

Key issues from 2nd meeting of self-certification group at QAA Scotland offices, 5.6.06

Present:

John Harper (Robert Gordon University, Chair)
Rowena Kochanowska (University of Strathclyde)
Andrew Nash (University of Glasgow)
Eva Gonczi (Hungarian Ministry of Education)
Lea McKay (University of Paisley)
David Bottomley (QAA Scotland)
Gerard Madill (Universities Scotland)
Alan Runcie (QAA Scotland/Universities Scotland)

And by video link: Aune Valk, Head of Open University Centre, University of Tartu, Estonia

Apologies:

Rachel Heaney (NUS/SACCA) – comments on report to follow
Brent Macgregor (Edinburgh College of Art) – additional comments sent by e-mail

Introduction

John Harper welcomed all to the 2nd meeting of the group. Those members not present at the first meeting were content with their understanding of how the verification process came about, and so it was agreed to examine the report criterion by criterion after revisions made to it as a result of the 1st meeting.

Main issues highlighted under specific criteria:

Criterion 1

It was agreed that the response to this criterion should simply state that QAA Scotland is the body responsible for developing the framework for qualifications of HEIs in Scotland. More detail on the provenance of this decision, the inception of the framework, the role of SFC and its relation to QAA Scotland etc. could go in the revised 'introduction' to the report (the current introduction is for purposes of the working group only)

Criterion 2

Once again criterion 2 was the main focus for discussion. To that effect:

- The methodology for the matching exercise between the Bologna cycle descriptors should be placed at the start of the response to this criterion, and it should be clear that the exercise is based on: a comparison of the cycles with the Scottish qualification descriptors; credit comparisons (SCQF to ECTS); and engagement points with/entry points at each of the cycles.

Throughout the report both SCQF and ECTS credit should be mentioned for purposes of clarity for a wider readership.

- The response should be structured as follows: methodology for matching exercise; a descriptive overview of awards within the Scottish system; conclusions reached over the match of Scottish awards to the cycles; and possibly a supplementary section further highlighting the use of subject benchmarks
- The Graduate Diploma would be classed as a short cycle qualification; the Graduate Certificate would be an intermediate award.
- The Postgraduate Diploma would be a second cycle qualification; the Postgraduate Certificate would be an intermediate award in the second cycle. The report should state clearly and unequivocally which qualifications match the cycle descriptors and those which do not. It was important to place the overall exercise in the context of the lifelong learning agenda to emphasise the purpose of qualifications such as the Graduate Certificate and Postgraduate Certificate.
- The 'characteristic outcomes' in the Scottish qualification descriptors should also be matched against the Bologna cycle descriptors (currently only the 'skills expected of students' were matched)
- The matching exercise should be presented slightly differently such that the Bologna cycle descriptors are the key benchmark against which the Scottish descriptors will be mapped. The mapping should start with the Bologna descriptors and match aspects of the Scottish system, including characteristics and outcomes. It would be important to refer to all aspects of evidence in this section rather than referring to such information later in the paper. A short commentary on the basis for matching each award to a particular cycle might accompany the technical mapping exercise
- There was some discussion over whether or not further reference to/use of subject benchmarks could be made, to provide further evidence to support the matching exercise. The group agreed that officers should consider how best to do this subsequent to the meeting in the process of further refining the report.
- It should be clear that achievement of a 1st cycle award does not guarantee entry to the second cycle, but that it gives the right to apply for access to the second cycle, in line with the Lisbon convention. The section on entry requirements should be moved to the beginning of the response to criterion 2.
- The appendix detailing the mapping exercise might be reformatted (e.g. into Landscape) to ensure that the wider European audience is clear on what matches which cycle. Some form of diagrammatic representation and linkage might be possible.
- It was agreed that to emphasise the international dimension and mobility, the report should mention (perhaps along the lines of the Irish report) how European graduates could enter the Scottish system.

- It was important to bear in mind that this was not only a pilot for self-certification, but that it would also be used by countries in developing their own NQFs.

Criterion 3

Eva Gonczi made the point that it would be helpful to emphasise the wider European move to systems based on learning outcomes. David Bottomley agreed and indicated that wider aspects in Scotland and the UK, such as the Diploma Supplement, programme specifications and subject benchmarks etc. were all based on learning outcomes – the Scottish framework should be seen explicitly in that context.

Criterion 4

There should be less emphasis on the process of credit rating, and more emphasis on: how autonomous institutions engage with this Scottish award-bearing framework; how the qualifications they offer are based on learning outcomes; and how assurance is in place to monitor these standards (ELIR, Code of Practice etc.). A possible link to the SCQF level descriptors was essential in emphasising how credit relates directly to learning outcomes. This was particularly relevant in the context of ECTS which does not have levels and has no direct link to learning outcomes.

Criterion 5

- Officers would check consistency with the Berlin (and Bergen) communiqués.
- The group felt that only the first two bullets quoted from the ELIR handbook were germane to the verification process, and that a link to the QAA website describing the Quality Enhancement Framework was preferable to having that same text within the document.

Criterion 6

Affirmed as acceptable as it currently stands.

Criterion 7

There should be a web link to demonstrate that responsibilities of the domestic parties to the framework have indeed been published.

Procedures

These were further affirmed as straightforward and acceptable as currently stated.

Conclusion

The group agreed that a report on the conduct of the process and the issues raised during its conduct should accompany the final report to the Bologna working group on qualifications frameworks on the verification process itself. There should also be a short report for the forthcoming European regional workshops.

The group further agreed that a progress report on the verification process should go to the meeting of SACCA on 14.6.06, accompanied by the record of the key points made at both meetings of the verification working group.

John Harper thanked the group for their very helpful contributions and for two highly productive meetings. The group would continue the iteration process for the verification report electronically, with the possibility of briefly convening again immediately subsequent to the planned seminar for a wider group of interested stakeholders, due to take place on the 22nd August. The final report would be submitted to the Bologna working group on qualifications frameworks by the end of September 2006.