



Qualifications Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity – TPG A (QUATRA – TPG A)

Preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process

DRAFT Guidelines, Observations, and Recommendations –
based on the QUATRA – TPG A project

Tbilisi, 28 September 2023

Horacy Debowski, Baiba Ramina, Gunta Kinta, Khatia Tsiramua



Co-funded by
the European Union

Background information

- In September 2018, the BFUG formally established Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework (TPG A on QF)
- The Self-Certification Working Group was established in 2022 per request of TPG A on QF member countries.
- The Working Group on Self-Certification is comprised of 8 members: Andorra, Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece and Kazakhstan, Latvia. In 2023, Sweden joined the Working Group as an observer. Georgia and Bulgaria co-chair Working Group.

Sources (1)

- The survey was used to collect the experience and best practices of TPG A on QF members on the self-certification process of national qualifications frameworks against the QF-EHEA.
- In total 16 countries sent their responses, including:
 - countries who completed the self-certification process: Albania, Austria, Croatia, Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, North Macedonia, Poland and Romania;
 - countries who have the self-certification in their policy agenda: Azerbaijan, Andorra, Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Georgia

Sources (2)

- An analysis of the existing European documents and literature:
 - Ministerial conferences and communiqués, in particular, especially those issued after 2005: Rome (2020), Paris (2018), Yerevan (2015), Bucharest (2012), Budapest/Vienna (2010), Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), London (2007), Bergen (2005)
 - Self-certification reports and referencing reports prepared by the countries within EHEA and EQF processes
 - Notes of the meetings of National Correspondents within Qualifications Frameworks European Higher Education Area
 - EQF Advisory Group notes related to the referencing process and updating referencing.

Sources (3)

- *Aligning National against European Qualification Frameworks: The Principles of Self-Certification*. Official Bologna Conference the London – Leuven/Lovain-la-Neuve work programme. Organised by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia in co-operation with the Council of Europe. Tbilisi State University, November 27 – 28, 2008. Final report prepared by **Věra Šťastná**, General Rapporteur.
- *Study of self-certification reports on the compatibility of national qualifications frameworks with the overarching qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area (2016)* conducted by **Mile Dželalija and Bryan Maguire** within the works of the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation, Education Department of the Council of Europe

Sources (4)

- *Quality Assurance And Qualifications Frameworks: Exchanging Good Practice*, report prepared by: Carita Blomqvist, Tony Donohoe, Maria Kelo, Karin Järplid Linde, Rafael Llavori, Bryan Maguire, David Metz, Teresa Sanchez within the work of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- The report by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks 2005 (Chair: Mogens Berg)
- The report by the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks 2007 (Chair: Mogens Berg)
- Bologna Process Coordination Group For Qualifications Framework Report On Qualifications Frameworks Submitted To The BFUG for Its Meeting On February 12 – 13, 2009 Directorate General Iv: Education, Culture And Heritage, Youth And Sport (Directorate Of Education And Languages – Higher Education And Research Division).

Structure of the report

Chapter 1. Methodology [Approach adopted in producing the guidelines]

Chapter 2. Self-certification within the Bologna process

Chapter 3. Key bodies and institutions involved in the self-certification process

Chapter 4. Designing self-certification process – overview of the key steps

Chapter 5. Structure and content of the self-certification report

Chapter 6. Involvement of international experts

Chapter 7. Preparation of the self-certification report along with the referencing report and relation with the referencing process within the EQF development – key information

Chapter 8. Updating self-certification reports

Recommendations

List of Annexes

Main observations and recommendations (1)

We expect qualifications to be transparent and quality assured

We should expect the same from the policy level to duly prepare the self-certification reports and to care that they are transparent, up to date and quality assured via peer review proces and consultation with stakeholders

Main observations and recommendations (2)

We expect qualifications system to be permeable across different education sectors (within HE and between VET and HE)

We should expect the same from the policy level to assure permeability between policy documents and reports (e.g. self-certification and referencing reports)

Main observations and recommendations (3)

Varieties of solutions and situations:

- EHEA: 49 countries
- EQF: 41 European countries (EU member states, EFTA countries and pre-accession countries)
- Third countries comparison: Ukraine, Cape Verde and before the process of alignment: Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand

Different times of reports submission

Main observations and recommendations (4)

Development and publication of procedure for the self-certification process e.g. in the form of BFUG note is recommended

The proposed procedure of submission the self-certification report

1. A country submits a self-certification report to BFUG Secretariat
2. BFUG Secretariat pass the self-certification report to the Council of Europe and then to the National Correspondence Network of QF EHEA for peer review
3. Presentation of the report and peer review (comments) within NCNetwork
4. Revision of the self-certification report by a country, according to the NCNetwork comments
5. Submitting corrected report by a country to BFUG for publishing

EQF AG Note-43 in section 5 describes the procedure for report discussion, which consists of the following steps:

- The draft revised report is sent to all EQF AG members 4 weeks in advance of its discussion by the EQF AG.
- A small group of EQF AG members (3-4) analyses the report and presents its views to the EQF AG when the report is discussed. This could replace the current procedure whereby EQF AG members can, on a voluntary basis, give their comments.
- Cedefop analyses the report and provides written comments that are shared with the country at the latest one week before the report discussion.
- In the EQF AG meeting the country updating the referencing gives a presentation of the update (max 30 minutes), which is followed by a discussion started by Cedefop, the Council of Europe (in particular to ensure compatibility with the QF EHEA) and the countries that have prepared the comments. The entire discussion will last about 1.5 hrs.

Main observations and recommendations (5)

Providing integrated and updated information about the self-certification process on the ENIC-NARIC website

Main observations and recommendations (6)

Updating verification and process criteria

Verification criteria

1. The national framework for higher education qualifications and the body or bodies responsible for its development are designated by the national ministry with responsibility for higher education.	No changes necessary.
2. There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the European framework.	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications in the national framework and the cycle qualification descriptors of the QF-EHEA .
3. The national framework and its qualifications are demonstrably based on learning outcomes, and the qualifications are linked to ECTS or ECTS compatible credits.	No changes necessary.
4. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national framework are transparent.	No changes necessary.
5. The national quality assurance system for higher education refers to the national framework of qualifications and is consistent with the Berlin Communiqué and any subsequent communiqués agreed by ministers in the Bologna Process.	The national quality assurance system for higher education refers to the national framework of qualifications and is consistent with the ESG . [Maybe Paris Communiqué?]
6. The national framework, and any alignment with the European framework, is referenced in all Diploma Supplements.	The national framework, and any alignment with the QF-EHEA , is referenced in all Diploma Supplements.
7. The responsibilities of the domestic parties to the national framework are clearly determined and published.	No changes necessary.

Process criteria

<p>1. The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework.</p>	<p>The competent national body/bodies shall self-certify the compatibility of the national framework with the QF-EHEA.</p>
<p>2. The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process.</p>	<p>The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question, which follow ESG. [QA agencies that have been confirmed to follow ESG]</p>
<p>3. The self-certification process shall involve international experts.</p>	<p>No changes necessary.</p>
<p>4. The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out.</p>	<p>No changes necessary.</p>
<p>5. The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process.</p>	<p>The EHEA secretariat and ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process.</p>
<p>6. The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework.</p>	<p>The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the QF-EHEA.</p>

Main observations and recommendations (7)

Procedure (guidance) on updating the self-certification reports

Main observations and recommendations (8)

Development guidance material for international experts providing support in self-certification process, which includes their review of the self-certification report and statement

Recommendations for EHEA member states

1. Understand the requirements and expectations of the self-certification process, as well as understanding the role of different bodies and institutions at the national level

Recommendations for EHEA member states

2. Setting the aims of the self-certification process, and if relevant making a decision on whether the self-certification process will be aligned with the referencing process

Recommendations for EHEA member states

3. Informing the EHEA bodies and if relevant EQF Advisory Group about launching the process.

Recommendations for EHEA member states

4. Establishment of the national coordination committee (task force) and setting their mandate and tasks.

Recommendations for EHEA member states

5. Estimate the envisaged timeline of the self-certification process and key steps

Recommendations for EHEA member states

6. Allocation of appropriate resources (human and financial)

Recommendations for EHEA member states

7. Conducting initial analysis of correspondence of national qualifications framework with QF-EHEA and consultations with the national stakeholders

[a detailed comparison of the level descriptors, learning outcomes, ECTS, validation of non-formal and informal learning and quality assurance processes]

Recommendations for EHEA member states

8. Composing the self-certification report in cooperation with the national stakeholders and international experts.

It is recommended to involve at least two international experts for the self-certification process.

International experts (1)

There is no standardised way to involve international experts in finalising the QF-EHEA self-certification, and the countries' experiences vary (Dzelalija & Maguire 2016)

International experts (2)

The squad of international experts, i.e. their number, expertise and country of origin, as well as the stage of their involvement in the self-certification process, should reflect the objectives of a country towards the self-certification process

Minimum no. of 2 experts

International experts (3)

The role of international experts

International experts should provide an objective and unbiased assessment of the national qualifications framework (NQF) and its alignment with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA.

International experts are expected to present their opinions regarding fulfilment of each verification and process criteria

International experts (4)

The stage of involvement

It is recommended that international experts should be involved, at the earliest possible stage of the work on the self-certification process, so they can adequately assess not only the process but also the verification criteria of the self-certification process.

International experts (5)

Statement

The self-certification report should explicitly include statements from international experts on the report and the self-certification process.

This is very important that the report clearly demonstrates what was the role of international experts in the self-certification process, what was the rationale for their employment and at what stage of the work on the self-certification they were involved

Addressing each verification and process criteria

International experts (6)

Expertise:

- International experts should have a deep understanding of higher education systems, both in their own country and internationally
- Experts should be familiar with the development, implementation, and maintenance of qualifications frameworks.
- Involved international experts might come from countries that share similar features of the education and/or qualifications systems but also from countries with very different organisations of education systems

Recommendations for EHEA member states

9. Proposed structure of the self-certification report

Recommendations for EHEA member states

10. Ensuring transparency of the self-certification process at national level and publishing the results of self-certification

Recommendations for EHEA member states

11. Submitting the self-certification report to the EHEA secretariat and if relevant EQF Advisory Group

Recommendations for EHEA member states

12. Updating the self-certification report every 5-7 years or sooner if significant changes are introduced into national higher education systems

Thank you for your attention

horacy.debowski@cke.gov.pl

Questions for joint discussion

Are there any important topics related to self-certification that are missing?

Will BFUG procedure be useful in self-certification process?

Should international experts be supported by guidelines and to what extent their review process should be standardised. What if assessment is negative?