VIRQUAL

Virtual Mobility and European Qualification Framework

The use of e-learning in the EHEA and its relation with the EQF implementation

VIRQUAL PROJECT

WP8 / SIG 4
E-learning contributions to EQF implementation

Author:
Ana Silva Dias
(TecMinho- Minho University Interface - Portugal)

Contributions on
EQF in Hungary:
László Komáromi
(Dennis Gabor Applied University, Hungary)

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1. Introduction

In this paper we give an overview on e-learning and EQF within the Virtual Mobility and European Qualifications Framework Network (VIRQUAL project[1]).

The aim is to contribute to the development of the e-learning in EHEA in what concerns its relations to the EQF implementation. Furthermore it is intended to gather information and bring together knowledge and development to contribute to the implementation of virtual mobility in Europe.

This is the first step to the in-depth research that is underway in order to find the international/European groups, projects and experts that are already working on the field in order to involve them in the group discussions and to create and share knowledge and practice.

2. What is EQF and how it relates with e-learning

The European Commission proposed (2006) that Member States should use the EQF as a reference tool to compare qualification levels used in different countries and relate their qualifications systems to the EQF by linking qualification levels to the corresponding EQF levels and, where appropriate, develop a national qualifications framework (NQF).

European exchanges indicate a key role for NQFs in:

- Reforming national education and training systems;

- in addressing lifelong learning;

- in taking forward the shift to learning outcomes;

- in addressing the needs of individual learners by improving transparency and clarifying progression;

- Making the referencing to the EQF easier. [2]

The EQF should enable international sect oral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common reference point and thus facilitate the placing of these qualifications within NQF.

On the EQF Recommendation of April 2008 sets out 2 significant milestones for implementation by the countries that voluntarily join the initiative. By 2010, they should reference their national qualifications levels to the appropriate levels of the EQF. And by

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[1] http://virqual.up.pt/

[2] Mike Coles (2009), http://www.nqai.ie/documents/MikeColesDublinApril09.pdf

2012, all new certificates and diplomas should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level[3].

There are already various forms of a NQF[4], some include all levels and types of qualifications whilst others, specifically separate HE qualifications from other types of qualifications. Some national systems employ a single framework whilst others have multiple frameworks that are generally integrated in a more or less formal way (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005).

In Portugal, for instance, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications is one subsystem of the NQF, based on a specific legal framework for the National Qualifications System that integrates:

(1) The National Agency for Qualifications (for all qualifications excluding Higher Education),

(2) The National Council for Professional Training,

(3) The Sect oral Councils for Qualifications.

Main questions related to the implementation of EQF were pointed out by the Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Youth - Jan Figel´s, in 2008:

- What principles should underpin national qualifications frameworks;
- The role of the sectors; and
- How to establish better links between VET and higher education and between formal and non–formal learning.

Answering to the questions is crucial in pursuing the ultimate objectives of the EQF—that is, to encourage mobility and lifelong learning.

In Virqual project partners intend to contribute to this discussion. In particular within SIG4 – e-learning contributions to EQF it is our intention to find out:

- How can e-learning courses contribute to the acquisition of qualifications in different levels of the EQF?
- Can we acquire all types of qualifications through e-learning?
- Which are the qualifications acquired by e-learning and the characteristics of these qualifications?
- What are the reasons why some qualifications can not be acquired by e-learning?

This group will gather information about the adoption of EQF in different countries and report examples of Good practices.

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[3] Gordon Clark (2009), http://www.nqai.ie/documents/gordonclark.pdf

[4] For example the NQF in Ireland http://www.nqai.ie

The aim is to analyse and decompose levels 5 to 8 of Learning Outcomes of EQF and propose concrete e-learning strategies that would contribute to the acquisition of EQF levels, describing experiences that lead to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences.

2.1   e-Learning and EQF

At the core of EQF development and implementation there is an increasing need for up-to-date procedures that can bring together the education and training qualifications, enabling them to fulfil the needs of the market, that is the needs of the economy and of the enterprises in terms of qualifications.

At the same time Lifelong learning reflects the need for individuals and society to adapt constantly in a changing world.

The implementation of he Bologna process is changing the way Universities see their role and the way they link with their students, with society and with the economy.

The European Higher Education Area is changing and new ICT forms of communication and learning is already facilitating the way people learn. An increasing number of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Europe has already online campus, facilitating the use and access to content curricula to their students. Learning content is thus available, but mainly for in-campus HEI students (and not so much to the Life long learning target groups –off campus students).

That means that HEI should have a better understanding of the labour market educational and training needs and should prepare not only the appropriate curricula, but also the appropriate technologies and pedagogies to address the specific learning outcomes in accordance with the EQF/NQF principles.

Anyway HEI will play a crucial role in updating and certifying the knowledge acquired and required by people of all ages and of divergent experience and should be able to integrate formal and informal learning paths, to integrate in-campus and off-campus learners, and in general the learning should be more learners centred.

The conditions introduce by Bologna, EQF and Life Long Learning strategies, are ideal conditions for e-learning to emerge as the adequate solution to overcome many barriers, specially the ones:

- Related to distance (students are both in-campus and at the workplace and so e-learning technologies and pedagogies are needed) and

- Related to socialization and partnership (different types of organizations involved – HEI, training institutions, sectorial bodies, enterprises)

- Related to network and development of the HEI that should act as a economical node (the university should be available for all, in a physical and a virtual way, putting together different online campus for HEI students and for Life long learning purposes)

- Related to the recognition and certification of non-formal or informal learning and to the assessment of previous knowledge

- Related to the development of flexible pathways, adapted to the needs of the student, to complete and improve their knowledge

The key importance of the EQF implementation using ICT, virtual mobility and e-learning is clearly defined by White (2008)[5]

> "By the development of instruments such as ECTS (Educational credit transfer systems), EQF (European qualifications framework), ECVET (European credits for vocational education and training) we are developing a system in which it will be progressively easier for a learner to acquire knowledge from different institutions in a flexible pathway; to pick and choose what suits best or is most accessible and to combine it, have it certified and recognised – and the use it across the EU. And those aims can be achieved via a mix of physical and virtual mobility."

e-learning and virtual campus have been developing in Europe for the last decade[6] but there is still a way to go in order to jump from the e-learning implementation phase to the e-learning quality phase in HE[7]. On the top of that the introduction of learning outcomes will bring changes in methods, pedagogies and technologies to be used, more adequate to a learner centred perspective.

2.2   e-learning and virtual mobility

The green paper for mobility "Promoting the learning mobility of young people", published by the European Commission in July 2009[8] refers

> "Virtual mobility, i.e. the use of the internet and other electronic forms of information and communication, is often a catalyst for embarking on a period of physical mobility. Although not a substitute for physical mobility, it does enable young people to prepare a stay abroad and can create conditions for future physical mobility by facilitating friendships, contacts and social networking etc. It also provides a means to keep in contact with the host country once the mobility period is over. It can also provide an international dimension to those learners who, for different reasons, are not able or willing to go abroad. In that context ICT can be used for "electronic twinning" and for virtual platforms, for teachers, other

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[5] White (2009) http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/tempus/events/white.pdf

[6] Re.ViCa Handbook: Reviewing the Virtual Campus phenomenon: The Rise of Large-scale e-Learning Initiatives Worldwide
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/doc.php?doc_id=15566&doclng=6&from=nws&where=72&lng=en

[7] Learning innovation project report – "ICT, Lifelong Learning and Innovation reports in ICT for learning in higher education" http://www.elearningeuropa.info/files/lo/HE.pdf

[8] Promoting the learning mobility of young people http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/mobility/com329_en.pdf

"multipliers", interested individuals, interactive communities, open source initiatives etc. Virtual mobility may also be an appropriate and practical form of mobility for young pupils, where travelling abroad may not be an option. Electronic twinning can enhance the quality of mobility initiatives (e.g. through better preparation) and make them more sustainable."

Within the Comenius programme[9], eTwinning is being developed to mainstream the use of ICT to promote collaborative learning, the European dimension, the sharing of resources and practice and the pedagogical use of ICT in schools Europe-wide. In eTwinning, primary and secondary schools establish an Internet twinning link with a partner school elsewhere in Europe. The main output of eTwinning are the joint pedagogical projects developed by the participating schools using the tools and the Internet spaces made available for them through the European eTwinning portal. The most original feature of eTwinning is that, rather than financing individual projects, it offers support, services, ideas, tools and recognition for facilitating school collaboration. More than 50,000 schools are involved in eTwinning throughout Europe.

The Virtual Campus for Digital Students[10] is a good practice to follow. This European network of providers of open and distance learning is building a virtual campus for "digital students" aimed at providing open educational sources and tools and to ensure the compatibility of the different e-Learning environments used in the partner universities.
How can we best make use of ICTs to provide valuable virtual mobility opportunities to enrich the physical mobility?
Can the eTwinning approach be used in other learning sectors e.g. voluntary service, vocational sector?

The VIRQUAL project proposes to help educational and training institutions to achieve Virtual Mobility and to guarantee EQF implementation through e-learning, aiming at finding specific obstacles in institutions and proposing concrete and innovative solutions.

2.3   EQF and NQF for HE and CE (levels 5 to 8)

In order to better understand the framework in what concerns Higher Education and Continuous Education it is necessary to analyse the EQF levels 5 to 8 which are the ones that refer to HE.

The Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA provides descriptors for cycles. Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of <u>achievements</u> and <u>abilities</u> associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

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[9] http://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm
[10] www.vicadis.net

Qualification	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual	In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)	In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy
Level 5 (*) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6 (**) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7 (***) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different field	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8 (****) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

(*) The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.

(**) The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.

(***) The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.

(****) The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

EQF and NQF refers to descriptors that can guaranty the qualification and certification levels in Europe allowing students and professionals mobility within European education and labour markets.

Aiming to better understand the problems and solutions encountered when implementing EQF we studied the NQF implementation in Portugal and Hungary (HE and CE).

Case 1: Portugal

The Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education published in March 2009 the "FHEQ in Portugal - Framework for Higher Education Qualifications" where the Portuguese levels of Qualification in HE have a corresponding qualification on the EQF levels.
The legal framework of higher education established the organisation of cycles of studies based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).
The typical higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal and the corresponding level of EQF and cycle of the FQ-EHEA are described bellow:

[Table 1] Typical higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal and the corresponding level of EQF and cycle of the FQ-EHEA

Higher education qualifications of the FHEQ-Portugal	Corresponding FQ-EHEA cycle	Corresponding EQF levels
Doctoral degrees	Third cycle qualifications	8
Doctoral course diplomas	–	–
Master's degrees	Second cycle qualifications	7
Master's course diplomas	–	–
Licenciatura degrees	First cycle qualifications	6
Higher education short cycle diplomas	Short cycle qualifications (within the first cycle)	5
Technological specialisation diplomas	Short cycle qualifications (linked to the first cycle)	5

In this process assessment is essential to the operation of a qualifications framework based on learning outcomes.

The Portuguese Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Agency ('A3ES') is responsible for the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their cycles of studies, with accreditation being fully dependent upon the results of the assessment procedure. The Agency 'A3ES' is also responsible for Portugal joining the European system of quality assurance in higher education. http://www.a3es.pt/

Quality assessment takes the form of (I) self-assessment and (ii) external assessment.

Self assessment is carried out by each higher education institution and external assessment is carried out by the Agency 'A3ES', the latter forming the basis of the accreditation procedures.

The quality assessment system necessarily includes the contribution of external bodies relevant to the process, specifically professional associations as well as other scientific, cultural and economic entities.

The quality assessment system ensures student participation by including students in self-assessment procedures, specifically through the compulsory involvement of educational councils and students' associations, their participation in anonymous educational surveys of the teaching staff and courses which form a compulsory part of the self-assessment.

Case 2: Hungary

The most serious challenge from the viewpoint of the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework and devising a national qualifications framework is the fact that this outcome-oriented approach is far removed from the determining traditions of the Hungarian educational and training system.

Primarily this is in the background of the reservation and doubt with which the majority of the representatives of the training institutions received the concept of the European Qualifications Framework in Hungary.

This problem of correspondence is not significant vis-à-vis "Knowledge", Skills" and "Competence" but it becomes greatly significant in the context of "personal and professional competence" as these are either non-existent or represent a very different level in the definition of the presently valid qualification requirements. This difficulty applies to a lesser degree to the area of vocational training as the National Register of Vocational Qualifications, which is of great significance in the sector, is closer to the outcome-based regulation, and special attention was a paid to defining competences in its renewal programme.

Along with all the above, some experts believe that, as international references have a large impact on the Hungarian way of thinking regarding education, the EQF may play the role of catalyst in the discourse within the different sub sectors.

Background activities intended to strengthen professional support and the wider acceptance of the outcome-oriented approach must also be quoted, such as the series of professional events planned in the near future in the framework of a

cluster for the recognition of learning outcomes, which is linked to the "Education and Training 2010" programme.

The various educational sub sectors are becoming increasingly open towards the needs of students and groups interested in the quality of educational services. This, however, results in further divergence rather than stronger links between the elements of the education sector.

Consequently, Hungary is lagging behind in building the system of lifelong learning (i.e. the creation of a rich range of learning opportunities consisting of elements building on each other). One element of this backlog is the under-evaluation of knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning and, as a result, the under-development of means enabling its recognition.

Although the reorganization of the systems regulating content and quality assurance has begun and brought significant changes in all sectors, due to the weaknesses of professional and political coordination in the education sector, these changes each have followed their own paths and the evolving systems under development are organically not connected with each other sufficiently.

In the course of the development of a cyclical training structure matching the goals of the Bologna process, the method of training regulation has been altered in Hungarian higher education. The former qualification requirements, almost exclusively oriented by contents and procedure, which determined the different departments and training programmes (laid down in a government decree), have been replaced by competence-based, outcome-oriented training and outcome requirements defined in learning results (at the level of ministerial decree).

Although this regulatory means continues to retain some elements of content and procedure, it also displays outcome expectations which consider the outcome indicators of the qualification framework devised for the European Higher Education Area and accepted by the education ministers in Bergen in 2005. Annex 1 of Ministry of Education Decree 15/2006 on the training and outcome requirements of the first degree and master's courses defines the generic descriptors of knowledge, abilities to apply knowledge and other skills that are needed for obtaining a basic degree (bachelors) or a master's degree in Hungary.

The **ECTS** (European Credit Transfer System) was introduced in 2002 based on a 1998 decree. The government monitored the operation of the credit system on several occasions. The results show that the credit system was in effect unable to support the mobility of students either between faculties or institutions within Hungary or in international frameworks. Not only is the international level of mobility low, so is the national level, and the application of the credit system during mobility is occasional.

Quality assurance systems

In Hungary, devising an individual quality development system and recording it in a separate document has been prescribed by law for all kindergartens and schools since 2003. In the period since the last report one significant change has taken place, namely the 2006 amendment to the law prescribed that in the

implementation of the quality management programme institutions must take into account the outcomes of the national measurement and assessment.

The accreditation of university programmes will also become more severe in order to improve quality in the near future. In higher education, alongside the operation of the Hungarian Higher Education Accreditation Committee, every institution must set up its own internal quality assurance system. Furthermore, a system of higher education quality awards has already been elaborated and legally regulated. The introduction of the system of student contracts in tertiary vocational training is currently under way to enhance practical training.

The aim is to organize coherent professional practice over a whole semester mainly in practice-intensive initial training programmes.

The adaptation in Hungary of the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) devised by the EU "Quality in VET Working Group" started immediately after the system was adopted, and related quality assurance development was carried out in 90 institutions involved in the Vocational School Development Programme and has continued in another 70 schools since 2006 in the second phase of the VSDP. In a few vocational training institutions 20 the previously launched quality assurance activity continued but most recently no resources were available to support these efforts.

3. How can e-learning contribute?

How can then ICT and e-learning be used to put in practice the acquisition of the different HEI levels of the EQF and at the same time how can e-learning contribute to the objectives of the programme E&T 2010 and beyond?

European Governments are acting in cooperation in what relates to EQF, Life Long Learning and the Bologna process, but there is a lack of information about a common or coordinated European strategy in what concerns the modes of learning and especially about e-learning (in that sense there are a number of independent measures under way in different countries and at European level).

The crucial role that e-learning will have in the European Space of Higher Education focus on: digital literacy, digital campus, the collaboration among European e-learning centres, the training of e-trainers and the transversal actions for the promotion of e-learning in Europe are very well described in a publication by ANCED, the Spanish Association of National e-learning and distance learning centres entitled "best practices in e-learning" [11]

> "An indicator of the value of the ICT in education and learning is the important investment that the institutions are making at the moment.

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[11] http://www.buenaspracticas-elearning.com/conclusions.html

Virtual mobility is going to have a leading role in the future related to activities development of teachers and students. This book already gathers examples of good practices based on new learning methods which consist of the use of virtual components in electronic learning opting for intercultural, information and knowledge exchange. Virtual mobility is as important because it tries to complement the traditional programs of physical mobility, breaking the barriers related to time and space and representing at the same time opportunities that not only are going to depend on the geographic location of the students and the teaching staff of different regions and countries, but at the same time are going to help the democratization of education. Opening knowledge routes between educational institutions and students of different nationalities without the necessity of physically moving since they will do it virtually, enriching social learning in multicultural surroundings, the acquisition of competitions in other languages and those skills associated to the ICT use. One of the objectives raised in the Declaration of Bologna is the promotion of European cooperation to assure a comparable quality level for development criteria and methodologies. In this sense, the present challenge of the institutions of Superior Education is the incorporation of the ICT, where it is required the development of strategic initiatives that which allow the creation of common work. The possible elaboration of standards that allow managing the inclusion and later evaluation of e-learning from the systems of traditional education with guarantees high levels of quality representing future work procedures."

In 2007 the European governments developed progress reports on the "education and training strategy 2010" where each country stated their progress in what concern this matter.

Case 1: Portugal

In the Portuguese national report, the most part of the measures under implementation for the HEI are in the direction of organization, quality and assessment of HEI, including modernising the way the university is ruled in order to change the way the University is working. And all those changes are coordinated with the NQF and Life Long Learning Strategy. (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/natreport07/pt_en.pdf)
According to this progress report "The National Lifelong Learning Strategy is also present in the priorities and policies laid down for higher education in Portugal. In order to develop the competencies needed for the knowledge-based economy and society and to achieve economic competitively, factors that are vital to Europe's social cohesion and the full application of the renovated Lisbon Strategy Agenda, the process for the reform of higher education is under way, within the context of the present movement for the modernisation of universities and the Non-

university higher education sector. This reform includes a number of measures, mobilising higher education institutions, households and enterprises, and aim at:

• Ensuring the recognition of the qualification of Portuguese people within the European Higher Education Area, implementing the Bologna Process, a unique opportunity to increase enrolment in the higher education system, thereby improving the quality and relevance of the training it offers and fostering mobility and internationalisation;

• Promoting equal opportunities in access to higher education, improving frequency and conclusion levels in higher education courses, attracting new publics, within a logic of Lifelong Learning and promoting Social Academic Action;

• Ensuring the correct regulation of the higher education system, namely its organising principles, the autonomy of Universities and Polytechnic Institutes, the principles for the organisation and management of institutions and their assessment, including institutions and degrees, as well as ensuring the best conditions concerning teaching and research careers;

• The definition of objectives not only in terms of education/training levels, but also in terms of professional profiles that are in short supply on the labour market.

• Diversifying learning opportunities, as well as increasing opportunities for vocational conversion to new jobs;

• Improving the articulation between the institutions that promote lifelong learning, thereby fostering the sharing of resources and the promotion of combined education/training solutions."

The same document gives a crucial importance to the promotions of closer relations between HEI and the enterprises, training institutions, unions, sectoral bodies, etc. A number of measures are reported but none refers to the use of ICT and /or e-learning or relates the strategy with the mobility of students and workers, or virtual mobility. Anyway an important network capability of the Portuguese system is appointed us a necessary and crucial step in order to put together different organizations, showing the need for a more flexible education and training market.

"(...) By linking enterprises, teaching, training and research institutions and institutional and financial support bodies, partnerships for innovation and employment can become driving forces for the exploration of new areas of growth and job creation. (...)

Higher education establishments credit learning obtained in non-formal and informal contexts, or in a professional context and as a result of life experience as part of the system governing the access to this level of education by people above

the age of 23. The same credits are awarded to students who apply for technological specialisation courses (non-higher level post-secondary level IV training); in a way that recognises their abilities and competencies.

(...) A vast process of reform designed to modernise the higher education system is currently underway in Portugal. Various issues have been addressed and are the object of new regulations: i) the guidelines for and regulation of the system; ii) the governance and legal status of institutions; iii) financing and efficiency; iv) access and equity; v) ensuring quality in higher education; and vi) opening institutions up to society and the economy. The reform is also intended to include strategies for attracting private funds, internationalising the system, the development of study programmes in English, and the offer of dual degrees with foreign partners, namely in advanced training."

In the report there is no reference to effective measures to take place in Portugal to promote and bring e-learning or ICT to the core of the life long learning process and to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy. The developments reported for Higher Education are oriented to standardise and organise qualitative procedures in the system being able to coop with the Bologna process and EQF European levels of qualification.

Case 2: Hungary

The Ministry of Education initiated the drawing up of a concept for developing the national qualifications framework (NQF) in 2006. The finalized concept emphasizes that the framework is to be regarded as a strategic tool suitable for supporting individual learning and career planning on the one hand, and for helping training providers in developing their programmes as a reference on the other; thus aiding a more successful harmonization of the training outcomes between the various sectors and sub sectors (general education, vocational training, higher education). At the same time, devising and introducing the NQF may provide an opportunity to extend the practice of acknowledging the results of non-formal and informal learning and to increase awareness thereof.

Using the concept, strategic preparation work began with the involvement of the ministries concerned.

The strategy acknowledges the fact that the development of the necessary conditions and the developments themselves will take several years (some experts believe it may take seven to eight years) development process. Based on the agreement of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Education and Culture, the developments laying the foundations for the NQF, and the development and introduction of the NQF have been integrated at several points into the National Development Plan II for the period of 2007-13.
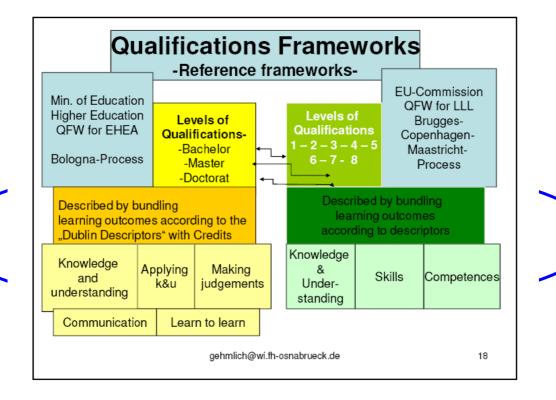
The EHEA is debating the concepts in evidence when integrating EQF (and NQF), the Bologna Process and the Education and the training strategy for 2010. The discussions integrate questions related to the implementation of different systems (Bologna and EQF) as well as questions related to translation of terms. For instance some terms like competences and skills have different understandings according to National, historical and educational factors.

The article by Volker Gehmlich (2009) describes those questions.

In this schema the Reference Qualifications Frameworks are being described by building "learning outcomes" according to

(1) The Dublin Core Descriptors with credits for HEI (in terms of Knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding and making judgements – communication and learning to learn) and

(2) The descriptors of the EQF/NQF for all levels of qualification (in terms of Knowledge and Understanding, Skills and Competences). These will correspond to different local reforms at the levels of HEI and VET.

4. Conclusions

The use of e-learning in the Higher Education and lifelong learning is already a reality in the European Higher Education Area.

The challenge for the e-learning sector is to envisage the ways e-learning will impose itself as a tool to solve many problems arising in the "new university". The communication between students and teachers must be faster and more adequate to the contextual needs of the students (introducing questions related with the location of students -off-campus and in the workplace), the learning outcomes (that should be related with the activities performed by learners), the virtual mobility of students and teachers, the learning systems, technologies and pedagogies in use by each organization, etc.

The e-learning scenarios and strategies in this context of integration within EQF, bologna and lifelong learning is a huge challenge.

Exploring these issues throughout case studies and interviews to keep actors in the field will bring us to up-to-date knowledge that can enlighten us with new knowledge to be produced under the discussion group.

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