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THE IMPACT OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS ON UNIVERSITIES IN FLANDERS (BELGIUM)

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EST. 1817

11 FACULTIES

TOP 100 UNIVERSITY

57 BACHELOR PROGRAMMES

150 MASTER PROGRAMMES

50 ENGLISH TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

42.000 STUDENTS

2.800 EXCHANGES YEARLY

600 PHD'S YEARLY

COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITY

PROGRAMMES AND EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES IN ALMOST ALL DISCIPLINES

Ghent: a genuine student city with +70,000 students in the heart of the European Union

London
310 km

Amsterdam
220 km

Paris
290 km

Berlin
790 km

Brussels
55 km

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN FLANDERS

- In 2003 → "**Structural Decree**" (for higher education only)

  = kind of de facto QF for HE in Flanders (based on Dublin descriptors)

  → validated in Nov-Dec 2008 (coordinated by NVAO)

  [based on the European "Bologna" Framework: QF for EHEA]

- In 2009 → "**Flemish Decree on the Qualification Structure**" (overarching framework , i.e. including HE)

  = Flemish Qualifications Structure

  [based on the European "Copenhagen" Framework: EQF for LLL]

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FLEMISH QUALIFICATIONS STRUCTURE

- FQS = 8 levels (cf. EQF for LLL), with level descriptors
- Level descriptors: described in terms of "competences" (for HE = learning outcomes)
  - Knowledge / Skills
  - Context / Autonomy / Responsibility
- The descriptors are:
  - Inclusive (all types of learning→ including non/informal learning)
  - Cumulative (2= also 1; 3= also 2 and 1 etc.)
  - distinctive (focused at the differences between levels)
- Only essential characteristics have been included

(hence: never attitudes because these can not be levelled)

EXAMPLE: LEVEL 6 ("BACHELOR")

FQS level	Level descriptor elements	
	Knowledge **Skills**	**Context** **Autonomy** **Responsibility**
Level 6	– critically evaluating and combining knowledge and insights from a specific area – applying complex specialised skills, linked to research results – gathering and interpreting relevant data and making innovative use of selected methods and resources to solve non-familiar complex problems	– acting in complex and specialised contexts – functioning with complete autonomy and considerable initiative – taking shared responsibility for the definition of collective results

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EXAMPLE: LEVEL 7 ("MASTER")

FQS level	Level descriptor elements	
	Knowledge **Skills**	**Context** **Autonomy** **Responsibility**
Level 7	– integrating and reformulating knowledge and insights from a specific area or at the interface between different areas – applying complex new skills, linked to autonomous, standardised research – critically evaluating and applying complex, advanced and/or innovative problem-solving techniques and methods	– acting in unpredictable, complex and specialised contexts – functioning with complete autonomy and a right of decision – taking final responsibility for the definition of collective outcomes

PROCEDURE FOR UNIVERSITIES

- All universities <u>together</u> define *domain* specific (e.g. "communication studies") learning outcomes → "**Domain Specific Reference Framework**" (DSRF)

- NVAO (Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation) validates the descriptions → automatic recognition as qualification

- NVAO sends qualifications to Agency for QA in Education and Training (part of Ministry)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF DSRF

DSRF = generic but provides space for profiling by each university/university college:

- additional learning outcomes, compatible with the DSRF
- own approach to learning, teaching, assessment
- organisation of course modules
- design of course modules

→ A framework not a straitjacket!

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A LESSON LEARNED…

- Remember: 2 QF's (°2003 and °2009)
- A lot of work had already been done → each university has defined LO's for each discipline and each course unit/module [as the result of the Structural Decree; in the framework of the external quality assurance procedures;…]
- But.. outside a framework; based on different methodologies

DSRF PROCEDURE (1)

- Procedure coordinated by VLIR (Rectors Conference) & VLHORA (Flemish Board of University Colleges)

- Universities/University colleges that propose a similar programme → develop a set of 12-15 learning outcomes

- Each set of learning outcomes → has to be linked to generic level descriptors (level 6 or 7)

- In line with the Dublin descriptors and with the Flemish, Belgian and international regulations about access to a profession

- **Does not lead to common programmes or course units!**

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DSRF PROCEDURE (2)

Elements of the "Learning Outcomes File"
- Name of the Qualification
- Programme level and type
- Institutions offering the programme
- Relevant legislation
- Admission requirements
- Further study possibilities in the field
- Sources of information
- … **and of course the learning outcomes**

DSRF PROCEDURE (2)

- Phase 1: Introductory meeting
- Phase 2: Development of a proposal by a Task force
    - 1 person per institution per discipline (ownership!) + 1 "project guide" (Conny/Isabelle)
    - Consultation of colleagues inside HEI
    - Based on an agreed methodology (with elements of Tuning, EUA Bologna Handbook, Core2,…)
- Phase 3: Tuning the proposal by a consultation group
- Phase 4: The stakeholder check
    - The proposal is checked with stakeholder representatives for compliance with scientific & societal expectations and international standards
    - Stakeholders include students/recent graduates, field representatives, domain specific experts (academics), (former) members of evaluation committees,…
- Phase 5: Settling the framework
- Phase 6: Validation by NVAO

CONCLUSIONS

SOME CONCLUSIONS

- The procedure
  - is time consuming ($\sim$ money!)
  - requires input from different stakeholders
- But:
  - generates quality
  - assures ownership
  - guarantees broad support
  - creates a lot of **added value**
    - → At different levels

ADDED VALUE AT HE-SYSTEM LEVEL

- Stimulates auto-regulation of the field

- Creates transparency

- Enhances communication with students & employers

- Allows to detect similarities and differences between programmes

- Creates both stability and dynamism

- Offers a base for recognition of prior learning at programme level

- Offers a base for international recognition

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ADDED VALUE FOR THE UNIVERSITIES

- Creates ownership of curriculum development
- Offers a good basis for internal and external quality assurance
- Facilitates communication with external stakeholders
- Facilitates international cooperation (LO = basis of a common language)
- Allows for regulatory initiatives
- Creates profiling opportunities
- Puts the focus on the *real* implementation of LO-based education!

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POINTS OF DISCUSSION (IN ARMENIA?)

- Is there a danger for bureaucratisation?

- Is it worth the investment?

- Is there a danger for uniformity in the field?
  Do institutions still have the chance to profile themselves?

- Is it useful for the labour market and for students?

- Does it work for recognition purposes?

- How to cluster the disciplines?

- New programmes → 1 institution decides? Is this a sufficient basis?

- How to go from the programme to the course modules?
  - Is the whole more than the sum of the parts?
  - What can be done for course modules present in different programmes?

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Thank you !