RECOGNITION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Elpida Keravnou-Papailiou
Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, University of Cyprus
Chairperson, Cyprus Council for the Recognition of HE Qualifications (KYSATS)
Department of Computer Science, University of Cyprus, Kallipoleos 75, P.O. Box 20537,
Nicosia 1678, Cyprus
Email: elpida@ucy.ac.cy

ABSTRACT

The paper presents the experiences of the author, in her capacity as Coordinator for the application of the Bologna reforms at the University of Cyprus, a state institute, and currently the only university operating in Cyprus. The paper focuses on the conversion of the existing credit-point system of the university, based on contact hours, to ECTS credits, the ultimate objective being to achieve a fully-fledged student-centered learning-oriented education system. The initial steps towards the development of a quality management strategy at the university, and the establishment of an internal quality culture are also discussed, in the broader context of external quality assurance. The paper concludes with an exposition on degree recognition, drawing from the author's experiences, as the Chairperson of the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of HE Qualifications (KYSATS).

1. BOLOGNA REFORMS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

The University of Cyprus (UOC) is a very young university. It was established by law in 1989 and admitted its first students in September 1992. Presently it has a student population of about 4,500 students. UOC participates in the Socrates/Erasmus programme since 1998 and from the very beginning of its participation it adopted the ECTS as a credit transfer system. In the summer of 2003, the decision was taken by the university Senate to apply ECTS to all programmes of the university, and thus to use ECTS both as a credit transfer and as a credit accumulation system. UOC issues its Diploma Supplement from 2004 (only in English at present and free of charge) and as from September 2005, all its programmes will have converted to ECTS. Although it may be said that UOC has achieved a difficult goal in a relatively short period of time, it should be emphasized that the road to this target has been quite bumpy with a number of unforeseen difficulties, and there are still things to be done before it can be safely said that a proper learning-centered educational methodology is solidly, securely and comprehensively in place. One aim of this paper is to share the experience of

applying the Bologna reforms with outside colleagues, students and other stakeholders, who are either going through, or have gone through, the same motions at their institutes/countries or are planning to do so.

Given that UOC had adopted (a) a modular educational structure from the start, based on credits, albeit credits measuring contact hours and not student workload, and (b) three discrete cycles (Ptychio, Masters [Magister], Didaktoriko), plus an overall philosophy loosely based on learning goals, and advocating continuous assessment, the immediate expectation was that the conversion to ECTS credits and learning outcomes, would have been an easy goal to achieve. However, it turned out not to be so. Rules and regulations had to be appropriately transformed, a modular allocation of credits was not possible, since in the old system it was not so either, the application of the ECTS gave the opportunity to departments for a more detailed evaluation and revision of their programmes, resulting in changes over and above those required by the application of the ECTS, etc. Overall there was substantial skepticism as to the true benefits of the reforms, even from students, in spite of the fact that ECTS is a student-centered system, and fears that the reforms could adversely affect quality. There were also objections rooted on the belief that the advocated "learning outcomes" were directly geared towards the parochial needs of the workforce and nothing else. This led to conclusions that the primary aim of the Bologna reforms is to feed the workforce with cheap labour, thus diverting from the traditional mission of academic institutions which is to develop critically thinking scientists and intellectuals.

Below we analyze in more detail the difficulties/problems that aroused and explain how these were handled, what solutions were put forward, and what remains to be tackled.

UOC has a semester-based academic year. Each academic year (September – June) consists of two semesters, the Fall Semester (September – January) and the Spring Semester (February – June). The summer months (July – August) can be used for (preparatory) thesis work, or even, in some cases, for the taught part of a programme. All taught programmes of study at the university, i.e. all 1st (Ptychio) and 2nd (Masters), cycle programmes consist of modular chunks or teaching courses. In addition they can include dissertation work (Diploma or Master thesis) that is also treated in a modular way. Furthermore, the 3rd (Didaktoriko) cycle programmes include a taught component consisting of modular courses. Every programme module is assigned a number of credits (normally 3 or 4 credits in the old system whereby credits measured teaching or contact hours), and students "accumulate" these credits, only if they successfully pass a module, implicitly meaning that they have met the aim and objectives of the module. Thus, a philosophy of meeting (learning) goals and accumulating credits was always in existence at UOC, although it was never referred to, so explicitly, this way. Modules can have prerequisites, in terms of other modules preceding them in the

normal flow of the programme, and are evaluated on the basis of continuous assessment. Continuous assessment entails at least two different ways of assessing a module including a final written examination. Thus a student has the flexibility to plan his/her individual course of studies, accumulating credits as s/he goes along. Sometimes students are allowed to take a higher load of study than the normal, enabling them to follow at the same time a minor programme of studies (in the case of 1st cycle students), or in very exceptional cases to complete their programme in a shorter period than the normal period of study. 1st cycle programmes have a normal duration of 8 semesters, 2nd cycle programmes have a duration of 3 to 4 semesters and 3rd cycle programmes have a normal duration of 4 academic years, made up of at least one academic year of taught courses at postgraduate level and at least two academic years of pure research work. In addition doctoral students have to pass a comprehensive examination and to present a proposal for a doctoral thesis before embarking on their doctoral-research work. The earliest they may submit a doctoral thesis is 3 years from admission. A doctoral student possessing a Masters qualification may be exempted from the taught part of the programme. Students may be admitted on a 3rd cycle programme directly from their first cycle degree (Ptychio).

All 1st cycle programmes at UOC include 2 to 3 modules on a foreign language and 3 to 5 modules of free electives, i.e. courses that are not directly related to the subject matter of a student's programme. The free electives must be chosen from at least two different Schools. Thus, by definition, every 1st cycle programme includes modules from a number of departments.

During the first week of teaching of a module, the instructor is obliged to inform the students in writing of the aims and (learning) objectives of the module, to specify the syllabus, bibliography, and teaching methods, and to explain how the students will be evaluated and assessed. In addition, s/he may include any other pertinent information (office hours, teaching assistants, etc.) in the so called "module contract". The university has not adopted a specific format and layout for module contracts and as expected, there is large variability, ranging from a paragraph or two giving a short description of the module aims, to a few pages of rather detailed information on the module covering all the above aspects (learning goals, teaching and assessment methods).

Once the decision was taken in the summer of 2003 to apply ECTS throughout the study programmes of the university, both as a transfer and as an accumulation system, the first step was to convert the old system of credits to the new system of European credits measuring student workload for meeting explicitly defined learning outcomes. The education structure of the university was already in place for this basic reform since the three discrete cycles were in place and no

integrated/combined programmes were in operation.[1] Before converting to the new credit system, though, the various rules regulating programmes of study had to be examined and revised to be in accordance with these reforms. In particular, all the references to credits had to be revised, but other changes had to be introduced as well. The notion of credits is very basic in a modular education system and in the case of UOC it practically touched all aspects, from tuition fees, to student load, to the definition of full time study, to student exchanges, etc. The translation of study rules could not be done in one go. So it was done in two phases, starting with the rules defining hard constraints (e.g. one academic year consists of 60 ECTS credits, full-time study in one semester means 30 ECTS credits, etc.) and moving towards the softer constraints, drawing for their specification from the experiences accumulated in converting the various programmes (e.g. a 1st cycle programme Diploma thesis could have a workload ranging from 10 to 30 ECTS credits, etc.).

One particular difficulty faced was due to the fact that a modular distribution of credits amongst the components of a programme could not be enforced since in the old system a mixture of credits was used. Even if a department had used a modular assignment of credits for its own courses, still different departments used different assignments, e.g. most departments in sciences adopted 4 credits (in the old system) while departments in economics, humanities, etc, adopted 3 credits as their norm, and as already explained 1st cycle programmes by definition involve courses from other departments and in fact some 2nd cycle programmes do so as well. After in depth discussions it was decided that a modular distribution was not possible, since such an approach would have entailed drastic changes for all programmes. For example, choosing 6 as the number of ECTS credits for all 1st cycle courses would have meant that an existing 4-year programme with 4 credit courses, in the old system, would be coalesced to 3 years, requiring the shrinking of the requirements of the existing courses and the addition of a full year's new courses. Thus the only viable option was to go for a semi-modular approach whereby 5 ECTS credits is adopted for the language courses and the courses used exclusively as free electives. For the remaining courses a rough heuristic has been used for translating the old system of credits based on contact hours to the new system based on workload, namely for each contact hour a student is expected to put an additional two hours of work on his/her own. This gave a high level estimation and distribution of credits amongst the components of a programme but further fine-tuning was necessary in order to meet the basic ECTS constraints (60 credits per academic year and 30 credits per semester). In addition, the credits had to be further analyzed and justified at a lower level in terms of student workload at the

---

[1] For the first four years of offering postgraduate programmes, namely 1997-2001, the 2nd and 3rd cycles were in fact combined. This did cause problems, although it offered the flexibility to students to move between the different study routes and to acquire both a Masters and a PhD degree. The decision, however, was rightly taken to differentiate and make the two cycles discrete.

granularity of hours. The workload of courses involving students of just one department (even if the courses are offered by other departments), are the responsibility of the students' department (in agreement with the offering department). The workload of mixed-audience courses is a matter of negotiation between the offering department and the various other departments involved. In some cases this was not an easy matter, since there are limited resources and it is not possible to offer different versions of some course to each sub-audience of students. Furthermore, given the fact that the Fall Semester is somewhat shorter that the Spring Semester, in order to allow for some flexibility, it was decided that the overall load of a Fall Semester could be between 1 to 3 ECTS credits lower than that of the corresponding Spring Semester. This way it was made possible to satisfy all the relevant constraints.

However, this is just the beginning, although the translation of the study rules, the high level distribution and justification of credits amongst the components of the various programmes, and the instigation of rules for the transition of existing students from the old to the new system (in favour of the existing students as a guiding principle), constitutes a very important beginning, proving the saying that the beginning is halfway to the target. Two tasks of critical importance remain to be done. One has to do with the full explication of the learning outcomes, as well as the teaching and assessment methods, of the programme modules. As already said, this explication is already happening to a large extent. However, more uniformity is required and in order to abide fully to this central aspect of a learning-oriented approach, a module/course template (in electronic form and both in English and Greek) is currently under development for approval and gradual use. The other task is to demonstrate that the estimates of the required student workload, do in fact agree with reality. For this task we could use the iterative process proposed in the context of the Tuning project [4]. In addition, the level of each programme (1st, 2nd, or 3rd cycle) should be evaluated against the level descriptors adopted in the European Qualifications Framework (Dublin descriptors) [1], or other level descriptors proposed in the context of the EHEA (European Higher Education AREA), e.g. the Tuning project descriptors. So far the conversion of our programmes to ECTS has resulted in substantial self-awareness both about the specific programmes as well as our education system at large. In the case of one department the converted, and substantially revised, programme can not be immediately applied due to lack of resources. In other cases, as the application of the reforms unfolds and refines itself, more concrete evidence regarding the justification of additional resources can be assembled.

Any reforms, small or large, bring about reactions not least because their application requires additional effort and even additional resources that may not be readily available. All implicated parties (in this case, professors, students, administrators) should be convinced of the benefits accruing from the reforms in order to have the motivation to expend the necessary additional effort to bring

about these reforms. In the case of UOC and the application of the ECTS, it was necessary not to press too hard with a very rigid schedule. Obviously an initial plan of action and associated schedule was drafted, but many extensions to this schedule were subsequently done, so that everyone felt at relative ease to think through and assess the changes to be done. In addition there were several meetings, both general meetings with all interested parties, as well as more local meetings with individual departments or student representatives for direct exchanges and discussion of general matters as well as matters of particular concern to specific departments. More meetings are planned for the future as the application of the reforms unfolds in order to assess the situation and share experiences. Written material was also circulated discussing the Bologna reforms and the implications of their potential application at UOC. Written material is necessary but not sufficient. Direct exchanges are also necessary. In our case, through the various interactions, we attempted to pass the message that credits do not represent the importance or significance of courses. Credits measure student workload. A mandatory course, even if it has just 1 credit, it constitutes a significant part of the programme concerned, by virtue of its obligatory status. A student cannot graduate unless s/he satisfies the learning outcomes of all the mandatory courses of his/her programme. Other issues such as the ECTS and DS Labels, what these mean for an institute and what their acquisition entails were matters that were best approached through open discussion forums, where everyone had the opportunity to air their views.

The Bologna reforms aim to bring about comparability, compatibility and comprehensibility between the various HE systems in Europe[2], by enhancing transparency and defining points of convergence that constitute a shared reference context, e.g. duration of cycles, level indicators, credit-point semantics, etc. The shared understanding emanating from this "unification" of HE in Europe, undoubtedly promotes mutual trust, which is further enhanced and consolidated through the application of common and transparent criteria and procedures for internal and external quality assurance. This in turn can bring about the much wanted mutual recognition of degrees and periods of study. Once an institute is convinced that another institute's education standards regarding the admission and evaluation of students, the delivery of programmes and the awarding of degrees are comparable and compatible to its own education standards, then naturally there will be no obstacles in recognizing the other institute's teaching modules and qualifications. Here we are not referring to formal recognition stipulated by law and agreements of mutual recognition of HE qualifications between states, but to the real essence of recognition resting on mutual trust based on quality. Joint programmes, if widely used throughout Europe, are rightly considered the catalyst of the sought "unification", since through them the collaborating institutes appreciate each other's education standards, which in turn leads to the relevant quality enhancements.

---

[2] and overall to enhance the competitiveness of the European HE

6

Quality is therefore the essential ingredient for achieving mutual trust. This is why concerns, expressed at UOC and elsewhere, that the Bologna reforms not only are not enhancing, but in fact are adversely affecting, quality must be seriously analyzed and convincingly addressed. It is not adequate to say that this is not so. In fact one is to a certain extent justified to think along these lines. The direct linkage of HE with the advancement of economy (Lisbon objective of turning Europe into the most competitive knowledge-based economy by the turn of the decade) is one reason for this. Emphasizing the inclusion of transferable (work-market-based) skills in the learning outcomes, in addition to traditional academic learning outcomes based on knowledge acquisition and research training is another reason. Finally, the initial stipulation that the duration of a 1st cycle programme should be 3 years (for the sake of competitiveness and to enable students to enter the workforce quicker) even if this was subsequently relaxed to 3 or 4 years (although there are still ongoing debates about engineering programmes) has left a bitter taste in countries where 4 years is considered absolutely necessary in order to provide comprehensive education at the basic level. And the fact remains that most European countries have adopted by national law the "3+2+3" structure. At present there are no pressures on UOC to rethink the 4 year duration for its 1st cycle programmes (Ptychio). UOC is not really competing for the international market (at the 1st cycle) given that the language of instruction is Greek, not a widely spoken language in Europe or elsewhere. However, if the top Cypriot students decide to study abroad (mostly UK) and a key factor for this decision is the shorter duration of the corresponding programmes, then UOC (and the other Cypriot state universities) will be forced to consider the question "3 or 4 years for 1st cycle programmes". However other countries are maintaining the 4 years for the 1st cycle, especially in disciplines like engineering, and UK universities are adding more and more programmes of 4 years in duration. Again the fact remains that while at UOC a student will need 6 years to acquire a Masters degree, at many other European universities s/he can, or will, do so in 4 years.

2. DEVELOPING AN INTERNAL CULTURE FOR QUALITY

In parallel with the reforms underlying the application of the ECTS, UOC is considering the development of mechanisms for managing and assessing the quality of its research and educational programmes, based on its mission, thus gradually developing its internal quality culture. Quality management for the purpose of quality enhancement on a continuous basis is an integral aspect of the Bologna reforms and it should be more explicitly addressed as such.

About four years ago UOC went through EUA's institutional evaluation and last year it participated in the associated follow-up procedure with very encouraging results regarding the reforms it has introduced, emanating from the feedback of the initial evaluation. Previously, UOC had appointed three member committees of

external experts from three different universities located in at least two countries, to carry out departmental evaluations covering both programmes of study and research activities. The results of these evaluations were interesting and useful, albeit quite heterogeneous across departments in format, detail and overall exposition (since the experts were given rather general directions as to what was required of them). These evaluations aimed at enhancing self awareness (identify strengths and weaknesses, and assess opportunities and threats), with the purpose of self improvement; evaluations of this kind certainly represent some initial steps towards a fully fledged internal strategy for quality management. The plan is that both the EUA institutional evaluation and the departmental/programmatic evaluations, the latter with a more well-defined aim, objectives and overall requirements, will be repeated at regular intervals.[3] Other self-evaluation initiatives of UOC include a study on the research productivity and visibility/impact of the departments of the university. In addition, the Research Committee of UOC has been discussing the broader matter of an internal policy of quality management in research and is preparing a proposal based on internationally accepted quality indicators [5].

The institution of "individual research activity support" that UOC has adopted from the start is important to be sustained, as it contributes substantially towards the scientific development of academic staff on a continuous basis. This institution primarily supports the mobility of researchers by enabling them to attend conferences and other scientific meetings and to keep in touch with external collaborators. In general, the continuous professional development of the staff of an organization represents an internal part of the organization's quality management strategy.

Regarding teaching, the establishment of a Centre for Teaching and Learning is an important development in the context of UOC's strategy for quality management of its educational programmes, and the EUA evaluation team is commenting UOC for this development in their follow-up report. The same committee though is critical of the fact that the use of the student evaluation questionnaire for courses and teaching is optional for the academic staff of the university, pointing out that student feedback for course and teaching improvement is an established practice.

The Graduate Studies Committee of UOC has recently submitted a proposal about quality assurance criteria for doctoral theses. In parallel, it is engaged in discussion about the broader matter of quality management of graduate programmes, in connection with general criteria for deciding the student intake to graduate programmes, and the establishment of a Graduate School. A corresponding quality management strategy of undergraduate programmes should also be specified.

---

[3] If institutional evaluation is included in the remit of a National QA Agency, repeating such evaluation in the context of internal quality management will be unnecessary.

Regarding administrative infrastructure, an ongoing project on total quality management of the administrative services of the university should form the central aspect of a future quality management strategy of the administrative services of the university. In addition, the much discussed reform plan of the administrative services that aims to promote quality by offering incentives at the workplace falls under this broader quality management, in the context of which the professional development of administrative staff on a systematic basis should also be addressed.

The internal quality management mechanisms of an organization, if adequate, could guarantee a positive outcome for the external quality evaluations. At a high level of abstraction both the provision of education programmes and the conducting of research can be viewed as interactive processes in the form "input – processing – output" where the input is students/resources and output is achieved learning/research results/impact on society/etc. Thus internal quality management amounts to managing the quality of such interactive processes, primarily from the perspective of their output, given the input. The output of a complex process like the provision of high level learning is multidimensional and for any particular institute the desirable output should be definable through its mission. At the end of the day, to be able to manage or assess quality (and hence to enhance quality) it is necessary to maintain an up to date, comprehensive data bank, collecting all relevant data on the basis of which the relevant assessments/conclusions/feedback may be drawn.

3. EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

During the Berlin Ministerial Conference (September, 2003), the Ministers responsible for HE agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include: (a) a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved, (b) evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results, (c) a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, and (d) international participation, cooperation and networking. In this context, the Ministers called upon ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop by the next Ministerial Conference in Bergen (May, 2005) an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies.

At the Bergen Conference the Ministers observed that although much has been done over the past two years in quality assurance and almost all participating countries in the Bologna process have made provision for a quality assurance system based on the Berlin criteria, there is still progress to be made [3]. HE

institutes are urged to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance. Furthermore, the Ministers adopted the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA as proposed by ENQA, in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB [2], on the basis of the Berlin Conference directive. The principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review is welcomed and the practicalities of the implementation will be further developed by ENQA, again in cooperation with the other three associations. The importance of cooperation between nationally recognized agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions is underlined. At the next Ministerial Conference in London (2007) the Ministers will examine in particular the progress in the introduction of proposed models for peer review in quality assurance agencies.

In Cyprus the only quality assurance agency in operation is the Council for Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (SEKAP) whose scope of activities covers only programmatic evaluation (with repeatedly encapsulated elements of institutional evaluation) for the education programmes of private schools of tertiary education. The Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture is presently discussing the establishment of a National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation based on the standards and procedures agreed upon by the Bologna signatory countries, and relevant legislation is being drafted. This Agency is proposed to carry out institutional and programmatic evaluation for all universities operating in Cyprus, both state and private universities. Moreover, the possibility of this Agency covering the external evaluation of non-university tertiary education institutes (again both private and public), as well as the recognition of HE qualifications, is being contemplated, whereby the functions of SEKAP and KYSATS, could be absorbed by this new body. It should be said that the initial proposal for the establishment of a National QA Agency for Cyprus was sent to the Ministry by UOC. The university fully supports this development as it endorses that there should be complete transparency where matters of quality are concerned and all institutes of HE should be accountable for their activities and quality provisions to the country in which they operate.

4. RECOGNITION OF DEGREES

Assuming that the Bologna process will succeed in bringing about the "unification" of the educational systems in Europe, thus creating a European HE area, still for many years to come there will be many qualifications obtained through the old systems that would need to be understood and recognized. The task of the competent national bodies in charge of the recognition of degrees, such as KYSATS in Cyprus, will be greatly facilitated with the establishment of a European Qualifications Framework as a kind of meta-framework overarching the

specific National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) that also need to be elaborated. Cyprus does not have such a framework at present. NQFs should encompass, not only the new degrees emanating from the reformed educational systems, but also the old qualifications based on the old systems, so that these can also be interpreted in terms of levels, learning outcomes and competencies, etc.

At the Berlin Ministerial Conference, a dedicated working group chaired by the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, was set up to co-ordinate the work on developing an overarching framework on qualifications for the EHEA based on national frameworks. The purpose of this work was not to streamline the systems operated by different nations, but rather to establish common reference points, thereby enhancing the compatibility of the various frameworks. The European Qualifications Framework has now been developed [1] and has been adopted by the Ministers at their last conference in Bergen. The overarching (or meta-level) framework for qualifications for the EHEA comprises three cycles (including the possibility of shorter higher education linked to the 1st cycle), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competencies (namely the Dublin descriptors), and credit ranges in the 1st and 2nd cycles. The Ministers also committed themselves to elaborate the corresponding national frameworks for qualifications compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2010, and to show progress in this respect by 2007.

As already mentioned the development of an overarching framework for qualifications for the EHEA and the subsequent elaboration of the national qualifications framework in direct compatibility with the overarching framework is expected to promote mutual understanding of national qualifications and thus to facilitate mutual recognition. With these developments the task of the national competent bodies for the recognition of qualifications will be facilitated. National frameworks can include other qualifications apart from those corresponding to the three cycles advocated in the Bologna process, both shorter cycles below the 1st cycle as well as qualifications in-between cycles, e.g. a qualification between a 1st and a 2nd cycle degree. In addition national frameworks can include vocational education and training, and qualifications for lifelong learning in general. The important thing is for these (national) qualifications to be assigned clear European-based semantics, both quantitatively in terms of duration and (ECTS) credits, as well as qualitatively in terms of generic descriptors defining levels, learning outcomes and competencies. Access routes to and from the various qualifications should also be indicated. All this information will enable one to draw loose correspondences, not necessarily with respect to the three basic cycles adopted by everyone, but with respect to the additional shorter and in between cycles, across national structures. This way, qualifications can be understood, and interpreted, in a pan-European fashion. A Diploma Supplement is already giving some of this information since it includes a general description of the HE system of the country

concerned. The establishment of a National Qualifications Framework will provide this information in a more uniform, comprehensive and explicit way.

Qualifications that existed in the old systems, but no longer exist under the reformed systems, should still be included in the NQFs since for many years to come many people will be holders of such qualifications and they should be able to make use of them. Thus extinct qualifications should be positioned in the maps of national qualifications, and assigned their particular semantics using the agreed reference points. For example, if an old combined qualification, referred to as a Masters degree, does not satisfy the generic level descriptors associated with 2nd cycle degrees (in the EQF), it can not be recognized as such under the new order of things. The extinct qualifications would probably concern mainly the old integrated/combined cycles. These qualifications are especially difficult to interpret and in fact these difficulties must have contributed towards the decision to establish the EHEA in the first place. There is large variability in combined degrees which involve different durations, 4, 5, or even more years, and very uncertain qualitative semantics.

KYSATS tries to interpret such combined degrees, coming from many different countries, within the context of the law underlying its function, and by drawing information from the developments in the context of the Bologna reforms. KYSATS can give two types of recognition: (a) equivalence that has to do with levels, looking into admission and assessment requirements and duration of programmes, and (b) correspondence that additionally to equivalence requires the inspection of the content of the programme studied. Correspondence is therefore much stricter than equivalence. All these notions are bound to be clarified with the elaboration of NQFs compatible with the overarching EQF, and thus the elaboration of NQFs is a much wanted development.

Bibliography

[1] Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*, Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, February 2005.

[2] Christian Thune (on behalf of ENQA). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area,* Helsinki, Finland 2005 (http://www.enqa.net/bologna.lasso).

[3] *Bologna Process Stocktaking*, Report from a working group appointed by the BFUG to the Conference of European Ministers responsible for HE, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005.

[4] Gonzalez J. and Wagenaar R. (eds.), *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe: Final Report Phase One*, 2003.

[5] Tavenas F., *Quality Assurance: A Reference System for Indicators and Evaluation Procedures*, EUA Publications, 2004.