

Comments from the Higher Arts Education Sector on the *Commission Staff Working Document*

'Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning'

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Commission Staff Working Document 'Towards a European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning'*. The following comments are submitted on behalf of the **inter}artes Thematic Network¹** for the European Higher Arts Education Sector, in collaboration with the *European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA)*, which is the main subject association in Higher Arts Education in Europe. As the Higher Arts Education Sector has embarked on a route of meaningful collaboration and greater transparency within the context of the *Bologna Process*, we believe we can make a major contribution to the realization of a future *European Qualifications Framework* which will take into account the roles, views, experience and specificity of the creative disciplines in Europe.

Developments in Higher Arts Education Institutes in Europe

Higher Arts Education Institutes in the Bologna countries are now fully engaged in the restructuring of curricula into two and three-cycle programmes as a result of the *Bologna Process*. Some of the Higher Arts Education Institutes only recently acquired higher education status and in some countries this is not yet the case for all Arts Education Institutes. In Denmark, France, and Poland where Higher Arts Education Institutes are accountable to their Ministry for Culture and not to the Ministry for Education, the process may not yet be as advanced as in other countries. In general Higher Arts Education Institutes make full use of the new opportunities offered by the *Bologna Process*, such as the introduction of third cycle degrees in the arts disciplines and the development of innovative Master's courses. Arts Institutes also maintain and further develop approaches and values which equip qualified arts graduates with unique creative competences and skills. Higher Arts Education is a growing sector that attracts a relatively high percentage of international students and

- Delivers a well-balanced curriculum equipping students with a wide range of artistic, professional and transferable skills, increasingly including research, regardless of whether the provision is located in a university or in a vocational training setting.
- Produces arts professionals who are able to work collaboratively with an understanding of the social and organisational context in which they are operating, think creatively and critically and solve a wide range of problems, work effectively in cross-disciplinary teams and are capable of constantly updating their skills and knowledge in response to changing requirements.
- Increasingly uses outcome-based approaches and credit accumulation systems such as ECTS, acknowledging that learning is experiential based on doing.
- Emphasises through practical project work the role of creativity in the development of innovative solutions using a wide range of materials and techniques.
- Uses rigorous methods of selection and assessment to ensure the high quality of its graduates.
- Increasingly delivers programmes for adult learners as part of lifelong learning.
- Develops meaningful connections with local society, industry and the creative industries.

¹ The **inter}artes** Thematic Network is co-ordinated by the Aleksander Zelwerowicz State Theatre Academy. See for more information <http://www.inter-artes.elia-artschools.org>

We have structured our comments according to the questions listed on Page 37 of the Staff Working Document and will address the questions about Sectoral Qualifications. In addition we wish to express our concerns about the level descriptors, in particular the lack of a systematic approach to creative competences, which should be integrated in all eight levels.

To which extent can the EQF become a catalyst for developments at sector level and how can it be used to pursue a more systematic development of knowledge, skills and competences at sector level?

As a highly internationalised sector we welcome the development towards national qualifications frameworks and an overarching *European Qualifications Framework* and we recognize the potential to improve the overall transparency between national systems in the Higher Arts Education Sector. Such developments will gradually overcome still existing formal barriers for student and staff mobility between national higher education systems, especially also between higher education systems where arts education is delivered in vocational training and those systems that provide Higher Arts Education in universities or university-related institutions.

From the point of view of the Higher Arts Education Sector the systematic development of knowledge, skills and competences at European sectoral level is well underway and increasingly and creatively draws on work in progress from the *Socrates Thematic Networks*, the *Tuning Project* (for which *inter}artes* is the reference to Higher Arts Education), the *Revised Dublin Descriptors*, and work done by the EUA and ENQA.

In 2004 a set of Milestone documents² was produced for Dance Education, Fine Art Education and Theatre Education, describing competences in these disciplines and the *inter}artes Thematic Network* is currently describing degree profiles and level cycle descriptors for the three cycles in Higher Arts Education in a large number of arts disciplines. Consultation with the professional field is anticipated as part of this process. In some Higher Arts Education disciplines such as Dance, Design and Theatre Education the involvement of the professional field is established practice, while in other areas this can present difficulties, as coherent professional fields do not really exist. We are also developing guidelines for quality assurance, building on the characteristics of the sector, through peer visits and consultation with Higher Arts Education Institutes across Europe. Our aim is to develop expertise in the field of quality assurance by initiating training programmes and developing a register of experts. In this respect we feel that developing connections with national Qualifications Frameworks with an overarching European Qualifications Framework presents a logical step forwards towards greater transparency. The draft document on the EQF also appeals to us, because it makes clear that the EQF does not affect fundamental ideas of diversity and the specificity of each educational sector.

How can stakeholders at Sector level become involved in supporting the implementation of the EQF and how can the link between sector development and national qualifications be improved?

As a European level sector stakeholder we fully agree that sector initiatives are significant (page 34 Sectoral relationships with EQF), going beyond national frameworks. We consider ourselves in the correct position to link the needs of the sector with a future European qualifications framework and to actively contribute to developing a structure in which national degree profiles, level descriptors and standards in Higher Arts Education can be linked with each other. This will be done in the form of **what is visually portrayed on slide 8 and 9 of Commissioner Figel’s PowerPoint presentation** and what the Staff Working Document on page 4 calls **‘a reading grid’**.

Inter}artes commits itself to developing such a grid, appropriate for all levels in Higher Arts Education. In order to do this successfully we not only need to be in contact with national qualifications authorities, but it would also be necessary to undertake such activities with the help of structured

² See for the 2004 MOVING ON Milestone Documents <http://www.bologna.elia-artschools.org/>

feedback and exchange with networks from other educational sectors and with relevant European networks (ENQA and others).

The reality is that qualifications primarily are the responsibility of the individual country and as a result Higher Arts Education Institutes - as all other educational institutions - operate within their own national framework. We would appreciate a strong incentive from the European Commission to facilitate pilot actions developing experimental ways of linking elements of a qualifications framework between two countries and/or linking with a future EQF. This could possibly be done in the form of experimental initiatives and/or examples of best practice, focusing on mutual 'tuning' of programmes and/or competences, transition courses, etc. It would be important to have the support of the European Commission as well as national authorities to set up such experiments. In such a way an EQF could work more effectively as a catalyst for developments at sectoral level.

We very much agree with bullet point 4 on page 34 which states that the decision to link sectoral initiatives should be decentralised and should be made by the stakeholders themselves. Nevertheless, the involvement of stakeholders in supporting the implementation of the EQF would be helped with a more established structure, in which a concrete dialogue between sectors and national and European authorities can take place, similar to and building on the experience of the *Tuning Project* and the *Socrates Thematic Networks*. To a certain extent, the existing thematic network structure allows us to be involved in this process but as this is only a three-year project more structural provisions would be necessary to undertake co-ordinated actions in this field from a sectoral point of view.

Do the level descriptors adequately capture learning outcomes and their progression in level?

In our view the level descriptors do not adequately capture core learning outcomes. We have serious concerns about the limited importance and value given to creative competences throughout the eight levels. We strongly feel that the definitions used in the document, as well as the descriptions in the eight levels undervalue the crucial element of *creativity*, inventiveness and originality. The *Staff Working Document*, as well as the *Revised Dublin Descriptors* developed for the three cycles in higher education within the framework of the *Bologna Process* defines learning outcomes and competences entirely in terms of cognitive, functional, personal and ethical competence (page 10-12). A systematic approach to a set of creative competences is missing. There are many aspects to creativity which should be further investigated, but one definition would include the ability to translate talents and vision into an external reality that is new and useful. Creativity does not only apply to arts but involves all spheres of life, and is an ability that must be nurtured and trained throughout all levels of education. In the eight levels described in the Staff Working Document the word '**creativity**' only appears in level 5 and '**originality**' is occasionally mentioned from level 7. Early and conscious development of creative skills is crucial, which may include a creative process, creative skills and a creative product. Further development of a vision on creativity as a key learning outcome/competence would be in line with developments in society where creativity and the creative professional is increasingly recognised as an important source of innovation in the knowledge society. We would like to argue in favour of a wider definition of competences that explicitly includes creative competences which will give a more accurate description of general competences and qualifications for Higher Arts Education.

Quality assurance should be based on self-evaluation and peer reviews

We support development towards common principles for quality assurance in education and training (page 26), but were disappointed that the principle of self-evaluation by the institution and a system of peer review with the active participation of students and professional bodies do not appear as strong elements of such common principles. We welcome a European-wide set of principles agreed by key stakeholders from the sector that ensure levels and standards, and place emphasis on the enhancement of quality through the development and use of transparent explicit criteria and processes appropriate to that sector. In the case of Higher Arts Education this includes: a strong emphasis on self-directed learning; recognition of the learning environments within Higher Arts Education such as laboratories, training and studio rooms, equipment; recognition of the different

ways of assessment and evaluation; as well as teacher - student ratios that are not necessarily common in other sectors.

Professional arts training in secondary education

We would like to draw your attention to a specific issue in relation to Higher Arts Education. In a number of European countries professional arts training is also delivered outside the structure of higher education. Educational routes exist in Dance and in Music, where students start their professional training at an early age (from 8/12 years onward) within a special programme as part of primary or secondary education, or in between secondary and higher education. These routes are important in order to maintain high standards of professionalism, especially for dancers and musicians for which professional training has to start early in life. In the streamlining of the higher educational system this form of professional training seems to be under threat and we would appreciate a separate effort to provide this form of professional education the importance it deserves.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on this important document and we trust that you will keep *inter}artes* and ELIA up-to-date with regard to the development of the consultation process.

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