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**«ALIGN: Achieving and checking the alignment between academic programmes and
qualification frameworks»**

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GUIDELINES

***for Aligning and Checking the Alignment of a Higher Education
Study Programme's Learning Outcomes
with Qualification Frameworks***

ALIGN (ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS) is a three-year multi-country project, under the Governance Reform, EACEA N° 35/2012, 6th call National Priorities for Joint Projects action.

The present edition constitutes of two major parts – National Report on Aligning Academic Programmes and Quality Assurance with EU standards with the main focus at site-visits to Ukrainian HEIs to pilot 6 academic programmes and present National Guidelines for introducing tools for HEIs to achieve alignment of academic programmes with National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and for QA agencies to check such alignment.

This Guidelines are prepared on the base of the project EU partners' materials, best practices, recommendations in correspondence with fundamental values and principles of European Higher Education Area.

INTRODUCTION FROM ALIGN MANAGEMENT TEAM

Dear Colleagues,

ALIGN is one of the initiatives of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and a joint endeavor of thought leaders in the Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian and European Union higher education to move the reform agenda in a post-Soviet context to a new level of performance in line with the international trends. The team was guided by the accumulated experience of academic program development and operationalization in Europe while striving to come up with innovative techniques ensuring achievement of academic program alignment with the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) as well as measuring the quality of achieved alignment.

INQAAHE is a global (umbrella) network of quality assurance providers in higher education. It is the first ever network in the field established in 1991 to ensure a productive collaborative platform among the providers as well as promote research and innovation in quality assurance. Currently, INQAAHE has around 350 members, both external and internal quality assurance providers, coming from all over the world. The contribution of INQAAHE to the field of quality assurance in higher education is immense and it continues to successfully serve its noble mission.

The 4-year journey of the ALIGN project was full of learning into the post-Soviet system of academic program development and implementation, the accumulated experience of the EU HEIs as well as hard work of the whole consortium to develop the most compatible and, in the meantime, legitimate techniques of assuring relevance of academic programs and the outcomes to the socio-economic needs of Armenia, Russia, and Ukraine.

The current guidelines for the Ukrainian higher education system is the culmination of the ALIGN project and at the same time launch of a wider process of alignment of academic programs with NQF and promotion of relevance of qualifications at the national, regional and international levels. The team behind it, guided by the European partners and led by the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine, Sumy State University, T. Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and Khmelnytsky National University have joined their efforts to benefit the HE in Ukraine by developing the guidelines in the hope to kick off wider implementation at the system level. We hope the key stakeholders find it useful in their journey of alignment and measurement of alignment with NQF.

The INQAAHE team behind the initiation of the project were as follows: David Woodhouse, former president and one of the founders of INQAAHE, Carol Bobby, former president of INQAAHE, Iring Wasser, former INQAAHE board member. All the wise guidance received from INQAAHE during the project development and implementation was an invaluable input worth highest appreciation from all the stakeholders involved.

We also extend our highest possible appreciation to the European Commission and its Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, the National Erasmus + Offices in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine, the Ministries of Education, quality assurance bodies, student and employer unions and the host institution YSULS, for the invaluable contribution to the project implementation and sustainable development of HE systems in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine.

Susanna Karakhanyan, PhD

INQAAHE President, Project Author and Member of Coordination Team



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Preamble

ALIGN (ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS) is a three-year multi-country project, under the Governance Reform, EACEA N° 35/2012, 6th call National Priorities for Joint Projects action.

The wider objective of the project is to enhance the intelligibility, consistency and transferability of qualifications through establishment of mechanisms for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to achieve alignment with Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) and for external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs) to check such alignment.

The targeted beneficiaries of the project – universities and national external evaluation bodies from Eastern Neighbouring Area (Ukraine, Armenia and Russia) have successfully carried-out pilot activities for internal and external evaluation of academic programmes according to European standards and guidelines. During the project life-time.

The present edition constitutes of two major parts – National Report on work and findings of the project with the main focus at site-visits to Ukrainian HEIs to pilot 6 academic programmes and National Guidelines for introducing tools for HEIs to achieve alignment of academic programmes with National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and for QA agencies to check such alignment.

This Guideline is an outcome of a work package, under the TEMPUS ALIGN transnational project between Ukraine, Armenia and Russia and their EU partners from Flanders - Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Poland and the UK, as well as members of Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). ALIGN aims to share contemporary models of good practice around the development of study programme learning outcomes and their quality management in the context of a study programme approval process which maps the study programme to a qualifications framework, or in its absence to the Dublin Descriptors and any relevant national field standards taking into consideration sectoral standards of professional, regulatory or statutory bodies.

This document is based on an appreciation of quality management in higher education and a recognition that, whatever the legal or cultural context, a HEI has primary responsibility for its own qualifications and educational undertakings. Whilst legal requirements for external accreditation may arise which result in certain decisions being taken external to an institution, nevertheless institutions have the initial and persisting responsibility to ensure high standards according to a model of scholarship and quality management of their own determination. In contemporary European language, this is known as internal quality assurance or internal quality management.

Specifically the Guideline offers insights about developing (or adapting) a higher education study programme, typically a Bachelor Degree, a Master degree or Doctoral qualification and aligning its learning outcomes to the outcomes established in a National Qualifications Framework, or in the absence of a National Framework, the Bologna Higher Education Framework and the Dublin Descriptors. This is a specific quality management process, and is one of many in an institution's quality infrastructure. It is normally an integral part of a study programme approval process.

Guideline Audience

This Guideline therefore has three primary audiences for whom different sections may have greater interest:

- the teacher in a Higher Education Institute (HEI)
- a HEI member of staff with specific responsibilities for quality management (QM)
- a member of staff in an external quality agency (EQA), and external peer reviewers

Guideline Assumptions

The study programme approval process described does not dictate whether it is managed by a HEI's QM staff, or by an EQA, or whether the process is repeated, where an external process follows an internal one. Whichever model is adopted within national dimension it typically culminates in a formal accreditation/approval.

The process described follows a contemporary standard international model, and is broken into seven steps. Step two (Section 8.2) is the focus of this Guideline and focuses on *the criteria* for aligning a study programme's intended learning outcomes with a National Framework (or the Bologna Framework and Dublin Descriptors) and how they might be expanded in *a set of questions* and used in a *self-evaluation* and subsequently in an external evaluation. The same criteria can guide the respective processes in order to minimise duplication, but sub-sets of criteria may have more relevance to differing audiences (e.g. internal and external).

1. Some key definitions

Term	Definition	Source
Alignment	The alignment process, for the purpose of this Guideline, is a process to determine whether an award made by a legitimate awarding body can be recognised to be at a designated Level in a National Framework of Qualifications (or in the absence of a Framework to the Dublin Descriptors for a First Cycle (e.g. Bachelor), Second Cycle (e.g. Master) or Third Cycle (e.g. Doctorate) qualification.	Align project
Study programme	<p>A study programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes programmes of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment.</p> <p>A study programme offers learners learning opportunities by which they may attain particular educational goals, by engaging in learning activities in a learning environment. The goals are expressed as the intended study programme learning outcome.</p> <p>A study programme is normally comprised of <i>modules or units</i>. A major degree programme (e.g. Bachelor, Master, Postgraduate Diploma) will normally require some kind of 'cohesion generating' process which integrates constituent modules, or units, so that the <i>minimum intended programme learning outcomes</i> are supported. The cohesion generating process should establish the epistemological and cultural identity of the study programme. It should also coordinate alignment of activities with the <i>minimum intended programme learning outcomes</i> and introduce learners to the broader community of practice to which they aspire.</p> <p>In the development of a new study programme the link between the intended learning outcomes and the created modules or units is established explicitly.</p>	<p>Glossary, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland</p> <p>Quality & Qualifications Ireland, <i>General Validation Handbook, Revised 2013</i>¹</p>

¹ http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/HET%20General_Programme_Validation_Manual%20Revised%202013.pdf

<p>Learning Outcomes</p> <p>Intended Learning Outcomes</p>	<p>There is a difference between Learning Outcomes and Intended Learning Outcomes.</p> <p>Learning outcomes are: a learner’s knowledge, skill and competence change as a result of learning. (In principle, learning outcomes may describe the change in knowledge, skill or competence in an individual (differential form). They may also mean the cumulative result of all learning, including prior learning at the time of entry to the study programme (integral form). The outcomes expected at level N are those specified at that level <u>in addition to</u> the sum of those at lower levels.</p> <p>Intended Learning Outcomes represent the educational Outcomes: goals. They describe the learning outcomes that the programme coordinator or teacher <i>intends</i> that learners will attain as a result of teaching and <i>learning activities</i></p> <p>Intended learning outcomes must always include the <i>minimum intended learning outcomes</i>.</p> <p>Actual learning outcomes achieved by a learner should include at least the minimum intended learning outcomes; they will typically include additional outcomes.</p> <p>Intended programme learning outcomes set out the outcomes expected across the entire study programme leading to an award. Thus an intended study programme learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, the skills they will have and be able to use.</p>	
<p>Qualifications Framework</p>	<p>A description of mutual relations between qualifications, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications for learners and the societies in which they live. In particular it describes the hierarchy of qualifications levels – each qualification is linked to one of these levels</p>	

Descriptors	General statements indicating the learning outcomes relevant to a qualification at a given level, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.	
Level Descriptors	Learning outcomes employed as generic statements that describe the characteristics and context of learning.	
Module/unit	Modules and units are synonymous. They are small discrete portions of a study programme with their own specified learning outcomes which are assessable. Some countries specify rules for size of a module/unit which leads to differentiation between them.	

2. Set of international sample documents to support the development of a learning outcomes approach

Here is a short list of documents which can be used to offer guidance for specific aspects of developing a study programme and using a transparent and verifiable approval process.

Quality Assurance – Quality Management

- ➔ Guideline for developing a Quality Assurance Manual – see <http://projects.kahosl.be/qpm/qualityManual.html>
- ➔ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2014 – 2015* <http://issuu.com/revisionsg/docs/esg - draft endorsed by bfug>
- ➔ INQAAHE *Guidelines of Good Practice for Quality Assurance Agencies (GGP)* [http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaahe---guidelines-of-good-practice\[1\].pdf](http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaahe---guidelines-of-good-practice[1].pdf)
- ➔ *The Quality Code*, UK QAA Quality Code <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>

Study programme Evaluation

- ➔ *Guidelines for assessment of study programmes at Bosnia-Herzegovina Universities* developed within ESABIH Tempus project

Learning outcomes; Taxonomies and verbs for articulation of study programme and module/unit outcomes

→ National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2010, *Learning Outcomes handbook*

Assessment

→ UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2012, *A Marked Improvement Transforming assessment in higher education*

(http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/assessment/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf)

And

→ HEA information sheet: *Assessment methods and descriptors*

And three UK HEA posters

→ *The assessment spectrum*

→ *Assessment Types*

→ *Purposes of Assessment*

Credit & Workload

→ Wagenaar, R. (2010) *Bologna and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): Role of Learning Outcomes and Workload in European Perspective*.

→ Tuning Templates, prepared by Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, *Workload Calculation*

Student Centred Teaching and Teaching for Effective Student Learning

→ European Students Union, *Time for a new paradigm in education: Student Centred-Learning Toolkit*

→ Clarke, J. (1995) *Suggestions for effective university teaching*

→ Online Programme on Becoming a Better University Teacher

http://www.ucdoer.ie/index.php/Category:Becoming_a_Better_University_Teacher

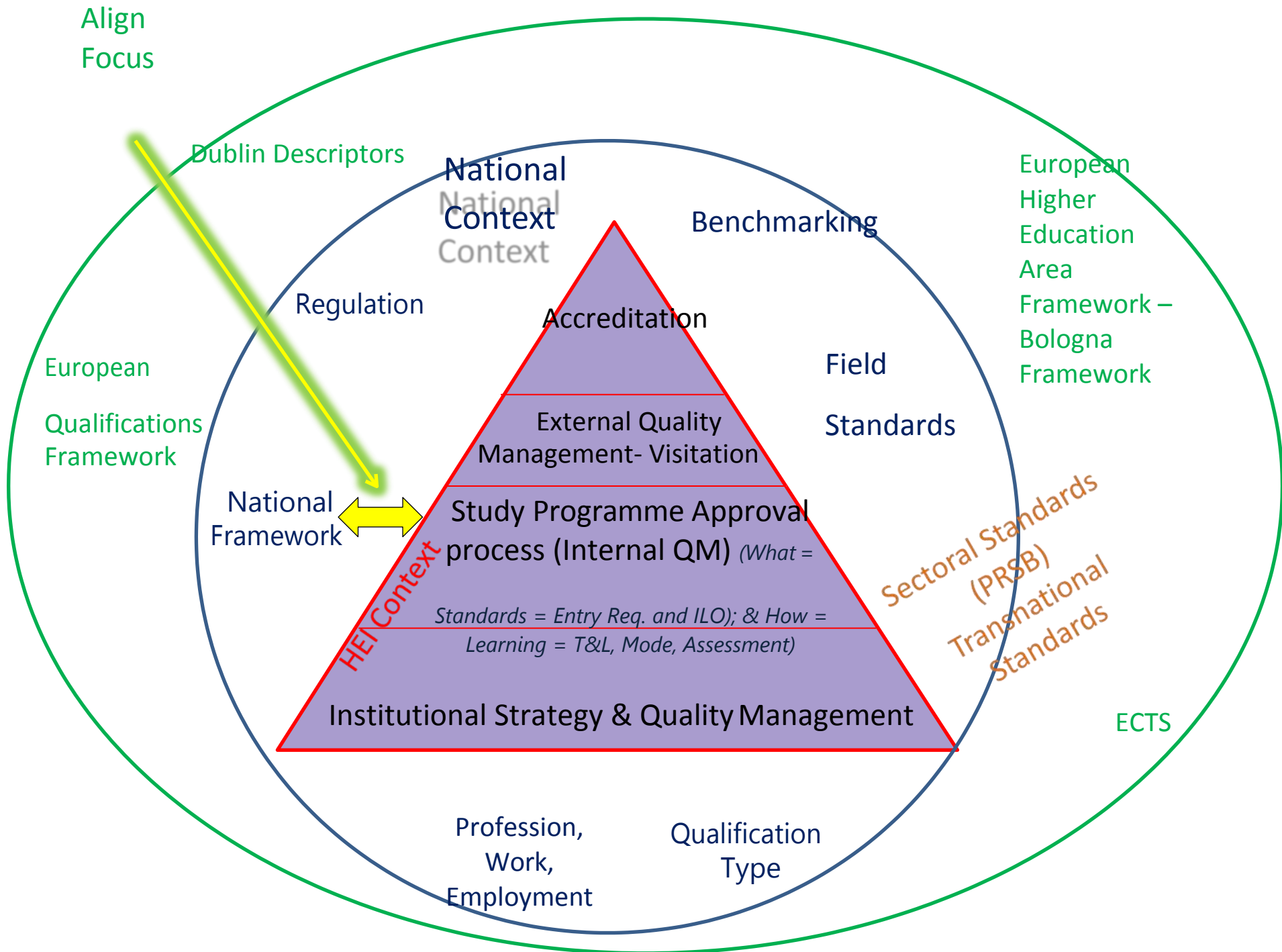
(covers Constructive Alignment – Biggs)

3. A Learning Outcomes Approach to Higher Education: Some Principles

1. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the autonomy and responsibility for defining their own objectives and deriving from them coherent and clear graduate attributes. Study programmes are designed and provided by establishing associated learning outcomes which should be in line with the mission statement and profile of the HEI including its regional context.
2. The internal quality management of a higher education institution must be designed to support a learning outcomes-based approach to educational provision.
3. A commitment to a learning outcomes-based quality management approach enables the alignment of learning outcomes of study programmes to outcomes defined in a National Qualifications Framework (or in its absence to the EQF or the Dublin Descriptors).
4. The achievement of learning outcomes is central to the contemporary quality approach; teaching and the whole study environment must be student-centred, which means that student needs and students' learning have to be the point of reference for every quality standard.
5. Learning outcomes of study programmes should be aligned with the national (education system, sociological specificities etc.), legal (stipulations by competent bodies such as ministries etc.) and socio-economic environment (needs of society and persons for work) and where relevant any professional, regulatory or statutory body (PRSB) at national or international level.
6. The use of the learning outcomes enables clear distinctions to be made around a study programme's qualification, e.g. Bachelor/Master, or a study programme's orientation, e.g. vocational or academic.
7. The establishment of learning outcomes for a study programme can assist in making international comparisons between programmes.
8. The number of learning outcomes set for a full study programme is typically limited between 8 and 15.
9. Each module/unit on a study programme also has defined learning outcomes which are also designated at an NQF level. Not all modules are required to be at the same level as the award level, e.g. if there are 24 modules units on a EQF Level 6 Bachelor programme, it is probable that some of those modules will be at lower levels, e.g. 4 or 5.

10. Each module/unit and programme is given an appropriate credit weighting reflecting workload of both contact hours and independent study.
11. Each study programme and each module/unit requires a distinct assessment strategy which is fair, valid and reliable and makes use of both formative and summative assessment, retaining a commitment to assessment for learning.
12. A student's potential to achieve an intended learning outcome is mediated through the provision of the study programme, i.e. the mode, the teaching and learning environment, human and physical resources, curriculum and essentially the assessment, etc., all of which must be verified as being fit for purpose, through a transparent quality management process.
13. Learning outcomes and associated curriculum adapted to the NQF or the Dublin descriptors demands that more attention is given to generic competences (soft skills), research activities (final work) and internationalisation than is typically the case at the moment in the more traditional study programmes.

4. European Higher Education Area context



1998

In 1998 four education ministers participating in the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the University of Paris (Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998) shared the view that the segmentation of the European higher education sector in Europe was out-dated and proposed to engage in a voluntary process to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

1999

This proposal was formalized one year later in Bologna, by 30 countries (The Bologna Declaration, 1999). This process today includes no fewer than 47 participating countries, out of the 49 countries that have ratified the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe (1954).

2003

In 2003, Ministers with responsibility for higher education gathered in Berlin to review progress in the Bologna Process. They called on each participating country to develop a national framework of qualifications. They also called for the elaboration of an overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. For the purposes of brevity, this Framework will be referred to as the Bologna Framework.

2005

Subsequently in Bergen in 2005 Ministers adopted the **Bologna Framework – i.e., the European Higher Education Area Framework.**

The **first, second and third cycles** established in the Bologna Process are the key elements of the overarching framework. These cycles can be best understood by reference to **internationally acceptable descriptors** which have been developed jointly by stakeholders across Europe – the so-called “**Dublin descriptors**”. They are of necessity quite general in nature. Not only must they accommodate a wide range of disciplines and profiles, but they must also accommodate, as far as possible, national variations in how qualifications have been developed and specified. Qualification descriptors are usually designed to be read as general statements of the typical achievement of learners who have been awarded a qualification on successful completion of a cycle.

2003-04 - Dublin Descriptors

The Dublin Descriptors were developed by a group called the Joint Quality Initiative and were adopted as the cycle descriptors for the Bologna Framework (the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area). They offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle which was in draft form at this time. They are known as the 'Dublin Descriptors' after the meeting in which they were agreed, in Dublin, March 2004.

The descriptors consist of a set of criteria, phrased in terms of competence levels, which enables one to distinguish in a broad, general manner between the three cycles identified. The following are the five criteria:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding
- Applying knowledge and understanding
- Making informed judgements and choices
- Communicating knowledge and understanding
- Capacity-development to enable continuing learning

2008 European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (EQF) acts as a reference framework for different countries' national systems. It is **a meta-framework**. The EQF does not replace national systems and does not include individual qualifications. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and sectors, and to facilitate their lifelong learning. It was developed in the years 2004-2007 and formally adopted as a Recommendation by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The EQF is based on the learning outcomes of knowledge, skill and competence.

Frameworks Side by Side (as a tool for comparison)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (EQF) (2008)	Bologna Framework of European Higher Education Area (2005)	Dublin Descriptors (2004)	Relevant Qualification	Relevant National Field Standard	Relevant Sectoral Standard	NFQ
Level 1	-	-				
Level 2	-	-				
Level 3	-	-				
Level 4	-	-				
Level 5	-	-				
Level 6	First Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>have demonstrated</u> knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon and their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study; ➤ <u>can apply</u> their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically 	<p>Bachelor</p> <p>Typically include 180-24-ECTS credits</p>			

		<p>demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>have the ability to gather and interpret</u> relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; ➤ <u>can communicate</u> information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; ➤ <u>have developed</u> those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy. 				
Level 7	Second Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>have demonstrated</u> knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that 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; ➤ <u>can apply</u> their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related 	<p>Master</p> <p>Normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits – minimum of 60 ECTS credits at the second cycle level</p>			

		<p>to their field of study;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>have the ability to integrate</u> 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; ➤ <u>can communicate</u> their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; ➤ <u>have the learning skills</u> to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. 				
Level 8	Third Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>have demonstrated</u> a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; ➤ <u>have demonstrated</u> the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; ➤ <u>have made a contribution</u> through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or 	Doctorate No credit currently allocated			

		<p>international refereed publication;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ <u>are capable of critical analysis</u>, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;➤ <u>can communicate</u> with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;➤ <u>can be expected to be able to promote</u>, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society;				
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5. National Contexts

The national context of the development of higher education should be analyzed through the prism of modern transformation (reformation) processes in higher education of Ukraine. These processes are the objective result of integration of Ukrainian higher education into European educational space and were officially launched by the Law of Ukraine "On higher education" approved on 06.09.2014 and Law of Ukraine "On education" approved on 28.09.2017.

Compared to the previous ones new laws contain significant innovations that require modernization of approaches of HEI to educational process.

Among the most crucial innovations which are particularly relevant to the current stage of reformation of higher education in Ukraine the following can be pointed out:

- academic autonomy. Each HEI has got the right to develop and implement their own educational and research programmes, and therefore, has the responsibility to provide quality of education for these programmes. This requires a substantial change in approaches to the educational process;
- new requirements for quality assurance system at national and institutional levels;
- initiating independent quality evaluation procedures of higher education, which essentially introduces competition principles in the educational market
- changing the defined format of higher education standards.

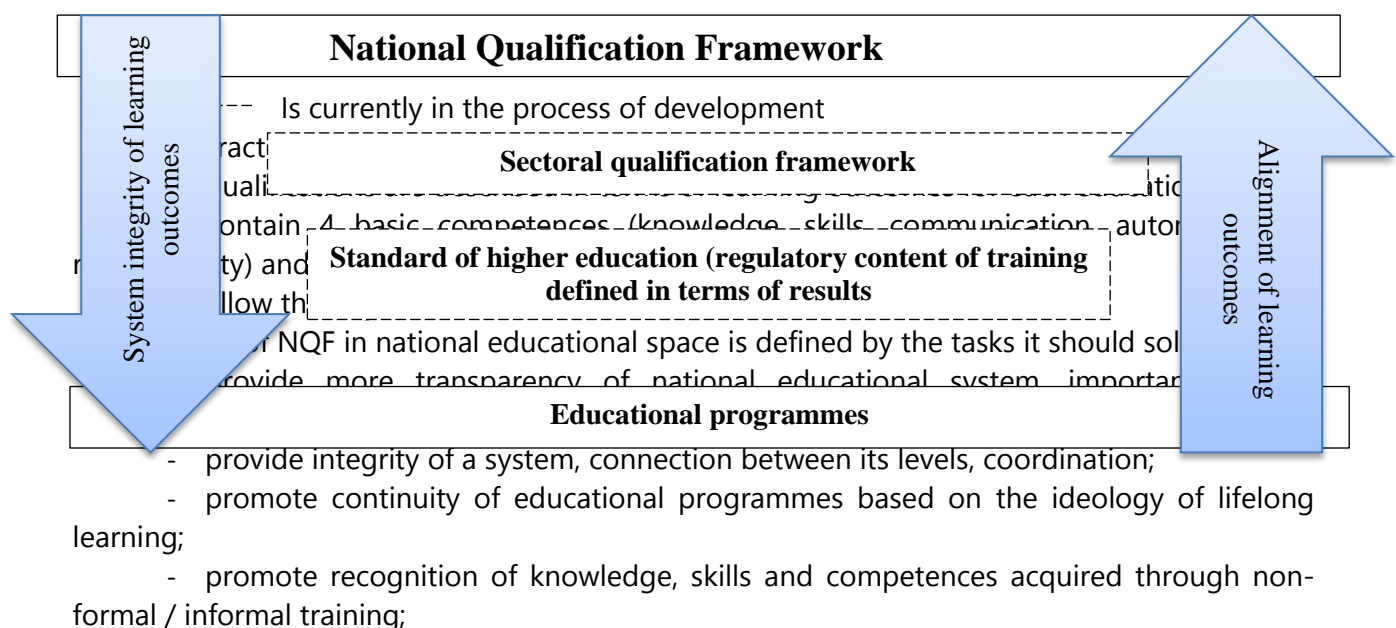
In Ukraine the following qualification frameworks are foreseen to be implemented:

- National Qualification Framework (NQF);
- Sectoral Qualification Frameworks (SQF).

National Qualification Framework (NQF) is a systematic and structured by competences description of qualification levels.

In Ukraine it was designed to meet the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education (2005) and the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008) and approved by the Statement № 1341 of Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on 23 November 2011.

Considering that the procedures of quality assurance for higher education are not finally developed, the National Qualification Framework remains basic qualification standard that refocuses educational process on learning outcomes.



- Create a tool to ensure correspondence of institutions to external and internal quality requirements;
- increase the relevance of education and training for society;
- promote international mobility (workers, students) by comparing national qualifications with qualifications in other countries.

National Qualifications Framework reorients the educational process to learning outcomes thus causes a change of pedagogical approaches. Focus of NQF on learning outcomes is not just a matter of comparison and classification of qualifications. Focus on competence changes the format of the educational process, transforms learning, teaching, assessment.

NQF has the following problems and drawbacks:

- non-compliance with the European Qualifications Framework;
- improper NQF levels' descriptors, that are not followed by special thematic descriptors;
- use of separate and weakly integrated tools for reforming in the field of education, in particular ignoring programme «Lifelong Learning»;
- explicit attraction of key stakeholders to NQF reforming process;
- unsettled contradictions between academic/institutional autonomy and state system of administration;
- lack of trained experts in the issues of supporting reforms in the field of higher education and NQF introduction;
- lack of clear strategy for including the notion of employability to the concept of higher education qualifications.

Process of implementation of NQF in Ukraine started with the joint Order of the Ministry of education and science, youth and sports of Ukraine and Ministry of social politics of Ukraine from 20.04.2012 №488/225 «On the approval of Plan of activities for implementation of National Qualifications Framework».

This action plan has been partially implemented by the end of 2015. In 2016, series of actions have been performed in order to facilitate a full size implementation of NQF, aimed at development of the renewed plan of activities, key players and resources necessary for its realization within defined terms.

Main provisions of Action plan concerning NQF introduction in Ukraine for 2017-2020:

- creation and introduction of National Qualifications Register, official inclusion in National Qualifications Framework;
- development of educational standards and programmes based on competence approach/learning outcomes;
- development/updating and approval of standards and study programmes of higher education;
- bringing higher education quality assurance system into accordance with ESG;
- bringing vocational education quality assurance system into accordance with the European recommendations (EQAVET)
- bringing educational programmes of higher education and vocational technical training into accordance with professional standards/professional qualifications (if any);
- bringing National Qualifications Framework into accordance with criteria of the European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning;
- bringing National Qualifications Framework into accordance with **the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area**;
- ensuring the official use of information on National Qualifications Framework in the annexes to documents about higher education and vocational technical training;
- ensuring the use of National Qualifications Framework as a tool for recognition of foreign qualifications.

Sectoral qualification frameworks determine the description of their levels in terms of competencies which are particular for the qualifications of a certain field of knowledge and/or

type of economic activity. Levels of SQF have to correspond to the levels of NQF.

The Law "On education" presupposes creation of interinstitutional environment for the implementation of NQF – the National Agency for qualifications that will unite the system of education with the labour market.

According to the Law of Ukraine "On education" the system of external quality assurance includes:

- licensing of educational activity;
- accreditation of study programmes;
- institutional accreditation;
- public accreditation of HEIs;
- monitoring of quality of education;

Licensing of educational activity is a procedure of the recognition of the ability of HEIs to provide educational services at a certain level of education according to the terms of licensing carried out by the MESU.

MESU develops terms for licensing in the HE sector and agrees them with the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

Laws of Ukraine "On Education" and "On Higher Education" provides for accreditation of study programmes. Accreditation of study programmes is a procedure of evaluation of a study programme in terms of its correspondence to educational standards and the ability of a HEI to provide achievement of LOs by students set in a study programme.

Accreditation of a study programme is voluntary and carried out by the initiative of HEIs.

Procedure of accreditation of a study programme initiated by the National Agency of quality assurance of higher education is to be confirmed by MESU.

An awarded certificate of accreditation confirms the correspondence of a study programme of HEI to the relevant field of study and level of higher education to the higher education standards and gives the right to issue a state-level degree in this field.

In Ukraine certificates of accreditation of study programs issued by foreign accreditation agencies or by higher education quality assurance agencies are recognized being in the list of agencies approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

Prior to approval of the established procedure for the accreditation of study programmes, such accreditation is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in the manner prescribed for accreditation of fields of study.

The Law of Ukraine "On Education" introduces institutional accreditation – an assessment of the quality of education activities of a HEI. It is voluntary and can be carried out by the initiative of a HEI. Institutional accreditation has to confirm by the corresponding document that the system of internal quality assurance meets the requirements of the national system of quality assurance in higher education.

Institutional accreditation is conducted by the National Agency for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education in cooperation with national and international experts, as well as international institutions that carry out activities in the field of quality assurance in higher education and are recognized by the National Agency for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education.

Procedure of institutional accreditation is to be developed by the National Agency of quality assurance of higher education under confirmation of MESU.

The result of institutional accreditation is confirmed by a certificate granting the HEI the right to self-accreditation of study programs (except for those study programs that are accredited for the first time within the relevant field of knowledge). The HEIs, which has carried out the self-accreditation of the study programme submits a written application to the National Agency of quality assurance of higher education, on the basis of which it receives a certificate of accreditation of the study program.

In the external quality assurance system of higher education, the recent Law of Ukraine "On Education" introduced the monitoring of the quality of education. It is a system of consistent

and systematic measures undertaken to identify and track trends in the quality of education in the country, in certain territories, in educational institutions. It also presupposes the defining of correspondence of actual results of educational activity with its stated aims as well as the assessment of the degree, direction and reasons of deviations from the aims.

External monitoring of the quality of education may be carried out by any bodies, enterprises, institutions, organizations, other legal entities that conduct an independent assessment of the quality of education and educational activities. The participation of educational institutions in external monitoring of the quality of education is voluntary, except in cases established by law.

The procedure, types and forms of monitoring of the quality of education are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

In the external quality assurance system of higher education, the Law of Ukraine "On Education" introduced such tool as public accreditation – a university assessment of the effectiveness of the internal system of quality assurance of education and ensuring the achievement of LOs provided by study programs and standards.

It is carried out voluntarily by the request of the HEI in order to recognize the quality of educational activities and the creation of its positive image and reputation. Public accreditation is carried out by accredited professional associations, other accredited legal entities, which carry out an independent assessment of the quality of education and educational activities.

The results of public accreditation of HEI can be taken into account when accrediting study programs and institutional accreditation.

National Agency for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education is the Institution which is authorized to implement state policy in the field of quality assurance in higher education in Ukraine.

Key activities performed by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education are:

- 1) setting the requirements for the system of quality assurance of higher education, develops the Statement for accreditation of study programs and submits it for approval to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine;
- 2) analysis of the quality of educational activities of higher educational institutions;
- 3) carrying out institutional accreditation and accreditation of study program;
- 4) accreditation of independent institutions for the assessment and quality assurance of higher education and their registration.

At the current stage of HE reformation in Ukraine the HE standards in the fields are in the process of development and approval.

6. Institutional Context: Internal (HEI-owned) Quality Management

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are generally autonomous institutions, albeit within regulatory contexts. The autonomy means that they are responsible for their own activities and for the standards and outcomes of those activities. Establishing a model of quality assurance or quality management in setting standards for processes and practices, in ongoing monitoring of those processes and in their periodic review has become the norm in higher education. Whilst a HEI may also be subject to external review through a particular regulatory context, its first responsibility is to manage its own affairs in a coherent and responsible way. And where public monies are made available to HEIs, it is reasonable that their processes be transparent and offer confidence to the public on the efficacy of the

investment made. A central focus of a HEIs quality management system is the study programme.

Following the development of a study programme (according to a learning outcomes approach) by a team of academic staff (according to an institutionally defined model) a HEI usually presents the study programme for a **formal accreditation process**. Checking the alignment of a study programme's learning outcomes with a framework (NQF or EHEA/Dublin descriptors) generally takes place during this process according to a particular country's regulatory context. The process can be owned by the study programme provider (a HEI) **or** by an external agency or by the ministry of education.

Where the formal process is owned by an external agency, a HEI should also have an 'internal' approval process based on self-evaluation. That internal process may mirror the external agency one using its criteria and framework, thus providing a mock/pilot for an agency process, or it may be different.

However these study programme processes are most meaningful when embedded in a well-understood and **coherent internal quality management system**. Prior to looking at the processes by which a study programme is aligned to a National Framework (or EHEA/Dublin Descriptors, below are some questions a HEI may wish to pose for itself.

6.1 Indicators of internal quality management⁵

6.1.1 *Is the overarching environment and governance of the HEI one which ensures high standards?*

- a) Is there a system of transparent governance in place with appropriate stakeholder, including student, representation?
- b) Is there a clear strategic planning and a resource allocation model in place?
- c) Is responsibility for decision-making clearly assigned to persons with the appropriate levels of authority?
- d) Is there clarity on the mission and purpose of the HEI?
- e) Is there clarity on the HEIs regulatory context and external obligations?
- f) Does the HEI demonstrate an understanding that higher education and training is a collegial, international, progressive endeavour, that changes, adapts, improves and sometimes copes with external threats and stresses?
- g) Has the HEI the competence and capacity to fulfil the role assigned to it in a sustainable way?
- h) Are the designated education and training facilities appropriate?
- i) Does the HEI have an open intellectual community that values critical reflection and fosters personal and professional development for learners and staff?
- j) Are staff appropriately qualified and experienced?
- k) Is there a system of criterion-based decision-making?
- l) In general does the pedagogic style incorporate good practice?
- m) Does the HEI have peer relationships with the broader community of higher

education and training?

- n) Does the HEI have a culture and practices underpinning access to, progression from and transfer within higher education and training?
- o) Does the HEI assign credit in a transparent way?
- p) Is there good availability of support services for learners?
- q) What type of external examining or external moderation of assessment or the study programme occurs?

⁵ Adapted and adopted, with permission, from HETAC *Registration Policy* 2008 and HETAC *Procedures for the Registration of Providers* 2011

6.1.2 Does the HEI have robust quality management and quality enhancement policies, procedures and practices for all study programmes? Is there is internal quality management system which ensures that study programme intended learning outcomes are monitored, and reviewed effectively? Are these quality management processes available to all staff, learners, and the public in a simple and clear way?

For example are there policies and procedures for quality management which meet effective standards for internal quality management within higher education institutions, such as those set out in Part 1 of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*

i.e. do the quality management policies and procedures of the HEI address:

1. Policy for quality assurance
- 2. Design and approval of programmes**
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
5. Teaching staff
6. Learning resources and student support
7. Information management
8. Public information
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
10. Cyclical external quality assurance

6.2 Two Key Areas around Study Programmes

There are many more approaches to internal quality management of a HEI, but *this* is just an overview and a prompt for HEIs in the development of their own model. This Guideline focuses on the **Design and Approval of a Study Programme** only. However it should be noted that a process for the Approval of a Student Programme, must be complemented by **a process for ongoing monitoring** and by **a process for periodic review**. The latter processes ensure that the study programme is achieving what it is intended to achieve and provides a mechanism to make changes to (or discontinue) a study programme to assure the intended outcomes.

7. Seven Steps of an Alignment Process, i.e. a Study Programme Design & Approval Process

This document *Guideline for Aligning and Checking the Alignment of an academic study programme's learning outcomes with Qualification Frameworks* examines a typical accreditation/validation process as this is where alignment takes place.

The guideline has broken the **study programme design and approval process into seven steps**. This structure inevitably leads to a consideration of matters broader than learning outcomes, but learning outcomes remain at the heart of this exercise and are the focus of steps one and two. Under each step some guidance will be provided. This can be used to inform the development of local policies and procedures by the HEIs and EQA who will be drawing on this document to develop their own documentation. The principles stated at the outset inform the approach adopted.

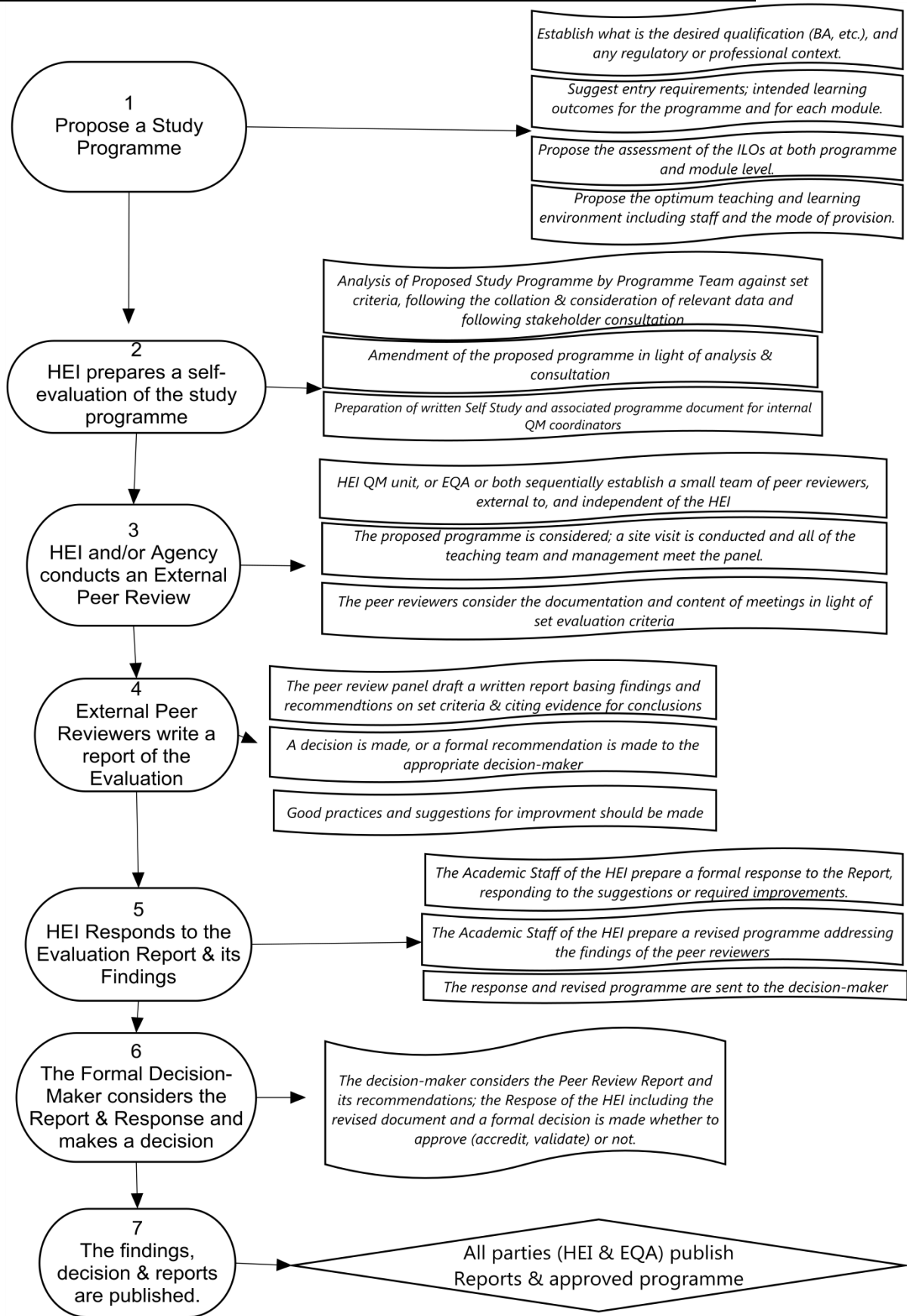
At this point in time, the Guideline is agnostic on the ownership of the study programme approval process – approval may reside wholly in a HEI, or be complemented by external accreditation.

A formal accreditation/validation/study programme approval process, which always addresses *more than the alignment of programmes intended learning outcomes* to a framework level, typically has the following elements:

1. **Development or Design of a study programme** and the writing of a proposed study programme document (setting standards), bearing in mind the *set written criteria* for its self-evaluation and approval.
2. **Self-evaluation**: analysis of a proposed study programme, relevant data collected and stakeholder feedback *against set written criteria*, possibly leading to a revision of the drafted intended learning outcomes, and the development of a modified or new study programme, which is presented in a written document for consideration by a panel of experts/peers.
3. **Peer review**: establishment of a small team of independent experts/peers who conduct a site visit to the HEI's campus to meet with the self-evaluation team (i.e. the study programme team) to consider the self-evaluation and the proposed study programme *against set written criteria* for study programme approval.

4. **Written report:** A formal written report is prepared. It normally includes an overarching recommendation on whether to approve or further revise the proposed study programme, as well as detail capturing elements of good practice or suggestions for further improvement. The report is written by referring to the criteria and citing evidence for judgements made.
5. **Responding to a report:** A formal written response from the provider (HEI) of the study programme, addressing improvement suggestions made by the peer reviewers, and where appropriate including a revised study programme document.
6. **Formal decision** is taken by the appropriate decision-maker.
7. **Publication** of findings and the newly approved study programme.

Seven Steps of Study Programme Design & Approval, incorporating the Alignment of Learning Outcomes



8 Elaboration of the Alignment Process, i.e. Study Programme Design & Approval Process

8.1 Developing a study programme and writing a study programme document

The academic's or teacher's challenge is to present his/her subject to a new cohort of learners so that they will be excited and engaged by the field - this has been at the centre of academia for centuries. Today, amongst other things, this involves the writing of a study programme with well-articulated learning outcomes so that it can be verified to meet national and international standards, and to be a high quality learning experience for students.

Designing a programme has many critical elements, and a detailed programme proposal can only be established following detailed reflection and analysis such as proposed in step 2, the self-evaluation of a proposed study programme against explicit, elaborated criteria, following stakeholder consultation, data collection and an environmental analysis. However prior to this some outline matters may be considered.

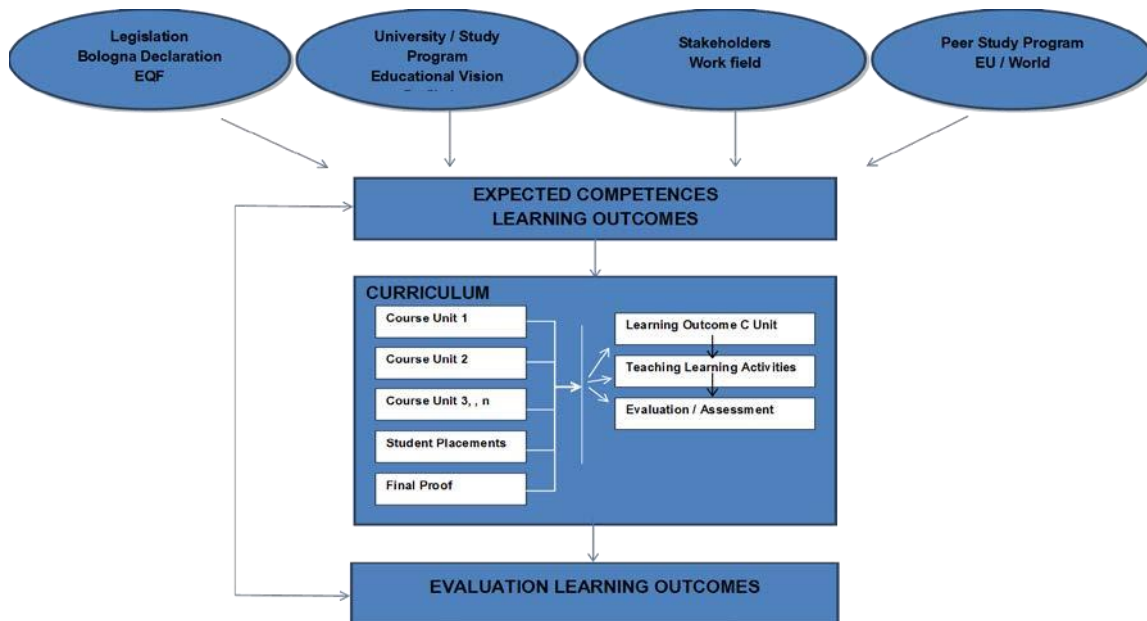
Establish what is the desired qualification (BA, etc.), and any regulatory or professional context.

Suggest entry requirements; intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each module.

Propose the assessment of the ILOs at both programme and module level.

Propose the optimum teaching and learning environment including staff and the mode of provision.

1 In establishing the qualification, or reassessing one already established, consider what the learners are expected to have achieved at the end of their studies in the context of...



2 Consider ...

Competences, Learning outcomes

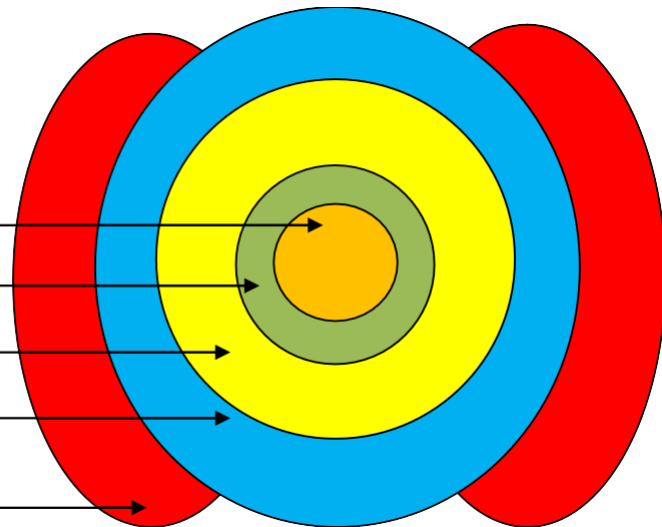
Bologna, Dublin-descriptors, EQF, Legislation

Competences of the work field

Specific competences of the university

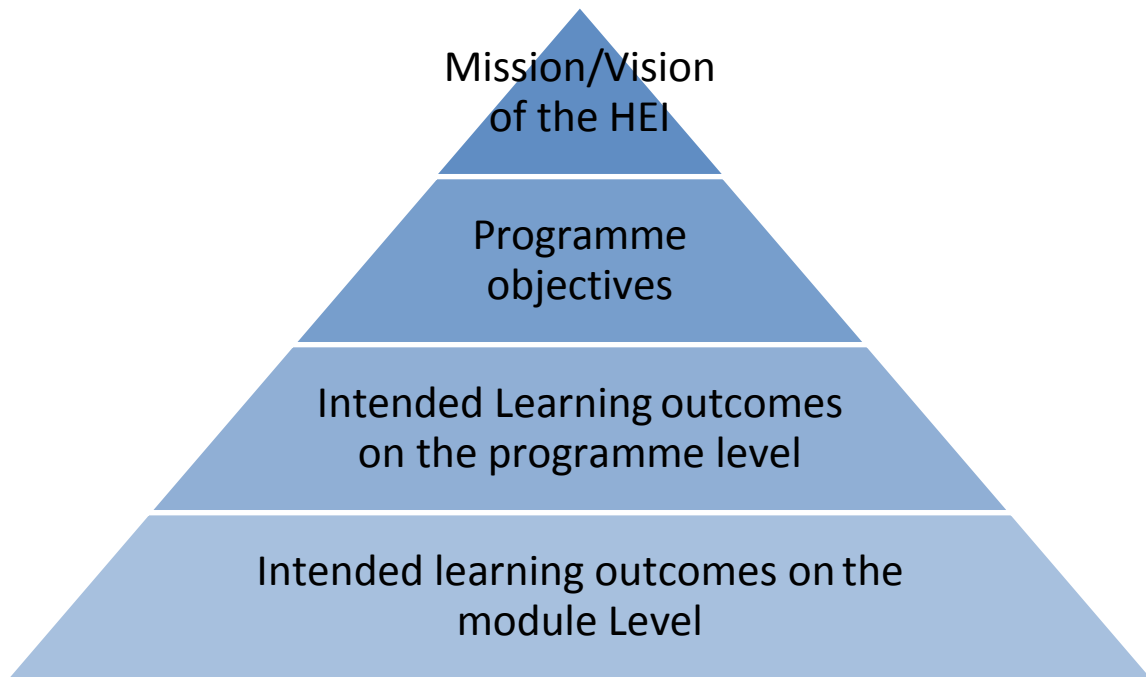
Competences deducted by comparison with peers of the EU, US

Chosen competences by students



3: Look at the modules that constitute the programme and suggest the relationship between them.

4: For establishing Learning Outcomes consider:



5: Look at assessment models and options.

6: Consider the mapping of the assessment to the module/unit and programme learning outcomes.

7: Consider staff competencies required; whether the programme is online, by distance, etc.; what equipment/resources are required; how much time is required.

8.2 A Self-evaluation

In higher education quality management, a self-evaluation is process of systematic and critical self-analysis leading to judgments and/or recommendations regarding the quality of either an institution or a study programme. This guideline is looking at study programme evaluation. Self-evaluation is basically a collective reflection providing an opportunity for quality enhancement. The resulting report further serves as a provider of information for a review team, an external peer-review panel appointed to conduct an independent, external evaluation.

The self-evaluation of a study programme is typically conducted by the academic owners of the study programme with support from quality management staff. It involves the systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and the holding of moderated interviews with lecturers and students; the constructive analysis (not description or restatement) of the information collated in *light of specific set criteria for the approval (alignment of learning outcomes) of a study programme*; resulting in two outputs:

- ➔ A written report encapsulating the findings and improvement recommendations, in order to make a statement about quality.
- ➔ Complemented by a Study Programme Handbook/Study Programme Document

The key components to enable the development of an effective self-evaluation process are:

- 1) **the setting of criteria** (each criterion has an intent, a requirement to be met) – this must be done by the HEI (see sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 for suggestions). What is the purpose of the evaluation – what key questions is the evaluation seeking to answer?
- 2) Identifying **the relevant information/data which needs to be collected** to ensure the criteria can be effectively responded to, and the optimum mechanisms for collecting it
- 3) Identifying **the relevant stakeholders** and how they should be consulted and their feedback incorporated into effectively responding to the criteria
- 4) **Establishing standards** by which it can be demonstrated the intents are minimally met
- 5) agreeing the participants in the processes and their roles
- 6) establishing what judgements and decisions can be made and what evidence is required to support these
- 7) revising according to feedback received
- 8) finally preparing results in clear and agreed formats (Self-Study Report and Proposed Study Programme Handbook)

8.2.1 Criteria for the Design & Approval of a study programme (embedding the alignment of Learning Outcomes) – To be used during the Self-Evaluation

Hereunder are suggested broad criteria for the approval of a study programme (including the alignment of learning outcomes). They are followed in the next section by detailed questions to aid in their development. Each HEI or EQA may wish to adopt these or a version of them to assist in developing or amending current local processes.

A deep understanding of these criteria will enable the academic and his/her quality management colleagues to develop a study programme with clear standards, an effective learning environment. They should be used in:

- the development of a study programme
- the self-evaluation
- the internal evaluation
- the external evaluation

8.2.2 Converting the Criteria for the Design & Approval of a Study programme (embedding the Alignment of Learning Outcomes) into Self-Evaluation Questions

In order to address the criteria in a self-evaluation of a study programme one must consider many concepts and details underpinning the overarching criteria statements. A sample set of questions that one might pose to oneself, or that an external panel may pose, to assess one's compliance with these are presented. **A self-evaluation should critically answer the questions asked.** The answers can be in the Report and/or the Study Programme Handbook.

To map or align a study programme to a Framework (or the Dublin Descriptors) it is necessary to know 'where learners start' and 'where they get to'. To test if one is addressing these alignment criteria ask, and answer with evidence for answers:

- 1.1** Is there evidence that the minimum intended study programme learning outcomes are consistent with any applicable subject/field standard and any relevant National Qualifications Framework, or in the absence of a NFQ the Dublin Descriptors?
- 1.2** Do the intended learning outcomes of the study programme correspond with the descriptions of Bachelor/Master level in the NQF or in the Dublin Descriptors?
- 1.3** Are the entry requirements for this study programme clear and in keeping with national norms?
- 1.4** Since awards standards are cumulative, can it be clearly demonstrated that the study programme's prerequisite learning specification includes the knowledge, skill and competence specified at lower Framework levels?
- 1.5** Do the intended learning outcomes emphasise *profound learning* outcomes much more than *transient learning* outcomes?

- 1.6 Do the intended learning outcomes correspond with national legislation and international recommendations?
- 1.7 Have the study programme, module/unit and programme unit learning outcomes have been specified describing what a student will know and be able to do at the end of the module/unit or of a unit?
- 1.8 Are the intended learning outcomes appropriate to the intended professional field (work field) of a graduate of this study programme?
- 1.9 Do the study programme learning outcomes correspond appropriately to the type (academic, vocational, professional) of qualification and the demands specific for the domain?
- 1.10 Do the learning outcomes of the study programme correspond with the requirements set by professional colleagues, both nationally and internationally, and by members of the relevant domain's community of practice?
- 1.11 Do the learning outcomes correspond with the needs of a beginning professional in the particular discipline?

Remembering that a study programme is a process which takes place in a particular environment and in a particular context, ask, and answer with evidence:

- 2.1 Has careful attention been paid to curriculum and study programme design and content?
- 2.2 Are the learning outcomes at study programme level underpinned by learning outcomes at module/unit level or programme unit level?
- 2.3 Has the study programme been developed so that the study programme learning outcomes are visibly mapped to specific modules or programme units.
- 2.4 What evidence is there that the target/prospective learners may achieve the intended study programme learning outcomes?
- 2.5 Is the study programme's strategy for enabling learners to move from the minimum access standard to the minimum intended study programme learning outcome explicit, realistic and viable?
- 2.6 Are the study programme's content and learning environment appropriate to the study programme's intended learning outcomes? Specifically
 - (a) Are the study programme's staff (assessors, teachers, etc.) as a group competent to enable learners to develop (achieve) the intended study programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements and expert in their respective disciplines?
 - (b) Are the staff members who are to provide both academic and administrative support for the provision of this study programme familiar with any national standards?

- (c) What training/induction has been provided for these staff members?
- (d) What are their precise roles and responsibilities?
- (e) Are the nominated persons competent to fulfil their roles?
- (f) Is the study programme's learning environment (physical, social, and intellectual and recognising that the environment may be virtual)
 - and its resources, such as libraries and online databases and physical resources, such as laboratories, equipment, study areas and studios;
 - and human resources, such as tutors, counsellors, advisors and peers where applicable
 - and other supports
 consistent with the intended study programme learning outcomes?
- (g) How are learners represented and how is feedback obtained?
- (h) Is the study programme content including reading lists, lecture notes, and any other material used by the study programme appropriate?
- (i) Does the study programme make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities?

2.7 Does the study programme *involve* authentic learning opportunities to enable the achievement of the intended study programme learning outcomes?

2.8 Is the study programme to be provided in a way that its intended learning outcomes can be reliably and efficiently attained by the learners?

2.9 Is it reasonable to expect that all learners who are judged qualified to access this particular study programme should be able to graduate from it subject to their making a reasonable effort and complying with the study programme's conditions?

2.10 In the case of a modular study programme the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints should be explicit and appropriate in light of the intended study programme learning outcomes. Are there effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways?

2.11 Does the study programme compare well against benchmarks (where appropriate)?

2.12 Has clear information been prepared for students on the intended learning outcomes of all modules, content, study and learning methodology, assessment, credits, learning materials, etc. presented in a clear study programme handbook (see model provided) or ECTS module/units' description files?

2.13 Is the proposed information about the study programme as well as its procedures consistent with national policies?

2.14 Is there clear information about career opportunities arising from the study programme? (E.g. The presentation of the study programme should not lead learners to presume that successful completion of the study programme will entitle them to enter a

particular profession or progress to another study programme unless this is actually the case. If, for example, the study programme is designed to meet the educational requirements of a regulated profession or recognised professional body this should be stated explicitly.)

- 2.15** Are the study programme's use of ECTS or other Credit systems and provisions for recognition of prior learning consistent with any national policy on these areas?
- 2.16** Does the study programme meet genuine education and training needs?
- (a)** Does the HEI have evidence that the study programme meets the proposed target learners' education and training needs?
- (b)** Is the study programme as a process and the intended study programme learning outcomes adequately informed by the views of appropriate stakeholders such as learners, graduates, lecturers, employers, relevant advisory bodies, social and community representatives?
- (c)** What research has been conducted for the provision of this study programme in the area in which it is to be provided?
- (d)** Can the HEI demonstrate that the proposed study programme compares favourably with other programmes already in place?
- (e)** Where the HEI is either part of the public service or its study programme is publicly funded, can it demonstrate that in developing the study programme it has given due regard to relevant public policy?
- 2.17** Is the study programme viable?
- (a)** Does the HEI have a viable delivery/business-plan for study programme? (*This is important for several reasons. For example if the study programme assumes a certain cohort size it may not function as planned if either insufficient or excessive numbers are recruited.*)
- (b)** Does the HEI have satisfactory contingency arrangements for adapting to changing circumstances or coping with failure of the study programme (having due regard for the interests of learners)?
- (c)** Is the study programme consistent with the provider's mission and strategy?
- 2.18** Has the mode of learning – distance, electronic, part-time, full-time, blended, etc. been clearly stated and is it appropriate to the cohort of intended participants and the intended learning outcomes.
- 2.19** Is there recognition within the study programme team that a different mode of provision constitutes a different study programme, and each type of provision is unique?
- 2.20** Has a *study programme assessment strategy* been provided for the study programme as a whole and *module/unit assessment strategies* for each of its constituent modules?
- 2.21** Are the study programme **and** module/unit assessment strategies (**for both formative and summative assessment**) both clear and appropriate? Do they provide for the verification of the attainment of the intended learning outcomes?

- 2.22** Are all the study programme and module/units intended learning outcomes capable of being assessed?
- 2.23** Are all assessments fair, valid, reliable and transparent? Does the assessment design process ensure valid assessment of the intended learning outcomes?
- 2.24** Are assessment decisions in relation to design, development and variety made within a study programme context and focused on study programme learning outcomes?
- 2.25** Is assessment for learning given emphasis in relation to assessment of learning?
- 2.26** Can the assessment satisfactorily verify whether the students have realised the learning outcomes of the components of the curriculum in a way that is insightful for students?
- 2.27** In respect of a master's study programme, is there a thesis in which the student shows analytical capacity or an independent problem-solving capacity at academic level?
- 2.28** Are the study programme's procedures for assessment of learners consistent with any institutional or national assessment regulations?
- 2.29** What arrangements are in place for External Examiners, where this model of monitoring is utilised, and what other mechanism is in place to monitor and review the maintenance of study programme standards?
- 2.30** Are you confident that assessment tasks demand high standards of learning?
- 2.31** Is assessment and feedback planned within and across programmes to ensure appropriate student preparation and practice before summative assessment takes place?
- 2.32** Is there an emphasis on assessment for learning over systems focused on marks, grades and reliability?
- 2.33** Is it evident in the study programme design that there is understanding of the limitations of explicit assessment standards?
- 2.34** Are students encouraged to participate in disciplinary communities?
- 2.35** Is there an emphasis on building students' assessment literacy through a learning process in which they internalise, apply and reflect on assessment standards?

- 2.36** Do local disciplinary communities play a role in facilitating collaboration about assessment standards?
- 2.37** Are there appropriate student representation opportunities and student feed-back opportunities? Where the study programme is being provided in more than one location including another jurisdiction how is this managed?
- 2.38** Have the specific needs of different modes of provision and types of higher education been considered, e.g. distance, part-time, online, professional, vocational, academic, etc.

8.2.2 Collecting Relevant Data for the Self-Study

In light of the criteria for the design and approval of a study programme (above) it is clear that a HEI will need to collect and analyse certain data. A critical feature of this exercise is the wise choice of WHAT data. What is required to answer the questions posed. This may vary depending on the nature of the HEI and the proposed programme, but typically would include amongst other things:

- Student Statistics
 - Entry numbers
 - Graduating numbers
 - Employment status
 - Level of performance
 - Persistence levels
- Funding
 - Fee levels
 - Funding available
 - Fee payment levels
- Data on Comparative Programmes or Institutions
 - Number of similar programmes – regionally, nationally, internationally
 - Number of applicants to/graduates of similar programmes
- Employment opportunities for graduates of this type of programme

8.2.4 Consulting with stakeholders and considering institutional mission and other environmental issues

Every new programme has to be planned and delivered within many (often competing and changing) contexts --- intellectual, professional, financial, institutional, national. The planning team seldom exercises any great influence on many (if any) of these domains. Yet we cannot ignore them: they are very likely to affect the success of the programme in many different ways. It makes sense to do everything possible to optimise the environments in which our degree programmes can be nurtured. One way of thinking about this is to undertake a 'stakeholder analysis', and to repeat this kind of exercise as often as is needed.

Here are some of the questions to be asked during engagement with key stakeholders:

1. Within the HEIs

Will there be the managerial and administrative support needed?

- the qualification fits well with our HEI's strategic plans, priorities & USPs...
- there are senior managers who champion this particular study programme...
- we are confident that the learning resources & facilities will be available...
- market research has shown us the scale and nature of student demand...
- sustainability (for HEI) & affordability (for students) are in business plan...
- the collateral impact of the degree is positive and appreciated...
- A risk assessment has been done: all is well!

2. Societies

How would key 'external' stakeholders – current & potential employers, professional associations, public bodies, government agencies, international organisations, media – be persuaded that this degree was vital to the public interest?

- They have been involved and listened to throughout the planning processes...
- employability & enterprise are embedded in the curriculum and assessments --- career planning, placements, internships, business planning...
- work-based learning activities are available for part-time students...
- the study programme sees higher education as local and global...
- the achievements of students will be showcased in the media...
- our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be informed by external views of what these should be ...
- high 'value for money' can be shown
- external stakeholders are involved in many aspects of the degree...
- professional associations will recognise the awards...
- national/international benchmarks have been applied...
- the programme makes good use of technology and emphasises digital literacy...

3. The programme/teaching team

Does the programme/teaching team work together?

- there is a shared vision about the kind of Community of Practice (micro-culture) that the team wants to build for *and with* our degree students ...
- the study programme is progressive, and *more* than the sum of its parts (modules)...
- the teachers, administrators and supporters of learning all work as a team ...
- individuals understand their distinctive roles and responsibilities...
- similar programmes elsewhere have been studied and advice has been welcomed from others ...
- Any training and support needs have been identified and addressed ...
- the success of the study programme will be professionally important to the team...
- the study programme is supported by extra-curricula events/activities...

4. Prospective Students

What is known about them?

- the details of the demographics, the nature of demand ...
- their needs, knowledge & abilities, backgrounds & experiences, expectations, passions & interests ...

- their preparedness for postgraduate study, learning styles, language abilities...
- their personal, academic & career aspirations ...

Have they been involved in discussions about the design of the programme?

- patterns, place, pace, topics, modes of study and assessment...
- role of technology-supported learning (distance, online, intensive)...
- internships, placements, work-based learning assessments...

Some articles which may be useful to read

Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards of learning and teaching in HE - A report to HEFCE by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (Open University), NOP Research Group and SQW Ltd, 2003. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/11876/4/>

Chenicheri Sid Nair Patricie Mertova, (2009), "Conducting a graduate employer survey: a Monash University experience", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 17 Iss 2 pp. 191 - 203 <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/09684880910951390>

8.3 Writing the self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation team drafts a document to accompany the proposed Study programme Handbook/Study programme Document which addresses each of the criteria for aligning a study programme identified in section 8.1.

The self-evaluation report is considered to be the main vehicle for the unit to convey information about the alignment of the study programme with the NQF. But equally, and perhaps even more importantly, it serves as a critical reflection of the study programme in terms of its management procedures and the manner it handles in using learning outcomes as a central value in the strategic development of the curriculum. Therefore, the self-evaluation report should not be only descriptive, but needs to be evaluative and synthetic, that is, it should evaluate strengths and weaknesses in introducing learning outcomes. In addition, the analysis should take into account the recent introduction of the new curriculum based on learning outcomes and the NQF, but it also has to anticipate future developments.

With regard to **each criterion for aligning a study programme**, the study programme team, i.e. the self-evaluation team typically should conduct a SWOT analysis, identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This should lead to action plans for improvement, and a revised study programme according to the improvements identified. Specifically it would be good to include:

- The most important strengths of the study programme
- The most relevant opportunities for improvement and the corresponding remedies
- A brief outline of the fundamental policy options of the study programme as a continuation of ongoing developments in aligning to the NQF.

At the end of the report conclusions should be presented. The report should then be sent to the external experts via the HEIs internal quality management mechanisms.

8.4 External Peer Review

An external peer review can happen twice, or a modified version can happen. Firstly the HEI may wish to establish a peer review panel to evaluate its programmes according to its and any national criteria. On completion of this internal process, and the implementation of any improvements which arise, the HEI may submit the study programme for external evaluation by an External Quality Assurance Agency.

Peer review is a process whereby following the collection of relevant information by internal academic and support staff, and its analysis, **under the criteria for aligning a study programme** (as identified in section 8.2.2), leading to the preparation of a written report with the associated Study programme Handbook/Study programme Document, i.e. the self-evaluation, a subsequent external evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, academic peers, representatives of the work field and student representatives. It usually requires a number of distinct stages:

- a) the appointment of peer reviewers and assignment of roles
- b) the analysis of the self-study report and evidence obtained during a site visit **according to the criteria for aligning a study programme** (peer reviewers should be trained on the criteria)
- c) the conduct of a site visit
- d) the preparation of a formal initial report with recommendations
- e) the consideration of a HEI's response to the formal report
- f) the preparation of a final report and final recommendations for submission to the decision-making body
and
- g) perhaps a subsequent follow-up (12 months) by the same peer review panel or by the entity which appointed the peer review panel

A HEI (or external agency) has written guidelines for the all of these steps, or any other elements in the process which may be relevant to its context. The HEI (or external agency) must also have explicit statements on the **authority of and decisions available to panels**. It should be clear exactly what the panel is being asked to do, to whom it is accountable and what are its precise functions.

8.5 The Report of the External Panel

A formal written report, including a recommendation on whether to approve or further revise a study programme, and capturing elements of good practice or suggestions for further improvement is prepared. Typically this is prepared by a nominated secretary, though some models involve each member of the panel preparing a particular section and the HEI or Agency collating and generating a comprehensive report.

The report should be clear, **explicitly address the evaluation criteria for aligning a study programme**, and cite relevant evidence for conclusions and judgements. It should refer to the various sources of relevant information such as:

- The Self-evaluation Report and any appendices
- Minutes from interviews and internal discussions
- The panel's judgements

Normally a report is revised several times, taking into account panel members' remarks, prior to a final version being sent to the HEI or agency.

8.6 The HEI Responding to a Report

When a HEI or the study programme team (self-evaluation team) receives a formal report from a peer review panel, they should consider the detail in an open and considered manner. In addition to providing the panel with information on any incidental factual inaccuracies, a formal response from the provider (a HEI) of the study programme, [including a revised study programme document](#) addressing suggestions made by the peer reviewers should be developed.

8.7 Making Decisions Based on a Report

In this process it is important that all parties are clear on the nature of the recommendations made, and the responsibilities of the HEI and study programme team in responding to them. It should be clear where formal lines of authority and decision lie, and what the local or national regulatory contexts are. For example, can a study programme team reject the advice of an evaluation panel, or who is the actual decision-maker in respect of validating a study programme?

8.8 Final Report, Publishing Findings, Providing Public Information

When the HEI has prepared a formal response to the evaluation panel's report, that response including a revised study programme is normally sent to the evaluation panel to see if it addresses the matters raised in the evaluation panel's report. Where the evaluation panel is satisfied that the revised study programme meets the validation criteria, the evaluation panel makes a final decision (or recommendation to the decision-maker) whether to validate the study programme or not.

The evaluation panel's report, the HEI's response and the evaluation panel's final decision/recommendation are typically published on the HEI's website and also that of any relevant agency. The duration of the approval proposed (where relevant) should be published along with any monitoring or follow-up mechanism.

9 Conclusion

Within the ALIGN project, the aim of «Alignment» has been to support selected universities in the development of their academic programmes and quality assurance procedures so that these can be seen to meet European and national standards (European and National Qualifications Frameworks: EQF and NQF). This means that academic programmes are

designed, delivered and developed within a university in ways that conform to the European and national frameworks, and that each university has clear and effective quality assurance systems to ensure that the design, approval, monitoring, support and development of its academic programmes complies with national and European requirements.

The key elements of Alignment (based upon the use of appropriate qualifications for awards at various levels, student-centred education, learning outcomes, credit accumulation and mobility, institutional responsibilities for quality assurance, etc.) are relatively straightforward.

However, the processes of Alignment are often challenging for any university; involving both technical changes (as the use of common nomenclature for awards) conceptual changes (as in understanding student-centred learning) and cultural changes (as in the developing a university community in which everyone has a role and responsibility for maintaining and improving the quality of courses). Even so, as Alignment is achieved it brings many benefits.

It is hoped that this Guideline can serve as a reference guide for HEIs and EQAs in developing their own suites of tools to support them in the processes of approving and aligning learning outcomes with a qualifications framework.