

ENIC NETWORK (COUNCIL OF EUROPE/UNESCO) NARIC NETWORK (EUROPEAN COMMISSION)

DGIV/EDU/HE (2004) 26
ED-2004/UNESCO-CEPES/ENIC.11/10
DGEAC/NARIC/04-...
Strasbourg/București/Bruxelles, 2 April 2004
Orig. Eng.

11th Joint Meeting of the ENIC and NARIC Networks
7 – 8 June 2004
Room 9, Council of Europe Headquarters, Strasbourg

A QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport (Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education – Higher Education and Research Division) of the Council of Europe, UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) and Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, Unit for Higher Education

ITEM 10

Distribution: meeting
Document available on <http://www.coe.int/DGIVRestricted>

INTRODUCTION

A qualifications framework describes the various qualifications of an education system as well as the articulation between them. In one sense, all countries that have an education system also have a qualifications framework. In another sense, however, the concept of qualifications framework is a relatively new one that is only found in a few European countries (Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom; the latter has one framework for England, northern Ireland and Wales and a separate one for Scotland) and that was brought firmly into the Bologna Process through the Berlin Communiqué and the work programme for 2001 – 05. In the latter sense, often referred to as “new style” qualifications frameworks, the concept implies a new way of thinking about what constitutes a qualification as well as how various qualifications interlink and articulate and, not least, how individuals can move from one qualification to another through different learning paths within an education system.

In the latter sense, the concept of qualifications framework is one of the key elements of the Bologna Process and its work programme between the Ministerial conferences in Berlin (September 2003) and Bergen (May 2005). It is worth quoting the Berlin Communiqué at some length on this point:

Ministers are pleased to note that, following their commitment in the Bologna Declaration to the two-cycle system, a comprehensive restructuring of the European landscape of higher education is now under way. All Ministers commit themselves to having started the implementation of the two cycle system by 2005.

Ministers underline the importance of consolidating the progress made, and of improving understanding and acceptance of the new qualifications through reinforcing dialogue within institutions and between institutions and employers.

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 outcomes, competences and profile. They also undertake to elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

Within such frameworks, degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programmes. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies.

Ministers invite the Follow-up Group to explore whether and how shorter higher education may be linked to the first cycle of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area.

Ministers stress their commitment to making higher education equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means.

At its meeting on 9 March 2004, the Bologna Follow Up Group appointed a working group whose mandate is to coordinate the work to develop an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, chaired by Mogens Berg (Denmark).

The purpose of putting this item on the agenda of the 2004 ENIC/NARIC meeting is double: Firstly, this will be an excellent opportunity to update the Networks on developments with regard to the qualifications framework, which will have a very significant impact on the work of the Networks as well as of individual centres in the years to come. Secondly, the debate will also provide an opportunity for Network members to voice their opinions on these developments.

As a preparation for the debate, the present document reproduces four key documents in the discussion of qualifications frameworks leading up to the Berlin Ministerial meeting:

Appendix 1: The recommendations from the seminar on qualifications structures in higher education in Europe (København, 27 – 28 March 2003);

Appendix 2: The general report from this seminar

Appendix 3: The recommendations from the seminar on lifelong learning (Praha, 5 - 7 June 2003);

Appendix 4: The general report from this seminar

It should also be noted that some of the Bologna seminars in the present work programme (2003 – 2005) are particularly relevant for this discussion. This is particularly true for the seminars on Learning Outcomes (Edinburgh, 1 – 2 July 2004), on Improving the Recognition System (Rīga, 3 – 4 December 2004) and on Qualifications Frameworks (København, 13 – 14 January 2005). Invitations to Bologna seminars are sent by the organizers to members of the Bologna Follow Up Group, who are responsible for coordinating the participation of each country in these seminars.

APPENDIX 1

BOLOGNA SEMINAR ON **QUALIFICATION STRUCTURES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE** **27-28 March 2003** **Copenhagen Denmark**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants in the conference on Qualification Structures in European Higher Education, organized by the Danish authorities in Copenhagen on March 27 – 28, 2003 recommend:

1. The Ministers meeting in Berlin in September 2003 should encourage the competent public authorities responsible for higher education to elaborate national qualifications frameworks for their respective higher education systems with due consideration to the qualifications framework to be elaborated for the European Higher Education Area.
2. The Ministers' meeting should also be invited to launch work on an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, with a view to providing a structural framework against which individual national frameworks could articulate with due regard to the institutional, historical and national context.
3. At each appropriate level, qualifications frameworks should seek to describe the qualifications making up the framework in terms of workload, level, quality, learning outcomes and profile. An EHEA framework should seek to describe qualifications in generic terms (e.g. as first or second cycle degrees) rather than in terms specific to one or more national systems (e.g. Bachelor or Master)
4. Qualifications frameworks should also seek to describe these qualifications with reference to the objectives or purposes for higher education, in particular with regard to four major purposes of higher education:
 - (i) preparation for the labor market;
 - (ii) preparation for life as active citizens in democratic society;
 - (iii) personal development;
 - (iv) development and maintenance an advanced knowledge base.
5. While at national level, qualifications frameworks should as far as possible encompass qualifications at all levels, it is recommended that, at least as a first step, a framework for the European Higher Education Area focus on higher education qualifications as well as on all qualifications giving access to higher

education. As far as possible, an EHEA framework should also include qualifications below first-degree level.

6. Within the overall rules of the qualifications frameworks, individual institutions should have considerable freedom in the design of their programs. National qualifications frameworks, as well as an EHEA framework, should be designed so as to assist higher education institutions in their curriculum development and design of study programs. Qualifications frameworks should facilitate the inclusion of interdisciplinary higher education study programs.
7. Quality assurance agencies should take the aims of the qualifications frameworks into account in their assessment of higher education institutions and/or programs and make the extent to which institutions and/or programs implement and meet the goals of the qualifications framework of the country concerned, as well as an EHEA framework, an important element in the overall outcome of the assessment exercise. Higher education institutions should also take account of the qualifications frameworks in their internal quality assurance processes. At the same time, the qualifications frameworks should define their quality goals in such a way as to be of relevance to quality assessment.
8. While an EHEA qualifications framework should considerably simplify the process of recognition of qualifications within the Area, such recognition should still follow the provisions of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention. The Ministers meeting in Berlin in September 2003 should therefore invite all states party to the Bologna Process to ratify this Convention as soon as possible.
9. The main stakeholders in higher education within the EHEA should be invited to contribute to a dialogue on a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area as well as give consideration to how such a framework could simplify the process of recognition of qualifications within the framework. Considerations of national frameworks could benefit from taking into account experience with other frameworks.
10. Transparency instruments such as the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS should be reviewed to make sure that the information provided is clearly related to the EHEA framework.
11. Whether at national level or at the level of the European Higher Education Area, qualifications frameworks should make provision for the inclusion of joint degrees and other forms of combination of credits earned at the home institution and other institutions as well as credits earned through other relevant programs or experiences.
12. Qualifications frameworks, at national level as well as at the level of the European Higher Education Area, should assist transparency and should assist the continuous improvement and development of higher education in Europe.

APPENDIX 2

Strasbourg/København, April 8, 2003

DANISH BOLOGNA SEMINAR

KØBENHAVN, MARCH 27 – 28, 2003

**QUALIFICATION STRUCTURES IN
EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Report by the General Rapporteur
Sjur Bergan
Head, Higher Education and Research Division
Council of Europe

Final version

INTRODUCTION

Franz Schubert is reputed often to have asked about people he did not know well: “*Kann er was?*”. In discussing higher education qualifications, we have moved a step further and would tend to invert this basic question: “*Was kann er?*”

Unfortunately, the pun is lost in the English translation, but it may be worth emphasizing the shift from a concern with whether a person knows *anything* to a concern with *what* he knows and can do. It may also be worth underlining that today, we would not restrict ourselves to the masculine personal pronoun.

My task as Rapporteur to this conference on Qualification Structures in European Higher Education could be seen simply as providing a synopsis of our discussions during this day and a half. However, I will not simply push the replay button, and I have my reasons. Firstly, the background report by Professor Stephen Adam is both as comprehensive and as readable as those who know him well have come to expect, and I would not be able to do him justice by attempting to produce an “executive summary”, all the more so as Stephen has provided such a summary himself.

Secondly, the other presentations as well as the discussions have been rich and stand on their own merit, and the reports from the discussion groups give an overview of the main points in these. So, I am also indebted to Seán Ó Foghlú’s presentation on the way ahead; to Julia Gonzalez, Nick Harris and Andrejs Rauhvargers for their introductions on curriculum planning, quality assurance and recognition, respectively; to the panel of “end users”: Bastian Baumann on behalf of the students, Stina Vrang Elias on behalf of the employers, Maria Sticchi Damiani on behalf of the institutions and Peter van der Hijden, speaking for the European Commission; and not least to the rapporteurs of the discussion groups: Maria Sticchi Damiani, Dorte Kristoffersen and Helle Otte. The latter played a particularly important role in helping me elaborate a set of recommendations that were submitted to and adopted by the participants at the end of the conference. These recommendations are reproduced in a separate document and will be submitted to the Bologna Follow Up Group as well as to the Berlin Higher Education Summit.

Allow me, therefore, to choose a different strategy. Allow me, rather than reproducing extensively from what has been said during this conference, to offer my own reflections on the discussions. It goes without saying that such an approach is as indebted to Stephen Adam’s background report, the other presentations and the discussions as a more traditional approach would have been.

I also hope I can take this more analytical approach without practicing what I have come to call Sir Humphrey’s Theory of Minutes. Those of you familiar with the British TV series *Yes, Minister* and, after Jim Hacker’s principled fight against the Euro-sausage, *Yes, Prime Minister*, may remember the scheming senior civil servant Sir Humphrey lecturing his apprentice Bernard on how to write meeting reports. Minutes, according to Sir Humphrey, are not there to show what *happened* in a meeting, but what *should* have happened.

This, however, is not my intention. Rather, I will attempt to combine an analysis of what has been discussed at this seminar with some thoughts on what needs to be discussed in the time to come.

One additional point may be in order by way of introduction. In the same way as qualifications is used as a generic term covering a whole range of outcomes of higher education programs¹, I would much prefer to use generic terms also when describing qualification structures or frameworks. This point was also strongly made by Maria Sticchi Damiani. Therefore, unless referring to activities organized and named by others, such as the Helsinki seminar on Bachelor degrees, I will refer to first and second tier systems or first tier and second degrees rather than “Bachelor” and “Master’s”. This, incidentally, is in keeping with the principles of the Diploma Supplement, and the reason is that by translating the name of a qualification, one also gives a hint of the recognition of that qualification. A Russian *bakalavr* may well be recognized on the same level as an Irish Bachelor, but that decision is for a competent recognition authority to make and not for a translator.

QUALIFICATION STRUCTURES AND INITIATIVES

The Bologna structure

The København seminar focuses on qualification structures, a topic that is of course at the heart of the Bologna Process. As Director General Jens Peter Jacobsen of the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation said in his opening remarks: We are here at this seminar to develop the Bologna Process. One of the stated goals of the European Higher Education Area is to establish a qualification structure consisting of a first degree of at least three years’ duration (today, we would probably have said of at least 180 ECTS credits), of a second degree and of a doctoral degree. The Bologna Ministers also explicitly said that the first degree should be relevant to the labor market. Since this is at least an implicit goal of both the second degree and the doctoral degree, we may safely assume that all parts of the “Bologna” degree structure should be relevant to the labor market as well as serve as a basis for further studies (with the exception, of course, of the doctoral degree, which will not lead to a further formal qualification, but which will nonetheless serve as the basis for further development of real competence through research).

That is, however, about as much as the documents of the Bologna Process so far say about the qualification structure, and that is one reason why I believe the København seminar is an important contribution to the elaboration of the European Higher Education Area. We have a skeleton of a Bologna qualification structure, and I believe what we already have has the potential to be helpful because it provides the beginning of a framework within which we can locate higher education qualifications from various European countries. However, like Stephen Adam, who spoke of this framework as something of an empty shell, I also believe that this qualification structure needs to be developed further for the European Higher Education Area to become a reality, and that the main contribution of the København seminar to the Bologna Process will be to launch a debate on how this could be done as well as to make some proposals. Hopefully, some will emerge at the end of this report. To quote the Danish Qualifications Framework: “Locating the degrees in

¹ Cf. Article I.1 of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, which defines a higher education qualification as “Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme”.

the context of the terms used in the Bologna Declaration only provides limited additional value unless supplemented with a description of the individual degrees”².

In developing a qualification structure for the European Higher Education Area, it will be helpful to take account of developments at various levels in Europe, and Stephen Adam’s report provides an excellent overview of a good number of initiatives and developments.

These come in several categories, and I will list them briefly for reference and recapitulation. The first set concerns international attempts at describing qualifications.

Joint Quality Initiative

The *Joint Quality Initiative* (JQI) is an informal network for quality assurance and the accreditation of first and second tier degrees, and it has elaborated what has come to be known as the Dublin Descriptors as well as the Amsterdam Consensus. The JQI, consisting of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain (specifically represented by Catalunya), Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, has sought to establish generic descriptions for first and second degrees.

Bologna seminars

Two official Bologna seminars, both held in Helsinki in February 2001 and March 2003, respectively, have attempted to describe first and second degrees³. These descriptions include workload expressed in terms of ECTS credits and level, and they underline the need to provide a description of the orientation and profile of the qualification in the accompanying Diploma Supplement. The consideration of second degrees was much helped by a recent EUA study⁴.

A Bologna seminar on recognition issues in the Bologna Process, organized by the Council of Europe and the Portuguese authorities in April 2002 addressed a set of recommendations to various actors in higher education, including to the Berlin Summit to be held in September 2003. In particular, this seminar emphasized the importance of moving toward recognizing qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes and competences rather than on the formal characteristics of the study programs leading to the qualification, such as length of study. The seminar also underlined the role of the ENIC and NARIC Networks⁵ in this respect, recommended that all countries party to the Bologna Process ratify the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention and underlined the importance of providing adequate and relevant information on qualifications.

Another Bologna seminar, focusing on credit transfer and accumulation and organized by the European University Association and the Swiss authorities in October 2002, emphasized the importance of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) as a credit *transfer* system and also its potential as a credit *accumulation* system.

² Towards a Danish “Qualifications Framework” for higher education (final report of January 15, 2003), p. 13.

³ The two seminars were referred to as being on Bachelor and Master’s degrees, respectively.

⁴ Andrejs Rauhvargers and Christian Tauch: *Survey on Masters Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe* (Bruxelles 2002: European University Association).

⁵ <http://www.enic-naric.net>

The Tuning Project

The Tuning Project, coordinated by the universities of Deusto and Groningen and financed by the European Commission, has sought to establish learning outcomes at first and second degree level in a number of academic disciplines⁶. A particularly interesting feature of the Tuning Project, presented at the conference by Julia Gonzalez, is that it drew a distinction between generic and subject specific competences. The former include the capacity for analysis and synthesis, the capacity to learn, problem solving, capacity for applying knowledge in practice, concern for quality and information management skills. The Tuning Project is important because it is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to establish learning outcomes on such a wide basis, and also because it shows how difficult this is. However, the inherent difficulty in establishing learning outcomes should be taken as an encouragement to undertake further work, and not as an indication that it may not be worth the effort, because this undertaking is crucial to the definition of a qualification structure as well as to the recognition of the qualifications that emanate from this structure.

Transnational European Evaluation Project

Last, but not least, the Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP), which was launched in 2002 and is currently under way and coordinated by the European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA), seeks to develop a European methodology for the use of common criteria for quality assurance. In this, it builds on initiatives like the Tuning Project and the descriptors for first and second degrees developed by the Joint Quality Initiative.

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

At national level, some attempts have been made to define qualification frameworks, and Stephen Adam refers extensively to the Danish, Irish, United Kingdom⁷ and Scottish frameworks. It may be worth making the point that all higher education systems have a qualifications framework. What distinguishes the frameworks surveyed for this conference, however, is that they have gone a good step beyond the traditional frameworks in emphasizing not only input factors and formal characteristics but also output factors such as learning outcomes, and that they are explicit about some elements that have traditionally been assumed or understood.

There is perhaps no agreed definition of a qualifications framework, but it is worth bearing in mind what Stephen Adam says in his report:

A national qualifications framework is simply a systematic description of an education system's qualifications where all learning achievements are measured and related to each other. A European qualifications framework would amount

⁶ Business, education science, geology, history, mathematics; "synergy groups" have been established in physics, chemistry, languages, humanitarian development, law, medicine, mechanical engineering and veterinary science.

⁷ In this context, covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

to an agreement about a common structure or architecture within which different national qualifications could be located. It is essential to stress that this should not entail the creation of identical qualifications in terms of delivery, content or approach.⁸

Stephen Adam goes on to outline some of the possible functions of a qualifications framework, which include:

- make explicit the purposes of qualifications;
- raise the awareness of citizens/employers about qualifications;
- improve access and social inclusion;
- delineate points of access and overlap;
- facilitate recognition and mobility;
- identify alternative routes;
- position qualifications in relation to one another;
- show routes for progression as well as barriers⁹.

Not all qualifications frameworks will fulfill all of these functions, but Stephen Adam's list is still a very useful guide.

The aims stipulated for the Scottish framework are also worth quoting:

"The general aims of the SCQF are to:

- *help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfill their personal, social and economic potential*
- *enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.*

The SCQF will provide a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities and make the relationships between qualifications clearer. It will also clarify entry and exit points, and routes for progression within and across education and training sectors and increase the opportunities for credit transfer. In these ways it will assist learners to plan their progress and minimise duplication of learning.¹⁰

Thus, a qualifications framework is concerned with describing each qualification as well as with how the various qualifications interrelate and how students can progress from one qualification to another. Qualifications frameworks, at least the ones covered by Stephen Adam's reports, are not concerned with higher education alone, rather they cover the whole range of qualifications, both theoretically and practically oriented, from beginning level to research qualifications.

⁸ Stephen Adam: *Qualifications Structures in European Higher Education: To Consider Alternative Approaches for Clarifying the Cycles and Levels in European Higher Education Qualifications*, section 1.2.

⁹ This list is taken from Stephen Adam's Power Point presentation at the seminar.

¹⁰ An Introduction to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (September 2001), Executive summary, p. vii

The common point of the qualifications frameworks covered by the report is that they seek to define levels in terms of learning outcomes and competencies. As Stephen Adam says about the Irish framework: “The approach is to build from the bottom up in terms of how outcomes should be expressed in awards”. The concrete make up of the national qualifications frameworks vary, thus the Irish framework distinguishes between 10 levels and the Scottish 12. The frameworks tend to emphasize operational skills, in the broad sense of what one can do with a given qualification, rather than the attitudes or values the qualifications convey, but it is worth noting that the Danish framework explicitly mentions “democratic competence” as a general goal at all levels and also stipulates “responsibility in relation to own research (research ethics)”¹¹ as a goal for doctoral qualifications.

SOME REFLECTIONS

Clearly, the developments, initiatives and frameworks described by Stephen Adam and discussed at this conference are very valuable, and their importance is not limited to the framework within which they were designed. On this basis, then, I would like to take this opportunity to offer some reflections on where we are and where we might go from here.

A qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area?

The starting point for my reflections is two seemingly contradictory tendencies at work today. On the one hand, there is a tendency to define study programs in more flexible ways, so that students may combine elements and disciplines in ways that suit them, whether out of personal interest, to improve employment opportunities or for other reasons. This is positive in that it allows individuals to tailor make their studies and thus increase their relevance. However, this development also presents a formidable challenge, and this is the other tendency: this individualization of study programs may easily lead to confusion, and confusion may easily lead to lack of recognition of the qualification. Therefore, we have to develop systems that allow us to describe this diverse reality within an understandable framework - in fact, within a clear qualifications framework or structure. What the Danish Qualifications Framework says about the needs of employers for an “academic system that is simple, with as few levels as possible, and coherent, so similarities and differences clearly stand out” is undoubtedly true, and I believe this need is not limited to employers.

Therefore, establishing a transparent qualifications framework or structure should be a high priority for national education authorities, but saying this begs a question that is also raised by Stephen Adam: what is the relationship between national qualifications frameworks and a similar framework for the European Higher Education Area?

Again, allow me to make a point about terminology that is considerably more than a digression from the main line of argument: I prefer to refer to a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) rather than a “European” framework for at least two reasons. Firstly, the adjective “European” has become imprecise through

¹¹ Towards a Danish “Qualifications Framework” for higher education (final report of January 15, 2003), pp. 14 and 26, respectively.

overuse and is now applied to a variety of geographical and political constellations far short of its real meaning¹², and it is also used as a very imprecise quality label to describe any number of networks, diplomas and products. As one small illustration, it may be recalled that in the 1780s, the quality of Ottoman produced gunpowder had declined so dramatically that gunpowder was imported from abroad. New factories were built to relaunch Ottoman gunpowder production, and the aim was to reach what was commonly referred to as “European standards”¹³, which in this context were neither a law nor an ISO type industry standard, but simply an aspiration for high or at least improved quality.

Secondly, the name given to a qualifications framework also indicates the authority with which this framework has been established. In the case of national education systems, this authority is clear, and it is safe to refer to a Danish, Irish, United Kingdom or Scottish qualifications framework. The authority is less clear at supranational level, but if the European Higher Education Area is to become a reality, some kind of agreement on a qualification structure or framework as well as on its relationship to the frameworks of individual higher education systems is needed. An EHEA reference will therefore hopefully make sense, whereas an imprecise reference to “European” will not, I am afraid.

One could, of course, see the EHEA framework as a synthesis or a lowest common denominator of the frameworks of its constituent higher education systems. However, a more proactive approach would seem preferable. As Jens Peter Jacobsen said, we need to do more than develop some 30 different national frameworks. Even if some “Bologna” countries have established well-conceived national qualifications frameworks of the kind described in Stephen Adam’s report, most have not, and this would be an opportunity to outline an EHEA qualifications framework before most countries start elaborating their own. While this work should of course draw on the experience of those that have a qualifications framework, work on an EHEA framework could be very helpful to the majority of countries that have yet to establish their own frameworks. What Julia Gonzalez said about the Tuning Project being an experience of joint learning could hopefully also be applied to the development of a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area. At the same time, this would provide an opportunity to develop a common understanding of the key concepts and parameters of a qualifications framework that should also serve as a basis for qualifications frameworks of the higher education systems that make up the European Higher Education Area. Peter van der Hijden in his introductory remarks referred to the need to bring together the various national experiences and experiences in different European context, ranging from the Tuning Project and ENQA to the ENIC and NARIC Networks and the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention.

Of course, many issues remain to be addressed, and these include what we should aim at. Nick Harris defined this clearly by asking whether a qualifications framework for the EHEA should aim at information or regulation, and whether it should describe “typical” qualifications or define the absolute minimum standards or threshold. He may well have answered his own question by hinting that an EHEA framework might have to address all of these aspects. Certainly, one should be careful not to be too directive at the level of EHEA, as national authorities in cooperation higher education institutions, students and

¹² See, for example, the European Commission’s Communication on the role of universities in the Europe of knowledge, which defines “Europe as a whole” as the countries of the European Union, “the other Western European countries” and the candidate countries, cf. section 3.2 of the Communication.

¹³ Philip Mansel: *Constantinople - City of the World's Desire 1453 - 1924* (London 1997: Penguin), p. 254.

other stakeholders should have a key role in defining qualifications frameworks for their own systems. The goal should not be to arrive at identical frameworks, and the reasons for this also includes one mentioned specifically by Stephen Adam: qualifications frameworks are also about the ways in which we define and transmit our culture. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine an EHEA framework totally devoid of prescriptive elements. Again, I think of an EHEA framework as an image of Europe: a unique balance of unity and diversity, where considerable variety is found within a recognizable overarching frameworks. Cars, buses and trucks come in many different shapes, sizes and colors, but it helps if they all drive on the same side of the road. If the cars drive on the right, the trucks on the left and the buses in the shade, the system will quickly reveal its limitations.

Workload, level, quality, learning outcomes and profile

Qualifications are generally described in terms of their workload and level, as is indicated by the frequent reference to Bachelor and Master's degrees or, for that matter, to one and two tier higher education systems, as well as to the number of years of study required. Luckily, the latter is now increasingly being replaced by a reference to the number of (ECTS) credits required, so that we are no more likely to speak about a qualification requiring 180 ECTS credits than one requiring three years of study. Level is, of course, one important parameter in describing qualifications, and it is a prominent feature of the frameworks described in Stephen Adam's report. Thus, the Danish framework, at least in its English version, refers to Bachelor, Candidate, Master and PhD levels at higher education level, whereas the Irish and Scottish frameworks outline 10 and 12 levels. Workload is also an important parameter, and it is particularly interesting to see that some qualifications frameworks combine these two requirements, so that any given qualification is described in terms of both workload and level. To take just one examples, a Scottish Master's degree is described as being of level 11 in the Scottish Qualifications Framework, and it consists of at least 180 SCOTCAT points of which a minimum of 150 should be at level 11.

While level is an indispensable part of the description of a qualification, it is not sufficient. If it were, what the Bologna Declaration has to say about a two-tier system might have been enough to establish an EHEA framework. Whether you were to describe your own qualifications framework or to recognize a qualification from a foreign framework, it would be difficult to do so without referring to quality. This is, in fact, an area in which developments have been quite rapid, in that we have moved from implicit assumptions of quality in education systems that have essentially been state run to explicit provision for quality assurance in more diverse systems. As late as 1997, when the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention was adopted, there was still discussion of whether a formal quality assurance system was necessary or not, but today, the discussion focuses on what such a system should look like.

For good reason, quality assurance is one of the action lines of the Bologna Process. Provision for quality assurance is a part of the public responsibility for the higher education framework¹⁴, which implies that public authorities are responsible for defining and establishing this provision, but they do not have to carry it out themselves. So as to

¹⁴ A thorough discussion of the public responsibility for higher education will be found in the proceedings of the Bologna seminar on the Social Dimension of Higher Education, organized by the Greek Ministry of Education in Athenai on February 19 – 20, 2003. The proceedings are under publication.

avoid misunderstandings, I would also like to make it clear that I consider quality assurance to be a part of national higher education systems, and that I am not in favor of any kind of European quality assurance agency. However, I believe criteria and procedures for quality assurance should be agreed through a European network. As Nick Harris said, there should be an overarching Code of Good Practice for the management of quality and standards.

As several speakers mentioned, there is an increasing emphasis on learning outcomes or, to put it crudely, on what you can do with a qualification rather than on how it has been earned. This is a challenge, and a project like Tuning has shown both how important this is and how difficult it is. Still, challenges are there to be met and not to be run away from, and defining learning outcomes in such a way that they can be an important factor in describing qualifications frameworks is a challenge to all major stakeholders in higher education in Europe and another reason for them to intensify their dialogue and cooperation.

Thus, we see that workload, level and quality are all given due consideration and that we at least bring up learning outcomes quite frequently in discussion, even if these considerations are not always explicitly placed in the context of a qualification structure or framework. A fifth factor is given far less consideration, and I am referring to the profile of a qualification. There are, of course, limits to what a national qualifications framework – and probably more so for a framework for the European Higher Education Area – can say about the profile of qualifications, since these may differ considerably from one academic discipline to another, since some of the requirements may be highly specific to one discipline and since national traditions may also vary. However, the ways in which you can combine credits to give your qualification an appropriate profile is crucial in making sure, to use Nick Harris' phrase, that a degree is something more than the sum of its component courses.

Nevertheless, there is implicit agreement on some important points. While a first degree may be specified as being of 180 or 240 ECTS credits of the appropriate level, there is also an unstated agreement that there should be some kind of coherence to the qualification. Students who earned 10 credits in history, 10 in each of two foreign languages, 10 in mathematics and so on with no further concentration in any area may have had a taste of higher education, but they would hardly have earned a higher education degree even if the total amount of credits thus earned were to add up to 180 or more. In practice, such an eclectic menu would at least be discouraged by higher education institutions, but it may be useful to give some thought to whether a qualifications framework for the EHEA should not give some indication as to profile and concentration. In particular at first degree level, traditions may vary considerably from one country to another, so that it may be difficult to reach firm agreement, but at the very least, the issue deserves to be explored. At second degree and doctoral degree level, it may be easier to reach agreement, and maybe one should start here.

However, even if agreement on the details may be difficult, it may also be worth pointing out that discussions are likely to focus on the right balance between specialization or concentration on the one hand and a broader orientation on the other, and not on the principle of either. Essentially, three types of courses are all seen as legitimate within a given study program:

- (i) those that contribute directly to the student's specialization or main area of competence;
- (ii) those that are in other academic areas but that underpin this specialization;
- (iii) those that are in distinct academic areas and do not contribute to or underpin the student's specialization, but that give his or her qualification an added dimension by broadening the student's horizon or by providing a basic competence in a second academic area.

Admittedly, these may seem like abstract speculations, so let us take an example, at the risk of falling into some of the many pits such an exercise seems to offer.

A student whose academic specialty is history should probably earn a considerable part of his or her credits from history courses, the level of which should be appropriate to the level of the qualification. However, such a student would most likely also need some knowledge of relevant areas – we may perhaps call these “supporting disciplines”¹⁵. According to the student's specialization within the quite broad discipline of history, these “supporting disciplines” could be economics, statistics, a foreign language or a whole range of other disciplines, and the courses may not necessarily be of the same level as the qualification the student is working toward. A history student at second degree level may well need a basic introduction to statistics, but there should also be a limit on how many introductory courses in “supporting disciplines” may count toward the degree. Finally, the same student may wish to broaden his or her horizon or add a second area of competence by taking a number of credits not related to the relevant specialization within history. That credits outside of a student's academic specialization are important to his or her overall competence on the labor market was strongly emphasized by Stina Vrang Elias.

The distinction between “supporting disciplines” and non-related credits may sometimes be difficult to draw and may depend on the precise specialization the student chooses, in our case within the field of history. This freedom to choose some credits that do not seem immediately “relevant” from the strict point of view of the main discipline is also important in avoiding that the boundaries of academic disciplines be “fossilized” and to encourage a measure of transdisciplinarity. A student of Latin American history can hardly do without Spanish and Portuguese, while for a student of economic history, Spanish and Portuguese may provide an added qualification and broaden his or her horizon. The example also illustrates the limits of a qualifications framework: it should stipulate the main outlines and principles but it should not attempt to regulate all details.

We have, then, examples of national qualifications frameworks that make explicit stipulations concerning workload and level, that operate within higher education systems with adequate provision for quality assurance and that increasingly seek to define learning outcomes. Could we take this as a model also for an EHEA qualifications framework and add considerations on the profile of qualifications? This will not be easy, but it is a challenge to which I believe we should rise. Expressing this in clear and simple terms will not be less of a challenge. As Stina Vrang Elias said: “Industry needs something

¹⁵ May I be forgiven for calquing this term on the one my native language, at least in a previous system, used to describe such disciplines: *støttefag* or *redskapsfag*.

much simpler than you have ever imagined". While those of us in higher education may be forgiven for questioning whether reality can be made quite that simple, or indeed if employers are not in actual fact guided by a slightly more complex view of reality, the injunction to avoid undue complexity is well taken and should be translated into practice.

Stina Vrang Elias' comment also points to the importance of involving a broad range of stakeholders in the elaboration of qualifications frameworks, whether at national level or for the European Higher Education Area. These include the social partners, and higher education institutions should play a very important role. The same is true of students, and I was amazed that in the very broad range of stakeholders contributing to the Scottish framework, unless I have misread the information, students seem to be absent. I also believe that no national framework should be elaborated without reference to relevant developments elsewhere.

What do we measure?

The national frameworks covered by Stephen Adam's report are mainly focused on measurable skills and competencies, and this is by no way an unnatural bias, both because what is measurable is more easily described in terms of a framework and because one of the main purposes of education is to develop and convey skills useful to the labor market. Nevertheless, a qualifications framework based exclusively on such skills and competencies would miss some important dimensions that distinguish education from training and, in a more profound sense, makes human existence worth the effort. It is therefore important to note that the qualifications frameworks surveyed include references to intellectual competencies¹⁶; generic cognitive skills, such as evaluation and critical analysis¹⁷ or critically evaluate new concepts and evidence¹⁸. As already mentioned, the Danish framework is also explicit about developing values and attitudes, even if it assumes that this factor is present to the same degree at all levels of the framework and therefore does not specify or describe the degree of attainment at each level.

Developing qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area could be a welcome opportunity to think more systematically about the purpose of higher education, since the qualification framework should presumably be defined with reference to these objectives. I believe higher education has at least four fundamental objectives:

- (i) preparation for the labor market;
- (ii) preparation for life as active citizens in democratic society;
- (iii) personal development;
- (iv) development and maintenance an advanced knowledge base.

This point was also made by Bastian Baumann, even if his list differed slightly from mine.

Ideally, a qualifications framework should take account of all these elements, even if I realize that developing adequate descriptors will be a tall order. However, I believe the Bologna Process would be well advised to pay greater attention to its vision for higher

¹⁶ The Danish framework

¹⁷ The Scottish framework

¹⁸ The UK framework

education, both in terms of a qualifications framework and in the broader discussion leading us toward 2010.

The range of qualifications

All the national frameworks surveyed for the København conference are comprehensive in that they span the full range of qualifications from basic education¹⁹ to doctoral degrees. This is, in my view, highly commendable, and I would encourage other countries to do the same. In his presentation, Seán Ó Foghlú outlined a number of other initiatives that go in the direction of defining competencies and qualifications in other areas of education, such as the København Declaration for vocational education and training, European lifelong learning policies, EU policies and Directives on recognition for professional purposes²⁰ and the OECD frameworks of qualifications review. He also emphasized the need for links to schooling.

These initiatives and links are important, and when the time comes to start work on a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area, they should be taken into consideration as concerns content as well as methodology. For example, the extended use of working groups with clearly defined areas of work used in some of the other context may, as emphasized by both Seán Ó Foghlú and Peter van der Hijden, be a good model for work on an EHEA framework.

The question is, however, whether close structural links to other sectors of education or a comprehensive qualifications framework are a realistic goal for a framework above the national level, at least in the near future. With some regret, I would think, as Nick Harris also said in his presentation, that we would do better to focus on elaborating a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area that would focus on higher education qualifications, but preferably also including considerations on qualifications giving access to higher education. If we stick to the terms of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, such a framework would be for “qualifications concerning higher education”.

One specific issue is whether an EHEA framework should include qualifications situated between entry level and the first degree, something akin to the UK Foundation Degree or the Danish Vocational Academy Degree (AK). Strictly speaking, these qualifications are not covered by current Bologna policies, but they are a reality in many systems. Should not the EHEA framework take account of this reality? I believe that if it does not, we will have a weakened and less useful framework.

Another issue, raised by Stephen Adam, concerns the place and role of what in shorthand is called “lifelong learning qualifications”. These will be the topic of a Bologna seminar to be organized by the Czech authorities in Praha on June 5 – 7, so it may be premature to address this issue in detail, but Stephen Adam is right in pointing out that some of these qualifications belong in a framework of higher education qualifications. However, I think we also need to ask whether the shorthand is really correct rather than misleading. The term “lifelong learning qualifications” would seem to indicate that we are talking about a

¹⁹ In the case of the Scottish framework, there is explicit mention of a level describing outcomes for learners with severe and profound learning difficulties.

²⁰ Meaning, in general, qualifications giving access to regulated professions, typical examples of which are medicine, dentistry, and architecture.

separate set of qualifications for those who come to higher education late in life or through alternative routes, and I am not at all sure that this is the right approach. Rather, I would prefer to think in terms of alternative learning paths that more often than not lead to the same qualifications earned by those following more classical learning paths.

What use for higher education institutions?

Even though the Bologna Process was launched by Ministers responsible for higher education, the European Higher Education Area cannot become a reality without the active contributions of higher education institutions, students and staff, the large majority of whom have to identify with the goals for the Area. An important question is therefore what use institutions can make of a national qualifications framework as well as one for the EHEA.

A qualifications framework should guide and be of help to institutions in designing their higher education programs and curricula. Admittedly, a qualifications framework could be seen as a restraint, but only if it is overly detailed and directive. It should lay down certain ground rules to be followed, but its main function should be that of providing guidance and assistance – along with improved acceptance of the study programs outside of the institution. It should also be emphasized that within the overall rules of the qualifications framework, the individual institution will have considerable freedom in the design of its programs.

By stipulating broad requirements as to the workload, level, quality and profile of qualifications, the framework will offer basic guidance that must, however, be implemented at institutional level. Within these basic outlines, a framework will also offer institutions for creative curriculum development and creative ways of complementing competence in a core area with competence in other academic fields that will strengthen students' position on the labor market as well as contribute to their personal development. While a strong competence in a given field will continue to be of paramount importance, academic disciplines are no longer separated by impenetrable walls. Rather, interdisciplinary approaches add new dimensions to academic programs, and the qualifications frameworks must make such approaches possible.

Quality assurance and the qualifications framework

As we have already seen, quality is an important element in the make-up of a qualification. Making provision for quality assurance is increasingly seen as one of the basic responsibilities of public authorities for higher education, and this is an important development in attitudes in European higher education over the past 5 years or so. Public authorities may choose to carry out quality assurance themselves or leave this task to others, but the responsibility for the framework for quality assurance will and should remain with public authorities.

It may also be worth underlining that, in my view, quality assurance is the responsibility of the individual higher education system and thus, in the majority of cases, a national responsibility. There should be European cooperation, and cooperation within the EHEA, as concerns methodology, criteria and procedures, and there should be transparency about the results of the quality assurance exercise, but I am not in favor of a European quality assurance agency, nor even one for the EHEA.

Hence, it is important that quality assurance agencies take the aims of the qualifications frameworks into account in their assessment of higher education institutions and/or programs and make the extent to which institutions and/or programs implement and meet the goals of the qualifications framework of the country concerned, as well as an EHEA framework, an important element in the overall outcome of the assessment exercise. Higher education institutions should also take account of the qualifications frameworks in their internal quality assurance processes. At the same time, the qualifications frameworks should define its quality goals in such a way as to be of relevance to quality assessment.

Recognition

A qualifications framework would be an important contribution to facilitating the recognition of qualifications within the European Higher Education Area. As Bente Kristensen, speaking on behalf of the Danish Rectors' Conference, said in her introductory remarks: a more systematically defined degree system will facilitate recognition. I also very much agree with the point made by Andrejs Rauhvargers underlining that with the Bologna Process, recognition has developed from being a technical issue for specialists to one of the main concerns of higher education policy in Europe. However, it is important not to create expectations about "automatic recognition", as recognition depends on the purpose of the application and as, even in seemingly obvious cases, a minimum of assessment is needed. Recognition, as Andrejs Rauhvargers pointed out, is about assessing a foreign qualification with a view to finding a correct place and path in another country's education or employment system. A qualifications framework for the EHEA will greatly facilitate the evaluation, but the evaluation will still have to be done.

An EHEA framework would allow us to relate the variety of higher education qualifications within the Area to a commonly understood qualifications framework, and this would be a significant step forward. In particular, it should facilitate the most basic form of recognition: that ascribing a level within one's own higher education system to a foreign qualification, and for many purposes, including many kinds of recognition for the labor market, this would be sufficient. For example, in several countries, candidates for employment in the civil service need a higher education degree at either first or second level, but the specialization and profile of the qualification may in many cases not be important. I believe that our goal should be to elaborate an EHEA qualifications framework where any first degree within the Area is recognized as a first degree within any other part of the Area, and the same should of course be true for second degrees and doctoral degrees. Thus, we would have "EHEA degrees", in the sense of easier recognition, if not in the sense of a common education system.

For other purposes, however, recognition is somewhat more complex and must take account of factors other than level, e.g. profile. Even these more complex cases, however, would be much helped by an EHEA framework, and they should otherwise follow the provisions of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention, which all states party to the Bologna Process should be invited to ratify as soon as possible. I am, incidentally, pleased to note that our host country, Denmark, deposited its instrument of

ratification on March 20, 2003²¹. The ENIC and NARIC Networks should be invited to contribute to a debate on a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area as well as give consideration to how such a framework could simplify the recognition of qualifications within the framework.

However, as was emphasized by Bastian Baumann as well as by several participants in the debates, an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area should not only facilitate recognition within the EHEA; it should also facilitate the process of recognition of qualifications emanating from higher education systems that are a part of the Area and other parts of the world, and *vice versa*. Therefore, a qualifications framework for the EHEA is also important for what is commonly referred to as the external dimension of Bologna.

Recognition is also much helped by what we have come to refer to as transparency instruments, above all the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer System. These instruments describe a qualification in terms of the system within which it is issued. National qualifications framework will be valuable elements in describing qualifications, but an EHEA framework would be an even more important guide in that we would then be able to relate all qualifications issued within any system of the European Higher Education Area to a commonly understood framework. When we will have progressed on the development of an EHEA framework, transparency instruments such as the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS should be reviewed to make sure that the information provided is clearly related to the EHEA framework.

Mobility

Increased academic mobility both within the European Higher Education Area and between the Area and the rest of the world is another key goal of the Bologna Process, and an EHEA qualifications framework would be an important contribution to this goal.

So far, I have not drawn any clear distinction between the terms framework and structure, and I am not aware that any meaningful distinction actually exists. Reverting to the concept of structure does, however, allow me to make what I think is a valid point. Essentially, structures come in two varieties: those that are closed and would tend to lock people in and those that are open and help people move. An EHEA qualifications framework must be an open structure that helps mobility - it must be a bridge and not a fortress. A qualifications framework should be an essential part of the infrastructure of the European Higher Education Area and help students and graduates move between its constituent systems.

Therefore, qualifications frameworks have to be constructed in such a way that some of the elements of the construction can be foreign made and still be immediately usable in the structure. This is a principle of major organized exchange programs such as ERASMUS, NORDPLUS or CEEPUS, but we also know that there are a number of problems with the recognition of study periods taken abroad.

²¹ An updated overview of ratifications and signatures may be found at <http://conventions.coe.int>, search for ETS 165.

Another example is joint degrees²², which is a potentially powerful instrument in encouraging academic mobility, but which also suffer from recognition problems, to the extent that we are now preparing a draft Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees to be submitted to the Lisboa Recognition Convention Committee. Since qualifications frameworks lay down the ground rules for how qualifications may be made up, it is worth asking whether they should not explicitly allow for joint degrees or other forms of combination of credits earned at the home institution and other institutions as well as credits earned through other relevant programs or experiences.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I admit that some of the preceding paragraphs have been complex and that they may have tried to express in too compressed a form what I consider as important considerations in the construction of the European Higher Education Area. The reader will therefore be forgiven for letting escape a sigh of relief when seeing the subtitle of this final part of the report.

I have sought to outline some key elements and proposals for further action, and these are admittedly relatively ambitious. Much remains to be done, and much remains unclear. Even the vision for the European Higher Education Area to be established in 2010 is not completely clear. Maybe we can take comfort in Seán Ó Foghlú's comparison with the Peace Process of Northern Ireland, where some lack of clarity was necessary to bring all concerned parties on board, and where the initial years of the Peace Process relied on space for the different sides to have their own interpretation. However, ultimately, these interpretations must to a large extent converge.

The idea of setting up a European Higher Education Area in little more than a decade is in itself an ambitious undertaking and cannot be realized without ambitious proposals. To those who worry that we may be describing a Utopia, I would be tempted to borrow my answer from the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater: in that case, there is little reason to worry. The dangerous Utopias are not those that remain Utopia, but those that may actually materialize²³. Granted, Savater is describing 1984 and the like, but the point may be worth keeping in mind even for a less dramatic field such as higher education, all the more so as, even if the damage caused by a bad education may not be immediate, it may be devastating.

In my view, the answer has to be that the European Higher Education Area is not Utopia, but reality in the making, and it depends on our clarifying and agreeing on concepts and priorities in a range of higher education policy areas. If we want the Bologna Process to end up in a European Higher Education Area by 2010, we have to be more explicit about its goals as well as about its structure, and an EHEA qualifications framework will be an important contribution to in this sense. It is worth bearing in mind Peter van der Hijden's two conditions for a qualifications framework to be useful:

- (i) it must in fact be what it claims to be: a framework – nothing less, but also nothing more;

²² See Andrejs Rauhvargers' article in Andrejs Rauhvargers and Christian Tauch: *Survey on Masters Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe* (Bruxelles 2002: European University Association).

²³ Fernando Savater : *El contenido de la felicidad* (Madrid 2002: Aguilar), pp. 50 – 53.

- (ii) it must be well known and accepted.

I would go as far as to say that an overarching qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area is a *conditio sine qua non* to the setting up of a European Higher Education Area that is broad in terms of geography and firm in terms of the implementation of higher education policies, that addresses the whole range of purposes of higher education, that is useful to the labor market, society in a broader sense and the individual, and that ultimately furthers education as defined by Ambrose Bierce:

Education, n. That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding²⁴.

²⁴ Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

APPENDIX 3

BOLOGNA SEMINAR ON RECOGNITION AND CREDIT SYSTEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Praha, June 5 – 7, 2003

RECOMMENDATIONS

To higher education institutions and others

Higher education institutions and others should:

- reconfirm their historical commitment to, and reconsider their approach and relationship to, lifelong learning, bring learning closer to the learner and interact more with local communities and enterprises;
- adopt internal policies to promote the recognition of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning for access and study exemption;
- reconsider skills content in courses and the nature of their study programs;
- use the Diploma Supplement, ECTS credits and skills portfolios to record learning as well as to facilitate individual learning paths;
- express all qualifications in terms of explicit reference points: qualifications descriptors, level descriptors, learning outcomes, subject related and generic competencies;
- integrate lifelong learning into their overall strategy, global development plan and mission;
- develop partnerships with other stakeholders.

To public authorities responsible for higher education

Public authorities responsible for higher education should:

- clarify and define their goals with regard to lifelong learning and develop appropriate implementation strategies;
- develop new style national qualifications frameworks that integrate forms of lifelong learning as possible paths leading to higher education qualifications, as well as access qualifications, within this qualifications framework;
- take appropriate measures to ensure equal access to and appropriate opportunities for success in lifelong learning to each individual in accordance with his/her aspirations and abilities;
- ensure the right to fair recognition of qualifications acquired in different learning environments.

- encourage higher education institutions to develop and implement lifelong learning policies and measures the measures and support them in their endeavors;
- apply appropriate methods for the evaluation and, where appropriate, accreditation of various forms of lifelong learning.

To international institutions and organizations

International institutions and organizations should:

- through the ENIC and NARIC Networks, seek to develop international good practice to promote the recognition of qualifications earned through lifelong learning paths, as far as possible using the provisions and principles of the Lisboa Recognition Convention;
- where appropriate and needed, develop international instruments to facilitate such recognition;
- bring together existing experience with national qualifications frameworks with a view to facilitating the development of further national frameworks as well as a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area that would encompass lifelong learning paths.
- support and develop projects furthering the integration of lifelong learning paths within qualifications frameworks, improved description of lifelong learning paths and improving the opportunity of learners to follow the paths thus established;
- stimulate networks working in this area.

To the Berlin Higher Education Summit

The Ministers of the Bologna Process, meeting for the Berlin Higher Education Summit on September 18 – 19, 2003 may be invited to:

- launch work involving all appropriate stakeholders on a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area encompassing the wide range of lifelong learning paths, opportunities and techniques and making appropriate use of the ECTS credits. In entrusting the Bologna Follow Up Group with the organization of this endeavor, they should encourage cooperation between the development of this framework and the work of the Brugge-København Process in vocational education and training;
- underline the importance of improving the possibilities of all citizens to follow the lifelong learning paths established within qualifications frameworks in accordance with their aspirations and abilities and entrust the Bologna Follow Up Group, in time for the 2005 Ministerial Conference, with exploring how this goal may be achieved.

APPENDIX 4

Praha/Strasbourg, June 7, 2003

**BOLOGNA SEMINAR ON RECOGNITION AND CREDIT
SYSTEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

Praha, June 5 – 7, 2003

REPORT BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR

Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe

Let us make a golden rule: to show everything to all the senses as far as possible. In other words, to show visible things to the eyes and audible things to the ears. And if something can be perceived by other senses, then it should also be presented to those senses.

(Comenius' Golden Rule, displayed outside of the room in which the seminar was held)

INTRODUCTION

The starting point for the Bologna Seminar on Recognition and Credit Systems in the Context of Lifelong Learning organized by the Czech authorities in cooperation with the Czech Technical University is that higher education is no longer a once in a lifetime experience, if it ever was.

While this may seem obvious, it is worth underlining the fact, since our everyday language abounds with expressions and images that point in the opposite direction. Graduation may not be a part of everyday vocabulary, but the much more definite (and definitive) sounding “finish university” and “finish school” are. If people finish their education at age 25 or even 18, what do they do for the rest of their lives? Certainly, imagining that at 18, people will have all the knowledge or skill they will need until the end of their existence is wildly optimistic. I would even be tempted to say it is wildly pessimistic, if we consider what such a view implies in terms of lack of development and intellectual stimulation.

Yet, expressions like these are found in many languages. In my native language we talk about a person who is *ferdig utdannet* or *utlært*, and both expressions imply that there is no need for further education. As often when trying to translate from Norwegian, the German equivalent comes most readily to mind, in this case as *fertig ausgebildet* or *ausgelehrt*. In Spanish, someone who *ha terminado la carrera* is not ready for retirement, but rather for starting his or her professional career, the idea being that the person in question has – once again – completed his or her education. So as not to leave out the third large European branch of the Indo-European language family, the Slavic, the Russian *Я кончил(а) школу* also does not exactly leave the doors of learning wide open, as it were.

AIM OF THIS REPORT

The program of the Bologna seminar organized by the Czech authorities in cooperation with the Czech Technical University is a complete one, and it covers the main issues relating to recognition and credit systems in the context of lifelong learning. Sessions focusing on transferability in the tertiary sphere, qualifications frameworks in the context of lifelong learning, transparency instruments, validation of prior learning and the recognition of non-traditional qualifications bear witness to the complexity of the seminar and the variety of issues addressed. Add to this intensive group discussions as well as plenary presentations and comments by stakeholders representing students (ESIB), higher

education institutions (the European University Association), a higher education institution with very close links to an employer (Škoda Auto College), the Czech Council of Higher Education Institutions, the Czech Accreditation Commission and networks and projects working in the field (ENIC and NARIC Networks²⁵, TELL, Transfine²⁶), and the reader will further appreciate the complexity of the discussion, which was completed by the presentation of national case studies.

The complexity of the issue, which was so well reflected in the conference program, has in a sense also structured the ambitions and scope of this report. Providing anything close to a thorough and faithful synthesis of the various presentations would not only be verging on *hubris* – and we know what happened to those who, in Greek mythology, overstepped this line - but it would also in a sense be superfluous. Conference participants heard the original presentations, which are of an infinitely higher quality than any attempt to summarize them in a late hour of the night could possibly be, and those who were not at the conference, will have an opportunity to read the various contributions in the publication to be prepared by our Czech hosts.

I see my function as Rapporteur, therefore, rather to attempt an analysis of the issues that have been raised, to try to put the various bits and pieces together in something like a coherent whole and, not least, on the basis of the presentations and the discussion at the seminar, to seek to identify some issues that warrant further consideration. It is also my belief that addressing the various issues raised at the seminar will be of importance in establishing a European Higher Education Area that by 2010 will encompass all kinds of higher education.

An analytical report is as much indebted to the presentations and discussions at the conference as a synthesis report would have been. This report therefore relies on the presentations and prepared comments of Ivan Wilhelm, Josef Beneš, Věra Šťastná, Stephen Adam, Peter van der Hijden, Volker Gemlich, Michel Feutrie, Jindra Divis, Štěpánka Skuhrová, Birgit Lao, Sylvie Brochu, Eva Münsterová, Milan Sojka, Alena Chromcová, Hana Slámová, Elisabeth Tosti, Andrew Cubie and Pavel Zgaga, as well as on the opening remarks of the Vice-Minister for research and higher education, Petr Kolář and Professor Miroslav Vlček, Vice Rector of the Czech Technical University.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON LIFELONG LEARNING

It is difficult to provide a short and snappy definition of lifelong learning that would meet with the approval of most of those directly concerned or who have otherwise given some thought to the issue. As the Trends III report²⁷ shows, definitions vary greatly throughout Europe. Lifelong learning may simply be another one of those ubiquitous relatives of the duck, whose common denominator is that we cannot provide an adequate definition, but we instantly recognize them when we see them.

²⁵ <http://www.enic-naric.net>

²⁶ <http://www.transfine.net>

²⁷ Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch: *Trends in Learning Structures in European Higher Education III. Bologna four years after: Steps towards sustainable reform of higher education in Europe*. Draft summary – EUA Graz Convention 29 – 31 May 2003

Nevertheless, Josef Beneš and Věra Štátná in their presentation not only reminded us that lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area; but also that it can be defined as a concept and as a “continuous learning process enabling individuals to acquire and update knowledge, skills and competencies at different stages of their lives and in a variety of learning environments, both formal and informal”. This definition follows the one given in the Council of Europe’s recommendation on lifelong learning in higher education²⁸, arising from the project on Lifelong Learning for Equity and Social Cohesion: a Challenge to Universities. Stephen Adam referred to the definition offered by the European Commission where lifelong learning is seen as “all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective”. However, one of the participants, in a comment from the floor, felt that a working definition rather than a political definition was needed. There is also considerable truth in Andrew Cubie’s definition of learning as being about not reinventing the wheel.

On this background, it may be worth exploring some characteristics of lifelong learning. The one that first comes to mind, simply because it is the one emphasized by the term itself, is that lifelong learning is situated in a different timeframe than traditional learning. One could perhaps paraphrase Henry David Thoreau and say that lifelong learners march to the beat of a different drummer. Given the brevity of human life, saying that lifelong learning, unlike the traditional concept of “standard learning”, is indefinite and therefore has no beginning and no end, is perhaps something of an exaggeration. However, within the time frame of the life of an individual, lifelong learning emphasizes that one is never done with absorbing new knowledge, skills and competence. Nobody can talk about lifelong learning with the authority of someone who has completed it all. In this sense, lifelong learning should be a model for all learning, at whatever level, and indeed for all human existence. As Volker Gemlich rightly said, lifelong learning can also be described as a culture, and Elisabeth Tosti argued the importance of life experience..

Often, though, discussions of lifelong learning betray an assumption – implicit as often as explicit – of alternative learning paths and contents. More often than not, lifelong learners are thought of not as persons undergoing traditional education at a more mature age than the classical student population, but as mature learners learning in different ways and perhaps also acquiring alternative knowledge and skills.

Such implicit assumptions have an impact on the topic of this seminar, in that if learning paths and contents differ from those of classical students, one may ask whether lifelong learners should not also be guided toward alternative qualifications.

It is worth dwelling on the assumption that lifelong learning should lead to alternative qualifications, not because it is universally held, but because those that hold it may not make the assumption explicit.

Lifelong learners have a variety of motives, ranging from personal fulfillment to earning qualifications that are immediately tradable on the labor market. In the words of Andrew Cubie, a key goal of the Scottish Qualifications Framework is to “help people of all ages and circumstances access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfill their personal, social and economic potential”.

²⁸ Recommendation R (2002) 6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on higher education policies in lifelong learning.

These motivations and potentials are of course not mutually exclusive; rather, they very often reinforce each other and a learning path that will increase a person's value on the labor market may equally provide him or her with deep personal satisfaction. In this, lifelong learning may well contribute to all the major functions of higher education:

- preparation for the labor market;
- life as an active citizen in democratic society;
- personal development;
- the development and maintenance of an advanced knowledge base.

Underlining that lifelong learners often follow other learning paths than “traditional” learners is certainly a valid point. This almost always applies to the aspect of time, and it often applies to the contents and combinations of study programs as well as the way in which qualifications are earned.

WHAT IS IN A QUALIFICATION?

Nevertheless, it is worth asking whether lifelong learning paths necessarily have to lead to non-traditional qualifications. In a deeper sense, this amounts to arguing that we should review the ways in which we define and measure educational achievements. Where traditionally we have been concerned with the formal ways in which a given qualifications could be achieved and how long it would take to earn it, there is now much discussion of whether it would not be better to seek to assess what a person has learned; what he or she knows and is able to do with a given qualification. In the words of Volker Gemlich, we need to identify the “can do levels”.

This emphasis on learning outcomes is not unproblematic, but it has been put on the agenda both of the recognition community, through the ENIC and NARIC Networks and their individual member centers, and of universities. A university driven project, the TUNING project coordinated by the Universities of Deusto and Groningen²⁹ and covering a variety of subject areas, has done pioneering work in this area, showing how difficult it is to define learning outcomes that go beyond stating the obvious but also that this can actually be done. In particular, the TUNING project makes a highly useful distinction between subject specific and transversal competence, reminding us that higher education is not just a question of learning facts but also of developing a number of skills like the ability to reason in abstract terms, capacity for analysis and synthesis, problem solving, adaptability, leadership, ability to work autonomously as well as part of a team³⁰.

Thus, lifelong learning is one of several elements that should lead us to reexamine what we mean by qualifications. Here, Sylvie Brochu emphasized the paradigm shift from teaching to learning, while Volker Gemlich underlined the need to look at lifelong learning provision from the learner's perspective. In this way, the issue of lifelong learning links directly with another issue that has been pioneered in a few countries like the United Kingdom³¹, Ireland and Denmark, namely that of defining a qualifications

²⁹ Cf. <http://www.relint.deusto.es/TuningProject/>

³⁰ The list has essentially been taken from the TUNING project.

³¹ Where the qualifications framework for Scotland is distinct from that for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

framework. In commenting on this, I draw not only on the present seminar, but also on the Bologna seminar on Qualifications Structures in European Higher Education organized by the Danish authorities in København on March 27 – 28, 2003³². Not least, I draw on Stephen Adam's presentations to both seminars.

Essentially, a qualifications framework is a system for describing all qualifications offered within a given education system and how they relate to each other. Not least, elaborating a qualifications framework helps us refine our concept of a qualification, and here much has happened lately. As described by Andrew Cubie, a key function of qualifications frameworks is to guide individuals and help them reach their educational goals with as few complications as possible. The traditional concepts of workload and level have been refined and are no longer expressed only in terms of "years of study". Rather, ECTS credits have largely won acceptance as units measuring the workload required to earn a specific qualification, and these can be earned fast or slowly, depending on the learner. If the ECTS is developed into a credit accumulation and not only a credit transfer system, this would also help with the definition of level.

The concept of level is, however, being refined beyond the insistence of the Bologna Declaration on a two-tier system consisting of a first and a second degree, and the existing national qualifications frameworks are relatively explicit in their level descriptors.

However, when assessing a qualification, we not only need to know something about its workload and level. We also need to know something about the quality of the qualification. While the concern for quality is not new, the widespread acceptance of the need for formal systems assessing the quality of higher education is a fairly recent development. It may be worth recalling that as late as 1997, when the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention was adopted, there was still discussion of whether a formal quality assurance system was necessary or not. Today, the discussion focuses on what such a system should look like.

Learning outcomes, referred to above, are also an integral part of the discussion of qualifications frameworks. Less discussed is the issue of the profile of a qualification, even though it will often not be sufficient for someone assessing a qualification to know that it is of adequate level. Whether assessing a qualification for employment purposes or for the purpose of further study, an evaluator will often need to know the specific profile of a qualification. While all second degrees will probably provide the learner with a good number of transversal competences, the subject specific competences will also be of importance for someone looking to hire a historian with good knowledge of Czech or considering applications for admission to a doctoral program in information science.

LIFELONG LEARNING - SEPARATE BUT EQUAL?

If we develop a more sophisticated view of what qualifications actually constitute and how different qualifications relate to each other, a safe assumption would also be that we would more readily accept that different learning paths may lead to the same qualification. This is of immediate relevance to the discussion of qualifications, recognition and credit systems in the context of lifelong learning.

³² Cf. . http://www.vtu.dk/fsk/div/bologna/Koebenhavn_Bologna_Reprot_final.pdf

One may of course take the view that earning one's qualifications off the beaten track, as it were, constitutes an additional value that should be recognized through a separate qualification. However, the opposite view is equally plausible: that any qualification deviating from the traditional ones may easily be considered second rate, even if the justification for reaching such a conclusion may be entirely lacking. An additional consideration is that, in the interest of transparency, which is another major concern of the European Higher Education Area, a balance has to be struck between allowing learners to define study programs that fit their own profiles and interests and providing a framework for describing the qualifications earned through these programs in a way that is understandable to informed outsiders. Variety has many advantages, but increased transparency is not one of them.

I would therefore argue that lifelong learning should primarily be seen as alternative learning paths toward qualifications described in the qualifications framework of a given education system. This is not to say that all lifelong learning experiences have to end up with a traditional qualifications, but I would be even more concerned if they *a priori* had to end up with a qualification marked "LLL", say a Master of Science LLL. Separate learning paths may be seen as equal, but the chances of gaining acceptance for separate but equal lifelong learning qualifications is not something I would put a lot of money on if I were a gambler. There is even historical precedent for considering that "separate but equal" will easily end up as anything but³³.

Saying that there should be room for earning traditional qualifications through lifelong learning experiences does, however, amount to saying that we must take a broader view of how qualifications may be earned and which elements may go into any given qualification. This is no small challenge for a qualifications framework.

LIFELONG LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Josef Beneš and Věra Šťastná remind us that an important part of the background for the discussion about lifelong learning is an increased demand for qualifications at all levels combined with an increasingly diverse student population. This is matched by a diversity of provision, including post-secondary or tertiary programs not considered a part of higher education, at least not in all countries, as well as different kinds and levels of higher education programs and a diversity of study forms, ranging from the classical full time student in his or her early 20's through the increasingly common part time student, encompassing a considerably broader age group, to distance learners.

All of this implies that qualifications may be obtained in different ways, at different speeds and at different ages. We may refer to different learning paths leading to the same qualifications, and in some countries, public authorities responsible for the higher education framework have begun to see the various qualifications of their higher

³³ In 1896, a US Supreme Court decision, known as *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, approved segregation in schools by accepting the formula "separate but equal". This decision was not overturned until 1954, when the Supreme Court, in *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, ordered the integration of American schools. The implementation of this decision was a central element of the Civil Rights struggle of the 1950s and early 1960s.

education system as a coherent whole. Therefore, they have set out to describe these qualifications, the way they relate to each other, and the competencies, knowledge and skills they certify in terms of what is often referred to as “new style” qualifications frameworks³⁴. This concept was explored in detail at the Bologna seminar organized by the Danish authorities in København on March 27 - 28 this year, and I will therefore not attempt to give anything like a full description of the concept.

Nevertheless, as Stephen Adam demonstrated in his presentation, the concept of qualifications frameworks is highly relevant also to lifelong learning. Indeed, one could say the concept helps “demystify” lifelong learning by showing that various learning paths may lead to the same goal. Lifelong learning is one among several possible paths, it is as valuable as the more classical paths. Most likely, a given qualification can be earned by several lifelong learning paths as well as several more traditional paths.

It may be worth recalling the functions of national qualifications frameworks, as outlined in Stephen Adam’s presentation. These include:

- making explicit the purposes of qualifications;
- delineate points of access and overlap;
- identify alternative routes;
- position qualifications in relation to one another;
- show routes for progression as well as barriers.

Stephen Adam underlined that lifelong learning is an all-inclusive concept in need of deconstruction. Indeed, he jokingly referred to lifelong learning as suffering from a multiple personality disorder. I think he is right in his assertion, and it may be that lifelong learning is not sufficiently well integrated into higher education policies in part because it has been thought of as something entirely different from standard higher education policies and therefore something to be left to those with a special interest in the issue. The not uncommon assumption that there are separate “lifelong learning qualifications” may also in part arise from this. In my view, the focus on qualifications frameworks and the place of lifelong learning paths within them will help deconstruct lifelong learning and put it in its proper context as an important part of overall higher education policies.

By showing how different qualifications relate to each other, qualifications frameworks should also facilitate the transfer of qualifications between different parts of the system. The need for facilitating such transfer was underlined by several speakers. It is also worth bearing in mind the timely reminder by Josef Beneš and Věra Šťastná: broad transferability does not mean automatic transferability. Therefore, systems and methods must be developed to facilitate transfer, and one example from the Czech Republic is the transfer between the higher professional and university sectors described by Hana Slámová.

³⁴ The point being that all education systems by definition have a qualifications framework but that, traditionally, the description of the qualifications and not least the relationship and interaction between them leaves much to be desired. The “new style” framework therefore represent a significant step forward.

DESCRIPTION OF QUALIFICATIONS EARNED THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS AND EXPERIENCES

As the variety of qualifications and learning paths increases, developing tools to describe these qualifications and learning paths in a way that makes them understandable to informed - and, sometimes, less informed - outsiders is of great importance. Two such tools have been developed and are in quite wide use today, and both have their place within the Bologna Process.

The Diploma Supplement, developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, aims at describing a qualification in terms of the education system within which it was earned. The Diploma Supplement can also be adapted to qualifications - such as joint degrees - earned within two or more higher education systems. The Diploma Supplement, which is an addition to and not a substitute for the original diploma, contains information on the student, the institution and program, the competencies earned and the higher education system. In many countries, institutions are now obliged by law to issue Diploma Supplements to their students once these earn their degrees.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), developed by the European Commission, facilitates the transfer of competence earned at one institution or within one higher education system to another institution and/or system. It has achieved this by developing a standard unit expressing workload - the ECTS credit, 60 of which constitute an average workload for an academic year - as well as a standardized grading scheme. There is also discussion of broadening the ECTS to a credit accumulation as well as a credit transfer system. As emphasized by the Bologna seminar on credit transfer, organized by the EUA and the Swiss authorities in Zürich in October 2002, the ECTS must be developed to include the concept of level.

Peter van der Hijden raised the issue of whether credits have absolute or relative value, i.e. whether the value of credits may depend in part on the use to which they will be put. His question was perhaps not quite answered by the participants in the seminar, but a reasonable assumption seems to be that while for many purposes, a credit is a credit is a credit, some study programs will have limits on the amount of credits that can be earned in a given area. Whether this is assigning relative value to credits or emphasizing the profile of a given qualification is perhaps a debate worth pursuing.

The two transparency instruments are complementary, and an ECTS transcript can easily be incorporated into a Diploma Supplement. In this context, it is well worth remembering Michel Feutrie's reference to ECTS as a transferable model combining

- formal learning in higher and vocational education, for the purpose of certification;
- non-formal learning in companies or organizations, for the purpose of employability;
- informal learning in the voluntary sector, for the purpose of professionalization.

To the extent that the various kinds of educational experiences could not be readily described through the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS, these transparency instruments

could be brought together with the remaining elements in a portfolio, describing all the relevant experience, skills and competencies that constitute the person's overall achievements. One possible model could be the European Language Portfolio, developed by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division to describe a person's competencies in foreign languages, whether formally certified or not, according to a list of well established criteria of fluency. In the case of computing skills, the EU has developed a European Driving License. In the case of many lifelong learning experiences, it is an important part that candidates are closely involved in constituting their own portfolios, as underlined by Jindra Divis.

The point was made by several speakers that recognition, quality assurance, certification and documentation procedures must be kept as "light" as possible. They specifically warned against creating too heavy a bureaucracy. It is easy to agree with this view in general terms, but since "bureaucracy" has become a catchword for all that is wrong with public administration, it may be worth recalling that a key characteristic of bureaucracy is that it provides for predictable decisions based on the merits of the case and taken by professional employees in the sense that they derive their income from their administrative post³⁵. Therefore, decisions are not based on arbitrary factors such as who examines the files, at what time of day this happens or on the payment of direct fees or provision of other services to the individual bureaucrat, commonly referred to as corruption. Bureaucracy should be kept at a reasonable level, but it is as much of an illusion to believe that modern, complex societies can function without an element of public administration as to believe they can be governed without politics.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE LISBOA RECOGNITION CONVENTION

The Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, adopted in Lisboa in April 1997 and hence referred to as the Lisboa Recognition Convention, provides the legal framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Europe. At the time of writing, it has been ratified by 31 states and signed by a further 12³⁶. The main point of the Lisboa Recognition Convention will be found in Appendix 1, suffice it here to underline the following aspects:

Among the main points of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention are the following:

- Adequate access to an assessment of foreign qualifications.
- Non-discrimination.
- The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfill the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.

³⁵ Cf. Max Weber: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922); the reference here is to a Norwegian edition of Weber's writings: *Makt og byråkrati* (Oslo 1982: Gyldendals Studiefakler), pp. 105 - 157).

³⁶ An updated list of ratifications and signatures, as well as the text of the Convention and its Explanatory Report, may be found at <http://conventions.coe.int>, search for ETS 165.

- Recognition unless the competent authority can demonstrate a substantial difference.
- All parties shall provide information on the institutions and programs they consider as belonging to their higher education systems.

In a legal sense, the Convention is only applicable to the parties, i.e. the countries that have ratified the Convention or otherwise declared themselves bound by it, and for qualifications belonging to their higher education systems. However, the Convention also has a second function: that of serving as a guide to good practice. In this sense, its provisions can equally well be applied in other contexts and to other kinds of qualifications.

If national qualifications frameworks – and possibly a qualifications framework for the European Higher Education Area – are construed so as to include different learning paths to the same educational achievements and qualifications, there should be no formal reason why the provisions of the Lisboa Recognition Convention could not be applied to qualifications earned through a lifelong learning path. If these paths were not to be recognized as belonging to the higher education qualifications of a Party, the Convention could still be applied *de facto* and its principles be applied to lifelong learning at higher education level.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

If recognition aims at taking due account of a person's competence, skills and knowledge without regard to how these have been attained, the question of recognition of non-traditional qualifications - or at least of qualifications earned in non-traditional ways - arises. Again, it is good to keep in mind the context of diversification of higher education, including the development of transnational education and virtual learning, in which this discussion takes place. This is not a concern only for lifelong learners, but since they tend to follow more varied paths than traditional higher education graduates, the issue of recognition of prior learning takes on a special importance in discussions of lifelong learning.

As presented by Jindra Divis and Štěpánka Skuhrová, a project on prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR)³⁷, carried out by the ENICs/NARICs of the Czech Republic, Germany and Sweden and led by the Dutch ENIC/NARIC, has sought to develop a methodology for the recognition of non-formal or informal learning or, in broader terms, any kind of competence at higher education level that cannot be documented by traditional means. Through different forms of assessment, including interviews, simulations and tests as well as the candidate's portfolio, the PLAR methodology seeks to establish the candidate's actual competencies, whether for the purpose of access to higher education (at whatever level appropriate) or for employment. In the Netherlands, which has pioneered this form of assessment, the PLAR methodology has not least played an important role in assessing immigrants' teacher qualifications.

³⁷ <http://ice-plar.net>

LIFELONG LEARNING AS A PART OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Lifelong learning policies, as well as the broader issue of the European Higher Education Area, are discussed in a context marked by globalization, massification of higher education, decreasing demographic curves, an increasingly heterogenous student body, an emphasis on the need for quality education and increasing pressures as concerns employability and the competitiveness of students on the labor market, as Josef Beneš and Věra Štastná so usefully reminded us. Sylvie Brochu as well as one of the working groups usefully emphasized that higher education institutions have to satisfy a double agenda: one the one hand, they have to be competitive economically, while on the other hand they also have to fulfill their social responsibility. She also reminded us that in addition, higher education institutions have to reconcile the need for a market orientation with the need to keep a certain distance in order to discern longer term trends. The classical university model was of course not devoid of market orientation, but the shape of the market has changed quite dramatically since the day of the Medieval university. As we have put it in another context, one of the dilemmas facing modern universities is how, in the age of the sound bite, one can develop an understanding of the importance of an institution that by its nature takes the longer view³⁸.

As Stephen Adam emphasized, this context also includes the fact that only half of the EU member states have strategies for lifelong learning, even if the recently published Trends III report indicates that most Bologna countries are now planning to develop lifelong learning strategies or already in the process of doing so. Of the 11 Bologna countries that already have established such policies, north western Europe is clearly overrepresented³⁹.

In reflecting on the role and place of lifelong learning within the Bologna Process, it may be worth emphasizing that lifelong learning should be considered a part of overall higher education policies rather than as a separate strand. The same would be true for policies directed at other levels or profiles of education, and Stephen Adam very usefully reminded us that the Bologna Process should interact with initiatives in other areas of education, such the Brugge-København Process. However, to borrow from Josef Beneš and Věra Štastná again, higher education is our “playground”.

The current work program of the Bologna Process, covering the period 2001 – 2003, is divided into 5 or 6 categories. However, it is also possible to read it differently. In my reading, this program consists of two broad areas, the first of which focuses on qualifications and degree structures, while the second has to do with the social dimension of higher education, which was in particular emphasized by Birgit Lao, but also by several other speakers like Sylvie Brochu and Stephen Adam. In my view, lifelong learning touches on both of these aspects within the Bologna Process. In his closing remarks, Pavel Zgaga also touched on this, and he emphasized that lifelong learning is such a general idea that it could be left happily to live its life in theories, but considerable effort is needed to translate these theories into practical policies and action.

³⁸ For these and related issues, see Nuria Sanz and Sjur Bergan: *The Heritage of European Universities* (Strasbourg 2002: Council of Europe Publishing).

³⁹ Cf. *Trends III*, pp. 12 - 13.

As concerns the first, I believe the main issue for the further progress toward the European Higher Education Area is how lifelong learning can be integrated into qualifications frameworks at both national level and for the European Higher Education Area as entirely valid paths leading to the various qualifications making up these frameworks. In the terms of the Lisboa Recognition Convention, lifelong learning paths would then be a part of the higher education systems of States party, which also means that the qualifications thus earned would be considered for recognition on a par with the same qualifications earned through more traditional higher education learning paths. A second issue is how these learning paths could then be adequately described through transparency instruments like the Diploma Supplement, the ECTS and possibly a lifelong learning portfolio.

As concerns lifelong learning as a part of the social dimension of higher education, the issue is probably considerably easier to phrase than to solve: if lifelong learning paths are integrated into accepted qualifications frameworks, how can authorities and higher education institutions encourage people to actually follow those paths. This was not one of the main issues for the present conference, which focused on qualifications and credits, but it is worth underlining that it touches on issues like equitable access, student finance, motivating members of new or underrepresented groups to pursue higher education, adapting learning methods and institutional working schedules and certainly a host of other issues. Trends III also emphasizes that if the “competitiveness agenda is reinforced by tight national budgets and not counterbalanced by government incentives, university provision of LLL may well be forced to let go of the more costly social agenda”, something that would be detrimental to the goal of an inclusive European Higher Education Area and that would not help us achieve the goal stipulated by the Ministers in their Praha Communiqué:

Lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area. In the future Europe, built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, lifelong learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life.

Personally, I cannot conceive of quality of life without an opportunity to learn and broaden horizons, as I fully share Pavel Zgaga’s desire to “live a long life in learning”. I also cannot conceive of a developed society that would not offer its citizens an opportunity to develop their competencies, skills and knowledge. The choice in favor of lifelong learning should not be all that difficult if one contemplates the alternatives – is one of them lifelong ignorance? However, reaching a goal is generally more difficult than imagining it, so we still have work to do before this part of the Bologna Process will meet the two criteria for success defined by Ivan Wilhelm in his presentation:

- (1) making the right decisions;
- (2) convincing the majority of people that your decision is right.

Hopefully, the recommendations from this conference will help persuade higher education institutions, public authorities responsible for higher education, international organizations and institutions and the Ministers of the Bologna Process set out to consider lifelong learning as an integral part of higher education policies, as learning paths within higher education qualifications framework that will help broaden access to higher

education and further equity and social cohesion. If so, the seminar will have been a successful one.

Lifelong learning, as life itself, is sometimes difficult. However, the alternatives are unappealing, and this should in itself constitute a strong incentive to success.

MAIN POINTS OF THE LISBOA RECOGNITION CONVENTION

- Holders of qualifications issued in one party shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another party.
- No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, color, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin.
- The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfill the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.
- Each party shall recognize qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees – as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
- Recognition of a higher education qualification issued in another party shall have one or both of the following consequences:
 - a. access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations and preparations for the doctorate, on the same conditions as candidates from the country in which recognition is sought;
 - b. the use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which recognition is sought.

In addition, recognition may facilitate access to the labor market.
- All parties shall develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfill the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence.
- All parties shall provide information on the institutions and programs they consider as belonging to their higher education systems.
- All parties shall appoint a national information center, one important task of which is to offer advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons.

- All parties shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO that aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relating it to the higher education system within which it was issued.