

3. Developments relating to accountability for quality agenda

This part outlines the development of the accountability for quality agenda in the European Higher Education Area, Britain, the OECD, the USA and Australia. It gives particular attention to new policy and regulatory initiatives of governments, and action and reaction responses of higher education institutions and organisations.

3.1 Developments in the European Higher Education Area

Of particular interest are the following developments: the Bologna Process; Qualifications frameworks; The Diploma Supplement; Tuning; and Institutional classifications.

3.1.1 The Bologna Process

The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999 expressed a commitment by the 29 signature countries' ministers to a process to "bring their higher education systems into greater harmony and transparency in matters of degree cycles, quality assurance practices, and credit mechanisms so as to realise mutual recognition of course work and degrees and hence enable their students to move easily through the borderless economic landscape of Europe" (Adelman, 2009).

3.1.2 Qualifications frameworks

In 2002, the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training laid down plans for trans-European recognition of vocational qualifications. The ensuing European Qualifications Framework was seen as "a mechanism enabling comparability between national qualifications systems, thus enhancing transferability and mobility of labour" (Brockmann et al., 2008). The Berlin ministerial communiqué of 2003 expanded on the Bologna Process framework through an agreement to draw up a Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EQF), add Doctoral education, after a Bachelor's/Master's two-cycle core, undertake to develop compatible national qualifications frameworks, develop national quality assurance systems, and expand the use-purpose of the credit transfer scheme (ECTS) to include accumulation as well as transfer, such that ECTS became the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme.

The EQF was formally adopted on 23 April 2008 when the European Parliament and the Council recommended that member states adopt it, with the following requirements:¹²

- Relate their national qualifications systems or frameworks to the EQF by 2010, by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualifications levels to the eight levels of the EQF;
- Ensure that by 2012 all new certificates, diplomas and 'Europass' documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate EQF level;

¹² Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning [<http://eur-lex.europa/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:111:0001:0007:EN:PDF>]

- Use an approach based on learning outcomes (what the learner knows, understands and is able to do) when defining and describing qualifications;
- Promote and apply common principles of quality assurance when relating qualifications in higher education and vocational education and training within national qualifications systems to the EQF;
- Designate National Coordination Points, which will be in charge of referencing national qualifications levels to the EQF levels in a transparent way, involving all relevant stakeholders in the process.

The main role of the EQF is to provide a “translation device”, a reference for one country to explain to others how its national qualifications are arranged and how the ‘levels’ of its national qualifications system relates to the ‘levels’ of the EQF (Quintin, 2010). ‘Referencing’ means the process by which a ‘level’ in a national qualifications framework or system is related to one of the eight EQF ‘levels’. The eight EQF reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes, independent of the place and mode of learning (see Box 10).

Whilst in respect of Higher Education, a general nomenclature is used for Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorate degrees, the equivalence required for reference to the EQF concerns levels rather than award titles. That is, it is the expected ‘levels’ of learning outcomes that determine where different qualifications fit in the EQF referencing, not what the qualification is called or which type of institution issued it.

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Box 10. The European Qualifications Framework

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) acts as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting cross-country mobility of workers and learners and facilitating their lifelong learning.

The EQF aims to relate different countries’ national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems. Agreed upon by the European institutions in 2008, the EQF is being put in practice across Europe. It encourages countries to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF so that all new qualifications issued from 2012 carry a reference to an appropriate EQF level. An EQF national coordination point has been designated for this purpose in each country.

The core of the EQF concerns eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do—‘learning outcomes’. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8). This will enable a much easier comparison between national qualifications and should also mean that people do not have to repeat their learning if they move to another country.

The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational. This approach shifts the focus from the traditional system which emphasises ‘learning inputs’, such as the length of a learning experience, or type of institution. It also encourages lifelong learning by promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This reflects a wider shift within which the EQF is acting as a catalyst for reforms: most Member States are now developing their own National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) based on learning outcomes. Several countries (Belgium-Flanders, Britain, France, Ireland, Malta) already have one in place.

Source: European Commission. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc44_en.htm. Accessed 19 July 2010.

There are several complexities in referencing exercises. One challenge is that whereas the European Qualifications Framework has 8 levels, the Irish and German national qualifications frameworks have 10, and Scotland 12. Another challenge is that level descriptors drawn up to suit national needs and circumstances reflect different orientations to learning. Some countries (e.g. Finland, Malta, Slovenia) emphasise key competencies such as learning to learn, communication and social skills, entrepreneurship and judgement (Grm & Bjornavold, 2010). The German approach treats competence as an overarching concept, covering “knowledge, ability and understanding, practical realisation and implementation, as well as generic competences” (BMBF, 2008). In this context, “competences are to be understood as general potential capabilities and personal characteristics that in (unknown) future situations (presumably) facilitate successful professional action” (BMBF, 2008). The German qualifications framework categories are divided into the field of Knowledge and Understanding (subdivided into Extending Knowledge and Consolidating Knowledge) and into the field of Skills (subdivided into Instrumental, Systemic and Communicative competences) (BMBF, 2008).

3.1.3 The Diploma Supplement

As part of the Europass System (see Box 11), the Diploma Supplement describes a higher education qualification in an easily understandable way and relates it to the higher education system within which it was issued.

Box 11. The Europass System

“The Europass system, formally established in 2004, is an internet-based system, managed at both the Community and the Nation State level with the objective of establishing a single community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences by means of the creation of a personal, coordinated portfolio of documents outlined below.

The *Europass-CV* is a standardized CV template intended ‘to provide citizens with the opportunity to present in a clear and comprehensive way information on all their qualifications and competences’. The template is quite detailed, and individuals can choose what (not) to include. As such, it is in essence a self-declaration and thus a personal document. The electronic interface allows for linkage with the other Europass elements.

Europass-Mobility is a record documenting periods of learning attended by its holder in countries other than his/her own. It is aimed at helping the holder to better communicate what has been gained by this, again especially in terms of competences. Unlike the E-CV, this document is not compiled by an individual, but is awarded to her/him by both the sending and the hosting institution. In accordance with the importance of mobility schemes discussed earlier, the Europass-Mobility is only provided for recognized European learning pathways, i.e. those that are part of formalized mobility programs and agreements.

The *Europass-Diploma Supplement* is designed to provide information on its holder’s educational achievement at higher education level. It is attached to a higher education diploma, with similar authentication, and produced by the competent national authorities, on the basis of a common template. Although it is adaptable to local needs, the common template specifies eight categories that should be completed or it should be explained why they are not completed (a principle derived from the corporate code of good governance: ‘provide information or explain why you are not providing it’).

The *Europass-Language Portfolio*, like the E-CV is an electronic template which individuals can use to ‘present the language skills, cultural experiences and competences’. Again, like the E-CV, it is something an individual fills out, with the help of guidelines provided, but as such it is a non-certified document. It is intended to serve two purposes: pedagogical and reporting. As to pedagogical, it is supposed to ‘enhance motivation for language learning and intercultural experiences’, whilst as to reporting it ‘documents language proficiency and takes stock of competency levels’. It should be noted that experiences imply both formal and informal experiences.

The *Europass-Certificate Supplement* is the vocational training equivalent to the DS. It describes the competences and qualifications that correspond to a vocational training certificate, and is an officially certified document, awarded by the competent national authorities.”

Goedegebuure & Corrigan (2008).

3.1.4 Institutional classifications

The Europeans have also indicated some sensitivity to international league tables of higher education institutions which rely primarily on measures of research performance, and where European institutions, with a few notable exceptions, tend to be ranked outside the top 100. They are interested in a broader view of the role of universities and a more balanced representation of the importance of teaching and learning in ratings and classifications (van Vught et al., 2010).

U-Map has been developed as an instrument to classify universities and to map the European university landscape. It is an instrument that allows the various stakeholders as active users of the classification to decide for themselves which elements of the multidimensional classification are important to them (www.u-map.eu).

Institutions are described along six dimensions: Teaching and learning profile; Student profile; Research involvement; Involvement in knowledge exchange; International orientation; and Regional engagement. A multidimensional classification system is intended to provide a series of lenses through which important similarities and differences among higher education institutions can be described and compared. U-Map does this by providing a framework for creating and analysing 'institutional profiles' (see Box 12).

ProfileFinder produces a list of higher education institutions (HEIs) that are comparable on the characteristics selected by the inquirer. *ProfileViewer* provides an institutional activity profile for comparing three institutions (www.u-map.eu).

U-Map aims to make transparent the diversity of European Higher Education. It is a descriptive tool to identify higher education institutions that show similarities on certain indicators and dimensions, and enable meaningful comparisons (van Vught, 2010). The U-Map approach contrasts with "current quality assurance schemes that tend to emphasise uniformity...and present information in the form of 'passing uniform thresholds' (accreditation), succeeding in generally acceptable performances (audits), or ratings on uniform scales (rankings)" (van Vught et al., 2010).

The U-Map approach prioritises transparency for multiple stakeholders, valuing diversity of purpose on the part of learners and provider institutions, without diminishing institutional accountability to government for the cost-effective use of resources.

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Box 12. U-Map Institutional Profiles

Teaching and learning profile	Student profile	Research involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree level focus • Range of subjects • Orientation of degree • Expenditure on teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mature students • Part-time students • Distance learning students • Size of student body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer reviewed publications • Doctorate graduation • Expenditure on research
Involvement in knowledge exchange	International orientation	Regional engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start-up firms • Patent application filed • Cultural activities • Income from knowledge exchange activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign degree seeking students • Incoming students in international exchange programmes • Students sent out in international exchange programmes • International academic staff • The importance of international sources of income in the overall budget of the institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates working in the region • First year bachelor students from the region • Importance of local/regional income sources
van Vught et al., 2010.		

U-Multirank

In another effort to dilute the research bias of world university rankings, work is underway in designing a user-driven, interactive web-based ranking system. The approach involves three user steps: (i) selecting institutions or fields within institutions, drawing on U-Map for the identification of comparable institutions; (2) choosing whether to rank at whole of institution or field level; and (iii) selecting a set of indicators to suit their needs, either from a choice of menus or from a personalised selection from the data cells on the information grid. The main advantage of the U-Multirank approach is that it offers multi-dimensional views of the capacities and performance of institutions, reflecting the diversity of the systems and the varying needs of users:

“The implication of this approach is that institutions can be expected to have different comparative results on different dimensions. The set of the ‘scores’ of an individual institution on the whole set of dimensions of the classification defines the institution’s ‘performance profile’ (CHERPA-Network, 2010).

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3.1.5 Tuning

Tuning Educational Structures in Europe started in 2000 as a project to link development in Higher Education to the political objectives of the Bologna Process. Over time, tuning has developed into a ‘process’, an approach to re-designing, developing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing the quality of first, second and third cycle degree programs (Tuning, 2010). The Tuning outcomes and its tools are presented in a range of Tuning publications, which institutions and their academics are invited to test and use in their own context. Tuning focuses not on educational systems but on educational structures with an emphasis on the content of studies. Whereas educational systems are primarily the responsibility of governments, educational structures and content are those of higher education institutions and their academic staff (Tuning, 2010).

The following outline of Tuning has been extracted from the official Tuning website (Tuning, 2010):

“In the framework of the Tuning project a methodology has been designed to understand curricula and to make them comparable. Five lines of approach have been distinguished to organize the discussions in the subject areas:

1. generic (general academic) competences,
2. subject-specific competences,
3. the role of ECTS as an accumulation system
4. approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment and
5. the role of quality enhancement in the educational process (emphasising systems based on internal institutional quality culture).

Each line has been developed according to a pre-defined process. The starting point was updated information about the state of the art at European level. This information was then reflected upon and discussed by teams of experts in the now nine subject related areas. It is the work of these teams, validated by the respective European networks, that has provided understanding, context and conclusions which can be considered valid at European level (Tuning, 2010)

Tuning has developed a model for designing, implementing and delivering curricula offered within one institution, or, jointly, by two or more institutions. The following main steps in the process for designing a study programme either a local programme or an (international) integrated programme/joint degree were identified:

1. Meeting the basic conditions:

For all study programmes:

- Has the social need for the programme on a regional/national/European level been identified? Has this been done on the basis of a consultation of stakeholders: employers, professionals and professional bodies?
- Is the programme of sufficient interest from the academic point of view? Have common reference points been identified?
- Are the necessary resources for the programme available inside or, if required, outside the (partner) institution(s) concerned?

For international degree programmes offered by more than one institution:

- Is there commitment of the institutions concerned? On what basis: an (official) agreement or a strategic alliance?
- Is there sufficient guarantee that the programme will be recognised legally in the different countries?
- Is there agreement with regard to the length of the programme to be designed in terms of ECTS-credits based on student workload?

2. Definition of a degree profile.
3. Description of the objectives of the programme as well as the learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities) that have to be met.
4. Identification of the generic and subject-related competences which should be obtained in the programme.
5. Translation into the curriculum: content (topics to be covered) and structure (modules and credits).

6. Translation into educational units and activities to achieve the defined learning outcomes.
7. Deciding the approaches to teaching and learning (types of methods, techniques and formats), as well as the methods of assessment (when required, the development of teaching material).
8. Development of an evaluation system intended to enhance its quality constantly.

This model is based on the assumption that programmes can and should be enhanced on the basis not only of feedback but also of 'feed forward' by taking into account developments in society as well as the academic field concerned.

Tuning makes the distinction between learning outcomes and competences to distinguish the different roles of the most relevant players: academic staff and students/learners. Desired learning outcomes of a process of learning are formulated by the academic staff, preferably involving student representatives in the process, on the basis of input of internal and external stakeholders. Competences are obtained or developed during the process of learning by the student/learner. In other words:

- Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of learning. They can refer to a single course unit or module or else to a period of studies, for example, a first or a second cycle programme. Learning outcomes specify the requirements for award of credit.
- Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes. Competences will be formed in various course units and assessed at different stages.

Tuning distinguishes three types of generic competences:

- Instrumental competences: cognitive abilities, methodological abilities, technological abilities and linguistic abilities;
- Interpersonal competences: individual abilities like social skills (social interaction and co-operation);
- Systemic competences: abilities and skills concerning whole systems (combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge; prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences required).

Tuning links learning outcomes, competences and ECTS workload-based credits (Tuning, 2010).

Importantly, tuning reports make it clear that subject area learning outcome statements are reference points only, and are not intended to prescribe the 'profile' of individual programs which may include learning outcomes additional to the Tuning documentation (Harris, 2009).

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