

QUATRA – TPG A project between Rome and Tirana

The Bologna Process has more than 25 years of history, specific tools and measures have been designed and implemented to achieve its aims towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). One of the tools is the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), which often is interpreted as a bridge between various education systems facilitating mutual trust, transparency and diversity of qualifications. The countries in EHEA have developed and are implementing their national qualifications frameworks in higher education – three cycle-systems – to describe their higher education.

Since 2018 and the Ministerial Conference in Paris, particular attention has been focused on facilitating peer support and exchange of experience among the member countries. The Paris Communiqué (2018) established three thematic peer groups corresponding to the relevant key commitments essential for the functioning of the EHEA:

1. Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS – Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework (TPG A on QF);
2. Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement – Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (TPG B on LRC);
3. Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) – Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C on QA).

The Rome Communiqué (2020) reconfirmed the directions of action, i.e. to devote special effort to completing implementation of three key commitments by the use of peer learning and support.

The article will focus on the work of the TPG A supported by the Erasmus+ Programme project “Qualifications Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity – TPG A” (QUATRA – TPG A, 2022-2025). In the EHEA working period of 2021-2024, in total, 34 members participated in the TPG A activities, including both 29 countries and five organisations. The activities of the group are managed and coordinated by three co-chairs who are delegated from their countries. The TPG A co-chairs represented Austria, Georgia and Latvia.

The aim of the project

The QUATRA – TPG A project was designed following the recommendations and conclusions of the Rome Communiqué (2020). Thus, the QUATRA – TPG A project aimed to enhance cooperation between national authorities, members of TPG A and stakeholders in developing common approach for trust, transparency and diversity in qualifications frameworks and ensure the fulfilment of the key commitment.

The aim was achieved through different project activities, which included arranging TPG A meetings, peer learning activities on key priorities implementing qualification frameworks and international conference, as well as setting three working groups on qualification framework related topics to ensure more intensive discussions leading to specific recommendations on the related topics.

The project was implemented by the Academic Information Centre (AIC, Latvia) in the role of the project coordinator in cooperation with the project partners – Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation, Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry of

Education, Science and Research of Austria and Georgian National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE).

The project events

In order to facilitate the exchange of experiences and ensure peer support, in the terms of QUATRA – TPG A project five TPG A meetings, four peer learning activities and one international conference was arranged in four different countries – Austria, Estonia, Georgia and Latvia.

The first peer learning activity “The Place of Micro-Credentials in Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education” (20 October 2022 in Riga, Latvia) explored the concept of micro-credentials in various national contexts, how they are implemented and whether are included in the qualifications frameworks. The second and fourth peer learning activities were devoted to one of the essential tools of the Bologna Process – learning outcomes. Firstly, TPG A discussed “How are learning outcomes perceived, transmitted, and implemented in daily practice of higher education institutions?” (25 April 2023 in Vienna, Austria) analysing the use of learning outcomes at the level of higher education study programmes and involving hands-on sessions on formulation of the learning outcomes. Secondly, a wider perspective on the topic was provided by the event “Learning Outcomes and Future Skills” (18 April 2024 in Tallinn, Estonia). The latter peer learning activity focused on skills forecasts and various tools and systems for assessing and updating learning outcomes in higher education considering labour market needs. The third peer learning activity “Self-Certification of National Qualifications Frameworks to the Overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA” (28 September 2023 in Tbilisi, Georgia) was devoted to various aspects of self-certification including the discussion on the draft recommendations (more details in the next paragraphs) and national cases.

At the end of the project, the final conference “Qualifications Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity” (20 March 2025 in Riga, Latvia) provided an opportunity to share the main outcomes of QUATRA – TPG A project and explore the developments of Bologna Process in the context of qualifications frameworks in higher education. The materials of the events are published on the [project webpage](#) hosted by the Academic Information Centre.

Each peer learning activity and the final conference was succeeded by a meeting of TPG A members to provide a platform for discussion on the recent developments in the countries and at international level. During the meetings, various issues were debated according to the agenda proposed by the TPG A co-chairs and approved by the TPG A members. The minutes of the meetings were published on the [Bologna Process website](#) (ehea.info).

The main topics discussed in the meetings were reflections from TPG A meetings and activities; updates from TPG B and TPG C; activities of the working groups (micro-credentials, short-cycle HE, self-certification); latest developments in the member countries on qualifications frameworks; follow-up to the peer learning activities; Final Report of Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG, 2024) and preparation of Tirana Communiqué (2024); as well as future priorities in the work of TPG A.

Working groups and recommendations

The project activities involved setting up three smaller groups of TPG A members who pursued specific topics in relation to the qualifications frameworks in higher education. The topics were

proposed by the TPG members during the preparation phase of the project considering the national and international tendencies and policy developments.

The following working groups of TPG A members were established in August-September 2021 (active until November 2023):

1. short-cycle higher education (4 members) chaired by Latvia (AIC),
2. self-certification (8 members) chaired by Georgia (NCEQE) and Bulgaria,
3. micro-credentials (17 members) chaired by Latvia (AIC) and Armenia.

The activities and methods of the working groups included regular online and face-to-face meetings (4-5 meetings for each group), conducting surveys of TPG A members on the relevant topics (three surveys), analysing the results of surveys and preparing study reports (three reports), using the study reports to draft recommendations concerning the explored issues (three sets of recommendations), presenting and discussing the recommendations at TPG A events and meetings.

The recommendations on short-cycle qualifications in higher education analysed various aspects to be taken into account by the countries considering the introduction of short-cycle qualifications, e.g., access to short-cycle studies and further studies, duration and/or volume of study programmes, EQF or QF-EHEA level etc. The guidelines, observations, and recommendations on the preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process provide updated criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA, suggest a possible procedure for the self-certification process including the updating of the self-certification reports, as well as a tentative structure of self-certification reports. Finally, the recommendations and guidelines on micro-credentials review design and implementation of small units of learning leading to micro-credentials from the perspective of national authorities, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. The recommendations are published on the project webpage and Bologna website. Furthermore, the documents contributed to the preparation of the BICG Report 2024; thus, ensuring tangible outcomes of the work of the TPG A.

In September 2024, the TPG A members gathered for the symposium “Fostering the Development of NQFs: Self-Certification, Short-Cycle Higher Education, Micro-Credentials” (in Riga, Latvia) to explore future development possibilities regarding the three topics analysed in the recommendations. The purpose of the event was to make a further step to discuss practical implementation of the designed recommendations as the ideas and concepts were already mentioned in Tirana Communiqué (2024).

Impacts and conclusions

The main focus of the project was providing support to the TPG A operation, and for any group regular face-to-face meetings and events are essential for peer learning and exchange of experience. Therefore, one of the main conclusions is that peer support is more efficient when in-person meetings may be ensured to have a strong platform for discussion and networking. However, in future TPG A members should be more encouraged to share their experience and lessons learnt although there might be not evident progress towards key commitments. The processes related to the development of qualifications frameworks are complex, involving many stakeholders and time consuming, as a result not always the member countries may demonstrate clear outcomes of reforms in a three-year period.

Considering the implementation period of the project (May 2022 – April 2025), the QUATRA – TPG A project provided an opportunity to transfer knowledge and experience between the members of TPG A in the work period 2021-2024 and 2024-2027. The final conference and the TPG A meeting in March 2025 brought together representatives of both working periods.

As mentioned above, the TPG A activities in the terms of QUATRA – TPG A project involved establishment of three working groups (self-certification, short-cycle higher education, micro-credentials). Regarding the activities of the groups, conclusion was drawn that exploring specific topics in smaller groups leads to more tangible outcomes that may contribute to policy developments. The project team hopes that the provided three set of recommendations may serve as an inspiration and reference both for HEI stakeholders and policy makers reviewing and developing national and EHEA level policy. The main points of the recommendations were also discussed in the BICG Final Report (2024), which provided evidence for the Tirana Communiqué (2024).

During the TPG A meetings, the information exchange and cooperation with other TPGs – TPG B and TPG C – was essential to strengthen coordination and efficiency when implementing key commitments. The three TPGs also collaborated on horizontal dimension by exploring a common topic from various perspectives – qualifications frameworks, recognition and quality assurance – to facilitate a holistic approach towards the implementation of key commitments. The groups explored the topic of micro-credentials, which in the context of TPG A was analysed during a peer learning activity and by one of the working groups resulting in recommendations. The cooperation of the TPGs led to a common publication [“Micro-Credentials for Higher Education Institutions: Approaches developed in the EHEA using peer support”](#) (2024) under the coordination of CIMEA (co-chair of TPG B). Thus, conclusion may be drawn that cooperation between TPGs is valuable element to coordinate resources and support the development of the Bologna Process.

A closer collaboration between various EHEA working groups and structures may also provide more options for a peer support and exchange of experiences. The implementation of the project activities led to the conclusion that possibilities to present, discuss and disseminate results of the groups should be further strengthened to have more tangible outcomes that demonstrate evident impact on the policies at national and EHEA level.

To sum up, the project “Qualifications Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity – TPG A” seems to have had an essential role at ensuring support to the Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework in the work period between Rome and Tirana with a clear understanding that peer support for the countries of the European Higher Education Area at developing qualifications frameworks in higher education has evidently high added value.