8th Thematic Peer Group on Qualifications Frameworks (TPG A on QF) meeting

18 September 2024

Minutes of meeting

List of participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Andorra	Jordi	Llombart
Austria (former TPG A co-chair)	Karin	Riegler
Azerbaijan	Vusala	Gurbanova
European Commission	Koen	Nomden
Belgium -Flanders	Nina	Mares
Croatia	Ana	Tecilazic
Croatia	Josipa	Cesnovar
Croatia	Slaven	Zjalic
Czech Republic	Tereza	Vengrinova
Estonia	Janne	Pukk
Council of Europe	Jean Philippe	Restoueix
Georgia	Ketevan	Panchulidze
Georgia (former TPG A co-chair)	Khatia	Tsiramua
Germany	Tilman	Dort
Greece	Alexandra	Karvouni
European Students' Union	Levente	Varga
Italy (former BICG co-chair)	Ann	Kathrine Isaacs
Latvia (former TPG A co-chair)	Baiba	Ramina
Italy	Elisa	Petrucci
Kazakhstan	Alibek	Madibekov
Kazakhstan	Amanta	Nurmagambetov
Latvia	Gunta	Kinta
Business Europe	Inga	Lapina
Latvia	Liene	Zvirbule-Jankova
Latvia	Jain	Bamato
Latvia	Jolanta	Silka
Malta	Jon	Vercellono
EHEA Secretariat	Alexandrina	Druta
Montenegro	Jasna	Jovanovic
North Macedonia	Borcho	Aleksov
Poland	Jacek	Lewicki
Romania	Antonela	Toma
San Marino	Monica	Cavalli
Slovakia	Vladimir	Bilohuscin
The Netherlands	Tinka	Thede
Turkey	Zafer	Tatli
UK-Scotland	Paul	White
Ukraine	Vasyl	Fediuk

Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, EI-ETUCE, EURASHE and Spain did not attend the meeting.

Meeting starts at 9:30 GMT.

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

Documents: [Agenda of the meeting](#)

The former Austrian co-chair of the TPG A on Qualifications Frameworks opened the last meeting of the TPG A for the 2021-2024 work period. She announced that the meeting would focus on the work of the group within the former BFUG work period from 01.05.2021- 30.04.2024. The goal was to reflect on the past, present, and future of the TPG A work and to plan for the upcoming final conference, taking place next spring. The former TPG A co-chairs are currently considering March as a possible option, but the final decision is still pending.

Regarding the agenda, Council of Europe suggested discussing the future direction of the Network of National Correspondents for Qualification Frameworks. The Austrian co-chair suggested that this topic is discussed at the end of the meeting.

The agenda of the meeting has been adopted.

2. Reflections on the peer learning activities of QUATRA – TPG A

Documents: *Presentation from the co-chair of TPG A on Qualifications Frameworks, Khatia Tsiramua, National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (Georgia)*
The recommendations on short-cycle qualifications in higher education
Preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process (Guidelines, observations and recommendations)
Recommendations and Guidelines on Micro-credentials

The former Georgian Co-chair reflected on the 4 PLA meetings that took place during the 2022-2024 period. For each PLA, the presentations were followed by group discussions by members, which were well received.

For the first PLA, hosted by Latvia, The former Georgian Co-chair highlighted the valuable insights gained from the Canadian experience with micro-credentials, noting that the feedback received was particularly enlightening. The group also benefitted from presentations by colleagues from Malta, who shared their advancements in developing micro-credentials. Additionally, insights from the Irish higher education system provided further context on the topic, while a study from Latvia offered a comprehensive overview of the status of micro-credentials in the country.

The second PLA was hosted by Austria in 2023. Key topics of discussion included the design of learning outcomes—focusing on policy, process, and practice— responsibilities for designing

these outcomes at the module and study program levels, and how to integrate learning outcomes into teaching practices for higher education faculty.

The third PLA in 2023 was organized by Georgia, providing a valuable opportunity to present the first draft of recommendations on Preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process to the TPG A group and gather feedback. Additionally, an engaging panel of international experts was invited, including colleagues who have participated in NQF self-certification and referencing processes. Two countries, Kazakhstan and Latvia, were also invited to share their experiences with self-certification.

The forth PLA was organised by Estonia, where participants discussed the essential skills needed for the future and recent developments in the skills policy and EQF. The forecasting system for skills in Estonia (OSKA) was highlighted as particularly interesting. National experiences from countries such as Georgia, Romania, Estonia, and Lithuania were shared, focusing on key trends and recent developments within their respective skills ecosystems.

After the meetings, feedback was collected through surveys, which received positive responses.

3. Policy priorities discussed and approved in the Ministerial Meeting 2024

Documents: Presentation from the BICG, Co-chair, Prof. Dr. Ann Katherine Isaacs on Policy Priorities discussed and approved in the Tirana Ministerial Conference

The Co-chair of the former BICG provided updates on the policy priorities discussed during the recent Ministerial Conference in Tirana. The presentation was structured around four main sections: the communiqué itself, key priorities, a focus on BICG, and strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of TPG A. The former BICG co-chair considered that the drafting committee of the Tirana Communiqué opted not to introduce new ambitious visions but rather to assess progress based on previous commitments, specifically the vision set forth for 2030. The BFUG endorsed this approach, highlighting the need to evaluate the three key principles from the Rome communiqué: Innovation, Inclusion, and Interconnectedness.

Looking ahead to the next ministerial conference in 2027, which will be hosted by Romania and Moldova, the former co-chair noted the ongoing challenges faced by member countries, including the impacts of the pandemic and geopolitical tensions. However, she also pointed to emerging opportunities, such as advancements in artificial intelligence and the development of micro-credentials, which align with the goals outlined in the Rome Communiqué.

Ms. Isaacs highlighted the ongoing work of the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) under the guidance of the BICG, emphasizing that while progress has been made, gaps remain in achieving the desired level of implementation. She stressed the need for countries to create action plans to address these gaps and enhance knowledge-sharing activities related to the EHEA. In response to questions about the development of the ECTS in the context of the Erasmus program, it was noted that the focus was on creating a credit system that is student-centered, allowing for easier navigation through diverse study programs across countries.

The representative from Council of Europe, Jean Philippe Restoueix, raised concerns about the lack of concrete statistics on ministerial attendance at meetings, questioning how this impacts commitment levels among member countries. The co-chair acknowledged the importance of ministerial involvement and emphasized the role of TPG A in facilitating collaboration.

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The former TPG A co-chair from Latvia, Baiba Ramina, expressed disappointment with the Tirana communiqué, noting it lacked revolutionary ideas. The former BICG co-chair agreed, expressing hope that the national action plans would foster better communication between ministries and TPGs.

Finally, the former Austrian TPG A co-chair, Karin Riegler, inquired about alternative methods to assess policy implementation, particularly where there are gaps between legal adoption and practical application. In response, it was acknowledged that the Bologna Process Implementation Report often does not accurately reflect the realities faced by countries. Differences in how each nation implements key commitments can create barriers to collaboration, highlighting the importance of TPGs in understanding the complexities of these situations.

4. **The future activities in the context of European Qualifications Framework**

Documents: [Presentation from Unit on Skills and Qualifications, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission, Koen Nomden, on the future activities in the context of European Qualifications Framework](#)

The European Commission representative provided insights on the EQF developments. It was emphasized that the EQF aims to establish a common reference framework that accommodates the diverse qualification systems across Europe. This harmonization has significantly benefited students pursuing bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees, offering them enhanced opportunities compared to 20-30 years ago. The primary goals of the EQF include improving the transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications, thereby promoting employability, mobility, and social integration of both learners and workers. It also encourages lifelong learning and the modernization of education and training systems.

Currently, the EQF includes 41 countries, with 36 having successfully referenced their qualifications—Spain is expected to finalize its referencing in November. Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova have not yet referenced their frameworks due to their recent membership, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing political obstacles in this regard. Additionally, 34 countries indicate EQF levels on their certificates, diplomas, or supplements, while 23 provide this information in qualification databases.

The Commission noted the governance structure of the EQF, along with collaborations with various stakeholders, including the Council of Europe, student unions and others. The next scheduled evaluation of EQF is in 2024. While the EQF is primarily a transparency tool for formal qualifications, it is evolving to support digital credentials, allowing for data-rich and trusted qualifications.

The Commission highlighted the current efforts to link qualifications databases to the Europass platform, with 12 countries actively publishing qualification data and nine transitioning to the new European Learning Model. He also discussed the EQF's focus on validating learning achievements across different contexts and ensuring the trustworthiness of data origins.

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Finally, he announced that Ms. Roxana Mînzatu from Romania will serve as the new Vice-President of the European Commission, overseeing the important portfolio of People, Skills, and Preparedness.

5. Implementation of country's action plan

5.1 Documents: Presentation from Georgia Ketevan Panchulidze, Head of the Qualifications Development Unit at the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)

The speaker highlighted the country's significant progress in implementing the Bologna Process action plan. Among the accomplishments is the development of approximately 60 higher education subject benchmark statements, which align with the cluster accreditation plan for higher education programs. Additionally, Georgia has successfully introduced a revised transparent methodology and streamlined procedures for integrating qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which is also marked as completed.

The development and operationalization of the NQF digital registry is currently in progress, with technical specifications crafted with support from an EU project. The digital registry infrastructure is being developed by EMIS and is anticipated to be operational by 2025, representing a significant advancement in managing educational qualifications digitally.

Furthermore, Georgia has conducted awareness-raising activities, including surveys and thematic analyses regarding micro-credentials, alongside regular meetings with higher education institutions (HEIs) to promote understanding of Bologna Process commitments. These initiatives have been successfully completed. PLA on self-certification topic also took place in Tbilisi in 2023, which was organized by the TPG A on QF which developed recommendation document on Preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process.

Despite these successes, Georgia faces challenges in ensuring the full implementation and sustainability of its initiatives. Moving forward, she remarked that it is essential to prioritize continuous improvement through regular reviews and updates to the country action plan, allowing the country to address emerging challenges and seize new opportunities. Capacity building would be crucial, as providing training and support for higher education institutions is necessary to effectively implement the new frameworks and procedures. Moreover, securing adequate funding and resources for quality assurance activities remains a priority.

5.2 Presentation from Kazakhstan, Alibek Madibekov from the Agency for Education and Internationalisation

The speaker discussed the country's action plan for advancing its higher education landscape through a structured approach focused on introducing short-cycle programs and exploring micro-credentials.

Kazakhstan has established a three-tiered system for higher and postgraduate education, which includes bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies. A significant milestone was reached in 2020 when the national qualifications framework for higher education was self-certified.

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In 2018, Kazakhstan launched applied bachelor's programs, marking a notable shift in its educational offerings. A pilot project aimed at implementing these programs commenced on July 22, 2022, with seven universities participating. The program structure varies based on student background: general students undertake a three-year program worth 180 credits, while those from a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) background complete a two-year program worth 120 credits.

Aligned with the TPG A action plan, Kazakhstan is also exploring the potential of micro-credentials in higher education. The country aims to enhance educational flexibility and accessibility. This analysis has led to the development of specific "Rules for the Development and Implementation of Micro-Credential Programs," which outline the procedures for recognition.

5.3 [Presentation from Malta, Jon Vercellono from the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC), ENIC-NARIC of Malta](#)

The speaker presented the country's progress in implementing the Bologna Process, highlighting several key achievements and activities. Malta has made significant advancements in aligning its national qualifications framework (NQF) with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). A major milestone was the publication and dissemination of the Referencing Report, which updates the mapping between the NQF levels and the EQF levels. The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) has been instrumental in promoting this report among various stakeholders.

Additionally, the MFHEA has focused on strengthening the connection between the Maltese Qualifications Framework (MQF) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This effort has involved participation in numerous programs and initiatives, such as the university's "Fresher's Week," Euro Day activities, and the "I Choose" job fair, aimed at raising awareness and engagement.

To enhance outreach and communication, the MFHEA has consistently updated its website to provide relevant information and resources. The outcomes of various projects, particularly those related to the Automatic Recognition and the National Symposium on Automatic Recognition, have been shared widely with stakeholders to ensure transparency and collaboration.

Moreover, the MFHEA has extended training and support to MQRIC, which serves as the Information Centre for both the MQF and EQF. MQRIC has also trained agents from servizz.gov (153), who respond to public inquiries regarding the MQF and its applications.

5.4 [Presentation from UK-Scotland, Paul White, Lead for Transnational Opportunities at the SCQF Partnership](#)

The speaker presented the launch of the Scottish Tertiary Education Network for Micro-Credentials, which was established in 2020 as part of the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland's (QAA Scotland) National Enhancement Themes program. The network has focused on harnessing the potential of micro-credentials within Scottish higher education.

Among its key achievements, the network produced a Glossary of Terms related to micro-credentials in 2022, followed by a Good Practice Guide in 2023. These resources are designed to assist institutions in effectively implementing micro-credentials. Since 2023, the network has

transitioned to the next stage of its development, receiving support from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), which enhances its capacity for future initiatives. Additionally, the network now operates under a co-chairing model, featuring leadership from both a vocational college representative and a university representative, promoting collaboration across different educational sectors.

Looking ahead, the network aims to collaboratively develop a Micro-Credential Framework for Scotland (MCFS). This framework will establish a standardized approach for the design, delivery, and recognition of micro-credentials, ensuring consistency and quality across Scottish higher education.

6. Discussion in small groups and reporting results to the audience

As the meeting approached its conclusion, several small groups were formed to engage in discussions on three designated topics. This were regarding the specific areas within qualifications frameworks that should be prioritized for future cooperations, the types of activities or initiatives that could be undertaken to advance the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks and lastly the most pressing issues or emerging trends that should be explored or discussed in relation to qualifications frameworks.

One of the key insights was the importance of integrating micro-credentials into existing quality frameworks, emphasizing that robust quality assurance mechanisms will be crucial for effectively validating the recognition of microcredentials.

To enhance knowledge sharing, participants suggested that future meetings should include dedicated spaces for countries to share their challenges and experiences related to micro-credentials and qualifications frameworks. Furthermore, the discussions underscored the need to focus on learning outcomes and skills associated with micro-credentials, highlighting the establishment of clear competencies as essential for meeting industry needs and educational standards.

The conversation also touched upon the need for updates following self-certification processes, with participants advocating that those countries should reflect on their experiences and revise their approaches based on outcomes and feedback. Sharing experiences regarding short-cycle qualifications in higher education was identified as valuable, as learning from successful implementations can provide guidance for others looking to enhance their frameworks.

Participants acknowledged various challenges facing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), particularly the logistical issues that hinder the organization of in-person events, which are crucial for fostering dialogue among stakeholders in the qualifications landscape. They noted that clear learning outcomes are essential for students, providing them with an explicit understanding of what to expect from their educational programs and aligning educational objectives with student needs and labor market demands. Additionally, participants emphasized the necessity of deriving insights from previous projects to inform future initiatives, analyzing successful outcomes and challenges faced in earlier efforts to enhance the effectiveness of current strategies.

A significant example discussed was Malta's experience with the automatic recognition of various certificates and diplomas for refugees, which addresses equity and access in education for marginalized groups. The implementation of various tools was also seen as crucial. While many resources are already available, extending these tools beyond higher education is essential,

particularly given the challenges posed by qualification providers outside traditional educational systems, such as large international companies. This necessitates fostering dialogue among different external stakeholders, emphasizing not only employability but also accountability and recognition, with a strong focus on quality assurance. The European level could play a particularly valuable role in this process, with micro-credentials potentially acting as a key link.

Developing country-specific action plans emerged as a key element for effective implementation, outlining specific goals, challenges, and resources required for advancing qualifications frameworks. Participants emphasized that countries should receive targeted support in their efforts to implement and improve these frameworks, especially regarding micro-credentials. The group identified 11 topics for ongoing exploration to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing challenges in qualifications frameworks. Additionally, revising the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Users' Guide was suggested to better support the implementation of micro-credentials and ensure alignment with quality assurance standards.

Finally, participants discussed the need to delineate activities that should occur at the European level versus those best suited for national implementation, enhancing collaboration and ensuring that initiatives are contextually relevant. They expressed a strong desire to see the implementation of all previously drafted recommendations, focusing on the post-implementation phase and how member countries would adopt and implement these recommendations. The future TPG A group was suggested as the lead on this process to ensure continuity and effective execution. Participants also highlighted the importance of regularly updating NQFs to reflect the evolving labor market and encouraged countries to implement their NQFs and submit self-certification reports, as many countries had already reported their self-certification processes while others had yet to do so.

7. Conclusion and closing of the meeting

The Austrian co-chair noted that this would not be the final gathering, and in approximately one to two months, the date for the concluding meeting will be announced, which will again be held in Riga, Latvia.

8. Any other business (AOB)

There was no other business.
The meeting ended at 12:31 GMT.