In all cases however they are related to what the learner will know, understand and be able to do at the end of a learning experience. Their widespread use is part of the shift in paradigm that places the learner at the centre of the higher education experience. This shift is the foundation of the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process and ECTS.

1. In the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (Bologna Framework) learning outcomes (including competences) are seen as the overall results of learning. The Framework is based on the "Dublin Descriptors", developed by the Joint Quality Initiative. These descriptors consist of generic statements of typical expectations or competence levels of achievement and abilities associated with the Bologna cycles. The word *competence* is used in this case in a broad sense, allowing for gradation of abilities or skills. (http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf)

2. The European Qualification Framework for LLL instead distinguishes knowledge, skills and competence. It uses the following definition: "*competence* means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy". In this case the term competence is understood in a more limited way, as the capacity to transfer knowledge into practice. (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/reco8_en.pdf)

3. Tuning (Educational Structures in Europe) makes a clear distinction between learning outcomes and competences in order to distinguish the different roles of the most relevant players in the learning process: the academic staff and students/learners. For Tuning competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities and attitudes and are distinguished between subject specific and generic ones. Fostering competences is the object of a process of learning and of an educational programme. According to Tuning, learning outcomes express the level of competence attained by the learner. Learning outcomes are formulated by academic staff, preferably on the basis of input from internal and external stakeholders. (http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu or http://www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu)

## 3.3. ECTS, levels and level descriptors

From the key features:
*"Learning outcomes relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks."*

European and national qualification frameworks are based on agreed level descriptors, with learning outcomes and credits related to such levels. The Bologna Framework has agreed cycle descriptors with learning outcomes and credit ranges. The Bologna cycle descriptors are known as the 'Dublin Descriptors'[10]:

*"The Dublin Descriptors offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle. They are not meant to be prescriptive; they do not represent threshold or minimum requirements and they are not exhaustive; similar or equivalent characteristics may be added or substituted. The descriptors seek to identify the nature of the whole qualification."[11]*

(For further information on Dublin Descriptors see the references in the bibliography.)

10 Ibidem, p. 65

11 Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (2005) A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, p. 65 http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

The first two Bologna cycles are associated with the following ECTS credit ranges:[12]

- First cycle qualifications typically include 180-240 ECTS credits.

- Second cycle qualifications typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 ECTS credits at the level of the 2nd cycle.

These credit ranges follow the ECTS key feature stating that 60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a typical full-time academic year[13] of learning within a formal learning programme. This rule applies to all higher education qualifications independent of their level.

National qualifications frameworks may contain levels (or intermediate qualifications) within the three Bologna cycles (e.g. a short cycle within the first cycle). These levels allow institutions to structure a particular qualification and regulate progression through the qualification.

Credits are always described by the level at which they are awarded, based on the level of learning outcomes of the programme or component. Only credits awarded at the appropriate level can be accumulated towards a qualification. The appropriate level is stipulated in the national or institutional progression rules (see also section 4.3).

## 3.4. ECTS credits and workload

From the key features:
*"Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes."*

Prior to estimating the workload associated with a programme or an educational component, the learning outcomes should be defined. These learning outcomes are the basis for choosing suitable learning activities and for a consistent estimation of the workload necessary to complete them.

The estimation of workload must not be based on contact hours only (i.e. hours spent by students on activities guided by teaching staff). It embraces all the learning activities required to achieve the expected learning outcomes, including the time spent on independent work, compulsory work placements, preparation for assessment and the time necessary for the assessment. In other words, a seminar and a lecture may require the same number of contact hours, but one may require significantly greater workload than the other because of differing amounts of independent preparation by students.

The estimation of workload should be regularly refined through monitoring and student feedback.

12 There is no consensus on the usefulness of credits for the third cycle, but technically it is possible to attach credits to any cycle.

13 In most cases, student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, whereby one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work (see also Annex 5).

# 4. Implementing ECTS in higher education institutions

This section provides higher education institutions with some guidelines and illustrations of how to tackle the main steps in implementing ECTS. The objective is to show how ECTS is best used to generate maximum added value for learners.

## 4.1. ECTS credit allocation

From the key features:

*"Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or study programmes as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course components, dissertation work, work placements and laboratory work)."*

Credit allocation is the process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications/programmes or to educational components. ECTS credits are allocated on the basis of the typical workload necessary to achieve the required learning outcomes.

The number of credits allocated to the entire qualification or programme depends on the national or institutional regulations and the respective cycle of the Bologna Framework (see section 3.3).

Based on the ECTS key feature that 60 credits are allocated to the workload of a full-time academic year, 30 ECTS credits are normally allocated to a semester and 20 ECTS credits to a trimester. Qualifications which have formal programmes lasting three full-time academic years are allocated 180 ECTS credits.

Each academic year, semester or trimester is split into educational components. An educational component is understood to be a self-contained and formally structured learning experience (such as a course unit, module, seminar or work placement). Each component should have a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, appropriate assessment criteria, defined workload and specified number of ECTS credits.

### 4.1.1 Credit allocation to educational components

The allocation of credits to single educational components is performed as part of curriculum design with reference to national qualifications frameworks, level descriptors and qualifications descriptors. Generally it is the responsibility of higher education institutions and academic staff, but in some cases may be decided by external bodies.

Prior to allocating credits to individual components, an agreement should be reached on the 'profile' of the specific study programme and the associated learning outcomes. By profile is meant the description of the programme in terms of its main features and its specific aims. It is good practice to define this profile after consultation with relevant stakeholders.[14]

On the basis of the qualification profile, the academic staff design the curriculum by defining the learning outcomes and allocating credits to the programme components. Credit allocation to educational components is based on their weight in terms of the workload needed for students to achieve the learning outcomes in a formal context.

There are several approaches to credit allocation, and it is up to the institutions to decide on which method to use. The alternatives presented below illustrate two different approaches to allocating credits:

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14 Experts in the field, social partners, labour-market representatives, student representatives, etc. See the Tuning approach for examples: http://unideusto.org/tuning/ or http://www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu

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1) The teaching staff define the learning outcomes of each programme component, describe the learning activities and estimate the workload typically needed for a student to complete these activities. Proposals are collected, analysed and synthesised and the estimated workload is expressed in credits.

Using this approach, all the teaching staff are involved in the process of credit allocation. They can put forward their proposals in terms of learning outcomes, and estimate the workload necessary to achieve them. Through discussion and defining of priorities they can come to a final decision on the basis of the credits available (60 for each year). This procedure may result in different numbers of credits being attributed to single components (e.g. 3, 5, 8).

By using this option, institutions allow for maximum freedom in designing each component with regard to the learning outcomes and related workload. On the other hand, components of different sizes may be problematic when it comes to multidisciplinary or joint programmes or mobility.

2) Alternatively, the higher education institution or the faculty may decide from the start to standardise the size of educational components, giving each one the same credit value (e.g. 5) or multiples of it (e.g. 5, 10, 15), and thus predefine the number of credits to be allocated per component. In this case, the course units are often called 'modules'.

Within this predefined structure, the teaching staff define appropriate and feasible learning outcomes and describe the learning activities, on the basis of the standard size of the components. The estimated workload must be consistent with the number of credits allocated to that component.

By standardising the size of components, institutions allow for more flexible, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary pathways among programmes. On the other hand, the definition of learning outcomes within a component is constrained by the pre-defined number of credits that set a priori the workload for each component.

It is recommended that in either case components should not be too small, to avoid fragmentation of a programme. It is also advised not to make components too large, as that may inhibit interdisciplinary studies and restrict the choices available within study programmes. Very large components are problematic for mobile students at all levels – institutional, national or international.

Whatever the method for credit allocation, the main element determining the number of credits is the estimated workload needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes. The number of contact hours alone must not be used as a basis to allocate credits, since contact hours are only one element of students' workload. Proper credit allocation should be part of the internal and external quality assurance for higher education institutions.

### 4.1.2 Estimation of workload in ECTS

In estimating students' workload, institutions must consider the total time needed by students in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The learning activities may vary in different countries, institutions and subject areas, but typically the estimated workload will result from the sum of:

- the contact hours for the educational component (number of contact hours per week x number of weeks)

- the time spent in individual or group work required to complete the educational component successfully (i.e. preparation beforehand and finalising of notes after attendance at a lecture, seminar or laboratory work; collection and selection of relevant material; required revision, study of that material; writing of papers/projects/dissertation; practical work, e.g. in a laboratory)

- the time required to prepare for and undergo the assessment procedure (e.g. exams)

- the time required for obligatory placement(s) (see section 4.1.3).

Other factors to take into consideration for estimating students' workload in the various activities are,

for example: the entry level[15] of students for whom the programme (or its components) is designed; the approach to teaching and learning and the learning environment (e.g. seminars with small groups of students, or lectures with very large numbers of students) and type of facilities available (e.g. language laboratory, multi-media room).

Since workload is an estimation of the average time spent by students to achieve the expected learning outcomes, the actual time spent by an individual student may differ from this estimate. Individual students differ: some progress more quickly, while others progress more slowly.

### 4.1.3 ECTS credits and work placements

If work placements or internships are required to complete the programme (or a component) they are part of students' learning outcomes and workload and necessitate an allocation of credit. In such case, the number of credits allocated to the work placement should be included within the overall number of credits for the particular academic year.

#### Figure 2 – Good practice on learning outcomes and credit allocation for work placements[16]

Regarding the use of learning outcomes and credits for work placements, the following is considered good practice:

- The Learning Agreement regarding the work placement (signed by the institution, the learner and the employer) should specify the learning outcomes to be achieved;

- Work placements should have clear procedures for assessing learning outcomes and awarding credit;

- The roles of higher education institutions, learners and employers in the process of formulating as well as assessing these learning outcomes should be clear;

- The teaching staff in higher education institutions may require training regarding supervision and management of work placements;

- If required for the programme, the work placements should be integrated in the curriculum.

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15 By "entry level" is meant the level of learning outcomes learners are expected to have already achieved when entering the programme.

16 Tuning Dissemination Conference: Student Workload and Learning Outcomes: Key Components for (Re)designing Degree Programmes, Key Questions, Debates and Conclusions of Workshops, (21-22 April 2008, Brussels, Belgium) see: www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com_docman&task=docclick&Itemid=59&bid=92&limitstart=0&limit=5

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As with any other educational component, the teaching staff should define the learning outcomes to be achieved through work placements when designing the curriculum. These learning outcomes should be accompanied by the appropriate assessment methods and criteria. It is important that the assessment methods be compatible with the nature of work placements (e.g. observation and evaluation by a tutor or production of a report by the student).

As with any other educational component, credits for work placements are only awarded when the learning outcomes have been achieved and assessed.

If a work placement is part of organised mobility (e.g. an Erasmus placement), the Learning Agreement for the placement (or Training Agreement, see key documents in section 6) should indicate the number of credits to be awarded if the expected learning outcomes are achieved.

In the case of placement experiences undertaken during a formal learning process but not required by the programme, it is nevertheless advisable to define the learning outcomes and the workload in a Learning Agreement. The learning outcomes achieved through non-compulsory work-placements should then also be documented for example in student's Transcript of Records, the Diploma supplement (see key documents in section 6) or Europass Mobility document. They can also be recognised by an award of corresponding ECTS credits which are in that case additional to the standard number of 60 ECTS credits for the academic year.

### 4.1.4 Monitoring of credit allocation

The credit allocation to a new programme or component should be validated according to national and/or institutional rules. During programme delivery, the credit allocation should be regularly monitored to establish whether the estimated workload is realistic. Both validation and monitoring of credit allocation, like other aspects of a credit system, should be part of institutions' internal quality assurance procedures.

Monitoring can be managed in different ways. Whatever method is used, student and staff feedback should constitute an essential element for checking and revising credit allocation. Data on completion times and the assessment results of programmes and their components are also part of the monitoring of credit allocation.

It is important to inform students and staff about the purpose of the monitoring exercise and how it will be carried out, ensuring accurate answers and a high response rate.

If evaluations reveal a discrepancy between the anticipated workload and the time actually taken by the majority of students to achieve the expected learning outcomes, a revision of the workload, learning outcomes or learning and teaching methods becomes necessary. This revision should not be done during an academic year but should apply to upcoming academic years.

### 4.2. Awarding ECTS credits

Learners are awarded ECTS credits only when appropriate assessment has shown that they have achieved the required learning outcomes for a component of a programme or for the qualification. Credits are awarded by authorised awarding institutions. If the required learning outcomes are achieved in non-formal or informal contexts, the same number of credits as foreseen in the formal programme is awarded following the appropriate assessment. To validate non-formal or informal learning, higher education institutions can put in place different forms of assessment than those used for learners enrolled in the formal programme (see section 4.5). In any case, the assessment methods should be publicly available.

The award of credits certifies that a learner has complied with the requirements of the component. The number of credits awarded to the learner is the same as the number of credits allocated to the component. The full number of credits is always awarded if the student achieves a passing grade; it is never adjusted according to the learner's level of performance. ECTS credits do not express how well the learner performed in satisfying the requirements for the award of credit. The quality of the learner's performance is expressed by the in-

stitutional or national grading system.

Some national or institutional regulations foresee 'condoning'/ compensation procedures.[17] In such cases, the details of that process should be transparent.

Individual learners may be awarded more or fewer than 60 ECTS credits per academic year if they successfully undertake more or fewer educational components than those scheduled in the learning programme.

## 4.3. ECTS credit accumulation and progression

From the key features:
*"Credits may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications, as decided by the degree-awarding institution."*

At European level, the Bologna Qualifications Framework defines the credit ranges that a learner is required to accumulate in order to receive a qualification corresponding to the first and second cycle (see section 3.3). The credit ranges for qualifications within National Qualifications Frameworks are compatible with the Bologna credit ranges, even though the former may be more prescriptive and more detailed.

At national or institutional level, progression rules or programme requirements enable learners to progress within a given cycle in order to obtain a specific qualification. These stipulate the credits, for what learning outcomes, at what level, can be accumulated and how. Progression rules may be expressed in terms of the numbers of credits or credit ranges required at different stages within a programme of study (e.g. a minimum number of credits required to pass from one academic year/ semester to another). They may also be formulated in terms of detailed rules on what components

must and/or can be taken at what stage and of what level (e.g. compulsory courses, optional courses and prerequisites). The rules may be formulated as a combination of the above.

Progression rules also relate to the number of credits to be obtained at different levels within the National Qualifications Framework. Some qualifications frameworks are also credit frameworks, meaning that they define the number of credits per type of qualification (e.g. master). Such credit frameworks set the number of credits to be awarded after the achievement of required learning outcomes. Progression rules define how learners progress within the learning pathway to achieve this number of credits in a progressive manner.

Accumulation of credits is documented in an official institutional Transcript of Record, so that learners can have a record/ proof or confirmation of what they have achieved at each stage of their educational pathway.

## 4.4. Credit transfer in ECTS

From the key features:
*"Credits awarded in one programme may be transferred into another programme, offered by the same or another institution. This transfer can only take place if the degree-awarding institution recognises the credits and the associated learning outcomes. Partner institutions should agree in advance on the recognition of periods of study abroad."*

Successful credit transfer requires academic recognition of credits. Recognition of credits is the process through which an institution certifies that certain learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another institution satisfy certain requirements of one of the programmes they offer. Given the diversity of programmes and higher education institutions, it is unlikely that the credits and learning outcomes of a single educational component in different programmes

17 Condoning is the term used when an examination board exempts a student from reassessment in a failed (or marginally failed) component if the other related components are passed with sufficiently high grades.

will be identical. Therefore, a flexible approach to recognition of credits obtained in another context is recommended. 'Fair recognition' rather than perfect equivalence is to be sought. Such 'fair recognition' should be based on the learning outcomes – i.e. what a person knows and is able to do - rather than on the formal procedures that have led to the completion of a qualification or its component.[18] The recognition process should be transparent.

The Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications[19] as adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee states that:

*Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the State in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether:*

*(a) the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant.*

Recognition means that the number of credits gained for suitable learning outcomes achieved, at the appropriate level, in another context will replace the number of credits that are allocated for these learning outcomes at the awarding institution. For example in practice a 4 ECTS credit component in one institution can replace a 5 ECTS credit component in another institution if learning outcomes are equivalent. The

student will then be awarded 5 ECTS credits.

Decisions on credit recognition and transfer are taken by the qualification-awarding institution on the basis of reliable information on the learning outcomes achieved, as well as on the means of assessment and their validation. Institutions should make their recognition policies known and easily accessible.

In ECTS, credit recognition for the purpose of accumulation and transfer are facilitated by ECTS key documents like the Course Catalogue, the Learning Agreement and the Transcript of Records (see section 6).

### 4.4.1 ECTS and periods of study abroad

In the case of agreed student mobility, the three parties involved – the home institution, the host institution and the student – should sign a Learning Agreement for mobility (see section 6.3.1) prior to the mobility period. In such cases, recognition of the credits by the home institution is automatic if the conditions stipulated in the learning agreement have been fulfilled.

All learning components to be followed abroad should be listed in the Learning Agreement. Where a student is awarded credits for learning components other than those specified in the Learning Agreement it is up to the home institution to decide whether or not to recognise these. In case of changes to the programme of study agreed with the learner, the Learning Agreement may be amended, but the amended version must be signed again by the same three parties concerned within an agreed period of time.

The recognition of credits in the framework of joint programmes is stipulated in the regulations of the programme. There may be no need for Learning Agreements for mobility in the case of joint programmes as the credits achieved in the partner institution are automatically recognised if the rules of the joint programme are followed and the conditions are satisfied.

Further guidance on how to organise periods of study abroad within the framework of bilateral agreements can be found in annex 2 of this guide.

18 Adam, S (2004) Final report and Recommendations of the Conference: Improving the recognition systems of degrees and study credit points in the European Higher Education Area.
http://www.aic.lv/rigaseminar/documents/Riga_Final_ReportP_S_Adam.pdf

19 For the full document see: Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications as adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting, Riga, 6 June 2001. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp#TopOfPage

## 4.5. ECTS and lifelong learning

From the key features:

*"ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities. If students have achieved learning outcomes in other learning contexts or timeframes (formal, non-formal or informal), the associated credits may be awarded after successful assessment, validation or recognition of these learning outcomes."*

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.

### 4.5.1 ECTS and continuing education

Not all learners are full-time students enrolled in regular learning programmes. A growing number of adult learners follow 'stand-alone' training, without necessarily pursuing a specific qualification. Higher education institutions face increasing demands to satisfy the needs of adult learners and/or employers and to provide individual learning pathways.

When using ECTS for continuing education, the same principles for credit allocation, award, transfer and accumulation apply. Like for credits allocated to components which are part of programmes, credits allocated to continuing education are based on the workload typically needed to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Credits awarded for continuing education may be recognised and accumulated towards a qualification or not, depending on the desire of the learner and/or

the requirements for the award of the qualification. Some learners may only be interested in following a particular educational component without wishing to obtain the qualification.

### 4.5.2 ECTS and recognition of non-formal and informal learning

People often possess valuable competences acquired outside higher education institutions, through other types of learning activities, work or life experience. There is no reason why non-traditional learners should not benefit from the transparency and recognition which institutions can provide by using ECTS.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning opens up the possibility to achieve a higher education qualification to those who have not been able or have not wished to do so in the traditional way.

Higher education institutions should have the competence to award credits for learning outcomes acquired outside the formal learning context through work experience, hobbies or independent study, provided that these learning outcomes satisfy the requirements of their qualifications or components. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be automatically followed by the award of the number of ECTS credits attached to the corresponding part of the formal programme. The number of credits awarded should be the same as the credits allocated to formal educational components with comparable learning outcomes.

As with formal education, the award of credit is preceded by an assessment to verify the achievement of learning outcomes. The assessment criteria and associated methods should be constructed so as to measure the achievement of the required learning outcomes at the appropriate level, without reference to specific learning activities. For example, classroom discussion of the subject matter would no longer be considered in assessment, whereas the corresponding learning outcome of constructing arguments while interacting with a group would become relevant.

Institutions are encouraged to publish their recognition policy and practices for non-formal or informal

learning prominently on their website. These policies should include elements such as feedback to learners on the results of the assessment or the possibility for learners to appeal. Institutions are also encouraged to create 'assessment facilities' for advice, counselling and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. These may take different forms depending on national and institutional practices (e.g. they may exist within single higher education institutions or as joint centres for several institutions).

By implementing procedures for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, the social dimension of higher education institutions is strengthened. Institutions fulfil the objective of facilitating access to learners from professional life and a range of non-traditional learning environments, and thus contribute to making lifelong learning a reality.

### Figure 3 – Example of the use of credit for LLL – Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework (SCQF)[20]

The SCQF guidelines encourage the use of validation of non-formal or informal learning:

• for personal and career development (formative recognition)

• for award of credit (summative recognition)

The latter involves assessing, and then *credit rating* learning gained through experience which took place before a learner embarks on a formal programme or qualification. Credit rating is the process through which the credit value of learning is established. In general this means that the receiving institution determines the number of credits a learner can be awarded within a particular programme within that institution or organisation.

The process of awarding credit to non-formal or informal learning has these three stages:

1. Initial advice and guidance (what does the process involve for the learner, what credit limits there are for non-formal/informal learning, what are the costs, roles and responsibilities of learner and tutor/advisor; and different learning pathways to qualification)

2. Support (reflective process; understanding learning outcomes; identifying own learning outcomes; evidence gathering and selection)

3. Recognition/assessment ( assessment of evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria)

4. Award of credit (credit awarded through this process is of same value as credit gained through formal learning)

20 This summary is based on the presentation by Ruth Whittaker, Caledonian Academy, Glasgow Caledonian University, made during the Bologna seminar on Learning Outcomes based Higher Education (21-22 February 2008, Edinburgh). The full presentation can be found on: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/Edinburgh2008.htm

# 5. Quality assurance and ECTS

The primary responsibility for quality assurance lies with each institution.[21] Internal quality assurance involves all procedures undertaken by higher education institutions to ensure that the quality of their programmes and qualifications meets their own specifications and those of other bodies legitimately empowered to make specifications. External quality reviews undertaken by quality assurance agencies provide feedback to institutions and information to stakeholders. Taken together, internal quality assurance and external quality review aim to implement the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.*[22]

The use of ECTS is in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* and notably standards 1.2 and 1.7, which state that:

• Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of

their programmes and awards.[23] The quality assurance of programmes and awards is expected to include:

• development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes[24]

• careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content.[25]

• Institutions should regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.[26]

The implementation and use of ECTS by higher education institutions should be quality assured through appropriate processes (e.g. internal and external quality reviews and students' feedback).

21 Realising the European Higher Education Area. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003.

22 European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2005) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Standards-and-Guidelines-for-QA.pdf

23 Standards and Guidelines, p. 16

24 Ibidem, p.16

25 Ibidem, p.16

26 Ibidem, p.19

## Figure 4 – Good practice on ECTS and quality assurance

Regarding the quality assurance of ECTS and of related processes, it is good practice that higher education institutions' quality assurance processes ensure that for all their higher education programmes:

• educational components are expressed in terms of appropriate learning outcomes, and clear information is available concerning their level, credits, delivery and assessment

• studies can be completed in the time officially allocated to them (i.e., the workload associated with a semester, trimester or academic year is realistic)

• annual monitoring examines any variations in patterns of achievement and results gained

• students are provided with detailed information and advice so that they have the appropriate prerequisites and co-requisites for any studies undertaken and are not allowed to select educational components that are at an inappropriate level or that they have previously studied at the same level.[27]

With regard to mobile students and recognition this means that:

• credit transfer processes are included in the normal monitoring, review and validation procedures

• appropriate staff are designated as responsible for credit transfer and recognition matters

• Learning Agreements are completed in all cases; their development, and any subsequent changes to them, should be subject to sensitive yet robust approval processes[28]

• mobile students undertake normal educational components from the existing Course Catalogue; they follow the validated full assessment regime for those components and are graded alongside home students

• detailed transcripts are provided recording the credits and grades awarded

• recognition is given to all credits associated with successfully completed educational components undertaken as part of any approved learning agreement; results should be issued and transmitted promptly

• objective procedures exist for interpreting the grades awarded, so that also grades – and not just credits – are properly reflected in any final qualifications gained.

27 Prerequisites: required prior knowledge, usually defined in the form of the successful completion of other (previous) educational components. Co-requisites: educational components which require that some other components be undertaken at the same time or immediately following the successful achievement of the learning outcomes corresponding to that component.

28 The notion of sensitive 'fair recognition' and not strict equivalence should be used in developing learning agreements, as associated with the 1997 *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Explanatory Report: http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm

# 6. ECTS key documents

From the key features:

*"Credit transfer and accumulation are facilitated by the use of the ECTS key documents (Course Catalogue, Student Application Form, Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records) as well as the Diploma Supplement."*

The ECTS key documents described in this section constitute a widely used and accepted way of communicating those elements of information which are useful for all learners (including mobile and non-mobile students), academic and administrative staff, employers and other stakeholders. Using ECTS key documents correctly ensures transparency and enhances quality in higher education.

Increasingly, institutions keep track of learners' achievements in a systematic way within a computerised student records system which integrates the data contained in the ECTS key documents and other documents such as the Diploma Supplement[29].

## 6.1. Course Catalogue

The first key document is the Course Catalogue. This is the regular guide for all students attending the institution.

The exact format of the Catalogue is to be decided by the institution. It may be considered more appropriate to separate the general information for students from the academic information. In any case, all information should be detailed, user-friendly and up-to-date. The Catalogue should be published on the institution's website so that all interested parties can easily access it. It should be published sufficiently in advance for students to make their choices.

A checklist of the recommended contents of the Course Catalogue is given below (section 6.1.1). The checklist indicates the full range of information which should be provided. It is essential that information about the qualifications offered, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures, the level of programmes, the single educational components and the learning resources available to students be well documented and easily understood.

All learners should be able to identify an individual who will be able to give them relevant advice, at either institutional or departmental/subject level. It is therefore important that the Catalogue should include the names of people to contact, with information about how, when and where to contact them.

Transparency and accessibility apply equally to language. The publication should be available on the website, not only in the local language, but preferably also in another widely-used language in order to enhance transparency at international level[30]. Links to examples of Course Catalogues can be found on the following web page http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm

### 6.1.1 Checklist for the Course Catalogue

**Part 1: Information on the institution:**

- name and address
- academic calendar
- academic authorities
- general description of the institution (including type and status)
- list of programmes offered
- general admission requirements
- general arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (formal, informal and non-formal)
- general registration procedures
- ECTS credit allocation based on the student workload needed in order to achieve expected learning outcomes
- arrangements for academic guidance.

**Part 2: Information on programmes**

*General description:*

- qualification awarded
- level of qualification
- specific admission requirements
- specific arrangements for recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal)
- qualification requirements and regulations
- profile of the programme
- key learning outcomes
- occupational profiles of graduates with examples
- access to further studies
- course structure diagram with credits (60 per full-time academic year)
- examination regulations, assessment and grading
- graduation requirements
- mode of study (full-time, part-time, e-learning…),
- programme director or equivalent.

*Description of individual course units:*

- course unit title
- course unit code
- type of course unit (compulsory, optional)
- level of course unit (e.g. first, second or third cycle; sub-level if applicable)
- year of study (if applicable)
- semester/trimester when the course unit is delivered
- number of ECTS credits allocated
- name of lecturer(s)
- learning outcomes of the course unit
- mode of delivery (face-to-face, distance learning)
- prerequisites and co-requisites
- recommended optional programme components
- course contents
- recommended or required reading
- planned learning activities and teaching methods
- assessment methods and criteria
- language of instruction.
- work placement(s)

**Part 3: General information for students:**

- cost of living
- accommodation
- meals
- medical facilities
- facilities for special needs students
- insurance
- financial support for students
- student affairs office
- learning facilities
- international programmes
- practical information for mobile students
- language courses
- internships
- sports and leisure facilities
- student associations

## 6.2. Student Application Form

The ECTS Student Application Form has been developed for mobile students who will spend a limited study period in another institution. Students who intend to complete their studies at another institution should enrol according to the regular procedures of the institution concerned and will fill in other types of application forms.

The Student Application Form contains all the essential information about a mobile student that a prospective host institution needs. If an institution

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29 The Diploma Supplement is also part of the package of Europass transparency tools.
http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Introduction/navigate.action

30 The second language required for institutions applying for the ECTS label is English.

requires further information (for example, regarding housing, special health requirements) from incoming students, it may request it separately.

This Guide offers the standard Student Application form which can also be found on the following web page http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm. Institutions may choose to adapt the standard form (adding their logo and other specific information), but they should ascertain that it contains all the elements and that, as far as possible, the sequence is respected.

### 6.3. Learning Agreement

In higher education institutions, students normally register for a programme of study and for a number of specific course units/modules on either an annual or a semester basis. In practice, this represents a Learning Agreement for home students. By registering the student, the higher education institution enters into an agreement to deliver the courses and to grant credits for the achievement of the expected learning outcomes.

#### 6.3.1 Learning Agreement for mobile students

The ECTS Learning Agreement was originally developed for mobile students in order to provide a binding agreement before the mobility experience. When used for mobile students, Learning Agreements contain the list of course units or modules or other educational components the student is planning to take at the other institution, together with the code numbers and the ECTS credits allocated to the components.

An ECTS Learning Agreement is drawn up for a semester or a year of study and must be signed by the home institution, the host institution and the student. Those signing on behalf of the two institutions must be in a formal position of authority which allows them to commit the institutions. For the host institution, the commitment is to register the incoming student in the planned course units/modules and to provide the required learning activities; for the home institution, it is to grant recognition of the credits gained at the other institution. A student should not be asked to negotiate academic recognition with individual ac-

ademic staff members. The Learning Agreement, together with the Transcript of Records, is designed to guarantee full recognition of the programme of study undertaken in the host institution.

A programme of study may need to be modified after the arrival of the mobile student. In such cases, the Learning Agreement should be amended as soon as possible and endorsed by the three parties: the home institution, the host institution and the student. Only in this way can the recognition of the period of study continue to be fully guaranteed.

This Guide offers the standard Learning Agreement which can also be found on the following web page http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm. Institutions may choose to adapt the standard form (adding their logo and other specific information), but they should ascertain that it contains all the elements and that, as far as possible, the sequence is respected.

#### 6.3.2 Learning Agreement for work placements - Training Agreement

Learning Agreements for work placements or Training Agreements are also essential for work placements that are a required part of programmes. They should contain the same basic elements as the standard Learning Agreement, although obviously there are differences.

The Training Agreement should indicate clearly the location of the work placement, the period of the placement, the work to be undertaken (job description), the learner's rights and duties, and the expected learning outcomes. It will also need to indicate what assessment and assessment criteria will be used in relation to the expected learning outcomes and who will be responsible for this, i.e. the role of the work placement provider (employer) and, whenever applicable, the host institution.

The Training Agreement should be signed by the three parties – the learner, the home educational institution and the work placement provider (employer). Where a host institution is involved it is also expected to sign the agreement. The primary responsibility lies with the qualification awarding institution. The Agreement should indicate the number of

ECTS credits which will be awarded on achievement of the expected learning outcomes.

This Guide offers the standard Training Agreement which can also be found on the following web page http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm. Institutions may choose to adapt the standard form (adding their logo and other specific information), but they should ascertain that it contains all the elements and that, as far as possible, the sequence is respected.

### 6.4. Transcript of Records

Many institutions produce a transcript of records for each student at the end of each semester or year. This is an important document for the student and institution. It ensures that students have an accurate and up-to-date record of their progress, the educational components they have taken, the number of ECTS credits they have achieved and the grades they have been awarded. The ECTS Transcript of Records is such a certification, in an agreed format. It is an important formal document, providing evidence of progress and recognition.

For mobile students, the home institution firstly issues the Transcript of Records and sends it to the

host institution for each outgoing student before departure, to provide information about the educational components already completed, their level and the results obtained. Subsequently, the host institution issues another Transcript of Records for each incoming student and sends it to the home institution at the end of their period of study, in order to formally certify the work completed, the credits awarded, and the local grades received during the mobility period.

Since the Transcript is a vital document for recording the progress of all students and for recognising learning achievements, it is crucial to determine who is responsible for producing it, how it is issued and how it is delivered.

This Guide offers the standard Transcript of Records which can also be found on the following web page http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm. Institutions may choose to adapt the standard form (adding their logo and other specific information), but they should ascertain that it contains all the elements and that, as far as possible, the sequence is respected.

# 7. References for further reading

## 7.1. Credit and qualifications systems

**European Instruments:**

- *The framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area*
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/QF-EHEA-May2005.pdf
Background report: *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area,* Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, 2005
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf

- *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF
Other information on the EQF:
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm#doc

- Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region (CETS 165, 1997)
http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=165&CL=ENG
Explanatory report on the Convention:
http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/165.htm

**Publications at European level:**

- Tuning Educational Structures in Europe (2007)
http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/images/stories/template/General_Brochure_final_version.pdf
Further information and outcomes of the Tuning project:
http://unideusto.org/tuning
or:
http://www.rug.nl/let/tuningeu

**Relevant Bologna Seminar Reports:**

- Bologna Seminar on 'Development of a Common Understanding of Learning Outcomes and ECTS' Porto, Portugal, 19-20 June 2008 Final Report and Recommendations
http://portobologna.up.pt/documents/BS_P_Report_20080915_FINAL.pdf
Further information on the seminar (inputs, presentations):
http://portobologna.up.pt/

- Bologna Seminar on 'ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload' Moscow, Russia, 17-18 April 2008
*Conclusions*
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/documents/Moscow_April2008_conclusions_final.pdf

- Wagenaar, Robert (2006) 'An Introduction to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)', in: EUA, *Bologna Handbook. Making Bologna Work*. Berlin: European University Association
http://www.eua.be/publications/bologna-handbook/

- Le Mouillour, Isabelle, commissioned by Cedefop (2005) *European approaches to credit (transfer) systems in VET*. Cedefop Dossier 12. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/424/6014_en.pdf

- Adam, Stephen (2004) *Improving the recognition system of degrees and study credit points in the European Higher Education Area*.
Bologna Seminar on Recognition, University of Latvia, Riga, 3-4 December 2004, organised by Latvian authorities and the Council of Europe, supported by the EU Socrates programme. Final report and recommendations of the conference.
http://www.aic.lv/rigaseminar/documents/Riga_Final_ReportP_S_Adam.pdf

- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2005) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/Standards-and-Guidelines-for-QA.pdf

- Gehmlich, Volker (2006) 'The Added Value of Using ECTS' in: EUA, *Bologna Handbook. Making Bologna Work*. Berlin: European University Association
http://www.eua.be/publications/bologna-handbook/

## 7.2. Curriculum design

Volker Gehmlich, Andy Gibbs, Raimonda Markeviciene, Terence Mitchell, Graeme Roberts, Anne Siltala, Marina Steinmann (2008) *Yes! Go! A Practical Guide to Designing Degree Programmes with Integrated Transnational Mobility*, DAAD
http://eu.daad.de/eu/mocca/06493.html

## 7.3. Learning outcomes

- Bologna Seminar on 'Learning Outcomes Based Higher Education - The Scottish Experience' Edinburgh, UK, 21-22 February 2008 *Conclusions and Recommendations*
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/documents/Edinburgh/Edinburgh_Febo8_Final_Conclusions_and_Recommendations.pdf
Final Report
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/documents/Edinburgh/Edinburgh_Febo8_final_report.pdf

Further information on the seminar (inputs, presentations):

- http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/Edinburgh2008.htm

- Adam, Stephen (2008) Learning Outcomes Current Developments in Europe: Update on the Issues and Applications of *Learning Outcomes Associated with the Bologna Process*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government
Presented to the Bologna Seminar: Learning outcomes based higher education: the Scottish Experience (February 2008, Edinburgh).
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/BolognaSeminars/documents/Edinburgh/Edinburgh_Febo8_Adams.pdf

- Adam, Stephen (2004) *Using Learning Outcomes: A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing learning outcomes at the local, national and international levels*
http://www.pedagogy.ir/images/pdf/using-learning-outcomes-eu.pdf

- Kennedy, Declan, Hyland, Aine, and Ryan, Norma (2006) 'Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: A Practical Guide' in: EUA, Bologna Handbook. *Making Bologna Work*. Berlin: European University Association
http://www.bologna.msmt.cz/files/learning-outcomes.pdf
Presented to the Bologna Seminar: Using Learning Outcomes (July 2004, Edinburgh).
http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/040701-02Edinburgh/040620LEARNING_OUTCOMES-Adams.pdf

- Cedefop (2008) *The Shift to Learning Outcomes: Conceptual, political and practical developments in Europe*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
Synthesis:
http://www.trainingvillage.gr/etv/Upload/Information_resources/Bookshop/494/4079_en.pdf
The full report is to be published.

## 7.4. National publications

Each country has published, or is in the process of publishing, information on its national qualifications and credit systems. Two examples are Scotland and Ireland.

- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
  http://www.scqf.org.uk

- National Qualifications Authority of Ireland –
  National Framework of Qualifications
  http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/index.html

- HRK (2007) Bologna Reader II, Neue Texte und Hilfestellungen zur Umsetzung der Ziele des Bologna-Prozesses an deutschen Hochschulen, Bonn
  http://www.hrk.de/bologna/de/Bologna_Reader_gesamt.pdf

- Gehmlich, Volker (2008) Die Einführung eines Nationalen Qualifikationsrahmens in Deutschland – DQR – Untersuchung der Möglichkeiten für den Bereich des formalen Lernens, Osnabrück : Univ., Fak. für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwiss

- Meijers, van Overveld, Perrenet with the co-operation of Borghuis and Mutsaers (2005) Criteria for Academic Bachelor's and Master's Curricula
  http://www.jointquality.nl/content/descriptors/AC_English_Gweb.pdf

- Hildbrand, Tremp, Jäger Tückmantel (2008) The Curricula Reform at Swiss Institutes of Higher Education: An Analysis of the Current State and Perspectives in the Bologna Reform
  www.crus.ch/dms.php?id=5499

# 8. Glossary

The following glossary defines terminology for the purpose of this ECTS Users' guide.

| | |
|---|---|
| Accumulation | The process of collecting credits awarded for achieving the learning outcomes of educational components or other learning activities. |
| Allocation of Credit | The process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications/ programmes or to other educational components. |
| Assessment | The total range of methods (written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects and portfolios) used to evaluate learners' achievement of expected learning outcomes. |
| Assessment criteria | Descriptions of what the learner is expected to do, in order to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved. |
| Award of Credit | The act of delivering learners the number of credits that are assigned to the component or a qualification. The award of credit recognises that learners' learning outcomes have been assessed and that the learner satisfies the requirements for the educational component or the qualification. |
| Competences | A dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, ethical values and attitudes. Fostering competences is the object of all educational programmes. Competences are developed in all course units and assessed at different stages of a programme. Some competences are subject-area related (specific to a field of study), others are generic (common to any degree course). It is normally the case that competence development proceeds in an integrated and cyclical manner throughout a programme. |
| Condoning | Condoning is the term used in some national contexts when an examination board exempts a student from reassessment in a failed (or marginally failed) component if other related components are passed with sufficiently high grades. |
| Contact Hour | Hours (typically a period of 45-60 minutes) spent by students on activities guided by teaching staff. |
| Credit (ECTS) | Quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on the workload students need in order to achieve the expected outcomes of a learning process at a specified level. |
| Cycle | All qualifications in the European Higher Education Area are located within three cycles. One of the objectives indicated in the Bologna Declaration in 1999 was the "adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate." In 2003 doctoral studies were also included in the Bologna structure and referred to as the third cycle. |
| Cycle (Level) Descriptors | Generic statements of the broad expected outcomes of each of the three cycles. A good example of general cycle (level) descriptors are the so-called Dublin Descriptors, which have served as one of the foundations (along with ECTS) for the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. |
| Educational Component | A self-contained and formally structured learning experience (such as: course unit, module, seminar, work placement). |
| Formal learning | Learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Informal learning | Learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or "incidental"/random). |
| Learner | An individual engaged in a learning process (formal, non-formal or informal learning). |
| Learner-centred (approach or system) | An approach or system that supports the design of learning programmes which focus on learners' achievements, accommodate different learners' priorities and are consistent with reasonable students' workload (i.e. workload that is feasible within the duration of the learning programme). It accommodates for learners' greater involvement in the choice of content, mode, pace and place of learning. |
| Learning Outcomes | Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. |
| Level Descriptor | General statements of the typical achievement of learners who have been awarded a qualification at a certain level in a qualifications framework. |
| Module | A course unit in a system in which each course unit carries the same number of credits or a multiple thereof. |
| Non-formal learning | Learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective. |
| Programme (educational) | A set of educational components, based on learning outcomes, that are recognised for the award of a specific qualification. |
| Progression | The process which enables learners to pass from one stage of a qualification to the next and to access educational programmes that prepare for qualifications at a higher level than those he/she already possesses. |
| Progression rules | Set of rules that define conditions for learners' progression within qualifications and towards other qualifications. |
| Qualification | Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a recognised programme of study. |
| National Qualifications Framework (higher education) | The single description, at national level or at the 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. |
| Quality Assurance | The process or set of processes adopted nationally and institutionally to ensure the quality of educational programmes and qualifications awarded. |
| Recognition of credit | The process through which an institution certifies that learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another institution satisfy (some or all) requirements of a particular programme, its component or qualification. |
| Recognition of non-formal and informal learning | The process through which an institution certifies that the learning outcomes achieved and assessed in another context (non-formal or informal learning) satisfy (some or all) requirements of a particular programme, its component or qualification. |
| Student | Learner enrolled in a formal educational programme |
| Transfer | The process of having credits awarded in one context recognised in another context for purposes of obtaining a qualification. |
| Workload | Indication of the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes |

# Annex 1
# Learners' perspective in using ECTS

One of the objectives of ECTS is to ensure that learners' achievements, aspirations and capacities are taken into account in the learning process. The implementation of ECTS should provide protection and fair treatment for learners.

In an institution using ECTS, learners are entitled to expect:

- **a course Catalogue** clearly describing the curricula, with expected learning outcomes and their components, including the **allocated ECTS credits**

- **assessment methods** that are coherent with the expected learning outcomes and the workload

- **information** about these assessment methods that is available well in advance

- **award of the number of ECTS credits** allocated to each educational component after the required assessment procedure has been passed successfully

- participation in the periodical **monitoring and revision** of the estimated workload and thus of the credit allocation

- **participation** of student representatives in the process of ECTS implementation

- possibilities for **guidance** and support

- an opportunity to have **prior learning achievements,** such as non-formal or informal learning or credits from other institutions, taken into account for further studies

- the right to academic appeal if credits are not awarded for components that have been successfully completed.

In cases of mobility:

- for periods of study abroad or in another institution based on a Learning Agreement – **full academic recognition** from the home higher education institution for credits achieved during the study period abroad, in accordance with the Learning Agreement,[31] without duplication of assessment procedures

- for periods of study abroad or in another institution without a Learning Agreement – **fair recognition** of credits awarded during that period of study and **consideration** of them with respect to the award of a qualification

- careful and fair consideration by the home institution of grades awarded by the host institution.

In cases of recognition of non-formal and informal learning:

- the award of **the same number of credits** as allocated to formal educational components with comparable learning outcomes.

---

31 http://ec.europa.eu/education/archive/million/charter_en.pdf

# Annex 2
# Suggestions for institutions on recognition of periods of study abroad in the framework of bilateral agreements

**Selection of partner institutions**

It is suggested to make exchange agreements with institutions:

- that offer adequate descriptions of their programmes, including credits, learning outcomes, teaching/learning approaches and assessment methods

- whose standards you consider adequate for your students, so that you can accept their teaching and assessment procedures without requiring any further work or assessment.

Agreements should not only be made with institutions offering similar programmes, but also with those providing programmes complementary to yours, thus making available further opportunities for your students.

**Integration of mobility into programmes**

In order to structure mobility into your curricula:

- identify the semester or year when a period of study abroad would best fit into the programme (mobility window)

- schedule in that semester/year the educational components the learning outcomes of which can be more easily achieved abroad (e.g. language courses, international or comparative courses, supplementary/elective courses, preparation of dissertation, work placements, etc)

- identify, within the partner institutions, departments or curricula where similar, complementary and coherent learning outcomes could be achieved.

**Allocation of academic responsibilities**

Appoint an academic in each department or subject area who has the authority to:

- approve students' programmes of study abroad and amend them as needed (sign the Learning Agreement)

- guarantee full recognition of such programmes on behalf of the responsible academic body (sign the Recognition sheet).

**Interaction with single outgoing students**

Before the departure of the student, the responsible staff member will:

- discuss with the student, and finally approve, a Learning Agreement containing a programme of study abroad for a semester or a year (about 30 or 60 credits); this programme will have similar, complementary or coherent learning outcomes in relation to the programme in the home institution, but it will not necessarily have the same content

- guarantee in advance that all credits gained abroad in the approved programme of study will be fully recognised, transferred into the home programme and used to satisfy the qualification requirements.

After the return of the student, the responsible administrator will:

- transfer all credits gained abroad in the approved programme of study (Transcript of Records) into the student's official learning programme at home, indicating the learning activities they refer to, with their original titles; the credits will subsequently be included in the Diploma Supplement, with a note specifying the institution where they have been gained

- use the credits gained abroad for accumulation purposes to satisfy specific curricular requirements, as previously agreed in the Learning Agreement; recognising credits gained abroad as additional credits would not fulfil the commitment to full academic recognition, and should only be done if the student brings back more than 30/60 credits.

# Annex 3
# ECTS Grading Table

## Introduction

The first section of this annex describes the attempts made to design a reliable system for the interpretation and conversion of grades. The second section describes a simplified system called "The ECTS Grading Table". The simplified system builds on the earlier version and, like before, it requires universities to keep track of their grading practice and culture, which is good practice in many institutions across Europe. The ECTS Grading Table allows universities to ensure fair transfer and recognition of grades of mobile students. User comments on the new version are very welcome.

## Background

It is well known that European educational systems have developed different approaches to grading which are deeply rooted in their pedagogical and cultural traditions. It is to be pointed out, moreover, that not only do they have different grading scales, but they also use them differently in the various institutions and subject areas. While it is essential to respect these differences, it is also important to make them transparent within the European Higher Education Area, so that grades attributed in all countries, institutions or subject areas can be properly understood and when necessary compared by people with different cultural backgrounds. Mobile students have a right to a fair treatment of their grades when credits are transferred from one institution/country to another, as grants or other benefits may depend on their level of performance. Transparency of performance levels is equally important for graduates applying for a job in their own or in another country.

To tackle this problem, in the past years ECTS guidelines suggested that, in addition to their national scale, European institutions might use a European grading scale as a translation device into other grading systems. Such European scale was based on the statistical distribution of passing grades in each pro-

gramme, which showed how the national scale was actually being used in that context and allowed for comparison with the statistical distribution of grades in a parallel programme of another institution.

As a first step, the implementation of the ECTS scale required the collection of statistical data in the institutions who were willing to participate in the scheme to make their grades more transparent. In educational systems where ranking of students in each course unit/module was a standard procedure, statistical data could be provided for the very cohort in which the grade had been obtained. In the other cases, the statistical distribution was based on the grades given over the previous two or three years to a specific reference group - a single programme or a group of homogeneous programmes – from which a consistent grading pattern could be derived. These data, collected in a large number of institutions in Europe, have shown how national grading scales are actually being used. For example, teachers in French institutions are more consistently using the lower half of their scale, while their Italian counterparts are making more use of grades in the upper half of it. As for the subject area, the data from many Italian institutions showed that teachers in Engineering tend to mark lower than teachers in Humanities. Although these patterns had already been perceived by practitioners on an impressionistic basis, it is interesting to find that they are supported by statistical evidence. The grade distribution table developed for a specific reference group allows for a single grade currently obtained to be positioned in its own context, thus making it easier to understand the level of the student's performance and compare it with that of students with a similar position in other contexts.

As a second step in the implementation of the ECTS grading scale, the statistical distribution curve for each reference group was split into five segments (Top 10%, next 25%, next 30%, next 25%, lowest 10%) also called A, B, C, D, E, which could become a device for the direct translation of grades from a

degree programme in a given country/institution into a similar one in another country/institution. For example, if, based on the statistical data, in a French degree programme the grade 14 was obtained by the top 10% of the students, the ECTS grade A could be added into a student's transcript alongside the grade 14. In this way  the French grade 14 was understood as being one of the best grades obtained in that programme, comparable  to the grade having a similar percentage in the same subject area in another country/institution, to which an A had also been attached – for example a 30 in an Italian institution.

In the light of the experience made with the ECTS 5-point grading scale in the past years, it can be said that the second step described above proved to be far too ambitious and difficult to implement, especially in those national grading systems with only five or fewer passing grades, which could hardly fit into the predetermined percentage structure provided by the ECTS scale. In fact, the use of the ECTS scale by European institutions has been rather limited.

## Simplified system: The ECTS Grading Table

In order to simplify the procedure, while continuing to pursue the objective of making European grades more transparent, we propose using an "ECTS grading table", concentrating on the first step of the 5-point system. Thus institutions only need to provide in a standard table form the statistical distribution of their own grades. Therefore, the ECTS grading scale based on a predetermined percentage structure is to be replaced by a simple statistical table completed for each degree programme or group of homogeneous programmes.

In other words, instead of trying to fit existing grading practices in a standard distribution scale, universities need only to determine the actual percentage of students that receive each 'local' grade.

For example:

| National/institutional grade | Total number awarded in the reference group | Percentage of the total number |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 50 | 5% |
| 9 | 100 | 10% |
| 8 | 350 | 35% |
| 7 | 300 | 30% |
| 6 | 200 | 20% |
| | 1,000 | 100% |

This **ECTS grading table** can be produced for national grading scales of any size, from data concerning a given reference group which are easily available in institutional records.  When included in the Transcripts of Records and Diploma Supplements of the students, the table will facilitate the interpretation of

each grade awarded to them and will not require any further calculation.

The new **ECTS grading table** allows more straightforward comparison of two or more grading systems and cultures. This can be illustrated by another example:

| National / institutional grade country /system A | Grading percentage* | National / institutional grade country / system B | Grading percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30 lode | 5.6% | 1 | 20% |
| 30 | 15.7% | 2 | 35% |
| 29 | 0.5% | 3 | 25% |
| 28 | 12.3% | 4 | 20% |
| 27 | 11.8% | | |
| 26 | 9.0% | | |
| 25 | 8.2% | | |
| 24 | 11.3% | | |
| 23 | 2.7% | | |
| 22 | 6.0% | | |
| 21 | 2.3% | | |
| 20 | 5.7% | | |
| 19 | 1.9% | | |
| 18 | 6.9% | | |
| Total | 100% | | 100% |

* Based on the total number of grades awarded in the degree programme concerned during two preceding years.

From this example, we see that a 30 awarded in the scale of A should be converted to a 1 in the scale of B. The grade 2 of B will translate into the grades 26-29 (average 27) of the country or system A.

To sum up, **the ECTS grading table allows for simple, transparent interpretation and conversion of grades** from one system or context to another, and therefore does justice to the level of academic performance of all learners. Used correctly, it bridges different grading systems as well as different cultures in the European Higher Education Area and beyond.

To use the **ECTS grading table** the following steps should be taken:

1. Identify the reference group for which the grade distribution will be calculated (usually a degree programme, but in some cases a wider or different grouping of students such as a Faculty or sector -- e.g. Humanities).

2. Collect all grades awarded over a period of (at least) two academic years for the reference group identified.

3. Calculate the grade distribution in terms of percentages for the reference group.

4. Include the grading percentage table of your degree programme in every Transcript of Records/ Diploma Supplement.

5. For transfer, compare the percentage table of the other institution's degree programme with your own. On the basis of this comparison individual grades can be converted.

The first four steps in the procedure concern all programmes and are purely administrative tasks. The academic responsible for credit transfer may get involved in step 5 when general guidelines for the conversion of grades are being established.

# Annex 4
# Key documents

This Guide offers the standard forms of the Student Application, the Learning Agreement, the Training Agreement, the Transcript of Records and the outline of the Diploma Supplement.  Examples of updated and filled-in forms and of course catalogues can be found online at http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm.

There you can also find other useful documents, such as a planning form for an educational module or a form for checking the workload of an educational component.

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## LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME / ERASMUS – ECTS
# STUDENT APPLICATION FORM

( Photograph )

**ACADEMIC YEAR: 20**................/ **20**....................

**FIELD OF STUDY:** ..............................................................................................................

This application should be completed in BLACK and BLOCK letters in order to be easily copied and/or telefaxed.

**SENDING INSTITUTION**: Name and full address: ...................................................................
................................................................................................................................................
................................................................................................................................................

Departmental coordinator – name, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail :...........................
................................................................................................................................................

Institutional coordinator – name, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail : ............................
................................................................................................................................................

**STUDENT'S PERSONAL DATA** (to be completed by the student applying)

Family name:................................................    Firstname (s): ..............................................

Date of birth:................................................

Sex: M ☐ / F ☐    Nationality:....................    Place of birth:................................................

e-mail address: ...........................................

Current address:..........................................    Permanent address (if different): .................
...................................................................    ...................................................................

Current address is valid until:...................    ...................................................................

Tel. no (incl. country code nr.): ..................    Tel:..............................................................

**LIST OF INSTITUTIONS WHICH WILL RECEIVE THIS APPLICATION FORM** (in order of preference):

| Institution | Country | Period of study | | Duration of stay (months) | No. of expected ECTS credits |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | From | To | | |
| 1. | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |

---

Name of student**:** ...................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................

Sending institution : .....................................................    Country : ...................................

Briefly state the reasons why you wish to study abroad:.........................................................
...................................................................................................................................................
...................................................................................................................................................

**LANGUAGE COMPETENCE**  Note: A proof of knowledge of the receiving institution's language of instruction should be submitted

Mother tongue: ................................. Language of instruction at home institution (if different): ................................

| Other languages | I have sufficient knowledge to follow lectures | | I need some extra preparation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | YES | NO | YES | NO |
| | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**WORK EXPERIENCE RELATED TO CURRENT STUDY (if relevant)**

| Work experience / position | Firm /organization | Dates | Country |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |

**PREVIOUS AND CURRENT STUDY**

Diploma/degree for which you are currently studying: .............................................................

Number of higher education study years prior to departure abroad: ......................................

Have you already been studying abroad ?  Yes ☐    No ☐

If Yes, when?  at which institution ? .......................................................................................

The attached <u>Transcript of records</u> includes full details of previous and current higher education study.
Details not known at the time of application will be provided at a later stage.

Student's Signature ...................................................................... Date ................................

**RECEIVING INSTITUTION**

We hereby acknowledge receipt of the application, the proposed learning agreement and the candidate's Transcript of records.

The above-mentioned student is    ☐  provisionally accepted at our institution

                                                          ☐  not accepted at our institution

Departmental coordinator's signature                    Institutional coordinator's signature

..................................................................                    ..................................................................

Date:........................................................                    Date:........................................................

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# LEARNING AGREEMENT

**ACADEMIC YEAR: 20**............... **/ 20**................... **STUDY PERIOD: from** .............**to** ..................

**FIELD OF STUDY:** ...................................................................................................................................................

| |
|---|
| Name of student:.......................................................................................................... |
| Student's e-mail address: ......................................................................................... |
| Sending Institution: ...................................................... Country: ................................ |

**DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY PROGRAMME ABROAD/LEARNING AGREEMENT**

Receiving Institution: .............................................................. Country: ....................................

| Course unit code (if any) and page no. of the information package | Course unit title (as indicated in the course catalogue) | Semester (autumn/spring) | Number of ECTS credits |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Student's signature.................................................................... Date .................................

**SENDING INSTITUTION**

We confirm that the learning agreement is accepted.

Departmental coordinator's signature          Institutional coordinator's signature

................................................................          ................................................................

Date:................................................................          Date:................................................................

**RECEIVING INSTITUTION**

We confirm that the learning agreement is accepted.

Departmental coordinator's signature          Institutional coordinator's signature

................................................................          ................................................................

Date:................................................................          Date:................................................................

---

| |
|---|
| Name of student:.......................................................................................................... |
| Sending Institution: ...................................................... Country: ................................ |

**CHANGES TO ORIGINAL LEARNING AGREEMENT** (to be filled in ONLY if appropriate)

| Course unit (as indicated in the course catalogue) | Course unit title (as indicated in the course catalogue) | Deleted Course Unit | Added Course Unit | Number of ECTS credits |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |
| | | ☐ | ☐ | |

**If necessary, continue this list on a separate sheet**

Student's signature.................................................................... Date .................................

**SENDING INSTITUTION**

We confirm that the above-listed changes to the initially accepted learning agreement are approved.

Departmental coordinator's signature          Institutional coordinator's signature

................................................................          ................................................................

Date:................................................................          Date:................................................................

**RECEIVING INSTITUTION**

We confirm that the above-listed changes to the initially accepted learning agreement are approved.

Departmental coordinator's signature          Institutional coordinator's signature

................................................................          ................................................................

Date:................................................................          Date:................................................................

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# TRAINING AGREEMENT and QUALITY COMMITMENT

## I. DETAILS OF THE STUDENT

Name of student:......................................................................................................................................................

Subject area: .................................................................. Academic year: .............................................................

Degree: ....................................................................................................................................................................

Sending Institution: ................................................................. Country: ...............................................................

## II. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED TRAINING PROGRAMME ABROAD

Host organization:....................................................................................................................................................

Planned dates of start and end of the placement preriod: from .......................... till: ......................... ( ..................... months )

Knowledge, skills and competence to be acquired: ...............................................................................................

Detailed programme of the training period: ..........................................................................................................

Tasks of the student: ..............................................................................................................................................

Monitoring and evaluation plan: ............................................................................................................................

## III. COMMITMENT OF THE THREE PARTIES

By signing this document the student, the sending institution and the host organisation confirm that they will abide by the principles of the Quality Commitment for Erasmus student placements set out in the document below.

**The student** ........................................................................................................................

Student's signature:................................................................. Date:.....................................

**The sending institution** .......................................................................................................

We confirm that this proposed training programme agreement is approved.    On satisfactory completion of the training programme the institution will award ........ECTS credits and will record the training period in the Diploma Supplement.

Coordinator's signature:.......................................................... Date:.....................................

**The host organization** ........................................................................................................

We confirm that this proposed training programme is approved. On completion of the training programme the organisation will issue a Certificate to the student

Coordinator's signature:.......................................................... Date:.....................................

## QUALITY COMMITMENT
### For Erasmus student placements
This Quality Commitment replicates the principles of the European Quality Charter for Mobility

**THE SENDING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION\* UNDERTAKES TO:**

Define the **learning outcomes** of the placement in terms of the knowledge, skills and competencies to be acquired

Assist the student in **choosing** the appropriate host organisation, project duration and placement content to achieve these learning outcomes

**Select** students on the basis of clearly defined and transparent criteria and procedures and sign a **placement contract** with the selected students.

**Prepare** students for the practical, professional and cultural life of the host country, in particular through language training tailored to meet their occupational needs

Provide **logistical support** to students concerning travel arrangements, visa, accommodation, residence or work permits and social security cover and insurance

Give **full recognition** to the student for satisfactory completed activities specified in the Training Agreement

**Evaluate** with each student the personal and professional development achieved through participation in the Erasmus programme

**THE SENDING INSTITUTION\* AND HOST ORGANISATION JOINTLY UNDERTAKE TO:**

Negotiate and agree a tailor-made **Training Agreement** (including the programme of the placement and the recognition arrangements) for each student and the adequate mentoring arrangements

**Monitor** the progress of the placement and take appropriate action if required

**THE HOST ORGANISATION UNDERTAKES TO:**

Assign to students **tasks and responsibilities** (as stipulated in the Training Agreement) to match their knowledge, skills, competencies and training objectives and ensure that appropriate equipment and support is available

Draw **a contract or equivalent document** for the placement in accordance with the requirements of the national legislation

**Appoint a mentor** to advise students, help them with their integration in the host environment and monitor their training progress

Provide **practical support** if required, check appropriate insurance cover and facilitate understanding of the culture of the host country

**THE STUDENT UNDERTAKES TO:**

Comply with all **arrangements** negotiated for his/her placement and to do his/her best to make the placement a success

Abide by the **rules and regulations** of the host organisation, its normal working hours, code of conduct and rules of confidentiality

**Communicate** with the sending institution about any problem or changes regarding the placement

**Submit a report** in the specified format and any required supporting documents at the end of the placement

\* In the event that the higher education institution is integrated in a consortium, its commitments may be shared with the co-ordinating organisation of the consortium

# ERASMUS STUDENT CHARTER

The status of 'Erasmus student' applies to students who satisfy the Erasmus eligibility criteria and who have been selected by their university* to spend an Erasmus period abroad – either studying at an eligible partner university or carrying out a placement in an enterprise or other appropriate organisation. For study mobility, both universities must have an Erasmus University Charter awarded by the European Commission. For placement in enterprise the home university must hold an extended Erasmus University Charter (i.e. also covering rights and obligations relating to placements).

**As an Erasmus student, you are entitled to expect:**

- Your home and host universities to have an inter-institutional agreement.
- The sending and receiving institutions to sign with you and before you leave a Learning/Training Agreement setting out the details of your planned activities abroad, including the credits to be achieved.
- Not to have to pay fees to your host university for tuition, registration, examinations, access to laboratory and library facilities during your Erasmus studies.
- Full academic recognition from your home university for satisfactorily completed activities during the Erasmus mobility period, in accordance with the Learning/Training Agreement.
- To be given a *transcript of records* at the end of your activities abroad, covering the studies/work carried out and signed by your host institution/enterprise. This will record your results with the credits and grades achieved. If the placement was not part of the normal curricula, the period will at least be recorded in the *Diploma Supplement*.
- to be treated and served by your host university in the same way as their home students.
- to have access to the Erasmus University Charter and Erasmus Policy Statement of your home and host universities.
- Your student grant or loan from your home country to be maintained while you are abroad.

**As an Erasmus student, you are expected to:**

- Respect the rules and obligations of your *Erasmus grant agreement* with your home university or your National Agency.
- Ensure that any changes to the Learning/Training Agreement are agreed in writing with both the home and host institutions immediately they occur.
- Spend the full study/placement period as agreed at the host university/enterprise, including undergoing the relevant examinations or other forms of assessment, and respect its rules and regulations. Write a report on your Erasmus study/placement period abroad when you return and provide feedback if requested by your home university, the European Commission or the National Agency.

**If you have a problem:**

- Identify the problem clearly and check your rights and obligations.
- Contact your departmental coordinator for Erasmus and use the formal appeals procedure of your home university if necessary.
If you remain dissatisfied, contact your National Agency.

* "University" means any type of higher education institution which, in accordance with national legislation or practice, offers recognised degrees or other recognised tertiary level qualifications, or vocational education or training at tertiary level.

# GENERAL CONDITION

### Article 1: Liability

Each party of this agreement shall exonerate the other from any civil liability for damages suffered by him or his staff as a result of performance of this agreement, provided such damages are not the result of serious and deliberate misconduct on the part of the other party or his staff.

The UK National Agency, the European Commission or their staff shall not be held liable in the event of a claim under the agreement relating to any damage caused during the execution of the placement. Consequently, the UK National Agency or the European Commission shall not entertain any request for indemnity of reimbursement accompanying such claim.

### Article 2: Termination of the Contract

In the event of failure by the beneficiary to perform any of the obligations arising from the agreement, and regardless of the consequences provided for under the applicable law, the institution is legally entitled to terminate or cancel the agreement without any further legal formality where no action is taken by the beneficiary within one month of receiving notification by registered letter.

If the beneficiary terminates the agreement before its agreementual end or if he/she fails to follow the agreement in accordance with the rules, he/she will have to refund the amount of the grant already paid.

In case of termination by the beneficiary due to "force majeure", i.e. an unforeseeable exceptional situation or event beyond the beneficiary's control and not attributable to error or negligence on his/her part, the beneficiary will be entitled to receive the amount of the grant corresponding to the actual time of the placement. Any remaining funds will have to be refunded.

### Article 3: Data Protection

All personal data contained in the agreement shall be processed in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the British Council on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data. Such data shall be processed solely in connection with the implementation and follow-up of the agreement by the sending institution, the National Agency and the European Commission, without prejudice to the possibility of passing the data to the bodies responsible for inspection and audit in accordance with Community legislation (Court of Auditors or European Antifraud Office (OLAF)).

The beneficiary may, on written request, gain access to his personal data and correct any information that is inaccurate or incomplete. He/she should address any questions regarding the processing of his/her personal data to the sending institution and/or the National Agency. The participant may lodge a complaint against the processing of his personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office with regard to the use of these data by the sending institution, the National Agency, or to the European Data Protection Supervisor with regard to the use of the data by the European Commission.

### Article 4: Checks and Audits

The parties of the agreement undertake to provide any detailed information requested by the European Commission, the UK National Agency or by any other outside body authorised by the European Commission or the UK National Agency to check that the Placement and the provisions of the agreement are being properly implemented.

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# TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDS

**ACADEMIC YEAR: 20**...............**/ 20**.....................

**FIELD OF STUDY:** .............................................................................................................................

| | |
|---|---|
| NAME OF SENDING INSTITUTION: ...................................................................................... | |
| Faculty/ Department: ........................................................................................................ | |
| ECTS departmental coordinator: ..................................................................................... | |
| Tel: .......................................... Fax: ....................................... E-mail:............................. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| NAME OF STUDENT: ...................................... First Name: ............................................. | |
| Date and place of birth: .................................. Sex : M ☐ / F ☐ | |
| Matriculation date: ....................................... Matriculation number: ............................. | |
| E-MAIL ADDRESS: ............................................................................................................ | |

| | |
|---|---|
| NAME OF RECEIVING INSTITUTION: ................................................................................... | |
| Faculty/ Department of ................................................................................................... | |
| ECTS departmental coordinator: ..................................................................................... | |
| Tel: .......................................... Fax: ....................................... E-mail:............................. | |

| Course Unit Code (1)* | Title of the course unit | Duration of course unit (2)* | Local grade (3)* | ECTS credits (4)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | to be continued on a separate sheet | | | Total : ................ |

*(1) (2) (3) (4) see explanation on back page

Date:...................................................................

Signature of registrar/dean
administration officer:......................................................................... Stamp of institution: .......................................

NB : This document is not valid without the signature of the registrar /dean/administration officer and the official stamp of the institution

(1)   Course unit code :  Refer to the ECTS Course catalogue

(2)   Duration of course unit :

Y = 1 academic year

| | |
|---|---|
| 1S= 1 semester | 2S= 2 Semesters |
| 1T=1 term/trimester | 2T=2  terms/trimesters |

(3)   Grading:

a)  Description of the institutional grading system:
b)  Grading distribution in the department or programme (please specify) (For this section please refer to ECTS Users' Guide, Annex 3)

(4)   ECTS credits :

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 academic year | = 60 credits |
| 1 semester | = 30 credits |
| 1 term/trimester | = 20 credits |

# THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

*This Diploma Supplement follows the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the supplement is to provide sufficient independent data to improve the international 'transparency' and fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates etc.). It is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification to which this supplement is appended. It should be free from any value judgements, equivalence statements or suggestions about recognition. Information in all eight sections should be provided. Where information is not provided, an explanation should give the reason why.*

## 1. INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE HOLDER OF THE QUALIFICATION

1.1 Family name(s):

1.2 Given name(s):

1.3 Date of birth *(day/month/year):*

1.4 Student identification number or code *(if available):*

## 2. INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE QUALIFICATION

2.1 Name of qualification and *(if applicable)* title conferred *(in original language):*

2.2 Main field(s) of study for the qualification:

2.3 Name and status of awarding institution *(in original language):*

2.4 Name and status of institution *(if different from 2.3)* administering studies *(in original language):*

2.5 Language(s) of instruction/examination:

## 3. INFORMATION ON THE LEVEL OF THE QUALIFICATION

3.1 Level of qualification:

3.2 Official length of programme:

3.3 Access requirements(s)

## 4. INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS AND RESULTS GAINED

4.1 Mode of study:

4.2 Programme requirements:

4.3 Programme details: (e.g. modules or units studied), and the individual grades/marks/credits obtained:

*(if this information is available on an official transcript this should be used here)*

4.4 Grading scheme and, if available, grade distribution guidance:

4.5 Overall classification of the qualification *(in original language):*

## 5. INFORMATION ON THE FUNCTION OF THE QUALIFICATION

5.1 Access to further study:

5.2 Professional status *(if applicable):*

## 6. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

6.1 Additional information:

6.2 Further information sources:

## 7. CERTIFICATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT

7.1 Date:

7.2 Signature:

7.3 Capacity:

7.4 Official stamp or seal:

## 8. INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

*(N.B. Institutions who intend to issue Diploma Supplements should refer to the explanatory notes that explain how to complete them.)*

# Annex 5
# Overview of national regulations on the number of learning hours per academic year

| Countries | Hours range/ academic year | Hours range/ credit | Status of the proclamation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | 1,500 h | 25 h | Law |
| Belgium (Fl) | 1,500/1,800 h | 25/30 h | Decree (law on the Flemish level) |
| Belgium (Fr) | 1440 h | 24 h | Decree(law of the French Community) |
| Czech Republic | 1,500/1800 h | 25/30 h | Good practice, recommendation of ECTS Key Features. |
| Cyprus | 1500h/1800 h | 25/30 h | New Law for Higher Education (under consideration in 2008) |
| Denmark | 1,650 h | 27/28 h | Letters from the Ministry |
| Estonia | 1,560 h | 26 h | University Act law |
| Finland | 1,600 h | 27 h | Act of the Council of State |
| France | 1,650 h | 25/30 h | Recommendation by the University Presidents' conference |
| Germany | 1,800 h | 30 h | KMK (Kultusministerkonferenz = Standing Conference of the Ministers of the Federal States). Element of Accreditation |
| Greece | 1,500/1,800 h | 25/30 h | Ministerial Decision |
| Hungary | 1,620/1,800 h | 30 h | Act on Higher Education and attaching Governmental Decree |
| Iceland | 1,500/2,000 h | 25/33 h | No proclamation, but understanding among universities |
| Ireland | | 20/30 h | Recommendation on the principles and operational guidelines devised by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland |
| Italy | 1,500 h | 25 h | Ministerial Decrees |
| Latvia | 1,600 h | | Law |
| Lithuania | 1,600 h | | Law and Decree |

| Malta | 1,500 h | 25 h | In Educational Act, 2004 and subsidiary legislation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Netherlands | 1,680 h | 28 h | Law |
| Portugal | 1,500/1,680 h | 25/28 h | Decree 42/2005 of 22 February. |
| Norway | no range per academic year proclaimed/ decision of universities | no range per credit proclaimed | Law |
| Poland | 1,500/1,800 h | 25/30 h | Decree |
| Romania | 1,520/1,640 h | 25/27 h | Order of the Ministry of Education (from 1999) |
| Slovakia | no range per academic year proclaimed | 25/30 h | Good practice, recommendation of ECTS key features |
| Slovenia | 1,500/1,800 h | 25/30 h | Law (2004) |
| Spain | 1,500/1,800 h | 25/30 h | Royal Decree (law) |
| Sweden | 1,600 h | 26/27 h | Higher education ordinance (Government regulation) states full time studies during 40 weeks |
| Switzerland | 1,500/1,800 h | 25/30 h | Swiss University Conference (SUC) Regulation for the implementation of Bologna |
| Turkey | 1,500/1,800 h | | Law |
| United Kingdom | 1,200-1,800 h | 20 h | national Qualification (and Credits) Frameworks |

Education and Culture DG

ENQA

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
in the European Higher Education Area

**Education and Culture**

## DG Education and Culture

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission in the framework of the Socrates programme. This publication reflects the views of the authors only and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use wich may be made of the information contained therein.

ENQA report on Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

The publication can be downloaded from the ENQA website at http://www.enqa.eu/pubs.lasso

The original numbering system of the paragraphs found in the first edition has been restored for practical reasons.

Cover design and page layout: Eija Vierimaa

Helsinki, Finland, 2009

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# Foreword

In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) 'through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB', to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' and to 'explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005'. The Ministers also asked ENQA to take due account 'of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks'.

This report forms the response to this mandate and comes with the endorsement of all the organisations named in that section of the communiqué. The achievement of such a joint understanding is a tribute to the spirit of co-operation and mutual respect that has characterised the discussions between all the players involved. I would therefore like to extend my thanks to the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB together with the ENQA member agencies for their constructive and most valuable input to the process.

This report is directed at the European Ministers of Education. However, we expect the report to achieve a wider circulation among those with an interest in quality assurance in higher education. These readers will hopefully find the report useful and inspirational.

It must be emphasised that the report is no more than a first step in what is likely to be a long and possibly arduous route to the establishment of a widely shared set of underpinning values, expectations and good practice in relation to quality and its assurance, by institutions and agencies across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need to be developed further if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of quality assurance for the EHEA. If this can be accomplished, then many of the ambitions of the Bologna Process will also be achieved. All the participants in the work to date look forward to contributing to the success of that endeavour.


Christian Thune
*President of ENQA*
February 2005

# Executive summary

This report has been drafted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)[1], through its members, in consultation and co-operation with the EUA, ESIB and EURASHE and in discussion with various relevant networks. It forms the response to the twin mandates given to ENQA in the Berlin communiqué of September 2003 to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' and 'to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies'.

The report consists of four chapters. After the introductory chapter on context, aims and principles, there follow chapters on standards and guidelines for quality assurance[2]; a peer review system for quality assurance agencies; and future perspectives and challenges.

The main results and recommendations of the report are:
- There will be European standards for internal and external quality assurance, and for external quality assurance agencies.
- European quality assurance agencies will be expected to submit themselves to a cyclical review within five years.
- There will be an emphasis on subsidiarity, with reviews being undertaken nationally where possible.
- A European register of quality assurance agencies will be produced.
- A European Register Committee will act as a gatekeeper for the inclusion of agencies in the register.
- A European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will be established.

When the recommendations are implemented:
- The consistency of quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) will be improved by the use of agreed standards and guidelines.
- Higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies across the EHEA will be able to use common reference points for quality assurance.
- The register will make it easier to identify professional and credible agencies.
- Procedures for the recognition of qualifications will be strengthened.
- The credibility of the work of quality assurance agencies will be enhanced.
- The exchange of viewpoints and experiences amongst agencies and other key stakeholders (including higher education institutions, students and labour market representatives) will be enhanced through the work of the European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- The mutual trust among institutions and agencies will grow.
- The move toward mutual recognition will be assisted.

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[1] ENQA's General Assembly confirmed on 4 November 2004 the change of the former European Network into the European Association.
[2] The term "quality assurance" in this report includes processes such as evaluation, accreditation and audit.

**Summary list of European standards for quality assurance**
This summary list of European standards for quality assurance in higher education is drawn from Chapter 2 of the report and is placed here for ease of reference. It omits the accompanying guidelines. The standards are in three parts covering internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, external quality assurance of higher education, and quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies.

**Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions**

1.1 *Policy and procedures for quality assurance:*
Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

1.2 *Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:* Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

1.3 *Assessment of students:*
Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

1.4 *Quality assurance of teaching staff:*
Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

1.5 *Learning resources and student support:*
Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

1.6 *Information systems:*
Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

1.7 *Public information:*
Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

**Part 2: European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education**

2.1 *Use of internal quality assurance procedures:*
External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

2.2 *Development of external quality assurance processes:*
The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

2.3 *Criteria for decisions:*
Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

2.4 *Processes fit for purpose:*
All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

2.5 *Reporting:*
Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

2.6 *Follow-up procedures:*
Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

2.7 *Periodic reviews:*
External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

2.8 *System-wide analyses:*
Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

**Part 3: European standards for external quality assurance agencies**

3.1 *Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:*
The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

3.2 *Official status:*
Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3.3 *Activities:*
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

3.4 *Resources:*
Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

3.5 *Mission statement:*
Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

3.6 *Independence:*
Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

3.7 *External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:*
The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:
• a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
• an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
• publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
• a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

3.8 *Accountability procedures:*
Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

# 1. Context, aims and principles

In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited ENQA 'through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB', to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' and to 'explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005'. The Ministers also asked ENQA to take due account 'of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks'.

ENQA welcomed this opportunity to make a major contribution to the development of the European dimension in quality assurance and, thereby, to further the aims of the Bologna Process.

The work has involved many different organisations and interest groups. First, ENQA members have been extensively involved in the process. Members have participated in working groups, and draft reports have been important elements in the agenda of the ENQA General Assemblies in June and November 2004. Secondly, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Commission have participated through regular meetings in the 'E4 Group'. Thirdly, the contacts with and contributions from other networks, such as the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEE Network), have been particularly valuable in the drafting process. Finally, ENQA and its partners have made good use of their individual international contacts and experiences and in this way ensured that relevant international perspectives were brought into the process.

Quality assurance in higher education is by no means only a European concern. All over the world there is an increasing interest in quality and standards, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and the private purse. Accordingly, if Europe is to achieve its aspiration to be the most dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world (Lisbon Strategy), then European higher education will need to demonstrate that it takes the quality of its programmes and awards seriously and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality. The initiatives and demands, which are springing up both inside and outside Europe in the face of this internationalisation of higher education, demand a response. The commitment of all those involved in the production of these proposals augurs well for the fulfilment of a truly European dimension to quality assurance with which to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA's higher education offering.

The proposals contained in this report are underpinned by a number of principles which are described in more detail in the two chapters which cover the two parts of the Berlin mandate. However, some fundamental principles should permeate the whole work:

- the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;

- the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
- the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

The EHEA with its 40 states is characterised by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality, standards and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate. In the light of this diversity and variety, generally acknowledged as being one of the glories of Europe, the report sets its face against a narrow, prescriptive and highly formulated approach to standards. In both the standards and the guidelines, the report prefers the generic principle to the specific requirement. It does this because it believes that this approach is more likely to lead to broad acceptance in the first instance and because it will provide a more robust basis for the coming together of the different higher education communities across the EHEA. The generic standards ought to find a general resonance at the national[3] level of most signatory states. However, one consequence of the generic principle is that the standards and guidelines focus more on what should be done than how they should be achieved. Thus, the report does include procedural matters, but it has given a priority to standards and guidelines, especially in Chapter 2.

Finally, it must be emphasised that reaching agreement for this report is not the same thing as fulfilling the Bologna goal of a quality assurance dimension for the EHEA. Ahead lies more work to implement the recommendations of the report and secure the implied quality culture among both the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies.

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[3]   Throughout the report, the term "national" also includes the regional context with regard to quality assurance agencies, national contexts and authorities etc.

# 2. European standards and guidelines

The Ministers' mandate to develop 'an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' raised a number of important questions. 'Quality assurance' is a generic term in higher education which lends itself to many interpretations: It is not possible to use one definition to cover all circumstances. Similarly, the word 'standards' is employed in a variety of ways across Europe, ranging from statements of narrowly defined regulatory requirements to more generalised descriptions of good practice. The words also have very different meanings in the local contexts of national higher education systems.

Moreover, the drafting process itself has made evident that, within the quality assurance community itself, there are some quite fundamental differences of view of the appropriate relationship that should be established between higher education institutions and their external evaluators. Some, mainly from agencies which accredit programmes or institutions, take the view that external quality assurance is essentially a matter of 'consumer protection', requiring a clear distance to be established between the quality assurance agency and the higher education institutions whose work they assess, while other agencies see the principal purpose of external quality assurance to be the provision of advice and guidance in pursuit of improvements in the standards and quality of programmes of study and associated qualifications. In the latter case a close relationship between the evaluators and the evaluated is a requirement. Yet others wish to adopt a position somewhere between the two, seeking to balance accountability and improvement.

Nor is it just the quality assurance agencies that have different views on these matters. The interests of the higher education institutions and student representative bodies are not always the same, the former seeking a high level of autonomy with a minimum of external regulation or evaluation (and that at the level of the whole institution), the latter wanting institutions to be publicly accountable through frequent inspection at the level of the programme or qualification.

Finally, the standards and guidelines relate only to the three cycles of higher education described in the Bologna Declaration and are not intended to cover the area of research or general institutional management.

### Background of the standards and guidelines
This section of the report contains a set of proposed standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA. The standards and guidelines are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located. As mentioned earlier, it has not been considered appropriate to include detailed 'procedures' in the recommendations of this chapter of the report, since institutional and agency procedures are an important part of their autonomy. It will be for the institutions and agencies themselves, co-operating within their individual contexts, to decide the procedural consequences of adopting the standards contained in this report.

As their starting point, the standards and guidelines endorse the spirit of the 'July 2003 Graz Declaration' of the European University Association (EUA) which

states that 'the purpose of a European dimension to quality assurance is to promote mutual trust and improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas'. Consonant with the Graz declaration, the standards and guidelines contained in this report recognise the primacy of national systems of higher education, the importance of institutional and agency autonomy within those national systems, and the particular requirements of different academic subjects. In addition, the standards and guidelines owe much to the experience gained during the ENQA-coordinated pilot project 'Transnational European Evaluation Project' (TEEP), which investigated, in three disciplines, the operational implications of a European transnational quality evaluation process.

The standards and guidelines also take into account the quality convergence study published by ENQA in March 2005, which examined the reasons for differences between different national approaches to external quality assurance and constraints on their convergence. Further, they reflect the statement of Ministers in the Berlin communiqué that 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework'. In these standards and guidelines, therefore, an appropriate balance has been sought between the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play.

In addition, the standards and guidelines have also benefited particularly from the 'Code of Good Practice' published in December 2004 by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and other perspectives included in ESIB's 'Statement on agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines at a European level' (April 2004) and 'Statement on peer review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies' (April 2004), EUA's 'QA policy position in the context of the Berlin Communiqué' (April 2004) and the EURASHE 'Policy Statement on the Bologna Process' (June 2004). Finally, an international perspective has been included by comparing the standards on external quality assurance with the "Guidelines for good practice" being implemented by the international network INQAAHE.

### Introduction to Parts 1 and 2: European standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance of higher education
The standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance, which follow, have been developed for the use of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies working in the EHEA, covering key areas relating to quality and standards.

The purpose of these standards and guidelines is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to both higher education institutions in developing their own quality assurance systems and agencies undertaking external quality assurance, as well as to contribute to a common frame of reference, which can be used by institutions and agencies alike. It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should dictate practice or be interpreted as prescriptive or unchangeable.

In some countries of the EHEA the ministry of education or an equivalent organisation has the responsibility for some of the areas covered by the standards and guidelines. Where this is the case, that ministry or organisation should ensure that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms are in place and subject to independent reviews.

**BASIC PRINCIPLES**

The standards and guidelines are based on a number of basic principles about quality assurance, both internal in and external to higher education in the EHEA. These include:

- providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded;
- the quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the EHEA;
- there need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided and supported;
- transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;
- there should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions;
- processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money;
- quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes;
- institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality at home and internationally;
- processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation.

**PURPOSES OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

The purposes of the standards and guidelines are:

- to improve the education available to students in higher education institutions in the EHEA;
- to assist higher education institutions in managing and enhancing their quality and, thereby, to help to justify their institutional autonomy;
- to form a background for quality assurance agencies in their work;
- to make external quality assurance more transparent and simpler to understand for everybody involved.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

The objectives of the standards and guidelines are:

- to encourage the development of higher education institutions which foster vibrant intellectual and educational achievement;
- to provide a source of assistance and guidance to higher education institutions and other relevant agencies in developing their own culture of quality assurance;
- to inform and raise the expectations of higher education institutions, students, employers and other stakeholders about the processes and outcomes of higher education;
- to contribute to a common frame of reference for the provision of higher education and the assurance of quality within the EHEA.

**EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The standards and guidelines proposed in this report envisage an important role for external quality assurance. The form of this varies from system to system and can include institutional evaluations of different types; subject or programme evaluations; accreditation at subject, programme and institutional levels; and combinations of these. Such external evaluations largely depend for their full effectiveness on there being an explicit internal quality assurance strategy, with specific objectives, and on the use, within institutions, of mechanisms and methods aimed at achieving those objectives.

Quality assurance can be undertaken by external agencies for a number of purposes, including:

- safeguarding of national academic standards for higher education;
- accreditation of programmes and/or institutions;
- user protection;
- public provision of independently-verified information (quantitative and qualitative) about programmesor institutions;
- improvement and enhancement of quality.

The activities of European quality assurance agencies will reflect the legal, social and cultural requirements of the jurisdictions and environments in which they operate. European standards relating to the quality assurance of quality assurance agencies themselves are contained in Part 3 of this chapter.

The processes carried out by quality assurance agencies will properly depend upon their purposes and the outcomes they are intended to achieve. The procedures adopted by those agencies that are concerned to emphasise principally the enhancement of quality may be quite different from those whose function is first to provide strong 'consumer protection'. The standards that follow reflect basic good practice across Europe in external quality assurance, but do not attempt to provide detailed guidance about what should be examined or how quality assurance activities should be conducted. Those are matters of national autonomy, although the exchange of information amongst agencies and authorities is already leading to the emergence of convergent elements.

There are, however, already some general principles of good practice in external quality assurance processes:

- institutional autonomy should be respected;
- the interests of students and other stakeholders such as labour market representatives should be at the forefront of external quality assurance processes;
- use should be made, wherever possible, of the results of institutions' own internal quality assurance activities.

The 'guidelines' provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

# Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

## 1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance
**STANDARD:**
Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality.

The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

**GUIDELINES:**
Formal policies and procedures provide a framework within which higher education institutions can develop and monitor the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems. They also help to provide public confidence in institutional autonomy. Policies contain the statements of intentions and the principal means by which these will be achieved. Procedural guidance can give more detailed information about the ways in which the policy is implemented and provides a useful reference point for those who need to know about the practical aspects of carrying out the procedures.

The policy statement is expected to include:
- the relationship between teaching and research in the institution;
- the institution's strategy for quality and standards;
- the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- the responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units and individuals for the assurance of quality;
- the involvement of students in quality assurance;
- the ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised.

The realisation of the EHEA depends crucially on a commitment at all levels of an institution to ensuring that its programmes have clear and explicit intended outcomes; that its staff are ready, willing and able to provide teaching and learner support that will help its students achieve those outcomes; and that there is full, timely and tangible recognition of the contribution to its work by those of its staff who demonstrate particular excellence, expertise and dedication. All higher education institutions should aspire to improve and enhance the education they offer their students.

## 1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
**STANDARD:**
Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

**GUIDELINES:**
The confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities which ensure that programmes are well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency.

The quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include:
- development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes;
- careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content;
- specific needs of different modes of delivery (e.g. full time, part-time, distance-learning, e-learning) and types of higher education (e.g. academic, vocational, professional);
- availability of appropriate learning resources;
- formal programme approval procedures by a body other than that teaching the programme;
- monitoring of the progress and achievements of students;
- regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members);
- regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations;
- participation of students in quality assurance activities.

## 1.3 Assessment of students
**STANDARD:**
Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

**GUIDELINES:**
The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and that it takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support.

Student assessment procedures are expected to:
- be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
- be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
- have clear and published criteria for marking;
- be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;
- where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiners;
- take account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations;
- have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances;
- ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures;
- be subject to administrative verification checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures.

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance.

### 1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff
**STANDARD:**
Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

**GUIDELINES:**
Teachers are the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that those who teach have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching, have the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts, and can access feedback on their own performance. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills. Institutions should provide poor teachers with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level and should have the means to remove them from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective.

### 1.5 Learning resources and student support
**STANDARD:**
Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

**GUIDELINES:**
In addition to their teachers, students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing facilities to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors, and other advisers. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services provided. Institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students.

### 1.6 Information systems
**STANDARD:**
Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

**GUIDELINES:**
Institutional self-knowledge is the starting point for effective quality assurance. It is important that institutions have the means of collecting and analysing information about their own activities. Without this they will not know what is working well and what needs attention, or the results of innovatory practices.

The quality-related information systems required by individual institutions will depend to some extent on local circumstances, but it is at least expected to cover:
- student progression and success rates;
- employability of graduates;
- students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- effectiveness of teachers;
- profile of the student population;
- learning resources available and their costs;
- the institution's own key performance indicators.

There is also value in institutions comparing themselves with other similar organisations within the EHEA and beyond. This allows them to extend the range of their self-knowledge and to access possible ways of improving their own performance.

### 1.7 Public information
**STANDARD:**
Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

**GUIDELINES:**
In fulfilment of their public role, higher education institutions have a responsibility to provide information about the programmes they are offering, the intended learning outcomes of these, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the learning opportunities available to their students. Published information might also include the views and employment destinations of past students and the profile of the current student population. This information should be accurate, impartial, objective and readily accessible and should not be used simply as a marketing opportunity. The institution should verify that it meets its own expectations in respect of impartiality and objectivity.

# Part 2: European standards and guidelines for the external quality assurance of higher education

**2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures**
**STANDARD:**
External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

**GUIDELINES:**
The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met.

If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

**2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes**
**STANDARD:**
The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

**GUIDELINES:**
In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

**2.3 Criteria for decisions**
**STANDARD:**
Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

**GUIDELINES:**
Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability,

decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

**2.4 Processes fit for purpose**
**STANDARD:**
All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

**GUIDELINES:**
Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:
- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

**2.5 Reporting**
**STANDARD:**
Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

**GUIDELINES:**
In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.

Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

### 2.6 Follow-up procedures
**STANDARD:**
Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

**GUIDELINES:**
Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

### 2.7 Periodic reviews
**STANDARD:**
External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

**GUIDELINES:**
Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

### 2.8 System-wide analyses
**STANDARD:**
Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

**GUIDELINES:**
All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

**Introduction to Part 3: European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies**
The growth of European external quality assurance agencies has been expansive since the early 1990s. At the same time cooperation and sharing of best practices among agencies have been an integrated element in this development. Already in 1994/95 the so-called European Pilot Projects initiated by the European Commission resulted in the mutual recognition by agencies of the basic methodology of quality assurance: independent agencies, self-evaluations, external site visits and public reporting, laid down in the 1998 EU Council Recommendation on quality assurance in higher education. The creation of ENQA in 2000 was therefore a natural formalisation of this development in cooperation, and ENQA has been able to build on the state-of-the-art consensus arrived at during the 1990s.

The European standards for external quality assurance agencies, which follow, have been developed on the premises of this development in the young history of European external quality assurance. Moreover it is the conscious ambition that the standards should be neither too detailed nor too prescriptive. They must not reduce the freedom of European quality assurance agencies to reflect in their organisations and processes the experiences and expectations of their nation or region. The standards must, though, ensure that the professionalism, credibility and integrity of the agencies are visible and transparent to their stakeholders and must permit comparability to be observable among the agencies and allow the necessary European dimension.

It should be added that in this way the standards do also contribute naturally to the work being done towards mutual recognition of agencies and the results of agency evaluations or accreditations. This work has been explored in the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) and is part of the 'Code of Good Practise' by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

Several 'guidelines' have been added to provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

# Part 3: European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies

### 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
**STANDARD:**
The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

**GUIDELINES:**
The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions.

The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

### 3.2 Official status
**STANDARD:**
Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

### 3.3 Activities
**STANDARD:**
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

**GUIDELINES:**
These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

### 3.4 Resources
**STANDARD:**
Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

### 3.5 Mission statement
**STANDARD:**
Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

**GUIDELINES:**
These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

### 3.6 Independence
**STANDARD:**
Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

**GUIDELINES:**
An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:
- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

### 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
**STANDARD:**
The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:
- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

**Guidelines:**
Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

### 3.8 Accountability procedures
**STANDARD:**
Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

**GUIDELINES:**
These procedures are expected to include the following:
1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
   - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
   - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
   - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
   - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

# 3. Peer Review system for quality assurance agencies

In Berlin the Ministers called 'upon ENQA, through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB, to […] explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies'.

ENQA and its partners have met this call by building on the interpretation of the mandate that a system of peer review of agencies must include not only the peer review process itself, but also a careful consideration of the quality standards on which a review could be build. Further, there has been agreement in the process that peer review of agencies should be interpreted as basically the means to achieve the goal of transparency, visibility and comparability of quality of agencies.

Therefore, this report has as a major proposal the creation of a register of recognised external quality assurance agencies operating in higher education within Europe. This proposal is in essence a response to expectations that there is likely soon to be an increase of quality assurance bodies keen to make a profit from the value of a recognition or accreditation label. Experience elsewhere has shown that it is difficult to control such enterprises, but Europe has a possibly unique opportunity to exercise practical management of this new market, not in order to protect the interests of already established agencies, but to make sure that the benefits of quality assurance are not diminished by the activities of disreputable practitioners.

The work on these proposals has principally taken into consideration the European context and demands. At the same time there has been awareness in the process that similar experiences and processes are developing internationally. This chapter therefore opens with a brief analysis of the international experiences and initiatives relevant for the drafting of this part of the report. It then outlines the proposed peer review system based on the subsidiarity principle and the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. This outline leads to a presentation of the recommended register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The peer reviews and the agencies' compliance with the European standards play a crucial role in the composition of the register. Finally, a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is proposed.

### International context
Europe is not the only area where dynamic developments in the field of higher education quality assurance are currently taking place. This section describes some of the experiences and initiatives of organisations such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the United States (CHEA), OECD and UNESCO. The work of these organisations in relation to quality assurance have been found useful during the drafting of this report. Even though these international experiences have not been directly included in the specific recommendations, some key international elements are presented below in a manner that relates to the recommendations in this chapter.

The identification of good quality and good practices of external quality assurance agencies has also been on the international agenda for several years. INQAAHE discussed in 1999 and onwards a quality label for external quality assurance agencies, an idea originally initiated by the IAUP, in order to meet the need for higher education institutions to identify which agencies are qualified to fulfil the external quality assurance role. The quality label met widespread opposition and instead INQAAHE has focused on formulating good practice criteria for agencies. The result is a set of principles that presents common denominators of good practice while at the same time recognising the international diversity of agencies in terms of purposes and historical-cultural contexts.

In terms of the recommendations on peer review of agencies, the work done by CHEA is relevant. CHEA is a non-governmental organisation functioning as an umbrella body for the US regional, specialised, national and professional accreditation agencies. Accrediting organisations that seek recognition by CHEA must demonstrate that they meet CHEA recognition standards. Accrediting organisations will be expected to advance academic quality, demonstrate accountability, encourage improvement, employ appropriate procedures, continually reassess accreditation practices and possess sufficient resources. CHEA will demand that members undergo so-called recognition reviews every six years. There are basic similarities and compatibility between the CHEA approach and the proposals of this report, for instance in terms of cyclical reviews. However, this report has given a priority to a distinct focus on the quality assurance of agencies.

A separate initiative has been taken jointly by OECD and UNESCO to elaborate guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. The OECD-UNESCO guidelines will be finalised in 2005, but the drafting process has identified the contrast between the need to regulate the internationalisation of higher education and the fact that existing national quality assurance capacity often focuses exclusively on domestic delivery by domestic institutions. Therefore, it is posed as a challenge for the current quality assurance systems to develop appropriate methodologies and mechanisms to cover foreign providers and programmes in addition to national providers and programmes in order to maximise the benefits and limit the potential disadvantages of the internationalisation of higher education.

The proposed OECD-UNESCO guidelines recommend that external quality assurance agencies ensure that their quality assurance arrangements include foreign and for-profit institutions/providers as well as distance education delivery and other non-traditional modes of educational delivery. However, the drafting process of the guidelines also recognises that the inclusion of foreign providers in the remit of national agencies will in most cases require changes in national legislation and administrative procedures.

This report recognises the importance and implications of internationalisation for the quality assurance of higher education institutions. Although it has been considered too early to include a reference to this in the proposed European standards for external quality assurance, the proposal for a European register does explicitly include agencies from outside Europe operating here as well as European agencies with cross-border operations.

It should also be recognised that the continuing European process fully meets the OECD-UNESCO recommendation that agencies should sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks.

### Cyclical reviews of agencies

The field of external quality assurance of higher education in Europe is relatively young. However, it may be considered an element of growing maturity among agencies that recent years have evidenced an interest in enhancing credibility of agency work by focusing on internal and external quality assurance of agencies themselves. An ENQA workshop in February 2003 in Sitges, Spain, had quality assurance of agencies as its theme. The participants discussed existing experiences of external evaluation of agencies and one conclusion of the workshop was a recommendation that ENQA should work towards making cyclical external reviews of member agencies. Accordingly, ENQA received the Berlin mandate at a time when discussion of external reviews of agencies had already begun in ENQA and been an element in E4 meetings.

This report recommends that any European agency should at no more than five-year intervals conduct or be submitted to a cyclical external review of its processes and activities. The results should be documented in a report which states the extent to which the agency is in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies (see Chapter 2, Part 3).

In the EHEA the map of providers and operators in external quality assurance of higher education will no doubt be more complicated in the future. Therefore, it is important that non-ENQA members are included in considerations on quality assurance of agencies. And it is even more important that agencies from outside Europe have an open opportunity, if they want it, to measure themselves against the recommended European standards. Therefore, the report does not wish to confine the focus of this recommendation to nationally recognised European agencies and thus by implication only actual or potential ENQA members. On the contrary, agencies from outside Europe, but operating in Europe, or European agencies that are not nationally recognised, must also be allowed to opt for a review that assesses its compliance with the European standards.

The general principles for cyclical reviews are proposed to be as follows:

- External quality assurance agencies established and officially recognised as national agencies by a Bologna signatory state should normally be reviewed on a national basis, thus respecting the subsidiarity principle – even if they also operate beyond national borders. These European national agencies may on the other hand also opt for reviews organised by ENQA rather than internal nationally based reviews. The reviews of agencies should include an assessment of whether the agencies are in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- Agencies not established and officially recognised in a Bologna signatory state may on their own initiative opt to be reviewed against the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- The reviews should follow the process comprising a self-evaluation, an independent panel of experts and a published report.

An external review will typically be initiated at the national or agency level. It is therefore expected that reviews of agencies will usually follow from national regulations or from the internal quality assurance processes in place in the agency. This report wishes strongly to emphasise the importance of respecting the subsidiarity principle, and it is therefore proposed that ENQA, in respect of its own members, takes the initiative toward an agency only in the case where after five years no initiative has been taken nationally or by the agency itself. In case the agency is a non-ENQA member and after five years no initiative has been taken nationally or by the agency itself, the European Register Committee is responsible for initiating the review.

When national authorities initiate reviews, the purpose could obviously be quite broad and include the agency's fulfilment of the national mandate, e.g. However, it is a core element in this proposal that reviews – regardless of whether they are initiated at a national, agency or ENQA level – must always explicitly consider the extent to which the agency conforms with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. The ENQA General Assembly decided at its meeting in November 2004 that the membership criteria of ENQA should conform with the proposed European standards for external quality assurance agencies. Accordingly, the review of an agency will not only make evident the level of conformity with the European standards, but also at the same time indicate the level of compliance with ENQA membership criteria.

Finally, the report stresses that the involvement of international experts with appropriate expertise and experience will provide substantial benefit to the review process.

The follow-up of a cyclical review will first and foremost be the responsibility of the national authorities or owners of the agency and, of course, of the agency itself. ENQA will have a role in the followup only in the case of member agencies where ENQA must certify the degree to which the member agency meets the European standards for external quality assurance agencies according to the review. ENQA regulations will specify the consequences if this is not the case.

An illustrative outline of an exemplary process of an external review of an agency is shown in the annex to this report.

| PROPOSED REGISTER STRUCTURE | | REVIEWED | | NOT REVIEWED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Compliance with European standards | Non-compliance with European standards | |
| European national agencies | National operators | | | |
| | Cross-border operators | | | |
| European non-national agencies | | | | |
| Extra-European agencies operating in Europe | | | | |

**Register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe**
ENQA committed itself before the Berlin Ministerial meeting of 2003 to develop in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders a European register of quality assurance agencies, covering public, private, and thematic agencies, operating or planning to operate in Europe.

The register would meet the interest of higher education institutions and governments in being able to identify professional and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. This interest has firstly its basis in the complicated area of recognition of non-national degrees. Recognition procedures would be strengthened if it were transparent to what extent providers were themselves quality assured by recognised agencies. Secondly, it is increasingly possible for higher education institutions to seek quality assurance from agencies across national borders. Higher education institutions would of course be helped in this process by being able to identify professional agencies from a reliable register.

The most valuable asset of the register would thus be its informative value to institutions and other stakeholders, and the register could in itself become a very useful instrument for achieving transparency and comparability of external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

The register must make evident the level of compliance of entrants with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. However, it is important to stress that this report does not aim at proposing the register as a ranking instrument.

The register should be open for applications from all agencies providing services within Europe, including those operating from countries outside Europe or those with a transnational or international basis. The agencies will be placed into different sections of the register depending on whether they are peer reviewed or not, whether they comply with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies or not, and whether they operate strictly nationally or across borders.
A possible structure for the register is therefore:
Section 1. Peer reviewed agencies, divided into the following categories:
  • European national agencies that have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
  • European national agencies that have been reviewed, but do not fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
  • Non-national and extra-European agencies that operate in Europe, have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
  • Non-national and extra-European agencies that operate in Europe and have been reviewed, but do not fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

Section 2. Non-reviewed agencies
  • European national agencies, non-national agencies and extra-European agencies that have not been reviewed and are therefore listed according to information gained from their application for inclusion in the register.

Presented in a grid, the structure of the register is this:
A European Register Committee will decide on admissions to the European register. The committee will use agency compliance with the European standards for external

quality assurance agencies as identified in the cyclical review as one criterion for placement in the register. Other criteria should be developed which will take account of the diversity of the higher education systems.

The committee will be a light, non-bureaucratic construction with nine members nominated by EURASHE, ESIB, EUA, ENQA and organisations representing European employers, unions and professional organisations plus government representatives. These members will act in an individual capacity and not as mandated representatives of the nominating organisations. ENQA will perform the secretarial duties for the committee which will meet at least on a semi-annual basis.

The European Register Committee will as one of its first implementation tasks formalise the ownership of the register.

Another immediate task for the European Register Committee must be to establish an independent and credible appeals system to secure the rights of those that have been refused or that cannot accept their placement in the register. This appeals system should be an element in the protocol to be drafted by the committee soon after it has become operational.

**European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education**
Since the Prague meeting in 2001 the E4 group, consisting of ENQA, EUA, ESIB and EURASHE, has met on a regular basis to discuss respective views on the Bologna Process and European quality in higher education. Since the Berlin meeting in 2003 the E4 meetings have had as their major focus the implementation of the mandate of the Ministers on quality assurance in higher education.

This cooperation at the European level has proved constructive. The four organisations have therefore agreed that a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will continue to exist building from the E4 group. The foundation of such a forum would in practical terms establish the current cooperation between ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB on a more permanent basis. The forum would function primarily as a consultative and advisory forum for the major European stakeholders and it would resemble the current arrangements where the four respective organisations finance their own expenses and participation without the creation of a new administrative structure. In the longer term the forum should also include labour market representatives.

# 4. Future perspectives and challenges

This report contains proposals and recommendations that have been developed and endorsed by the key European players in the world of quality assurance in higher education. The very existence of the report is a testimony to the achievement of a joint understanding in a field where such an understanding might be thought inherently unlikely, given the different interests in play. The proposals offer increased transparency, security and information about higher education for students and society more generally. They equally offer higher education institutions recognition and credibility and opportunities to demonstrate their dedication to high quality in an increasingly competitive and sceptical environment. For the quality assurance agencies the proposals enhance their own quality and credibility and connect them more productively to their wider European professional fraternity.

The proposals will remain no more than proposals, however, if they are not accompanied by an effective implementation strategy. If approved by the Ministers in Bergen, immediate steps will be taken to begin to introduce some of the key elements of this report. The register of quality assurance agencies should be envisaged as being started during the latter half of 2005 and to be ready to go on-line in 2006. The ENQA secretariat has made provision for the extra resources that will be necessary for this purpose. Following the Ministerial meeting, ENQA will take the necessary concrete initiatives towards establishing the European Register Committee. The committee will begin its work with formalising the ownership of the register and drafting a protocol based on the preliminary work done by ENQA in the spring of 2005. The first of the cyclical reviews should be expected to take place during 2005.

The European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will also be an early initiative. Thus, the outcomes of the Bergen Ministerial meeting, and the establishment of the forum will be the main theme of the next meeting between ENQA and its E4 partners in June 2005. In addition, the future cooperation with other key stakeholders such as labour market representatives will be subject to discussions. ENQA has also arranged a meeting with the other European quality assurance networks prior to the next ENQA General Assembly in September 2005.

The possibility of rapid implementation of certain of the proposals of this report should not be taken to mean that the task of embedding the rest of them will be easy. It will take longer for the internal and external quality assurance standards to be widely adopted by institutions and agencies, because their acceptance will depend on a willingness to change and develop on the part of signatory states with longestablished and powerful higher education systems. What is proposed in the internal quality assurance standards will be challenging for some higher education institutions, especially where there is a new and developing tradition of quality assurance or where the focus on students' needs and their preparation to enter the employment market is not embedded in the institutional culture. Similarly, the standards for external quality assurance and for quality assurance agencies themselves will require all participants, and especially the agencies, to look very carefully at themselves and to measure their practices against the European expectation. The new cyclical review procedure will provide a timely focus for this purpose. It will only be when the benefits of adoption of the standards are seen that there is likely to be general acceptance of them.

The EHEA operates on the basis of individual national responsibility for higher education and this implies autonomy in matters of external quality assurance. Because of this the report is not and cannot be regulatory but makes its recommendations and proposals in a spirit of mutual respect among professionals; experts drawn from higher education institutions including students; ministries; and quality assurance agencies. Some signatory states may want to enshrine the standards and review process in their legislative or administrative frameworks. Others may wish to take a longer view of the appropriateness of doing so, weighing the advantages of change against the strengths of the status quo. The proposed European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education should prove a useful place in which to discuss, debate and learn about new thinking, the experiences of other systems and the similarities and dissimilarities of national experiences.

All in all, there will be a considerable and challenging workload for ENQA, its E4 partners and other key stakeholders to get to grips with in the coming years. The report therefore makes it clear that completion of this report is not the same thing as fulfilling the Bologna goal of a quality assurance dimension for the EHEA. Ahead lies more work to implement the recommendations of the report and secure the implied quality culture among both the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies. What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need continuing maintenance and coaxing if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of quality assurance for the EHEA.

A European higher education area with strong, autonomous and effective higher education institutions, a keen sense of the importance of quality and standards, good peer reviews, credible quality assurance agencies, an effective register and increased co-operation with other stakeholders, such as employers, is now possible and the proposals contained in this report will go a long way towards making that vision a reality.

# Annex: Cyclical review of quality assurance agencies[4] – a theoretical model

The model presented below is a proposed indicative outline for a process of external review of an external quality assurance agency. It is presented as an example of a credible process suited to identify compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. However, note must be taken that the purpose is instructive and illustrative. Therefore, the level of detail is high and most likely higher than what will be perceived as needed in individual peer reviews of agencies. It follows from this that in no way must the process presented here be considered as a standard in itself. Further, it should be noted that in the presented example the term "evaluation" is applied to cover objectives and processes. Terms, such as "accreditation" or "audit", might as well be applied.

The process covers the following elements:
- formulating terms of reference and protocol for the review;
- nomination and appointment of panel of experts;
- self-evaluation by the agency;
- site visit;
- reporting.

**1. Terms of reference**
The terms of reference must identify the goals of the review in terms of the perspectives and interests of authorities, stakeholders and the agency itself. All the main tasks and operations of the agency must be covered and in such a manner that it is evident that no hidden agendas are present.

**2. Self-evaluation**
**2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION REQUIRED FROM AGENCY AS BASIS OF REVIEW**
Relevant background information is necessary to understand the context in which the agency is working. The section is expected to include:

**2.1.1 A brief outline of the national higher education system, including:**
- degree structure;
- institutional structure;
- procedures and involved parties in establishing new subjects, programmes and institutions;
- other quality assurance procedures;
- status of higher education institutions in relation to the government.

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[4]  The structure of the annex approximates the one documented recently in a manual of a project on mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries.

**2.1.2 A brief account of the history of the particular agency and of the evaluation of higher education in general:**
- mission statement;
- establishment of the agency (government, higher education institutions, others);
- description of the legal framework and other formal regulations concerning the agency (e.g. parliamentary laws, ministerial orders or decrees);
- the financing of the agency;
- placement of the right to initiate evaluations;
- internal organisation of the agency; including procedures for appointment and composition of board/council;
- other responsibilities of the agency than the evaluation of higher education;
- international activities of the agency, including formal agreements as well as other activities, e.g. participation in conferences, working groups and staff exchange;
- role of the agency in follow-up on evaluations: consequences and sanctions.

**2.2 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNDERTAKEN BY THE AGENCY**
Evidence should be produced indicating that the agency undertakes on a regular basis external quality assurance of higher education institutions or programmes. This quality assurance should involve either evaluation, accreditation, review, audit or assessment, and these are part of the core functions of the agency.

By 'regular' it is understood that evaluations are planned on the basis of a systematic procedure and that several quality assessments have been conducted over the last two years. This evidence should include:
- a description of the methodological scope of the agency;
- an account of the number of quality assessments conducted and the number of units evaluated.

**2.3 EVALUATION METHOD APPLIED BY THE AGENCY**
**2.3.1 Background information**
An account of the overall planning of an evaluation and other fundamental issues is needed to be able to determine if the agency is working on the basis of transparent methodological procedures.

This account should include:
- the procedures for briefing of and communication with the evaluated institutions;
- the agency strategy for student participation;
- the procedures related to establishing the terms of reference/project plan of the individual assessment;
- the reference(s) for evaluation (predefined criteria, legal documents, subject benchmarks, professional standards, the stated goals of the evaluated institution);
- the extent to which the methodological elements are modified to specific reviews.

**2.3.2 Elements of methodology**
An account giving evidence that the methodology the agency is working on is pre-defined and public and that review results are public.

The methodology includes:
- self-evaluation or equivalent procedure of the given object of evaluation;
- external evaluation by a group of experts and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report with public results.

The agency can also work out and apply other methodologies fit for special purposes.

The agency's decisions and reports are consistent in terms of principles and requirements, even if different groups form the judgements.

If the agency makes evaluation decisions, there is an appeals system. This methodology is applied to the needs of the agencies.

If the agency is to make recommendations and/or conditional resolutions, it has a follow-up procedure to check on the results.

**2.3.3 An account of the role of the external expert group**
The account on the role of the external expert group should include:
- procedures for nomination and appointment of experts, including criteria for the use of international experts, and representatives of stakeholders such as employers and students;
- methods of briefing and training of experts;
- meetings between experts: number, scope and time schedule in relation to the overall evaluation process;
- division of labour between agency and experts;
- role of the agency's staff in the evaluations;
- identification and appointment of the member(s) of staff at the agency to be responsible for the evaluation.

**2.3.4 Documentation**
Several accounts of the agency's procedures for collecting documentation are needed to determine the procedures related to the self-evaluation of the agency and site visits:

*2.3.4.1 An account of the procedures related to self-evaluation*
This account should include:
- specification of content in the guidelines provided by the agency;
- procedural advice provided by the agency;
- requirements for composition of self-evaluation teams, including the role of students;
- training/information of self-evaluation teams;
- time available for conducting the self-evaluation.

*2.3.4.2 An account of the procedures related to the site visit*
This account should include:
- questionnaires/interviewing protocols;
- principles for selection of participants/informants (categories and specific participants);
- principles for the length of the visit;
- number of meetings and average length;
- documentation of the meetings (internal/external, minutes, transcriptions etc.);
- working methods of the external expert group.

*2.3.4.3 The reports*
The documentation should include the following information on the reports:

- purpose of the report;
- drafting of the report (agency staff or experts);
- format of report (design and length);
- content of report (documentation or only analysis/recommendations);
- principles for feedback from the evaluated parties on the draft report;
- publication procedures and policy (e.g. handling of the media);
- immediate follow-up (e.g. seminars and conferences);
- long-term follow-up activities (e.g. follow-up evaluation or visit).

### 2.3.5 System of appeal

The agency documents a method for appeals against its decisions and how this methodology is applied to the needs of the agency. It must be evident from the documentation to what extent the appeals system is based on a hearing process through which the agency can provide those under evaluation a means to comment on and question the outcomes of the evaluation.

Basically, the agency must provide evidence that the appeals system provides for those under evaluation an opportunity to express opinions about evaluation outcomes.

### 2.4 ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

This additional documentation should provide an account of the use of surveys, statistical material or other kinds of documentation not mentioned elsewhere. This material should be public.

### 2.5 PROCEDURES FOR A QUALITY SYSTEM FOR AGENCIES

The agency must document that it has in place internal quality assurance mechanisms that conform to those stipulated in the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

### 2.6 FINAL REFLECTIONS

An analysis of the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is needed in order to give an account of the capacity of the agency to adapt to new demands and trends and to permanently improve its actions while maintaining a solid and credible methodological framework and governance model.

### 3. Guidelines for the external review panel

These guidelines describe the expectations to the external review panel. They comprise guidance on:

- appointment and general organisation;
- site visit;
- drafting of the report.

As described above, the agency under review should provide a self-evaluation report according to the provided guidelines. The self-study should be sent to the external review panel no later than a month before the visit.

### 3.1 APPOINTMENT OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL

This section concerns the appointment of the experts that should conduct the review. The external expert group should consist of the following experts:

- one or two quality assurance experts (international);
- representative of higher education institutions (national);
- student member (national);
- stakeholder member (for instance an employer, national).

One of these experts should be elected Chair of the external review panel.

It is also recommended that the panel should be supplemented with a person who, in an independent capacity from the agency, would act as a secretary.

Nominations of the experts may come from the agencies, stakeholders or local authorities but in order to ensure that the review is credible and trustworthy, it is essential that the task of appointing the experts be given to a third party outside the agency involved. This third party could for instance be ENQA or an agency not involved in the process. The basis for the recognition of the experts should be declarations of their independence. However, the agency under review should have the possibility to comment on the final composition of the panel.

### 3.2 SITE VISIT

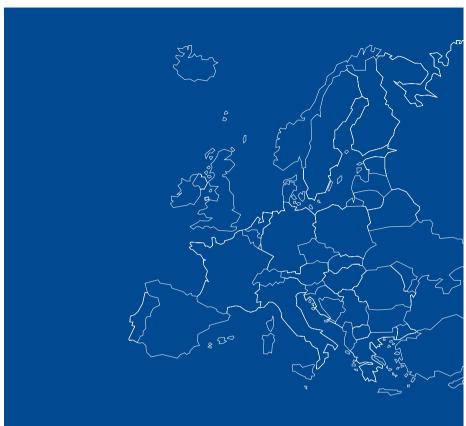A protocol must be available for the site visit along lines such as the following:

The visit is recommended to have a duration of two-three days, including preparation and follow-up, depending on the external review panel's prior knowledge of the agency under review and its context. The day before the visit the panel will meet and agree on relevant themes for the visit. The purpose of the site visit is to validate the self-study. Interview guides should be drafted with this perspective in mind.

The visit could include separate meetings with members from the agency board, management, staff, experts, owners/key stakeholders and representatives from evaluated institutions at management level as well as members from the internal self-evaluation committees.

### 3.3 PREPARATION OF THE REPORT

Apart from fulfilling the general terms of reference the report must focus in a precise manner on compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies as specified in the self-study protocol, as well as with possibilities for and recommendations on future improvements.

After the visit the external review panel assisted by the secretary will draft a report. The final version should be sent to the agency under review for comments on factual errors.

**This is the third edition** of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", drafted by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB and endorsed by the ministers of education of the Bologna signatory states at the Bergen meeting of May 2005. The original report has been adjusted to the current ENQA layout.
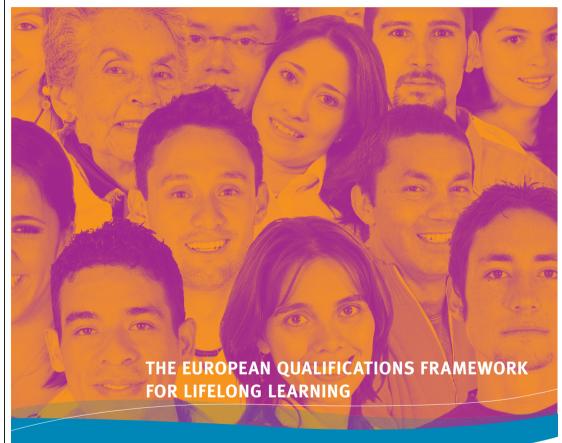
ENQA

EU
Education and Culture DG

European
Qualifications
Framework

**THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING**

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture

Education
and
Training

# THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

**DESCRIPTORS DEFINING LEVELS IN THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF)**

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications.

| | | KNOWLEDGE | SKILLS | COMPETENCE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual. | In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments). | In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. |
| LEVEL 1 | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 1** are | basic general knowledge | basic skills required to carry out simple tasks | work or study under direct supervision in a structured context |
| LEVEL 2 | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 2** are | basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study | basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools | work or study under supervision with some autonomy |
| LEVEL 3 | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 3** are | knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study | a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information | take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems |
| LEVEL 4 | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 4** are | factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study | a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study | exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities |
| LEVEL 5* | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 5** are | comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge | a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems | exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others |
| LEVEL 6** | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 6** are | advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles | advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study | manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups |
| LEVEL 7*** | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 7** are | highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research; critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields | specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields | manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams |
| LEVEL 8**** | The learning outcomes relevant to **Level 8** are | knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields | the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice | demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research |

**Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area**

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

\* The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.

\*\* The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.

\*\*\* The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.

\*\*\*\* The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

# THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

## What is the EQF and what are its benefits?

The EQF is a common European reference system which will link different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together. In practice, it will function as a translation device making qualifications more readable. This will help learners and workers wishing to move between countries or change jobs or move between educational institutions at home.

## Who is the EQF for?

The primary users of the EQF will be bodies in charge of national and/or sectoral qualification systems and frameworks. Once they have related their respective systems to the EQF, the EQF will help individuals, employers and education and training providers compare individual qualifications from different countries and education and training systems.

## What levels and what types of education does the EQF cover?

As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. Each level should in principle be attainable by way of a variety of education and career paths.

## Why does the EQF use learning outcomes?

The EQF uses 8 reference levels based on learning outcomes (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences). The EQF shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. Shifting the focus to learning outcomes

- supports a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competences) and education and training provision
- facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning
- facilitates the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems.

It also recognises that Europe's education systems are so diverse that comparisons based on inputs, say length of study, are impracticable.

## Does the EQF award qualifications?

No, the EQF describes levels of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. The awarding of qualifications will remain a matter for national qualifications bodies.

## What do countries have to do? What are the deadlines for implementation?

It's a voluntary framework, so there are no formal legal obligations on the countries. 2010 is the recommended target date for countries to relate their qualifications systems to the EQF, 2012 for them to ensure that individual qualification certificates bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

## What is the relationship with "Europass"?

Europass introduced a portfolio of documents to be used by individuals to describe their qualifications and competences. Europass does not, however, compare *levels* of qualifications. In the future, all relevant Europass documents, in particular the Europass diploma supplement and the Europass certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.

## What is the relationship with the Bologna process in higher education?

The EQF is fully compatible with the qualifications framework for Higher Education developed under the Bologna Process. Specifically, the EQF descriptors at levels 5-8 refer to the higher education descriptors agreed under the Bologna Process.  However, the formulation of the EQF level descriptors differs from the Bologna level descriptors developed specifically for higher education needs because, as a *lifelong learning* framework the EQF also encompasses vocational education and training (VET) and work contexts, including at the highest levels.

**More information is available at:**
ec.europa.eu/eqf

**http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture**

European
Qualifications
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