



## **Erasmus Mundus Programme**

### **Project UNIQUE**

University Quality Exchange

### **Higher Education Policy Gap Analysis**

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## I. Introduction

This paper is part of work package 2 “**Common Tools, Methods and Procedures needed for Co-operation with European Universities**”. It aims to provide a brief analysis of the existing systems in the partner countries, identifies main gaps and proposes recommendations on how the gaps between the respective systems could possibly be reduced. In this way, the identified recommendations seek to foster mutual recognition of courses and comparability of content.

The paper is based on inputs provided by Partner Country Universities (PCUs) as well as additional research (see section VII on useful sources and links). The main reference documents are as follows:

- a.) **UNIQUE Needs Analysis**
- b.) **UNIQUE Focus Group Summary**
- c.) **Inputs from PCUs on main gaps (UNIQUE tables – main gaps)**

Sections II to IV of the paper include an analysis of the existing systems in Europe and the PCU countries and compares

- a.) **guiding frameworks and processes;**
- b.) **qualification frameworks and the definition of learning outcomes;**
- c.) **tools for comparability/transparency; and**
- d.) **mobility programmes and approaches to internationalisation.**

The comparative analysis further identifies factors influencing higher education (HE) standards as well as common features in the comparability of HE standards and internationalisation. Chapter V analyses the characteristics/nature of main gaps identified in the partner countries and proposes recommendations on how the gaps between the respective systems could possibly be reduced (Section VI). Section VII lists useful sources and links.

## II. European’s Higher Education Standards in a Nutshell<sup>1</sup>

### a.) Guiding Frameworks and Processes

The **Bologna Declaration**<sup>2</sup> is the main guiding document of the Bologna process. It was adopted by the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries in Bologna/Italy in 1999. The Bologna Declaration aims to foster competitiveness of the European system of Higher Education as well as mobility and employability in the European area. Main objectives to reach these goals include:

- a system of **comparable degrees**, including the implementation of the Diploma Supplement;
- a system essentially based on **two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)** including a first cycle relevant to the labour market and a second cycle requiring the completion of the first cycle;
- a system of **accumulation and transfer of credits**;
- the **mobility** of students, teachers, researchers, etc;
- the co-operation in **quality assurance**.

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<sup>1</sup> See UNIQUE Needs Analysis and online sources as quoted under this section.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/mdc/bologna\\_declaration1.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/mdc/bologna_declaration1.pdf)

The **Bologna Process**<sup>3</sup>, launched with the Bologna Declaration 1999, is one of the main processes at European level, as it is nowadays implemented in 47 states, which define the **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**<sup>4</sup>. During the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference in March 2010, the EHEA was launched along with the Bologna Process' decade anniversary.

The three **overarching objectives of the Bologna process** have been from the start:

- Introduction of the **three cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate)**,
- **Quality assurance** and
- **Recognition of qualifications and periods of study**.

## **b.) Qualification Frameworks and Definition of Learning Outcomes**

The **European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)**<sup>5</sup> provides a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels.

In order to make the EQF work, European countries participating in "Education and Training 2020" should relate their national qualifications levels to the appropriate levels of the EQF, indicating in all new qualification certificates, diplomas and Europass documents the relevant EQF level.

The core of the EQF consists of **eight reference levels** describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – i.e. '**learning outcomes**', using knowledge, skills and competences as descriptors for each level. Levels of national qualifications will be based on one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8):

- Level 6 describes the level of Bachelor,
- Level 7 Master level and
- Level 8 Doctorate level.

**Learning outcomes**<sup>6</sup> are skills, knowledge and competences which a student has obtained in a specific educational programme. Learning Outcomes are usually described in a taxonomy that shows which skills and competences a student has obtained. It is most common in the EHEA to use a **taxonomy introduced by Mr. Bloom**.<sup>7</sup>

## **c.) Tools for Comparability/Transparency**

**Europass**<sup>8</sup> is a portfolio of five documents, designed to make skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood across Europe. It consists of the CV, a Language Passport, the Certificate Supplement (describing the content of training programmes), Europass Mobility and the Diploma Supplement.

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=5>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.ehea.info/>

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/news/EQF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/news/EQF_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://lib.sandiego.edu/cas/documents/assessment/UsingBloomsTaxonomyforLearningOutcomes.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> **Bloom's taxonomy** is a classification system used to define and distinguish different levels of human cognition—i.e., thinking, learning, and understanding. Educators have typically used Bloom's taxonomy to inform or guide the development of assessments (tests and other evaluations of student learning), curriculum (units, lessons, projects, and other learning activities), and instructional methods such as questioning strategies.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about>

**Europass mobility**<sup>9</sup> is a document to record knowledge and skills acquired in another European country, e.g. during a work placement in a company, an academic term as part of an exchange programme or a voluntary placement in an NGO.

The **Diploma Supplement**<sup>10</sup> contains detailed information on higher education degrees, offering a clear and internationally comparable description of individual study processes and the specific core competences which students should obtain during their studies.

**ECTS points**<sup>11</sup> makes teaching and learning in higher education more transparent across Europe and facilitates the recognition of all studies. ECTS points reflect the entire workload of a student in a course. One ECTS point equals between 25 and 30 hours of workload (depending on the EHEA member state). The student workload in ECTS includes hours spent in class and self-study. Course descriptions contain 'learning outcomes' (i.e. what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do after course completion) and workload (i.e. the time students typically need to achieve these outcomes).

Each learning outcome is expressed in terms of credits, with a student workload ranging from **1 500 to 1 800 hours per year** (full time).

- A Bachelor's degree (first cycle) corresponds to 180 – 240 ECTS (3 to 4 years);
- a Master's program (second cycle) 60 - 120 ECTS (1 to 2 years).
- PhD studies (third cycle) have no ECTS range.

#### **d.) Mobility Programmes/Internationalisation**

The **Erasmus Charter**<sup>12</sup> for Higher Education (ECHE) provides the general quality framework for European and international co-operation activities a higher education institution (HEI) may carry out within the Programme. The award of an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education is a pre-requisite for all HEIs located in an eligible country and willing to participate in learning mobility of individuals and/or co-operation.

**Erasmus Mobility**<sup>13</sup>: The status of 'Erasmus student' applies to students who satisfy the Erasmus eligibility criteria and who were selected by their university to spend an Erasmus period abroad – either studying at an eligible partner university or carrying out a placement in an enterprise or other appropriate organisation. For study mobility, both universities must have an Erasmus University Charter awarded by the European Commission.

The **Erasmus programme** is a European student exchange programme established in 1987 offering university students a possibility of studying or working abroad in another European country for a period of at least 3 months and maximum 12 months. Each student receives a grant which covers partly the costs of the stay abroad. Students going on exchange under the ERASMUS programme do not pay any university tuition fees. The full recognition of courses passed successfully abroad is guaranteed by the home university.

**Incoming/outgoing programmes:** Departments for international relations deal with the incoming and outgoing students; organise special programmes for incomings and outgoings, including buddy

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/european-skills-passport/europass-mobility>

<sup>10</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/erasmus/erasmus\\_university\\_charter\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/erasmus/erasmus_university_charter_en.php)

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/>

programmes which means that a local student takes care of the incoming student; organise introductory courses about the visiting country and administrative issues; organise orientation programmes as well as language courses.

**Joint Studies**<sup>14</sup> are developed or approved jointly by two or more institutions. Students from each participating institution spend part of the programme at the other institution(s) and periods of study and exams passed at the partner institution(s) are fully recognised. Teaching staff from each participating institution devise the curriculum together, form joint admissions and examinations bodies and participate in mobility for teaching purposes. Students who have completed the full program ideally obtain a degree awarded jointly by the participating institutions. The degree is fully recognised in all participating countries.

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.jointdegree.eu/>

### III. Analysis of Higher Education Standards in PCU Countries<sup>15</sup>

#### III.I. China

##### a.) Guiding Frameworks and Processes

The **Education Guiding Plan** provides a policy framework for all educational institutions in China. It aims at increasing research capability, international competitiveness and advancing higher education quality at all levels. Objectives of the Education Guiding Plan also include a closer co-operation with international partners through student and staff exchange programmes, research activities and joint degree programmes.

**Proposals on the Advance of Higher Education Quality at all levels (PAHEQ)** by the Ministry of Education were launched in March 2012. Strategic goals of PAHEQ are the modernisation of education, the promotion of a learning-oriented society as well as the development of strong human resources. PAHEQ is also supposed to foster the implementation of the Education Guiding Plan and identifies a set of 28 measures to reach its goals.

##### b.) Qualification Frameworks and Definition of Learning Outcomes

The Law of Education provides a **framework of national qualification** systems and identifies six different levels of educational qualifications:

- Level 4: Bachelor, taking 4-5 years to complete;
- Level 5: Master, taking 2-3 years to complete;
- Level 6: Doctorate, taking 3-4 years to complete.

##### c.) Tools for Comparability/Transparency

The **China Professional Pass** describes skills, knowledge and qualifications of a holder in a certain profession and aims to promote mobility within the country. China has established a **credit system** indicating the minimum number of credits for Bachelor/Master degrees, differentiating between compulsory and selective courses.

- In total, 155 credits are required for a Bachelor degree (corresponding to 2456 hours of work)
- 51 credits is the minimum number of credits required for a Master degree.

##### d.) Mobility Programmes/Internationalisation

The **Regulation on Overseas Study (RCSC)** provides a framework for international co-operation and mobility. It defines criteria for the selection of candidates who apply for a placement at a partner university or company abroad, financially supported by the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC). RCSC Students do not have to pay fees at the host university and receive a grant from the CSC. They are provided with a transcript of work at the end of their studies and are entitled to a full recognition of courses completed abroad. Student exchanges or company placements can last from 3 to 48 months and range from Bachelor level to Post-Doctorates/Senior Researchers. Incoming programmes are

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<sup>15</sup> Source: *UNIQUE Needs Analysis*



offered at different HEIs, including language courses. Different Double Degree Programmes are in place, requiring students to study one to two semesters at a partner university abroad.

## III.2. India

### a.) Guiding Frameworks and Processes

Higher Education is the shared responsibility of both the Central Government and the States. The coordination and determination of standards is the constitutional obligation of the Central Government. The Government provides higher education through an institutional system of governing, funding bodies and regulatory charters and bodies. The **Department of Higher Education at the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** is the main body responsible for higher education, both in terms of policy and planning. Main priority areas include

- a. enhanced access to higher education for all with particular emphasis on vulnerable groups;
- b. strengthening of research and innovation and
- c. promoting quality of higher education.

### b.) Qualification Frameworks and Definition of Learning Outcomes

The **National Education Policy 1986** defines nine educational levels with levels 7 to 9 referring to higher education:

- Level 7 – undergraduate;
- Level 8 – post graduate;
- Level 9 – doctoral/post-doctoral.

**Learning outcomes** are reflected through the knowledge, skills and competencies defined for the various levels and programmes in line with different documents on quality, but are not applied at a general policy level.

The **National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)** is a nationally integrated education and competency based skills framework that provides for multiple pathways, horizontal as well as vertical, both for vocational education and training, general education and technical training, linking one level of learning to the next higher level (10 levels in total). Each level is described by process, professional knowledge, professional skills, core skills and responsibility. The key elements of the NSQF provide:

- a. national principles for recognising skill proficiency and competencies at different levels leading to international equivalency;
- b. multiple entry and exit between vocational education, skill training, general education, technical education and job markets;
- c. progression pathways defined within skill qualification framework;
- d. opportunities to promote lifelong learning and skill development;
- e. partnership with industry/employers;
- f. a transparent, accountable and credible mechanism for skill development across various sectors;
- g. increased potential for recognition of prior learning.

### c.) Tools for Comparability/Transparency

Certifications and assessments of qualifications are provided by different institutions, tailored to Indian needs while focusing less on international comparability. HEIs are expected to report and document the mobility of their students. The system of grading and evaluation is not standardised throughout India and supplementary information varies depending on the system and format of the respective HEI (credit-based, grade-based and marks-based systems).

The degree/diploma system defines the supplementary format for each system for better translation and comparative scales. According to the **system of credits and grade points**,

- 156 – 180 credits are required for a bachelor degree (with a 10 hour work load equivalent to 1 credit) and
- 105 – 120 credits for a master's degree.

#### **d.) Mobility Programmes/Internationalisation**

The **UGC (University Grant Commission)** and **NBA (National Board of Accreditation) Charters on Quality** address the quality of programmes, research as well as international co-operation. While the Government provides a legal framework for HEIs to establish collaborations with foreign HEIs, the design and implementation of mobility programmes as well as incoming and outgoing programmes is stipulated in the personal charters of HEIs. The scope of such programmes depends on the available funding which also varies from institution to institution. Norms and standards for joint degree programmes are well elaborated and proposals are to be submitted to regulatory bodies for approval.

### **III.3. Mexico**

#### **a.) Guiding Frameworks and Processes**

The **Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (SEP)** is the main authority in education matters. SEP defines education standards for all levels including higher education through so-called Secretarial Agreements which function as main guiding documents. The agreements include standards in areas such as

- a.) accumulation, transfer and substitution of credits;
- b.) programmes of study and approval as well as
- c.) institutional administration.

The **National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT)** is in charge of promoting national scientific and technological activities at postgraduate level, setting national policies and supporting scholarships and research programmes abroad. National programs (master and doctoral) receive accreditation by CONACYT which also administers a National System of Researchers. The **National Center for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CENEVAL)** designs and conducts assessments in particular at bachelor level.<sup>16</sup>

Agreement 279 establishes a two-tiered system for higher education in Mexico: bachelor and master studies. The graduate studies level is comprised of three distinct cycles or degrees: specialty diploma, master, and doctorate. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (COPAES) is responsible for diagnostic evaluation and accreditation of HEIs. Accreditation, however, functions on a voluntary basis.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information see <http://www.ceneval.edu.mx>.

At the regional/global level, a **Higher Education Common Space (ALCUE)** is under development which is supposed to be operational in 2015. ALCUE will provide a platform for co-operation and exchange on higher education matters, uniting countries of Latin America, the Caribbean as well as the EU. Areas of co-operation will include comparability and recognition of programmes and degrees as well as student mobility.

## **b.) Qualification Frameworks and Definition of Learning Outcomes**

The **National System of Competencies (SNC)** provides a national framework for the definition and registration of competency standards. The SNC describes in terms of outcomes, the set of knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes needed to perform an activity in labour, social, government, or educational settings. The SNC also determines which institutions or organisations are allowed to evaluate and certify individuals based on these competency standards. Competency Standards can also be used by HEIs to design program curricula. Individual competencies are evaluated, and if the individual meets the respective standards a certificate is issued. To date, the Registry includes 369 competency standards. HEIs apply the **taxonomies developed by Bloom and Marzano**<sup>17</sup> when defining **learning outcomes**.

## **c.) Tools for Comparability/Transparency**

Credits reflect the anticipated workload of a student. 0,0625 credits are equivalent to one hour of learning. Credit requirements are as follows:

- Bachelor degree: 300 credits;
- Specialty degree: 45 credits beyond a bachelor degree;
- Master degree: 75 credits beyond a bachelor degree or 30 credits after a specialty degree;
- Doctoral degree: 150 beyond a bachelor degree, 105 beyond Specialty, and 75 beyond a master.

A System for Academic Credit Assignment and Transfer (STCA) was established in 2007 to facilitate the recognition of studies/courses and to ensure compatibility with ECTS and North American credit systems. STCA defines criteria for credit conversion and student mobility. Procedures are also in place for recognising credits earned through self-directed learning activities and on-the-job training.

## **d.) Mobility Programmes/Internationalisation**

Mobility, exchange as well as incoming and outgoing programmes largely depend on the personal charters of specific HEIs and vary accordingly. The EGADE Business School of Tec de Monterrey provides an example of a HEI that strongly promotes mobility and internationalisation. There is a strong tendency both towards joint and double degrees. A number of cross-border university networks promote co-operation of HEIs within Latin America and beyond (e.g. Red Universaria, Ibero-American Network for Graduate Studies REDIBEP).

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<sup>17</sup> Developed to respond to shortcomings of the widely used Bloom's Taxonomy and the current environment of standards-based instruction, Marzano's model of thinking skills incorporates a wider range of factors that affect how learners think and provides a more research-based theory to help teachers improve their learners' thinking. Marzano's taxonomy is made up of three systems and the Knowledge Domain, all of which are important for thinking and learning. The three systems are the Self-System, the Metacognitive System, and the Cognitive System.

### III.4. Namibia

#### a.) Guiding Frameworks and Processes

On the national level, the **National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)** is tasked to promote the establishment of a coordinated HE system, access of students to HEIs, quality assurance in HE and to advise on the allocation of funds to public HEIs. Namibia is also a member state of the African Union (AU) which aims at building an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa.

Education is seen as a key instrument in achieving this goal which is reflected in conventions and mechanisms such as the **Revised Arusha Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Africa** and the **Association of African Universities (AAU) Quality Rating Mechanism**. The AAU is the key body and forum for consultation, exchange of information and co-operation among HEIs in Africa. The **African Higher Education Harmonisation and Tuning Project (Tuning Africa)**, which is part of the Africa-EU strategic partnership, uses an internationally established methodology to enhance degree comparability, graduate mobility and employability. In its current pilot phase it involves 60 HEIs along five different disciplines (medicine, agriculture, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, teacher education). Plans are also under way to establish a continental quality assurance and accreditation agency.

#### b.) Qualification Frameworks and Definition of Learning Outcomes

The **Namibia Qualifications Framework** defines ten NQF levels. NQF levels are expressed in terms of generic outcomes against which typical qualifications can be positioned. Learning outcomes for each level are defined in terms of knowledge, abilities and skills for each level:

- Level 8 Bachelor/Professional level,
- Level 9 – Master,
- Level 10 – Doctorate).

The **Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA)** evaluates qualifications and issues evaluation reports. The NQA also examines foreign qualifications documents, confirms their legality and validity and evaluates and recognises credits between countries. At the regional level, important processes underway include efforts for the development of an African Qualifications Framework (PAU) as well as a SADC Regional Qualifications Framework.

#### c.) Tools for Comparability/Transparency

**Portfolio standards of qualification** require students to have a set of documents for employment and enrollment purposes including academic transcripts and an evaluation report from the NQA. Namibia applies a **system of NQF credits**, requiring

- 360 credits for a Bachelor degree,
- 240 credits for a Master degree and
- 360 credits for a doctorate degree.

One credit equals ten hours of teaching and learning. In SADC countries, students' work load ranges in most case from 400 to 1200 hours during one academic year. The quality assurance framework includes provisions for credit transfer from one institution to another, provided courses are similar. The final authority on the transfer of credits lies with the respective university.

#### **d.) Mobility Programmes/Internationalisation**

The **Intra-ACP academic mobility scheme (Intra-ACP)** is a co-operation and mobility program in higher education covering countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP), implemented by the EACEA. The scheme aims to promote sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The Intra ACP Nyerere Programme strives to enhance career prospects of students from Africa by offering possibilities for exchange and mobility at all levels of HE, including a scholarship scheme. It provides support both to HEIs in setting up inter-institutional co-operation partnerships between universities from different countries within the ACP regions; as well as to individual students, researchers and university staff who wish to spend a study / research / teaching period at partner universities abroad. Incoming and outgoing programmes are implemented in line with the personal charters of the respective HEIs. Regional programmes are implemented which include different African universities.

### **III.5. Russia**

#### **a.) Guiding Frameworks and Processes**

In 2003, Russia signed the **Bologna Declaration**. In 2005, a roadmap was agreed between Russia and the EU for setting up a **“Common Space of Research and Education, Including Cultural Aspects”**. In the area of research and development, efforts are focusing on creating favourable conditions for enhanced co-operation along mutually agreed priority fields. In the area of education, integration and closer co-operation within the EHEA is encouraged in line with the main principles of the Bologna Process.<sup>18</sup> Since joining the Bologna process, Russian universities have been modernising their educational programmes in order to meet the Bologna standards: Most importantly, the three cycle system has been gradually introduced (with the exception of some specialist degree programmes requiring 5 years of studying, equal to a master degree). Furthermore, quality assurance units were introduced to university structures.

#### **b.) Qualification Frameworks and Definition of Learning Outcomes**

Several attempts have been taken to develop a National Qualifications Framework in line with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. In May 2013, a **“National Plan for Professional Standards Development”** was launched, aimed at developing a national system of competences and qualifications – so-called new professional standards. Educational programmes are developed in line with the Federal Educational Standards which are required to indicate

- a.) the demanded period of studying;
- b.) the total workload of the educational program (in credits),
- c.) the appropriate qualification (degree),
- d.) characteristics of professional activities for each educational level,
- e.) **learning outcomes**<sup>19</sup>, including general cultural and professional competences, and
- f.) requirements in terms of program structure.

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<sup>18</sup> These are: a.) the adoption of comparable HE degrees; b.) the adoption of a two-tier “bachelor-master” and as soon as possible a three-tier “bachelor-master-doctorate” education system; c.) a credit system based on ECTS; d.) academic mobility; e.) co-operation on the provision of learning quality; e.) introduction of integrated curricula at HEIs; f.) promotion of life-long learning; g.) modifications in HEIs’ management with a view to adapting students’ learning to labour market changes; h.) increased attractiveness of the HE systems in Russia and in the EU.

<sup>19</sup> While European Learning Outcomes are defined by using verbs, learning outcomes in Russia are defined in terms of nouns (such as knowledge, skills, ability etc.).

### c.) Tools for Comparability/Transparency

Templates for **Europass** are used where required by European universities or employers while moving to Europe for academic or work purpose. Russian universities provide the **European Diploma Supplement** in line with the recommendations of the European University Association. According to the Russian Education Law, universities can use a credit system. For the development of new educational programmes, credits are required in line with the **ECTS system**. Credit points reflect all academic activities during a course (hours spent in class, self-study and traineeship). One credit corresponds to 36 hours of work; 60 ECTS are required for one academic year (full time studies). Credits for study programmes are allocated in line with Bologna Standards:

- Bachelor's degrees (first cycle) - 240 ECTS (4 years)
- Master's programmes (second cycle) - 120 ECTS (2 years)
- PhD studies (third cycle) - no ECTS range

### d.) Mobility Programmes/Internationalisation

Russian universities, students and academic staff have been involved in **Erasmus mobility** by participating in special EC initiatives under the Erasmus Mundus Program. Many Russian universities offer international exchange to students. Each university has a department for international relations or an institute for international education that deals with incoming and outgoing students and also organises special programmes for incomings and outgoings. Nowadays universities start implementing a buddy programme for incomings. All universities provide language courses and orientation programmes for incoming students. Russian universities are also more and more active in developing joint/double degree programmes.

## IV. Comparison of Higher Education Standards in Europe and UNIQUE Partner Countries

### a.) Comparative Table<sup>20</sup>

The table below **compares standards of HE** between PCUs and Bologna Member States in line with the analysis outlined under section III. of this paper. This is followed by a.) a summary of **key factors influencing these HE Standards** and b.) main findings regarding the **comparability of HE standards and international co-operation** in PCU countries.

STANDARDS	EUROPE	CHINA	INDIA	MEXICO	NAMIBIA	RUSSIA
<b>Guiding Policy/Legal Frameworks</b>	Bologna Declaration	Education Guiding Plan	Government of India Declaration	Secretarial Agreements of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP)	Higher Education Act 2003, Revised Arusha Convention (African Union)	Bologna Declaration, National Laws on Education
<b>National/Regional Processes</b>	Bologna Process	Proposals on Advance of High Education Quality	Government of India Higher Education Agenda and Process	Processes on accreditation/evaluation based on Secretarial Agreements	Implementation of HE standards spearheaded by NCHE <sup>21</sup> in line with HE Act 2003	Bologna Process
	European Higher Education Area (EHEA)	Chinese Higher Education Area	N/A <sup>22</sup>	Higher Education Common Space ALCUE <sup>23</sup> (under development)	AU Higher Education Initiatives	European Higher Education Area (EHEA); Common Space of Research and Education, Including Cultural Aspects (Russia and EU)

<sup>20</sup> Source: UNIQUE Needs Analysis.

<sup>21</sup> National Council for Higher Education

<sup>22</sup> The term 'N/A' as used in this paper stands for 'not applicable'.

<sup>23</sup> An initiative of countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union. Envisaged to be operational in 2015.

STANDARDS	EUROPE	CHINA	INDIA	MEXICO	NAMIBIA	RUSSIA
<b>Qualification Frameworks</b>	European Qualification Framework (EQF)	Framework of nat. qualifications system based on Law on Education	Indian Qualification Framework	National System of Competencies (SNC)	Namibia Qualifications Framework	National Plan of Professional Standards Development; EQF
<b>Balance Teaching/Learning</b>	Learning Outcomes (LO)	LO not incorporated into nat. qualifications system	Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes
<b>Tools for Comparability/ Transparency</b>	Europass	Chinese Professional Pass	Multiple Agency Formats	N/A	Portfolio standards of qualification	Europass
	Europass Mobility	N/A	Mobility Documentation	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Diploma Supplement	N/A	Degree Supplement Information	N/A	N/A	Diploma Supplement
	ECTS Points	Chinese Credit System	Credits and Grade Points	Credits (Agreement 279 of SEP)	NQF Credits	Russian Credit System
<b>Mobility Programmes/ Internationalisation</b>	Erasmus Charter	Regulation on Overseas Studies (RCSC) supported by CSC <sup>24</sup>	UGC and NBA Charter <sup>25</sup>	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Erasmus Mobility	RCSC Mobility	Mobility programmes as per Personal Charters of HEIs	Mobility programmes as per bilateral agreements of individual HEIs	Intra Africa Caribbean Pacific (Intra-ACP) Academic Mobility Scheme; Mobility programmes based on MoUs of HEIs	Erasmus Mobility
	Erasmus Exchange Programme	RCSC Exchange Programme				N/A
	Incoming and outgoing programmes	Incoming programmes	as per Personal Charters of HEIs	as per Personal Charters of HEIs	as per Personal Charters of HEIs	as per Personal Charters of HEIs
	Joint Studies	Double Degree Programme	Joint Studies	Double and joint degrees	Regional programmes	Joint Studies

<sup>24</sup> China Scholarship Council.

<sup>25</sup> University Grant Commission and National Board of Accreditation Charters.



## b.) Factors influencing HE Standards at PCUs/in PCU Countries<sup>26</sup>

- **Policy frameworks and institutional set ups** in the area of HE strongly impact on the formulation and implementation of HE standards. In India, for example, the institutional setup in the area of HE is complex and multi-layered, including 16 agencies operating under the Ministry of Human Resource Development as well as a number of regulatory and accreditation agencies. **Support from key stakeholders** remains of utmost importance.
- **Contextual problems** that influence HE standards include challenges in a given country/society, co-operation with the industry and business as well as labour market connections and employability of graduates.
- **Educational criteria** – defined as the accreditation criteria, or external standards, from a national or international perspective – strongly influence HE systems and vary from country to country.
- The **quality of students and secondary education** is of concern in some countries. In Namibia, for example, poor quality education at high school influences HE standards.
- Overall, the **quality of university/faculty** remains essential. This includes areas such as the quality of courses, the commitment and ability to teach as well as professionalism in general, research output, organisational culture as well as available infrastructure and equipment.
- Last but not least, **budget constraints** heavily impact on the HE systems.

## c.) Comparability of HE Standards and International Co-operation<sup>27</sup>

### Comparability of HE standards

Comparability of HE standards is considered very relevant by PCUs:

- More concretely, comparability is understood to enhance **competitiveness and recognition** at the global level.
- It can help to define **equal quality standards** and provides essential parameters **for international co-operation and joint/exchange programmes**.
- Comparability is also deemed essential for **benchmarking purposes** – e.g. in terms of curricula development, staff and student exchange programmes, research, credit and grading systems or the award of degrees.
- Last, but not least, comparability is in the very **interest of students**.
- Comparability **impacts on credit transfer and recognition of grades/degrees** obtained abroad.
- **Rankings** can provide guidance in informing students' choices on where to study, but are not the only/key denominators (for more information see also UNIQUE document on Key Performance Indicators).
- Comparability is mainly guaranteed through **agreements between host and sending institutions**, outlining standards such as selection criteria for exchange students, courses to be attended and credits to be gained.

### International co-operation

- International co-operation is **essential** for PCUs which is reflected in the vision/mission statements of HEIs as well as in the establishment of international offices.
- It strengthens **visibility, branding, global recognition and competitiveness** of HEIs.
- It is relevant for international accreditations and rankings and also enhances the overall **quality of education as well as employability of students**.

<sup>26</sup> Sources: UNIQUE Needs Analysis, UNIQUE Focus Group Summary.

<sup>27</sup> Source: UNIQUE Focus Group Summary.

- Students strongly profit from opportunities to compare and **learn best practices in a multicultural setting** which strongly impacts on cultural sensitivity and awareness.
- **Key areas of international programmes** include the involvement of faculty and students in exchange programmes, joint global research projects, joint global consulting projects, joint seminars, scientific and educational co-operation, international double degree programmes and international agreements.
- Effective **management of HEIs** is a major prerequisite for the functioning of international co-operation.

Most incoming/outgoing students participate in some kind of **assistant system** that helps them to get some orientation at the receiving university, or that provides outgoing students with guidance in choosing an appropriate university. In most HEIs, foreign students are integrated into existing courses, while in some HEIs special courses and study materials for foreign students are designed (e.g. China). Funding schemes for exchange programmes vary which can also affect the quality of programmes.

**Areas identified for improvement** include a.) exchange of information between partner universities and possibilities of exchange programmes, b.) programmes and processes that reflect the needs of foreign students and c.) improved synchronisation of exchange programme systems and administrative procedures.

## V. Characteristics of Gaps in Higher Education Systems: Europe and UNIQUE Partner Countries

This section provides an overview of the main gaps in UNIQUE partner countries compared to European standards. After a short narrative part for each partner country, it visualizes the identified gaps in a comparative table. The section concludes with a brief summary of challenges in relation to different quality standards for international mobility.

### V.1. China: Main Gaps<sup>28</sup>

- Strategic priority lies on the expansion of the education system (number of HEIs available) with a more recent shift towards quality assurance. Still, **national standards for HE quality are not yet available**.
- Unlike in other countries, the **responsibility for the evaluation and assessment of HEIs** lies with **public institutions** only.
- Differently to the EQF, the **national qualifications system does not include descriptors and learning outcomes**.
- While the European system(s) promote a student-centred approach, a **teaching/teacher-centred approach** is being applied in China with a current trend moving towards student-centred orientation.
- International exchange is promoted by many HEIs and there are joint studies with a number of HEIs abroad. **Mobility within China remains, however, limited**.

### V.2. India: Main Gaps<sup>29</sup>

- The complex institutional set up and diverse system requires further harmonisation within the country. There is also a **strong diversity of quality standards at HEIs**, varying quality in terms of teaching, learning and research.
- Other than the EQF, the **Indian Qualification Framework** provides degree design and delivery based on **different regulators for specific domains**.
- **Multiple Agency Formats for the documentation of learning** reflect the heterogeneity of HE within the country and are different from European tools such as Europass. Enhanced **comparability** within the country is required also in terms of **degrees** awarded.
- **Learning Outcomes are applied but evaluated differently within the country** (no unified approach).
- **Pedagogical approaches** differ from European systems, the latter being more lecture and tutorial based.
- **Different systems of credits and grade points** are being applied which are not compatible with the ECTS system.
- **Internationalisation is promoted only by few HEIs** (primarily private ones) and its scope strongly varies.
- **Accreditation** only requires minimum standards and is **not compulsory** which results in a strong diversity of quality standards at HEIs.
- Opportunities for **financial support** are limited.

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<sup>28</sup> Sources: UNIQUE - Identification of main gaps: China, UNIQUE Needs Analysis and Focus Group Summary.

<sup>29</sup> Sources: UNIQUE - Identification of main gaps: India, UNIQUE Needs Analysis and Focus Group Summary.

### V.3. Mexico: Main Gaps<sup>30</sup>

- There is **no single, comprehensive policy framework**: Even in areas where guidelines exist, each HEIs may develop internal standards. Standards on accreditations/student assessments are less rigorous.
- **Mentoring/tutoring is a requirement for national accreditations** which is not the case in Europe. There are stronger attendance requirements for students compared to Europe.
- **Investment in research is limited compared to Europe's average**.
- According to the **credit system** (Agreement 279 of SEP), .0625 credits are equivalent to one hour of learning.
- **Mobility** programmes are based on **bilateral agreements of individual HEIs**.
- **Quality assurance** is addressed in policy frameworks, with **no involvement of students** foreseen (opposed to Europe).

### V.4. Namibia: Main Gaps<sup>31</sup>

- AU/SADC-wide standards for harmonisation of co-operation are in place (AU/SADC), but implementation remains limited due to insufficient funding. Opposed to Europe, there is **no continent-wide QF** and **no unified set of AUA/SADC-wide quality standards**.
- In terms of the **NQF**, a gap compared to Europe is seen regarding the **recognition of credits equivalent to a particular level**. In comparison, more credits are awarded at undergraduate level and less at MA level.
- In terms of teaching/learning, there is **less flexibility in curriculum design** compared to European systems along with a **higher teaching load**.
- Learning is documented in Portfolio Standards of Qualification for use within the country, while **no continent-wide/global tools comparable to Europass** exist. There are also no documents comparable to **Europass Mobility and the Diploma Supplement**.
- With the **Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme** (implemented by the EACA) there is a mobility scheme comparable to Erasmus Mobility. Sustainability, however, is not guaranteed and funding of **mobility within Africa remains limited**.
- **Joint studies** together with European HEIs exist, but not between African HEIs.

### V.5. Russia: Main Gaps<sup>32</sup>

- HE is strongly regulated by Federal State Standards with **less autonomy granted to HEIs**, while European HEIs are also more independent in terms of study programme development.
- **Three-year undergraduate programmes** from some European countries are **not recognised**.
- **A National Plan of Professional Standards Development** has been launched which aims at the development of an NQF which is in line with the EQF.
- Compared to European systems, there is **less flexibility in curriculum design** and **less autonomy of students** in learning processes.
- There are **differences in study periods, study itinerary and assessment of students**.

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<sup>30</sup> Sources: UNIQUE - Identification of main gaps: Mexico, UNIQUE Needs Analysis and Focus Group Summary.

<sup>31</sup> Sources: UNIQUE - Identification of main gaps: Namibia, UNIQUE Needs Analysis and Focus Group Summary.

<sup>32</sup> Sources: UNIQUE - Identification of main gaps: Russia, UNIQUE Needs Analysis and Focus Group Summary.

- Compared to the ECTS system, the **Russian Credit System** puts **more weight on in-class activity** which is also reflected in credits. The average "weight" of disciplines in Russia ranges from two to three credits, while the average weight per discipline in European study programmes is five to six credits.
- Russia participates in the Erasmus programme, generally though there is **less emphasis on mobility** which is not an integral part of study processes.
- **Quality management** is understood as the **implementation of legal standards** with less emphasis on "practical aspects" of learning/teaching such as pedagogical methodologies. Financial support for students and educational opportunities for lecturers is limited.

## V.6. Comparative Table<sup>33</sup>

The table below provides an overview of the main gaps in UNIQUE partner countries compared to European standards:

THEMATIC AREAS	EUROPEAN STANDARDS	GAPS - CHINA	GAPS - INDIA	GAPS - MEXICO	GAPS - NAMIBIA	GAPS - RUSSIA
<b>Guiding Frameworks and Processes</b>	Strategic priority on quality assurance, harmonisation, enhanced comparability & Internationalisation.	Strategic priority on the expansion of the education system (number of HEIs available).	Lack of harmonisation within the country with complex institutional set up and diverse system.	No single, comprehensive policy framework. Even in areas where guidelines exist, each HEIs may develop internal standards.	AU/SADC-wide standards for harmonisation of co-operation in place, but limited implementation due to insufficient funding.	HE strongly regulated by Federal State Standards with less autonomy granted to HEIs.
<b>Qualification Frameworks</b>	European Qualification Framework (EQF), using descriptors and learning outcomes (LOs); distinguishes 8 levels.	National qualifications system w/o descriptors & LOs.	Indian Qualification Framework: Degree design and delivery based on different regulators for different domains; distinguishes 9 levels.	National System of Competencies (SNC), using learning outcomes; distinguishes 369 competency standards.	NQF; distinguishes 10 levels. Gap regarding the recognition of credits equivalent to a particular level. No continent-wide QF.	National Plan of Professional Standards Development: aims at development of NQF in line with EQF.

<sup>33</sup> Sources: UNIQUE Needs Analysis, UNIQUE Focus Group Summary, UNIQUE – Country documents on the identification of main gaps.

THEMATIC AREAS	EUROPEAN STANDARDS	GAPS - CHINA	GAPS - INDIA	GAPS - MEXICO	GAPS - NAMIBIA	GAPS - RUSSIA
<b>Teaching/Learning</b>	Systematic introduction of Learning Outcomes (LO); emphasis of student centered approach.	No systematic introduction of learning outcomes; Teaching/teacher centred approach with trend to move towards student centred orientation.	Learning Outcomes are applied but evaluated in different formats (no unified approach).	Mentoring/tutoring as a requirement for national accreditations (not the case in Europe). Stronger attendance requirements for students compared to Europe.	Less flexibility in curriculum design, higher teaching load.	Less flexibility in curriculum design. Less autonomy of students in learning processes. Differences in study periods & itinerary and assessment of students.
<b>Research</b>	Promotion of research through European Research Area (ERA).	Limited finance.	Varying scope; limited financial support.	Promotion through CONACYT.	N.I. <sup>34</sup>	N.I.
<b>Tools for Comparability/ Transparency</b>	Europass: Emphasis on transparency & comparability of skills/knowledge & experience a holder has.	Chinese Professional Pass: Emphasis on description of standards for different professions. For use within country.	Multiple Agency Formats reflect heterogeneity of HE within the country.	N/A	Portfolio standards of qualification in Namibia for use within country; no continent-wide/global tool comparable to Europass.	Europass – no gap
	Europass Mobility	N/A	No gap (Mobility Documentation)	N/A	No comparable document.	N/A
	Diploma Supplement	N/A	No gap (Degree Supplement Information)	N/A	No comparable document.	No gap (Diploma Supplement)
	ECTS Points (1 ECTS = 25-30hrs of learning)	Chinese Credit System (not equivalent to ECTS)	Different systems based on credits and grade points which are not compatible with ECTS.	Credits (0,0625 credits = one hour of learning)	NQF Credits (1 NQF = 10 hrs of learning); compared to Europe, more credits at undergrad. level and less at MA level	Russian Credit System: puts more weight on in-class activity; also reflected in credits.

<sup>34</sup> No information.

THEMATIC AREAS	EUROPEAN STANDARDS	GAPS - CHINA	GAPS - INDIA	GAPS - MEXICO	GAPS - NAMIBIA	GAPS - RUSSIA
<b>Mobility Programmes/ Internationalisation</b>	Erasmus Charter	No gap.	Internationalisation promoted only by few (primarily private) HEIs. Different programmes as per Personal Charters of HEIs.	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Erasmus Mobility	International exchange promoted by many HEIs (Regulation on Overseas Studies - RCSC).	Internationalisation promoted only by few (primarily private) HEIs. Different programmes as per Personal Charters of HEIs.	Mobility programmes as per bilateral agreements of individual HEIs.	Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme: concerns regarding sustainability.	Participation in Erasmus. Generally though less emphasis on mobility (no integral part of study process)
	Erasmus Exchange Programme					
	Incoming and outgoing programmes					
	Joint Studies with degrees awarded by two or more HEIs.	Joint studies with HEIs abroad (no gap); some possibilities for double degrees.	Joint Studies – no gap	Joint and double degrees – no gap.	No gap (Joint studies together with European HEIs, but not among African HEIs).	Joint Studies – no gap
<b>Quality Assurance</b>	Detailed standards and emphasis on QA	General principles for HE quality at macro level. Evaluation and assessment of HEIs by public institutions only.	Strong diversity of quality standards at HEIs.	Quality assurance considered in different frameworks; no involvement of students (opposed to Europe).	Lack of AUA/SADC-wide quality standards.	Different concept of quality management (=implementation of legal standards; less emphasis on practical aspects of learning/teaching).
<b>Financial Support/ Financial Structures</b>	Different funding schemes promoting mobility.	Limited funding.	Limited access to financial support for HEIs and students.	Support through CONACYT and FIDERH <sup>35</sup> .	Limited funding of mobility within Africa.	Limited financial support for students; limited educational opportunities for lecturers.

<sup>35</sup> Fund for Development of Human Resources (<http://www.fiderh.org.mx/>).



## V.7. Main Challenges in aligning Quality Standards between the EU and PCU Countries<sup>36</sup>

### Common gaps in PCU countries

- Main gaps and challenges identified relate to **quality standards** and **comparability** of HEIs. There are different approaches in terms of quality standards which is due to specifics regarding the economy as well as existing social and cultural standards.
- Differences in the **system of teaching/learning** are particularly pronounced and derive from diverse cultures, requirements, systems and quality standards. While some systems are tutorial-based, others are teachers-oriented; some have flexibility in the design and implementation of curricula, while others are centrally managed.
- The system of **evaluation and grading** makes comparability a challenging process: **Grading and credit systems** vary around the globe with no global standards being set.
- There is also a **lack of recognition of qualifications** gained abroad.
- **Quality and focus of research** varies considerably and is also reflected in the process of accreditation.
- Furthermore, also **language barriers** pose a challenge, especially with non-English speaking countries.

### Major challenges in aligning quality standards for international mobility

The table below provides an overview of the main challenges that were identified by PCUs for aligning quality standards for international mobility:

Major challenges	Description
<b>Cultural differences</b>	Responding to culture differences is a challenge. Existing differences also stem from the fact that Western cultures focus more on the individual, while Asian culture, for example, is more context-oriented. The ability to adapt to change and to learn from it is of utmost importance which is also promoted by international exchange programmes.
<b>Teaching/learning processes</b>	One of the major challenges identified are the different methodologies of learning which stem from different work and study cultures. While some systems are outcome oriented (e.g. Namibia); some are more teacher-oriented (e.g. China). Individual performances in courses are different as well: while in some systems students are acquainted with tutorial methodologies and case study-based, pro-active problem solving (e.g. India, Mexico), students in other systems are less pro-active and not used to raise many questions as interrupting lecturers is considered impolite (e.g. China, partly Russia). The availability of courses taught in English is at some HEIs limited which creates considerable <b>language barriers</b> .
<b>Quality indicators</b>	In many cases, quality indicators are not known which results in different approaches for meeting the targets of the various HEIs. No common quality indicators have been defined. Comparing HEIs internationally – e.g. through <b>rankings</b> – is also seen as a challenge (for more information, see UNIQUE paper on KPIs).

<sup>36</sup> Sources: UNIQUE Needs Analysis, UNIQUE Focus Group Summary, UNIQUE – Country documents on the identification of main gaps.

Major challenges	Description
<b>Evaluation and credit systems</b>	There are no unified rules for credit transfer and the system of evaluation of foreign students. At some institutions, there is a lack of recognition of credits, degrees and qualifications gained abroad (e.g. engineering degrees from Germany are not recognised in Namibia).
<b>Programmes duration and calendar</b>	A major difference in the educational model is in the duration of programmes. In Mexico, for example, the programme duration is longer. In addition, the <b>school calendars</b> are different.
<b>Standards for incoming students</b>	Standards for incoming students are not unified. This stretches from financial requirements (e.g. fees, funding), legal requirements (e.g. visa, health insurance) to programme specific requirements.
<b>Gap between public and private HEIs</b>	There are considerable gaps between public and private HEIs in terms of funding, mobility and quality (e.g. Latin America, India) which contributes to a notable heterogeneity of HEIs in PCU countries.

## VI. Recommendations on how to bridge existing Gaps

### a.) Introduction

*“The enrichment is in the variety and not in the standardisation of everything because then the competitive advantage is lost.” (Mexico)*

Government and competent national bodies need to establish, modify and implement HE **policies and measures that serve their cultural, social and economic needs**. It remains a key priority to ensure sustainability of domestic HE systems through public funding and to promote access and equity for domestic students.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time it is essential for HEIs and other stakeholders to further deepen and establish new **cross-border partnerships to enhance comparability and recognition** of study programmes across countries.

This has been also acknowledged by Member States to the Bologna Process in the strategy **"The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting"**<sup>38</sup> which was adopted at the Ministerial conference in May 2007 in London. Key priorities of the strategy include an intensified policy dialogue, strengthened co-operation based on partnership and furthering the recognition of qualifications. Each of the priorities identified in the strategy come with a

<sup>37</sup> International Association of Universities (IAU), [Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders: A Statement on Behalf of HEIs Worldwide](#) (2004).

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Strategy\\_plus\\_possible\\_actions.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Strategy_plus_possible_actions.pdf)

detailed set of suggested measures and recommendations which are also of relevance for this project.

At the level of the **OECD/UNESCO**, detailed policies and conventions provide important guidance to foster comparability and transparency of cross border higher education.

Most importantly, the "**UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education**"<sup>39</sup> provide a detailed set of recommendations which are of critical importance to this project. The guidelines encourage governments and other stakeholders – including HEIs, student bodies, and organisations responsible for quality assurance, accreditation, and academic and professional recognition – to take action based on three main principles:

- Mutual trust and respect among countries and recognition of the **importance of international collaboration in higher education**.
- Recognition of the **importance of national authority and the diversity** of higher education systems.
- Recognition of the **importance of higher education** as a means for expressing a country's linguistic and cultural diversity and also **for nurturing its economic development and social cohesion**.

The guidelines are **designed to help students getting easy access to reliable information on higher education offered outside their home country** or by foreign providers in their home country. They **call on governments and other stakeholders to make qualifications more transparent and to provide greater clarity on procedures for their recognition internationally**.

Specific recommendations include:

- An invitation to **governments to establish comprehensive systems of quality assurance and accreditation for cross-border higher education**, recognising that this involves both sending and receiving countries.
- An invitation to **higher education institutions and providers to ensure that the programmes that they deliver across borders and in their home country are of comparable quality** and that they also take into account the cultural and linguistic sensitivities of the receiving country.
- An invitation to **student bodies to get involved as active partners at international, national and institutional levels** in the development, monitoring and maintenance of the quality provision of cross-border higher education.

In addition to the 'UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education', other important sources from the OECD include the **OECD Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education**<sup>40</sup> (e.g. for Latin America and the Caribbean/Africa/Europe/Asia Pacific).

The **recommendations** outlined below **to partner countries of the UNIQUE project are based on the findings from the analysis in this paper and build upon the recommendations**

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<sup>39</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp).

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Strategy\\_plus\\_possible\\_actions.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Strategy_plus_possible_actions.pdf)

made in the above described policy frameworks of the OECD as well as the Bologna Process. The recommendations in the following section address HEIs.

A separate section is dedicated to other relevant stakeholders in the areas of HE such as EU/EHEA Member States, National Governments, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Bodies, Academic Recognition Bodies and Student Bodies.

## **b.) Recommendations to Higher Education Institutions**

**Commitment to quality** by all HEIs is essential: To this end, the active and constructive contributions of academic staff are indispensable. HEIs are responsible for the quality as well as the social, cultural and linguistic relevance of education and the standards of qualifications provided in their name, no matter where or how it is delivered.

In this context, it is recommended that HEIs:

- Recognise that quality teaching and research is made possible by the **quality of faculty and the quality of their working conditions** that foster independent and critical inquiry.
- Develop, maintain or review current **internal quality management systems** so that they make full use of the competencies of stakeholders such as academic staff, administrators, students and graduates. Furthermore, when promoting their programmes to **potential students**, they should take full responsibility to ensure that the information and **guidance provided is accurate, reliable and easily accessible**.
- **Consult competent quality assurance and accreditation bodies.**
- Develop and maintain **networks and partnerships at national and international levels** to facilitate the process of **recognition** by acknowledging each other's qualifications as equivalent or comparable.
- Where relevant, **use codes of good practice** such as the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education<sup>41</sup> and other relevant codes such as the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications<sup>42</sup>.
- Provide **accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and procedures of external and internal quality assurance** and the academic and professional **recognition of qualifications** they deliver and **provide complete descriptions of programmes and qualifications, preferably with descriptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills that a successful student should acquire**. HEIs should collaborate especially with quality assurance and accreditation bodies and with student bodies to facilitate the dissemination of this information.
- In line with the objectives of the UNIQUE project (WP 3), **develop training materials and further strengthen capacities at PCUs** for internationalisation, taking into

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<sup>41</sup>[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp)

<sup>42</sup>[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/criteria%20and%20procedures\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp)

account local needs and emphasising the exchange of knowledge between European universities and PCUs.

- Ensure the **transparency of the financial status** of the institution and/or educational programme offered.

### c.) Recommendations to other Stakeholders

#### Recommendations to the EU/EHEA member states

It is recommended to take all necessary steps to implement the strategy "**The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting**", which was adopted at the Ministerial conference in May 2007 in London. Most importantly, implement the recommendations outlined below:

##### **Strengthen co-operation based on partnership:**

- Strengthen established and create new consortia of institutions of higher education and stakeholder organisations in the EHEA and non-EHEA countries to encourage systematic and integrated co-operation (**Higher Education Consortia**).
- Develop programmes jointly by HE institutions in Europe and other world regions, comprising integrated mobility phases in partner countries (**Joint degrees**).
- Further implement (and expand) **mobility programmes** between EHEA and non-EHEA countries.
- Expand opportunities for **joint research activities**, including the possibilities of joint research-based degree programmes.

##### **Intensify policy dialogue:**

- Create/strengthen **HE policy fora** as an umbrella for meetings, workshops and seminars involving representatives of EHEA and non-EHEA governments as well as HE stakeholders.

##### **Further the recognition of qualifications:**

- Intensify **co-operation between the ENIC and NARIC Networks and networks from other regions** with a view to the development of a common understanding of **recognition** criteria, procedures and practices.

#### Recommendations to Governments/Policy Makers

Governments can be influential, if not responsible, in promoting adequate quality assurance, accreditation and the recognition of qualifications. They undertake the role of policy co-ordination in most higher education systems.

In this context, it is recommended in line with the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education that governments:

- Establish, or encourage the establishment of a **comprehensive, fair and transparent system of accreditation and quality assurance**.
- Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive **capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation**.
- **Consult and co-ordinate** amongst the various competent **bodies for quality assurance and accreditation both nationally and internationally**.
- Provide accurate, reliable and easily **accessible information on the criteria and standards** for registration, licensure, quality assurance and accreditation.
- Where appropriate develop or **encourage bilateral or multilateral recognition agreements**, facilitating the recognition or equivalence of each country's qualifications based on the procedures and criteria included in mutual agreements.
- Contribute to efforts to improve the accessibility at the international level of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive **information on recognised higher education institutions/providers**.

### Recommendations to Quality Assurance and Accreditation Bodies

In addition to internal quality management of institutions/providers, external quality assurance and accreditation systems have been adopted in many countries. The existing **systems of quality assurance and accreditation often vary from country to country** and sometimes within the countries themselves. Some have governmental bodies for quality assurance and accreditation, and others have non-governmental bodies. Furthermore, some differences exist in the terminologies used, the definition of “quality”, the purpose and function of the system including its link to the funding of students, institutions or programmes, the methodologies used in quality assurance and accreditation, the scope and function of the responsible body or unit, and the voluntary or compulsory nature of participation. While **respecting this diversity, a co-ordinated effort among the bodies of both sending and receiving countries is needed at both the regional and global level**, in order to tackle the challenges raised by cross-border provision of HE.

In this context, it is recommended in line with the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education that quality assurance and accreditation bodies:

- Ensure that their **quality assurance and accreditation arrangements include cross-border education provision**. This can mean giving attention to assessment guidelines, ensuring that standards and processes are transparent, consistent and appropriate to take account of the shape and scope of the national HE system, and adaptability to changes and developments in cross-border provision.
- Sustain and strengthen the existing **regional and international networks** or establish regional networks in regions that do not already have one. These networks can serve as platforms **to exchange information and good practice, disseminate knowledge, increase the understanding of international developments and challenges as well as to improve the professional expertise of their staff and quality assessors**.
- Establish links to **strengthen the collaboration between the bodies of the sending country and the receiving country and enhance the mutual understanding of different systems of quality assurance and accreditation**. This may facilitate the process of assuring the quality of programmes delivered across borders and institutions operating across borders while respecting the quality assurance and accreditation systems of the receiving countries.

- Provide accurate and easily **accessible information** on the assessment standards, procedures, and effects of the quality assurance mechanisms on the funding of students, institutions or programmes where applicable as well as the results of the assessment. Quality assurance and accreditation bodies should **collaborate with other actors, especially HEIs**, academic staff, student bodies and academic recognition bodies to facilitate the dissemination of such information.
- Reach **mutual recognition agreements with other bodies** on the basis of trust in and understanding of each other's professional practice, develop systems of internal quality assurance and regularly undergo external evaluations, making full use of the competencies of stakeholders.

### Recommendations to Academic Recognition Bodies

The **UNESCO Regional Conventions on Recognition of Qualifications** are important instruments facilitating the fair recognition of HE qualifications, including the assessment of foreign qualifications resulting from cross-border mobility of students, skilled professionals and cross-border provision of HE. There is a need to build on existing initiatives with additional international action to facilitate fair processes of recognition of academic qualifications by **making systems more transparent and comparable**.

In this context, it is recommended in line with the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education that academic recognition bodies:

- Establish and maintain **regional and international networks** that can serve as platforms to **exchange information and good practice**, disseminate knowledge, increase the understanding of international developments and challenges and improve the professional expertise of their staff.
- Strengthen their **co-operation with quality assurance and accreditation bodies** to facilitate the process of determining whether a qualification meets basic quality standards, as well as to engage in cross-border co-operation and networking with quality assurance and accreditation bodies. This co-operation should be pursued both **at regional and cross-regional level**.
- Where appropriate, **address the professional recognition of qualifications in the labour market and provide necessary information on professional recognition, both to those who have a foreign qualification and to employers**.
- Use **codes of practice** such as the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and other relevant codes of practice to increase the public's confidence in their recognition procedures, and to reassure stakeholders that the processing of requests is conducted in a fair and consistent manner.
- Provide clear, accurate and **accessible information on the criteria for the assessment of qualifications**.

### Recommendations to Student Bodies

As representatives of the direct recipients of HE and as part of the higher education community, student bodies bear the responsibility of helping students and potential



students to carefully scrutinise the information available and giving sufficient consideration in their decision making process.

In this context, it is recommended that in line with the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education student bodies:

- Be involved as **active partners** at international, national and institutional levels in the **development, monitoring and maintenance of the quality provision** of HE.
- Take active part in **promoting quality provision**, by increasing the awareness of the students of the potential risks such as misleading guidance and information, low-quality provision leading to qualifications of limited validity.

#### d.) Summary and Conclusions

It is up to **Governments** and competent national bodies to establish, modify and implement HE **policies and measures that serve their cultural, social and economic needs**. At the same time it is essential for **HEIs and other stakeholders** with strategic interest in internationalisation to further deepen and establish new **cross-border partnerships for enhanced comparability and recognition** of study programmes and degrees across countries.

In order to strengthen comparability, it is essential for HEIs to have in place **comprehensive and transparent quality assurance frameworks** and to **clearly communicate quality criteria** to partners within and outside the country. In **agreements with bilateral partners** it remains essential to ensure that the **recognition of credits/degrees is addressed and regulated in transparent ways**. **Information on study programmes/conditions** (including recognition of credits etc.) needs to be **easily accessible to potentially interested students** within the country and abroad. This also includes information on the **availability of courses in English language** – the latter being an essential element for the international attractiveness of HEIs.

HEIs also have an important role to play in **promoting the implementation of national/regional/global standards on recognition and provision of quality HE** with relevant national authorities. **Detailed recommendations and guidelines by different regional and global players are already in place** (e.g. Bologna process, UNESCO/OECD) and can provide important guidance to HEIs in different processes related to internationalisation. In this context it is also important to note that the implementation of standards **requires bundled commitment and active engagement of a variety of stakeholders**. The engagement in **national, regional and international networks** can help HEIs to profit from **exchange of information** and to **identify best practices** from around the globe. Last but not least, **targeted capacity building measures** – which are also an integral part of the UNIQUE project – can be instrumental in closing existing capacity gaps.



## VII. Useful Sources and Links

### **Sources from the UNIQUE Project:**

*UNIQUE – Country documents on the identification of main gaps*

*UNIQUE Focus Group Summary*

*UNIQUE Needs Analysis*

### **Other sources:**

*The Bologna Declaration*

[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/mdc/bologna\\_declaration1.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/mdc/bologna_declaration1.pdf)

*Further information on the Bologna Process:*

<http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=5>

*The University of West Florida, Bloom's Taxonomy of Critical Thinking and Writing Effective Learning Objectives/Outcomes*

<https://lib.sandiego.edu/cas/documents/assessment/UsingBloomsTaxonomyforLearningOutcomes.pdf>

*Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/criteria%20and%20procedures\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp)

*Diploma Supplement*

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ds/ds_en.pdf)

*ECTS Points*

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf)

*Erasmus Charter*

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/erasmus/erasmus\\_university\\_charter\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/erasmus/erasmus_university_charter_en.php)

*Erasmus Mobility*

<http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/>

*Europass*

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/about>

*Europass Mobility*

<http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/en/documents/european-skills-passport/europass-mobility>

*The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting*

[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Strategy\\_plus\\_possible\\_actions.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/WGR2007/Strategy_plus_possible_actions.pdf)

*European Qualifications Framework*

[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/news/EQF\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/news/EQF_EN.pdf)

*International Association of Universities (IAU), Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders: A Statement on Behalf of HEIs Worldwide (2004).*

[http://www.iau-aiu.net/sites/all/files/sharing\\_quality\\_he\\_en\\_0.pdf](http://www.iau-aiu.net/sites/all/files/sharing_quality_he_en_0.pdf)

*Joint degrees*

<http://www.jointdegree.eu/>

*UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/code%20of%20good%20practice_EN.asp)

*UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Education*

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/35779480.pdf>

*UNESCO Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Studies*

<http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/tools/conventions.shtml>