Study of self-certification reports

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Introduction to the Bologna Process

- **Members**: 48 countries and the EC
- **Non-voting members** (consultative and other): CoE, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, ENQA, UNESCO, BUSINESSEUROPE, EI, EQAR
- **Partners**, which can be invited BFUG events

The main focus of the Bologna Process is to strengthen the quality assurance of higher education institutions and their programmes and easier recognition of qualifications and periods of study.

- It supports modernisation of higher education which is needed to increase the competitiveness and better the lives of individuals and the society.
- It supports integration of education and scientific activities, innovation, technology development and social dimensions.
Needs for QF-EHEA self-certification

- **Importance of QA mechanisms** – many HEIs modernised study programmes, implemented QA standards and strengthened their QA mechanisms
- Most of HEIs **still need to do a lot** in order to be competitive compared to HEIs in other well-developed countries
- Many students **still face obstacles** in having their qualifications recognised for work or further studies
- **QF-EHEA** – an instrument designed to improve transparency of qualifications, to support LLL and mobility, based on QA
- The success of the Bologna Process in a country and in Europe **depends on trust and confidence** amongst all key stakeholders in the country and internationally – which further depends on **transparency of self-certification processes** in different countries

- Thus, there are **agreed common criteria and procedures for self-certification to the QF-EHEA**
Motivation for the study

• To support understanding and discussion on the self-certification processes (and reports) to the QF-EHEA – by presenting some introductory results of the self-certification processes
• To support self-certification processes in countries that are still in the first stages of the process
• Sources for this study – self-certification reports (separate or integrated with EQF referencing reports) and background documents
• Several aspects have been analysed:
  1. Self-certification reports in relation to the EQF referencing reports
  2. The role, structure and involvement of international experts during the self-certification processes
  3. The state of play of the implementation of NF and IF learning
  4. The usage of Learning outcomes (LO) by HEIs
  5. The implementation of QA processes, as defined by the ESG
1. Self-certification in relation to the EQF

- There are similarities and differences
  - For example, differences in the legal, political basis and in their geographical scope
  - For example, similarities in the idea of giving their sets of criteria and procedures
  - Designated authority: C-1, C-7 (QF-EHEA) correspond to C-1 (EQF)
  - Descriptors, demonstrating clear links: C-2 (QF-EHEA) – C-2 (EQF)
  - LO and credits: C-3 (QF-EHEA) – C-3 (EQF); EQF in addition – VNFIL
  - Transparency: C-4 (QF-EHEA) – C-4 (EQF)
  - QA principles and procedures: C-5 (QF-EHEA) – C-5 (EQF)
  - Mechanisms to certify learning process: C-6 (QF-EHEA) – C-10 (EQF)
  - Report: P-1, P-4, P-5 (QF-EHEA) – C-8 (EQF)
  - QA bodies: P-2 (QF-EHEA) – C-6 (EQF)
  - International experts: P-3 (QF-EHEA) – C-7 (EQF)
  - Diploma Supplement: P-6 (QF-EHEA) – C-10 (EQF)
  - C-9 (EQF) and C-8 (EQF) partly – not directly linked to QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
1. Self-certification in relation to the EQF

- **QF-EHEA objective** – to show that national NQF-HE matches to QF-EHEA (even a kind of a harmonisation with QF-EHEA is expected)

For EQF – national qualifications system should demonstrate how it relates to the EQF but without any prescribed or implied convergence.

For **QF-EHEA**, the process is based on the assumption that once the compatibility of a national QF for HE is self-certified, the link between the national levels of qualifications should be taken as proven. Another country doubting the linkage of that NQF to QF-EHEA would be required to show **substantial difference**.

- **Reporting of EQF and QF-EHEA** process may be kept **separate or it can be combined** in one document with separate sections for each process. One single report is seen as a tool for increased transparency – indicating that the processes have been closely coordinated and agreed by stakeholders.

- The **self-certification process** was envisaged in the EHEA ministerial communiques as a **one-time only event**. In the EQF process there have been discussions about how continuing referencing might be accomplished, etc.
Types of reports – Study

- **Integrated** with the EQF referencing reports (*most countries*):
  - Explicit response to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
  - Implicit response to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures (i.e., explicit response only to the EQF criteria for all education sub-systems)
  - No explicit nor implicit response on fulfilment of the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures for the HE

- **Separate** self-certification reports:
  - Explicit response **only** to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
  - Partly response to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
  - Explicit response to **both**: QF-EHEA criteria and procedures, and EQF criteria
Separate report on QF-EHEA

Common report (QF-EHEA included in report’s title and explained in separate chapter)

Common report (QF-EHEA explained in separate chapter but not included in the title of the report)

Common report (QF-EHEA included in the title of the report but no separate chapter)

Common report (QF-EHEA not included in the title of the report and no separate chapter; only implicitly responded)

Common report (QF-EHEA not included in the title of the report and no separate chapter; not aware to the QF-EHEA)
2. Involvement of international experts

- **QF-EHEA** aims to improve transparency and international understanding of qualifications in all countries.
- **International experts** – have a clear defined role in making sure that these expectations defined by QF-EHEA criteria and procedures have been met.
- Experiences:
  - International experts **have not been in all cases** involved in all stages.
  - Most of international experts have been involved in the process to make reports **more transparent and understandable** by readers from other countries.
  - There is not a fixed template for the involvement of international experts; experiences varies.
2. Involvement of international experts

- From 2 – 5 experts (sometimes there are no experts with a clear experiences within HE)
- From only surrounding countries – up to – various countries
- Without international organisations – including several international organisations (CoE, Cedefop, ETF, etc.)
- Without written role of experts – clear descriptions of the role (usually participated in several meetings; in some cases, able to provide their opinions; presentations of opinions varied; in some cases addressing specific criteria and procedures; etc.)
- Without written opinions from experts – very detailed
- Only positive opinions – negative review (which happened to be a good idea)
- Etc.

Study → number of international experts involved; the role; written opinion
Involvement of international experts

- 2 international experts, making report transparent; without written opinion
- 3 international experts, making report transparent; written opinion presented
- 4 international experts, making report transparent; written opinion presented
- 5 international experts, making report transparent; without written opinion
- 4 international experts, making report transparent; without written opinion
- 3 international experts, making report transparent; without written opinion
- 2 international experts, making report transparent; without written opinion
- 2 international experts; no clear role written; without written opinion

3. Validation of NF and IF learning

• There is a wide spectrum of approaches for the validation of NF and IF learning
• Only some of countries used this concept systematically (even less of them within HE)
• Different understanding of the concept, and different terms used in different countries for this process, such as:
  • Recognition of prior learning
  • Recognition of NF and IF learning
  • Validation of NF and IF learning
  • National credit rating
  • Institutional alignment, etc.
• This process is not guided by the QF-EHEA (but by EQF, Criterion 3, in relation to C-4 and C-5); C-5 is very important for development of trust in validation process
3. Validation of NF and IF learning

- VNFIL has not been described in separate self-certification reports

- Some countries described, but there are:
  - Terminology and conceptual issues
  - Linked to adult learning
  - Using terms “non-formal qualification” or similar
  - Etc.

- There examples with clear concepts and according to EU principles (in common reports)

- Most of countries – just declaration to include VNFIL

- In HE used for: access, part of programmes, but there examples where it is possible to achieve (in theory) full qualifications
Validation of NF and IF (VNFIL)

- VNFIL exists and linked to NQF
- VNFIL exists and there are strategy plan to link to NQF
- Procedures for implementation of VNFIL
- Strategy plan for VNFIL development exists, but some issues with concepts
- No-clear concepts, no strategy plan, but declared to introduce VNFIL

2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014
4. Learning outcomes (LO) used in HE

- Role of LO in HE plays an integral part of LLL strategy to promote different elements, such as:
  - Modernisation of HE
  - Promotion of student centered learning
  - Award, accumulation and transfer of ECTS (or equivalent) credits
  - Quality assurance
  - Flexible learning pathways
  - Key competences for LLL
  - Validation of NF and IF learning
  - Credibility for HEIs and employers
  - Etc.
4. LO used in HE

- In most cases, while countries introduced level descriptors, they have not yet systematically implemented LO within HEIs.
- **Various representations of LO** exists in different countries; most of them using similar as in EQF (KSC); there are other innovative representations; some of domains in different countries use only different term; various layers of descriptors exists.
- Some **descriptors are not completely generic** – some of level descriptors incorporate a set of key competences for LLL within level descriptors (i.e., learning, communication, ICT skills, etc.).
- **ECTS** credits are used differently (all cycles; or not for third cycle; various number of ECTS or equivalent; etc.).
- 1 ECTS (or equivalent) varies from 20 to 30 hours.
- Etc.
Implementation of LO and their dimensions (ECTS, etc.)

- Learning outcomes implemented; Dublin descriptors; ECTS used, but not for the third cycle
- Learning outcomes implemented; Dublin descriptors; ECTS used for all cycles (but carefully used for research)
- Learning outcomes implemented; no info on ECTS or similar credits
- Learning outcomes implemented; Dublin descriptors, ECTS used for all cycles (no structured for the third cycle)
- Learning outcomes not implemented; Plan exists; ECTS used

2006   2007   2008   2009   2010   2011   2012   2013   2014
5. Quality assurance

- **QA is crucial** in supporting HE systems and institutions in responding to changing environments while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students remain relevant and at the forefront of institutional missions.
- QA – the core components for all NQFs for HE.
- QA – Criterion 5 (**ESG** for HE).
- Experiences:
  - All countries have established some form of external QA, but significant differences in the approach.
  - QA moving towards making sure that expected LO are met when a qualification is awarded.
  - QA bodies are key stakeholders in self-certification processes.
  - Varying degrees of ESG implementation.
  - Etc.
5. Quality assurance

- Most reports described, but not focused to standards and functions of bodies, and some countries without evidences for the statements about QA
- Most countries express link to ESG
- Most of countries have a national agency for quality assurance
  - ENQA members, but not all countries
  - Registered in EQAR (21 countries; 18 with self-certification)
- Some countries use agencies from other countries
- There are examples of non-transparency of titles
Implementation of QA mechanisms according to the ESG

Agency established, preparing towards the ESG

Agency established, acting according the ESG

Creating of agency for quality assurance

2006  2007  2008  2009  2010  2011  2012  2013  2014
Impacts of self-certification reports

- Motivation of stakeholders and individuals
- Common concepts and terms
- Improvement of QA systems
- Partnerships within countries and internationally
- Peer-learning and development of national experts
- Contribution to increased mutual trust ("critical international friends", willingness to give and to receive constructive feedbacks)
- Building transparent systems for recognition of foreign qualifications
- Etc.
Needs for improvement

- Concepts and terms
  - Related to LO, qualifications, etc.
- Development and implementation of LO and credit system(s)
- Development and implementation of QA system (standards, body and their functions, guidelines)
- Levelling of qualifications and transparency of titles
- Understanding and implementation of the system for VNFIL
- Development and implementation of the system for Recognition of foreign qualifications (use of NQFs, self-certification and referencing)
- Fail to discuss the linkages between different self-certification criteria and procedures (descriptors; LO; levelling; QA). For example, how QA supports the shift to LO, descriptors, credits, and levelling of qualifications
- Etc.

⇒ Peer Learning Activities, further studies, etc.
Thank you!

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