

THE FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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"Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina"
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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (BIH)

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK¹

Introduction

The Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) higher education system is fragmented and in need of reform. The BiH educational area requires a higher education framework that is consistent with the principles and values of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as developed by the Bologna process,² including ENQA standards and guidelines for quality assurance in EHEA. The new BiH qualifications framework is designed to strengthen higher education and act as a lever in assisting the higher education authorities and decision makers in their reform efforts aimed at reshaping the academic community, its institutions and processes. The primary function of the framework is to act as a guide and reference point for those creating new qualifications and updating existing ones within the new quality assurance system for higher education.

The new framework has been produced in the frame of a joint project of the European Commission and the Council of Europe "Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina", following widespread consultation and agreement with appropriate stakeholders including academics, students, public authorities and social partners.³ Its successful implementation will improve public confidence in higher education. The framework is intended to help to improve the quality and recognition of qualifications and promote the reform of higher education for the benefit of all citizens.

Structure of the framework

The BiH framework for higher education qualifications consists of three cycles that reflect and expand upon the 'Dublin Descriptors'⁴ adopted by Ministers of Education under the Bologna Process,⁵ following a decision of ministers to adopt a higher education system that is

¹ A National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications: The single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between higher education qualifications. A qualifications framework is designed to ensure a consistent use of qualification titles.

² The Bologna Process is the most important and wide ranging reform of higher education in Europe. The ultimate aim of the Process is to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications. The Bologna declaration was signed by ministers of education from 29 European countries in 1999. The process was opened up to other countries, and further governmental meetings have been held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005) and London (2007). BiH joined the process in 2003.

³ For further information go to [Joint EC/CoE project 2006-2007 "Strengthening Higher Education in BiH"](http://www.coe.ba/highereducation) at <http://www.coe.ba/highereducation>.

⁴ Descriptors exemplify the outcomes of the main qualification at each level, and demonstrate the nature of change between levels. They provide clear points of reference at each level, and describe outcomes that cover the great majority of existing qualifications.

⁵ The 'Dublin Descriptors' were originally formulated and further developed by the Joint Quality Initiative (an informal group of higher education specialists from a variety of countries, see

essentially based on three cycles. The Dublin Descriptors are generic (non-subject specific) statements of the typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each Bologna cycle. They are built on the following elements: knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, generic cognitive skills, making judgements, communication skills and learning skills, learner autonomy accountability and working with others.

The BiH descriptors provide more detail than the Dublin Descriptors and are intended to be read with reference to each other. They describe the knowledge, skills and abilities associated with typical end cycle qualifications e.g. Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree, and Doctorates. These descriptors are not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive and need to be cross-referenced with other external reference points including national and international academic or professional subject specific guidance materials e.g. Tuning project⁶ materials and subject benchmark statements.

Currently, the BiH framework for higher education qualifications does not include any further levels or sub-divisions within the three cycles to illustrate progressions within the structure. However, the structure does reflect the ECTS credit ranges associated with the Bologna framework.

Relationship of the framework with the adoption of new approaches towards quality assurance, and recognition

The new BiH qualifications framework is just one aspect of higher education reform that must be taken in conjunction with other initiatives, which collectively are designed to transform the higher educational system to make it fully consistent with the European Higher Education Area. The Council of Europe and the European Commission Joint Project '*Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*' has three elements – (1) creating a higher education qualifications framework, (2) developing a work plan to introduce modern procedures and structures for the recognition of qualifications and, (3) establishing quality assurance standards and guidelines for higher education. These elements are connected and their simultaneous implementation is essential for any successful outcome.

Furthermore, it is recognised that successful reform will require bottom-up as well as top-down developments.

All three elements are closely linked to previous initiatives for university reform as well as the adoption of a framework law for higher education.

<http://www.jointquality.org>) and were adapted in Bergen as the cycle descriptors for the framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The full Bologna Working Group discussion text on 'new style' qualifications frameworks can be found at: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf.

⁶ "Tuning educational structures in Europe" was a pilot project undertaken by a group of European universities, with support by the European University Association (EUA) and the European Commission from 2000 to 2004 and a growing number of partners. It addresses several of the Bologna action lines, notably the adoption and application of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, based on two cycles and the establishment of a system of credits; by identifying points of reference for 1) generic competences, 2) subject-specific competences, 3) the role of ECTS as an accumulation system and 4) the role of learning, teaching, assessment and performance in relation to quality assurance and evaluation.

For further information go to <http://www.relint.deusto.es/TuningProject/index.htm>,
<http://www.let.rug.nl/TuningProject/index.htm>.

The objectives of the qualifications framework of the BiH Area are to:

- enable employers, schools, parents, prospective students and others to understand the achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles, and how qualifications relate to one another;
- assist higher education institutions (HEI), learners and others to clarify potential routes for progression and credit transfer, particularly in the context of wider participation in lifelong learning;
- create and maintain international comparability of standards, especially in intra-institutional, inter-institutional, regional and European contexts; and to facilitate mobility for all (students, academic and non-academic staff, citizens);
- eradicate inconsistency and confusion between higher education qualifications by a clear description of qualifications in terms of cycle/level, learning outcomes and credit;
- help create domestic and international confidence in BiH higher education qualifications and standards by integrating them with the new BiH quality assurance system fully consistent with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) '*standards and guidelines*';⁷
- improve the recognition of BiH qualifications and the employability of citizens by ensuring their relevance to the needs of the national and international labour market;
- ensure that access to, and the content of, BiH higher education is based upon the principles and values of democratic society.

Qualifications that signify the successful completion of the first cycle (180-240 ECTS credits) are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by appropriate learning resources (texts and information communication technologies), includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply the thorough knowledge and critical understanding of principles relating to the field of study/discipline in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;
- can apply the main methods for acquiring knowledge and undertaking applicative research in the given discipline, and are able to decide on the approach to be taken for

⁷ The full ENQA '*Standards and Guidelines*' for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area can be found at: <http://www.enqa.eu/files/BergenReport210205.pdf>.

solving a given problem and are aware of the extent to which the selected approach is suitable for solving the problem;

- can communicate using appropriate language (and where appropriate foreign language[s]), communication technologies, information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialised and non- specialised audiences for given area of science;
- have developed the necessary learning skills to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy and academic skills and attributes necessary to undertake research, comprehend and evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources;
- possess a foundation for future self-directed and lifelong learning;
- have acquired interpersonal and teamwork skills appropriate to employment and/or further study.

Qualifications that signify the successful completion of the second cycle (60-120 ECTS credits) are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding and mastering of knowledge in their field of study/discipline that is founded upon, and extends and/or enhances, that is typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
- apply conceptual thinking and abstraction with a high level of proficiency and creativity, which will enable the:
 - critical evaluation of current research and academic work at the forefront of the discipline
 - evaluation of different methodologies, development of critical opinion and the raising of alternative solutions
- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;
- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these using appropriate language(s), to specialised and non-specialised audiences clearly and unambiguously;
- are able to take their own knowledge to a higher level, deepen the understanding of their field of study/discipline and continuously develop their own new skills through individual learning and self-development;
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed and autonomous;

- have acquired interpersonal and teamwork skills appropriate to a variety of learning and employment contexts and also demonstrate leadership and/or initiative and make a contribution to change and development.

Qualifications that signify the successful completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:

(The following are the 'Dublin' third cycle descriptors that need to be discussed and expanded upon. They may well be altered following the current Bologna work in this area.)

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
- have made a scientific contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge;
- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise ;
- shall be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, advancement in a knowledge based society.

The BiH Framework of Higher Education Qualifications

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