

WCES 2012

Implementation of national qualification framework for higher education in Republic of Macedonia

Liljana Koleva Gudeva ^a*, Sasa Mitrev ^a, Emilija Ivanovska Janevik ^b, Blazo Boev ^c

^a Goce Delcev University, Faculty of Agriculture, Stip, Krste Misirkov b.b. PO box 201, 2000 Stip, Republic of Macedonia

^b Goce Delcev University, Faculty of Medicine, Stip, Krste Misirkov b.b. PO box 201, 2000 Stip, Republic of Macedonia

^c Goce Delcev University, Faculty of Natural and Technical Science, Stip, Krste Misirkov b.b. PO box 201, 2000 Stip, Republic of Macedonia

Abstract

The development of Qualifications Frameworks has been a major international trend in reforming national education and training systems since the late 1990s. The initiative first started among English-speaking developed countries. Since the late 1990s such frameworks have also been adopted by non-English-speaking and developing countries. In March 2005, following work undertaken by the European Commission, the Europe Union Heads of Government requested the development of a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. It is planned that the countries within the European Union, and other states, align their national frameworks of qualifications with the European Qualifications Framework by 2012. Republic of Macedonia joined the process and from May 2009 started with designing and implementation of National Qualifications Framework.

© 2012 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Selection and/or peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Hüseyin Uzunboylu

Keywords: European Qualifications Framework, National Qualifications Framework, Lifelong learning, Bologna cycle, Dublin descriptors.

1. Introduction

In May 1998 the Ministers in charge of higher education of France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany signed the so-called Sorbonne Declaration (Sorbonne, 1998) on the ‘harmonization of the architecture of the European Higher Education System’ at the Sorbonne University in Paris. The Sorbonne Declaration focused on: a progressive convergence of the overall frameworks of degrees and cycles in an open European Higher Education Area (EHEA); a common degree level system for under graduated and graduated; enhancing and facilitating student and teacher mobility; improving recognition of degrees and academic qualifications. The Bologna Process has progressed: Bologna 1999, Berlin 2003, 2004 Maastricht, Bergen 2005, and London 2007.

2. Framework of the Qualification for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

In 2003, Ministers with responsibility for higher education gathered in Berlin to review the Bologna process. *Ministers encourage the member states to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning*

* Liljana Koleva Gudeva Tel.: +389-32-550-627, Fax: +389-32-550-001
E-mail address: liljana.gudeva@ugd.edu.mk

outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching Framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (FQ for EHEA), Berlin Communiqué.

Furthermore, the Bergen conference of European ministers responsible for higher education in 2005 adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. Ministers committed themselves to elaborate national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010. On 14 December 2004, in Maastricht, the ministers responsible for vocational education and training of 32 European countries agreed to develop a European Qualifications Framework EQF (Maastricht Communiqué). In March 2005, the EU Heads of Government requested the development of an EQF for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL). It relates to all education and training awards in Europe, including those aligned with the FQ for EHEA.

The EQF is not a regulatory: it has no legal force and its implementation is on a voluntary basis. The aim of EQF is not to replace national and/or sectorial frameworks, but to be the source of final decisions on the recognition of qualifications. The EQF for Lifelong Learning (EQF LLL) has eight reference levels. It is planned that the countries within the European Union and other states participating in the Lisbon Strategy will align their national qualification frameworks (NQF) of with the EQF by 2012.

2.1. Relation and purpose of the FQ for EHEA

There are a number of countries with national frameworks of qualifications already in place or being put in place, each reflecting national structures and policy priorities. Some of these relate to all education and training while others just to higher education. The relation and purpose for the FQ-EHEA is to provide a mechanism to relate national frameworks to each other so as to enable:

- International transparency
- International recognition of qualifications
- International mobility of learners and graduates

A fundamental question for any framework of qualifications concerns its structure and the number of divisions it contains. The concept of “cycle” has been used in the Bologna Process to refer to stages in higher education, incorporating qualifications, programs, and phases of learning. The term “level” is more commonly found in documentation on national frameworks of qualifications.

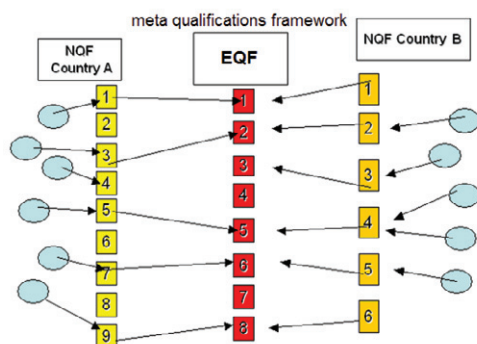


Figure 1. Compatibility of qualifications between country A and country B according EQF levels (META qualification framework)

2.1.1. Core elements of the EQF

The objective of the European Qualifications Framework is to develop a common description of qualifications that can be applied to all education systems in Europe. While sectorial directives and equivalence procedures require a direct, detailed comparison of courses and recognition directives even provide for the possibility of supplementary training when the differences between courses of training are more sizable, the European Qualifications Framework

takes a different approach. The EQF represents a stable point of reference and changes in training courses can be easily put into relation to other courses with its help.

The European Qualifications Framework is also called a *META qualifications framework* (Figure 1). This means that training programs are not to be directly assigned to an EQF level but rather to a level in a national qualifications framework which in turn corresponds to a particular EQF level. This makes it possible to take national peculiarities in education systems better into account

3. National Qualification Framework (NQF)

NQF in the Republic of Macedonia began to construct as a project activities, form the project NQF-LLL in the context of Lifelong Learning , funded by the of the European Commission form CARDS Regional Action Program.

The project NQF-LLL was finalized with a proposal for NQF to be set in correlation with the levels in the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF, 8 levels) and the cycles of higher education under the Bologna process. In this way, qualifying in the NQF would receive initial qualification comparability with systems in other countries that use META QF and also are involved in the Bologna process. It is proposed that the frame has eight levels that correspond to the eight levels of EQF and the three Bologna cycles (Table 1).

NQF for higher education started to be design in 2008 as a Tempus project activity Design and implementation of NQF for HE in Republic of Macedonia.

3.1. Baseline for NQF for Higher Education (NQF-HE)

Designing the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in R. of Macedonia is based on the ‘Overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA’, compatible with the EQF for LLL (EQF).

The spirit of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), ratified by Macedonia in 2003, was reflected in three new laws adopted by the Government: Law on Higher Education (Official Gazette No. 35/08), Low on adult education (Official Gazette No. 7/08) and Low on Vocational Education and Training (Official Gazette No. 71/06).

3.1.1. Methodology used for implementation of NQF-HE

The process for the design and implementation of the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in Republic of Macedonia is following the TEN STEPS recommendation as an outcome of the NQF Development and Certification Report from Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework, submitted to the conference of the Bologna Process in London, 2007. Ten steps in developing of NQF-HE are

1. **Decision to start:** taken by national body responsible for HE (Ministry of Education and Science)
2. **Setting the agenda:** the purpose of NQF
3. **Organising the process:** identifying stakeholders; setting up a committee / workgroup
4. **Design Profile:** level structure, level descriptors (learning outcomes), credit ranges
5. **Consultation:** National discussion and acceptance of design by stakeholders
6. **Approval:** According to national tradition (Ministry / Government / Legislation)
7. **Administrative set-up:** division of tasks of implementation between HEI, QAA and other bodies
8. **Implementation at institutional level:** Reformulation of individual study programmes to learning outcome based approach
9. **Inclusion of qualifications in the NQF:** Accreditation or similar (cfr. Berlin Communiqué)
10. **Self-certification:** compatibility with the EHEA framework (Alignment to Bologna cycles etc.)

4. Discussion

The National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications that closely define the profile, objectives and initial creation of the curricula of the first, second and third cycle of studies and curricula for vocational education shorter

than three years in Republic of Macedonia was established by *Decree for the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (Official Gazette No.154 from 30/11/2010) adopted by the Government.

Table 1. NQF correspondence to the eight levels of EQF and the three Bologna cycles

Bologna Framework	EQF META	NQF RM	Bologna Framework
	1	1	
	2	2	
	3	3	
	4	4	
*	5	5	*
First Cycle	6	6	First Cycle
Second Cycle	7	7	Second Cycle
Third Cycle	8	8	Third Cycle

* EQF level 5 is linked with Dublin Descriptor Short Cycle Qualification (within or linked to the first cycle). This is not formally part of the FQ-EHEA– in adopting the FQ-EHEA, Ministers agreed that the Framework would include, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications.

The levels of the NQF–HE are represented in Table 2. The levels in NQF–HE represent bands of qualifications that share similar expectations of attainment. There are three levels VI, VII and VIII and a short cycle, level V, linked to the first cycle in the NQF–HE in R. Macedonia. Levels V, VI and VII are divided into two sublevels.

Table 1. Levels of the NQF-HE correspondence to EQF-HE

Level NQF for HEQ	Higher Education	Level EQF for HEQ
VIII	III Cycle Doctoral Degree Min. 3 years	Level 8
VII A	II Cycle Full academic studies for Master Degree	Level 7
VII B	II Cycle Specialist Degree	
VI A	I Cycle University Studies 240 credits Professional Studies 240 credits	Level 6
VI B	I Cycle University Studies 180 credits Professional Studies 180 credits	
V A	Professional Studies from 60 to 120 credits Short cycles within the first cycle	Level 5
V B	Vocational education associated with the first cycle of studies up to 60ECTS	

After studying the compatibility documents and other relevant material, and after discussions with the stakeholders, it is the opinion that the National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education in the Republic of Macedonia is compatible with the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. National qualifications frameworks for higher education are developed by the competent public authorities in the country concerned. While this is ultimately the competence and responsibility of the public authorities responsible for the country's higher education system, however, the participation of a broad range of stakeholders – including higher education institutions, students, staff and employers – is necessary for the framework to be successful. The development of national qualifications frameworks should therefore include broad consultations to ensure the trust among various stakeholders and confidence in the integrity of the resultant framework.

5. Conclusion

The last few years, there are a number of important changes taking place in the qualification system in Republic of Macedonia. The most significant is the introduction of the National Framework of Higher Education Qualifications, the NF-HEQ. It puts the needs of the learner first and supports the national objective of moving towards a “higher education society”. The transparent nature of the NF-HEQ should allow learners to compare and contrast qualifications and to plan their education and training and career progression. It should aid employers in recognizing and understanding the level and standard of qualification, acting as a tool for identifying “appropriate fit” qualifications for specific roles. The international dimension of this development is important from an individual and an economic perspective.

References

- A framework for lifelong learning: a profile of the Scottish Qualification Authority (1999). *Scottish Qualifications Authority*. Glasgow: SQA.
- A framework for Qualification of the European higher education area (2005). Copenhagen: *Ministry of science technology and innovation*, ISBN 8791469538.
- Bologna declaration on the European space for higher education (1999). *European Commission Education & Training*, <<http://ec.europa.eu/education/polices/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>>.
- Bloom, B. S. (1956). Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: *The Cognitive Domain*. New York: David McKay Co Inc.
- Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: the classification of educational goals; Handbook I: *Cognitive Domain* New York, Longmans, Green, 1956.
- The Copenhagen declaration (2002). The Declaration of European Ministers of vocational education and training, and the European Commission in Copenhagen 2002.
- Dave, R. H. (1975). *Developing and Writing Behavioral Objectives*. (R. J. Armstrong, ed.). Tucson, Arizona: Educational Innovators Press.
- Decree for the National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in the Republic of Macedonia (2010). *Official Gazette*, No.154 from 30/11/2010).
- The Berlin Communiqué. Realising the European higher Education area (2003). Of the conference of the Ministers responsible for a higher education in Berlin 19. Sep. 2003 <<http://aecs.site.cramgo.nl/DownloadView.aspx?ses=3951>>.
- The European higher education area – achieving the goals. Bergen (2005). <<http://www.bologna-berden2005.no/Docs/00-Main doc 050520 Bergen Communiqué.pdf>>.
- Towards European qualification framework for livelong learning. Commission staff working document (2005). *European Commission Education & Training*, Brussels 08.jun. 2005. http://ec.europa.eu/education/polices/2010/doc/consultation_eqf_en.pdf.
- Harrow, A. (1972). Taxonomy of Psychomotor Domain: *A Guide for Developing Behavioral Objectives*. New York: David McKay.
- Kennedy, D. (2007). *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes*, Cork: Quality Promotion Unit, UCC.
- Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S., & Masia, B. B. (1973). Taxonomy of the Educational Objectives the Classification of the Educational Goals. Handbook II: *Affective Domain*, New York: David McKay Co., Inc.
- Lisbon strategy (2000). <http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/lisabon_strategy_en.htm>.
- Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training, Maastricht (2004). *European Commission Education & Training*, <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/news/ip/docs/maastricht_com_en.pdf>
- Pohl, M. (2000). Learning to Think, Thinking to Learn: *Models and Strategies to Develop a Classroom Culture of Thinking*. Cheltenham, Vic.: Hawker Brownlow.
- Simpson, E. J. (1972). *The Classification of Educational Objectives in the Psychomotor Domain*. Washington, DC: Gryphon House.