

## The Current State and Working out Problems of Georgian National Qualifications Framework

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### Abstract

Bologna process began in 1999 with signing the Bologna Declaration by Ministers of education from 30 European countries. Today, 45 countries participate in the Bologna process. In Bergen, 2005 European education ministers adopted General Framework of Qualification for European Higher Education Area (EHEA) referred as “Bologna Framework”.

Alongside with the Bologna framework, in September 2006, the second qualifications framework – “European Qualifications Framework” was created. It represents 8 degree system and encompasses the full process of education and learning so as is in full compliance with the Bologna process.

In the Bologna framework there are special mechanisms for connecting National Qualifications Frameworks with one another. In order to ensure compliance of National Qualifications Framework with the Bologna framework, the following issues should be provided during elaboration process:

- a) International Transparency- for easily readable content;
- b) International Recognition of Qualifications- for employment and further education
- c) International Mobility of Learners and Graduates- for generalizing learning outcomes and for awarding degrees.

While elaborating National Qualifications Framework, first and foremost base of the fact for the Bologna framework is a three cycle system of higher education that should be considered. Description of the qualifications should be fulfilled according to the internationally recognized descriptors, the so-called Dublin Descriptors.

Description of the qualifications should completely determine what kind of qualification (degree) a student deserves to get after the successful completion of a certain educational cycle.

In order to ensure compatibility of National Qualifications Framework with the Bologna Process, it is necessary to carry out self-certification process by state authorized body.

**Key Words:** Bologna Process; National Qualifications Framework; Dublin Descriptors.

The Bologna process was initiated in 1999 with signing the Bologna Declaration by Ministers of education from 30 European countries. Today, 45 countries participate in the process. The main goal of the Bologna Process is to create European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

According to Bologna Declaration the following objectives are of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide:

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- ! Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system
- ! Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labor market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.
- ! Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognized by receiving Universities concerned.
- ! Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
  - for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
  - for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorization of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights.
- ! Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- ! Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research.

The promotion of Bologna meeting decisions by signatory countries were discussed on European Ministers meetings in Prague (May, 2001) and Berlin (September, 2003).

In Prague, Ministers responsible for higher education agreed on the importance of enhancing attractiveness of European higher education to students from Europe and other parts of the world. They noted that the readability and comparability of European higher education degrees world-wide should be enhanced by the development of a common framework of qualifications, as well as by coherent quality assurance and accreditation/certification mechanisms and by increased information efforts.

The Ministers pointed out the need for a lifelong learning perspective in education. They defined the lifelong learning as “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”.

In Berlin the Ministers stressed that “consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework. 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 labor market needs. First cycle degrees should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, to second cycle programs. Second cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies”.

Ministers underline the important contribution of higher education in making lifelong learning a reality. They are taking steps to align their national policies to realize this goal and urge Higher Education Institutions and all concerned to enhance the possibilities for lifelong learning at higher education level including the recognition of prior learning. They emphasize that such action must be an integral part of higher education activity.

Ministers furthermore call those working on qualifications frameworks for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS credits. They stress the need to improve opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education.

Afterwards, in the Bergen meeting (May, 2005) the Ministers noted that the two-cycle degree system was being implemented on a large scale, with more than half of the students being enrolled in it in most countries. “However, there are still some obstacles to access between cycles. Furthermore, there is a need for greater dialogue, involving Governments, institutions and social partners, to increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, including in appropriate posts within the public service.”

Further the Ministers adopted the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, “comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles”. The Ministers committed themselves to elaborating national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010, and to having started work on this by 2007.

The Ministers “underlined the importance of ensuring complementarities between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing general education as well as vocational education and training as now have been developed within the European Union and being developed among participating countries”.

Parallel to the development of “Bologna Framework” for EHEA, the second overarching framework for qualifications have developed – the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. The European Commission published “Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the Establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning” in September 2006. The EQF which contains 8 levels, relates to all education and training awards in Europe, including those aligned with the Bologna Framework, and that its framework is fully compatible with its Bologna counterpart.

Diagrammatically, the relationship between the Bologna Framework and EQF may be illustrated as follows:

EQF Levels	Knowledge and Skills	Award Types	Bologna Levels
1	Basic general knowledge, carry out simple tasks	Level 1 Certificate	
2	Basic knowledge of a field, carry out tasks using rules and strategies	Level 2 Certificate	
3	Knowledge of a field and some theoretical ideas, carry out tasks and show personal interpretation	Junior Certificate	

4	Wide range of field-specific practical and theoretical knowledge, develop strategic approaches to tasks	Leaving Certificate	
5	Broad theoretical and practical knowledge within a field, develop strategic and creative responses in researching solutions	Bachelor Degree without permission of going on study for Master's Degree	Short Cycle within First Cycle
6	Detailed theoretical and practical forefront knowledge of a field, demonstrate mastery of methods and tools as well as innovation of used methods in a complex and specialized field	Bachelor Degree with permission of going on study for Master's Degree	First Cycle
7	Detailed theoretical and practical forefront knowledge of a field that forms the basis for originality in developing, demonstrate critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field and at the interface between different fields	Master's Degree	Second Cycle
8	Use specialized knowledge to critically analyze, evaluate and synthesize new and complex ideas at advanced frontier of a field; Research, conceive, design, implement and adapt projects for new knowledge and solutions	PhD Degree	Third Cycle

Georgia joined the Bologna Process in 2005 by the decision of Bergen Conference.

Georgia began to work out its National Qualifications Framework by the end of 2006. Responsible for NQF and its implementation is the Minister of Education and Science. The Coordination Group was established in the Ministry for dealing the NQF carrying out process. Heretofore, Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Higher Education on December 21, 2004. The law serves as a driving force towards integrating Georgia with the Bologna Process. In particular, the law stipulates that all HEIs should move to three-cycle degree system (bachelor, master and doctoral). Later, in 2006 the Parliament adopted the Law of Vocational Education.

At present there is an undertaking to make the determination in relation to the differentiation of further and higher education and training as well as make determination for titles of the all possible award types. A framework of qualifications must be based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence. National Framework of Qualifications should be determined as:

*The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards.*

The Georgian NQF will be based on European Qualifications Framework and consist of 8 levels of lifelong learning. It will use the concept of learning outcomes. EQF defines learning outcomes as written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the course unit or qualification. Learning outcomes will apply to all forms of learning, covering arts and sciences, the social sciences and vocational areas of learning.

The short description of each level is given below.

1 level. Compulsory 9 terms education at the secondary school. The learner is awarded by 1 level certificate without permission to go on learning at university for scientific degrees. The learner has general knowledge and can go on learning at secondary school for school-leaving certificate or get vocational education or get work of low qualification

2 level. Additional 3 terms education at secondary school; school-leaving certificate with the permission to go on learning at university.

3 level. School-leaving certificate plus non-formal or informal education in some field.

4 level. Vocational college or non-formal or informal education with practical and theoretical knowledge in some field.

5 level. Short cycle of university (higher professional) education, the Diploma of higher education without permission to go on learning for Master's degree.

6 level. The first cycle of university education, the Bachelor's degree with permission to go on learning for Master's degree.

7 level. The second cycle of University education, Master's degree.

8 level. The third cycle of University (Doctoral) education; PhD degree.

Furthermore, policies and criteria for the National Qualifications Framework must be outlined and the following necessary actions should be realized:

1. Preparation of Decree of Minister about working out the NQF.
2. Definition of structure and personal of NQF Working Group, distribution WG's members functions, carrying out a preliminary (preparatory) consultations with prospective WG's members.
3. Designate a national center to support and coordinate the relationship between the national qualification system and the EQF.
4. Reviewing the European countries NQF's current condition and status.
5. Definition of Georgian NQF objectives and contexts.
6. Making possibly precise clear definitions of NQF's terms.
7. Creation of register of specialties.
8. Working out competencies and descriptors for lifelong levels of qualifications using learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning according to the common European principles agreed in the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004.
9. Linking credit and quality assurance systems to NQF.
10. Working out the preliminary version of NQF.
11. Definition NQF's compliance with Georgian legislation; preparation project of amendments for corresponding Laws if needed.
12. Preparation of the self-certifying Document.

13. Process public familiarization of NQF's project and organizing public discussion about the contexts and problems.
14. Organizing consultations with Bologna Process QF WG and EC about context of the project of NQF.
15. Assessment of fulfilled actions and working out the final NQF document.
16. Issue all new qualifications and “Europass” documents contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.

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