

Excerpt from Duklas, J., Maki, K., Pesaro, J., Brady, J. (June, 2014). ARUCC PCCAT Transcript and Transfer Credit Nomenclature Study: an Examination of Current Practices at Canadian Postsecondary Organizations. Calgary, Alberta: Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) & Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admissions and Transfer (PCCAT).

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System Overview

The Bologna Process is at the core of the EU's efforts to enhance compatibility and coherence of participating nations' academic qualifications. The Bologna Process has been able to bring about system-wide change through the "implementation of trust-building tools aimed at increasing transparency across national jurisdictions and at bringing about convergency of systems" (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], 2012, p. 9). Key Bologna structures, resources and tools that have been developed to achieve a high level of comparability, compatibility and exchange among higher education systems in Europe include: the three-cycle system and the overarching European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (EHEAQF), which aligns with the existing European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF); the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); the Diploma Supplement; and quality assurance structures (2012, p. 9). Given their direct relevance to transcription and transfer credit nomenclature, the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement are described below. Further details on the broader European education system are contained in Appendix G.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

The ECTS is a "tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver study programmes and award higher education qualifications" (European Union, 2014d). Typically used in conjunction with outcomes-based qualification frameworks, the ECTS supports transparency and recognition in the assessment of qualifications. "The ECTS allows students to accumulate the credits they earn...in a transparent and comparable way.... [and] it facilitates the transfer of learning experiences between different institutions" (European Union, 2014b, p. 3). Three key features of the ECTS are the provision for credits to be awarded based on learning achieved in non-higher education contexts; that ECTS should support credit accumulation, not just credit transfer; and that the system include transfer credit ranges for qualifications at the bachelor and master's level (EACEA, 2012, p. 30).

The ECTS functions as a web-based tool, using course catalogues, detailed program descriptions, and course descriptions that include learning outcomes (expressed as what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do) and the workload (expressed as 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 for an academic year, and one credit generally corresponds to 25-30 hours of work" (European Union, 2014d).

Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement is typically used in parallel with the ECTS. It provides a "standardised description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by the holder of a higher education diploma" (European Union, 2014b, p. 3). The Diploma Supplement is produced by higher education institutions and is awarded free of charge in a major European language, on

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completion of a credential, according to standards agreed to by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO (European Union, 2014e). Every higher education institution taking part in the new *Erasmus+* education, training, and youth program has agreed to issue the Diploma Supplement in conjunction with its higher education diploma (European Union, 2014b). The Diploma Supplement has eight required sections, as illustrated in Table 3. The outline is accompanied by extensive explanatory notes about the information to be included, as well as sections on principles, guidelines and a comprehensive glossary of terms used in the Diploma Supplement (European Commission, 2002-2014). The Europass website provides examples of the Diploma Supplement for a range of EHEA member countries (European Union, 2014f).

Table 1: Outline Structure for the Diploma Supplement

Supplement Category	Supplement Component
Student information	Family name Given name Date of birth (day/month/year) Student identification number (if available)
Qualification type	Name of qualification Title conferred (if applicable and in original language) Main field of study for qualification Name and status of awarding institution (in original language) Name of institution administering qualification if different from awarding institution (in original language) Language of instruction/examination
Qualification level	Level of qualification Official length of program Access requirements
Contents and results gained	Mode of study Program requirements Program details (e.g., modules or units studied) Individual grades/marks/credits obtained from transcript Grading scheme and, if available, grade distribution Overall classification of qualification (in original language)
Qualification function	Access to further study Professional status (if applicable)
Additional information	Additional information (if relevant) Further information sources
Certification of supplement	Date Signature Capacity Official stamp or seal
National higher education system information	
Note	Where information isn't provided, a rationale is needed.

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Source: http://www.ehu.lt/files/Diploma%20Supplement_EN.pdf, retrieved March 1, 2014.

To encourage and monitor adoption of and compliance with these tools, the European Commission has a certification-type process that awards 'labels' to higher education institutions that demonstrate they are implementing the ECTS and/or the Diploma Supplement correctly. Through the labelling process, important issues related to differences in the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks, use of learning outcomes, and in the measurement of student workload have emerged. An expert working group has been assembled to address these issues and the outcomes of their work will be presented in the new ECTS User Guide, anticipated in 2015 (European Union, 2014b). Institutions value the labelling process because it "certifies a level of transparency and state of progress that strongly support[s] the internationalization of curricula" (p. 9).

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Appendix G: International Research

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System Overview

While each country in the European Union (EU) is responsible for its own education and training systems, policy directions are established by the European Commission to address issues of common concern, including skills deficits in the workforce and global competition. In Education and Training 2020, the European Union (European Union, 2014a) has defined its framework for education and training, with member states agreeing to the following four objectives to address these challenges by 2020: “making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship; and enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training” (p. 1).

The Bologna Process is at the core of the EU’s efforts to enhance compatibility and coherence of participating nations’ academic qualifications in order to achieve the above objectives. In the 15 years since its inception, the Bologna Process has come to be recognized internationally as a model of multinational cooperation to enhance quality, transparency, and mobility for learners in the higher education system in Europe, and on a global scale, to support the participating nations’ capacity to compete and succeed. A key outcome of the Bologna Process has been the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), launched in 2010, with 28 member states and 47 countries. (European Union, 2014b). “The EHEA was meant to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe” (European Higher Education Area [EHEA], 2010). The number and type of institutions varies by country, but typically includes a mix of publicly and privately funded institutions, both academically and professionally oriented (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], 2012, p. 22). There is also substantial variation in the size of the student population among the 47 member countries, with students from the following five countries making up more than 50% of total EHEA student numbers: Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Germany, and the United Kingdom (2012, p. 19).

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Qualifications Frameworks

While the Bologna Declaration initially called for the adoption of a two-cycle system based on undergraduate and graduate qualifications, the system was adapted at the 2003 Berlin conference to include studies at the doctoral level as the third cycle. Subsequent conferences defined expectations for completion of a qualification at one level to provide access to qualifications at the next level (i.e., completion of a first-cycle degree should give access to a second-cycle degree), and identified the need to include pre-first cycle qualifications (2012, pp. 31-36). In *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*, the Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks (2005) recommended the adoption of a three-cycle Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area, and that “the Dublin Descriptors be adopted as the cycle descriptors for the framework” (p. 101).¹ Further, guidelines were proposed for the range of credits typically associated with completion of each cycle and the criteria and procedures through which nations could assess the compatibility of higher education frameworks with the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (EHEAQF) (pp. 102-103).

In parallel to the development of the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework, the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) was adopted by the European Union in 2008 to encompass all education and training qualifications in Europe, including those aligned with the Bologna Framework. The EQF is a learning outcomes-based framework with eight levels, ranging from one (basic) to eight (advanced), describing what learners know, understand and are able to do. The EQF is inclusive of all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional, and vocational learning (European Union, 2014c). “While the EQF directly incorporates the cycle descriptors of the Bologna Framework, it does have its own separate level descriptors” (European Higher Education Area, 2008, p. 2).

The EQF provides a common reference framework for European higher education institutions to compare national qualifications systems. Through the “Compare Qualifications Frameworks” feature on the EQF portal, participating countries are able to compare national qualifications frameworks and levels along a set of 10 benchmark criteria and procedures that have been agreed to by the EQF advisory group (European Union, 2010). Comparison results are displayed in terms of how the qualifications levels of the selected country relate to the eight reference levels of the EQF in terms of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills, and competences (European Union, 2013).

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) work together to encourage cooperation among individual countries’ quality assurance agencies in meeting the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). The overarching objective is to “create an overall quality culture rather

¹ The term “Dublin Descriptors” was coined in March 2004 after a meeting in which it was agreed to adopt the terms to describe the characteristics of the cycles’ awards all of which, along with the Diploma Supplement, emerged as part of the Bologna process (European University Association, 2004).

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than a tick-box procedure” (European Union, 2014g, p. 9). The internal and external advantages of an enhanced focus on quality assurance is articulated by the EU’s Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, as follows:

Quality assurance is the basis for building trust in our education systems and we need to make greater use of its potential as a catalyst to modernise our universities and vocational education colleges. Our aim is to drive up standards in a way that encourages diversity and employability rather than uniformity (European Union, 2014h, p. 1).

The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were developed to respect the principles of institutional autonomy and national variations in responsibility and authority for quality assurance. Principles of the ESG stress that quality assurance should focus on the following:

[T]he interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education; the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities; [and] the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives” (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], 2012, p. 63).

Data and Reporting

Key achievements in implementation of the Bologna Process are reported in *The European Higher Education Area in 2012: Bologna Process Implementation Report* (EACEA, 2012). Despite acknowledged challenges in standardized data collection across all 47 countries of the EHEA, the report provides extensive statistical data, explanatory notes, and scorecard indicators across a range of areas including: student mobility; social and economic data on student life; outcomes and employability; and quality assurance. The report also includes a comprehensive glossary and methodological notes.