



# DECLARATION

Recommendations for the implementation of competence-based education and the matching of competences between higher education and the work field



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## 1/ POLICY LEVEL



The recommendations presented in this document are an extract from the declaration that has been developed within the Tempus project **"COMPETENCE - Matching competences in higher education and economy: From competence catalogue to strategy and curriculum development."**

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This project is financed by the Tempus program of the European Commission, and it has been implemented from January 2009 to January 2012.

The recommendations of this Consortium are divided into 3 different levels: **policy, institution and study programme. These "levels" strongly influence each other.** Decision-making at the higher level will certainly strongly influence the levels below. However, we argue that just as when introducing major reforms and quality management, **a top-down and bottom-up approach should be applied here simultaneously.** Sometimes the local situation will determine to which level the challenges and recommendations belong. Here below is an overview of the challenges discovered during this project and in colour, the appropriate recommendations that have been included.

## 1/ POLICY LEVEL

With policy makers we mean the national (or regional) policy makers in the area of education and economy (e.g. national and regional ministers, members of parliament), national quality assurance agencies and offices (accreditation agencies), national employment organisations, etc.

The four WB countries that are involved in this project have signed the Bologna Declaration. At the moment the legislation to implement all aspects of this declaration is very different in each of the four countries (stocktaking report). In some countries there is no requirement for implementation. In those in which it exists, the implementation is lacking. The development of the National Qualification Framework (concretisation of the EQF for each country) is in different stages of development and implementation depending on the country.

Considering this status quo, we have identified the main issues and have offered our specific recommendations to each one of them, as presented below.

## 1/ POLICY LEVEL

## 1 Better understanding of the Bologna process

In some countries there is a lack of awareness about the importance of the competence-based approach in education.

Encourage the decision makers to **take steps toward a better understanding of the effects of the Bologna Declaration**, e.g. competence-based teaching and learning. This can be done by organising trainings and information campaigns.

## 2 Accreditation system

In some of the WB countries a rigid accreditation system exists: Every change in the curriculum leads to changes in the accreditation documentation and requires the reaccreditation of the study programme. This makes the process of reform extremely slow. Flexibility of the study programmes, also a very important issue in EHEA, is also difficult in WB countries.

Introduce a more **flexible accreditation process**, which should allow more creativity and flexibility in designing and adapting the study programmes.

As a first step we propose that smaller changes in the curricula to be allowed without requiring the reaccreditation of the study programmes. In the future, reaccreditation has to be done after 4 or 6 years so that all study programmes can adapt themselves to the criteria of the Bologna Declaration.

## 3 Learning outcomes

At the moment there is no requirement to describe the learning outcomes of the study programme in the accreditation process. The different stages in the accreditation system (external evaluation and self-evaluation) do not include criteria for competence-based education.

This would be an enormous support for introducing the competence-based approach at all university levels. The risk, however, that competences are only formally included in the accreditation processes can be avoided by planning follow-up activities and assessments (for example, by regularly monitoring the implementation of the competence-based approach by an external panel or the accreditation agency). It will become necessary that the national accreditation agencies become members of EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - [www.eqar.eu](http://www.eqar.eu)) and introduce the standards and guidelines for accreditation in the EHEA. ([www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/050221\\_ENQA\\_report.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/050221_ENQA_report.pdf))

## 1/ POLICY LEVEL 2/ INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

## 2/ INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

### 4 ECTS description files / Diploma supplement

It will be beneficial to include and define learning outcomes in the **ECTS description files and in the diploma supplement** to convince the universities to deal with them in a systematic way.

**Include the learning outcomes in the ECTS description files** so that prospective students have the opportunity to find out in advance which competences they will acquire in all course units.

**Include the acquired competences by describing the learning outcomes in the diploma supplement as well** (not the list of expected competences to be acquired during the study programme, but the list of the actual acquired competences by each student separately). This also helps the employers and HE institutions to have a clear picture about the profile of the student or the recent graduate.

### 2/ INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

The management of the universities and the faculties has a great responsibility to further develop the cooperation with the work field and to implement the competence-based education. The COC in cooperation with the quality office will play an important role in implementing these items. The chambers of commerce and other umbrella organisations of employers should hereby assist the universities. Competence-based training, as a strategic aim of the university, should receive a high level of importance. It should be approved by the senate and ideally be part of the university's mission and vision statement. This strategy must also take care to build on a systematic link between the HE institutes and the labour market. Entrepreneurial universities must provide the real answer to the future needs of the region. The implementation of this strategy should respect the **combination of a top-down and a bottom-up approach**.

At this level we offer specific recommendations to the following issues:

#### 1 Lack of awareness

There is a lack of **awareness** in the fields related to this project (learning outcomes, competence-based learning, student-centred learning). At the moment the management (university, faculty, staff members and students) is **not familiar** with the relevant fields mentioned.

**Organise trainings and information campaigns for awareness-raising** before starting the implementation of this reform. Therefore the training materials developed in this project can be used and are available at [www.link-competences.org](http://www.link-competences.org). This is the responsibility of the university and/or faculty management.

### 2 Training

Implementing competence-based education is not possible without **training and coaching** of the different target groups (e.g. management, staff and students).

Coaching and training is an important task of the COCs. The COC should be a central service at the level of the rectorate and have a close link with the quality office.

### 3 Employability (Institutional level)

There is a need for a more efficient and systematic feedback system from the **work field** of the alumni to the universities. In this project a lot of effort was invested in contacting and obtaining feedback from the work field.

**Develop and strengthen relations between universities, faculties, study programmes and employers.**

This can be achieved via, e.g., internships, students' master theses, job fairs, guest professorships, applied research and collecting systematic feedback from the employers. It is vital to establish and maintain both contacts with employers and with alumni, via, e.g., establishing a database of employers and alumni and organizing activities for alumni (e.g. postgraduate courses).

### 4 Motivation of staff

The **motivation** of staff is essential when implementing new learning approaches. We learned in this project that many staff members are not motivated because they fear the additional workload and the increase of the transparency of the teaching process. It is difficult to describe and implement competence-based curricula. How can we motivate the staff members to use a competence-based approach?

Start implementing the new processes with the most motivated staff members and disseminate examples of good practice.

Describe each course unit with the specific content, learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment methodology always related to concrete competences. To this end we can use also the ECTS description files as starting points (Figure 1).

In our opinion the legislation and the support of the management is fundamental. Perhaps in some WB countries the status and the job profile of university staff members need adaptation.

## 5 Coordination of the long process

As we mentioned before, introducing a competence-based educational approach is a long and complex process requiring motivation and involvement of **the whole team**. How can we properly manage this long, complex process?

Introduce the competence-based educational approach successfully by **planning carefully and by systematically involving the whole teaching team**. As mentioned before, coaching and training can be done by the COC. This process should be directed by the coordinator of the study programme. Thus we have internal leadership and external coaching. **Good coordination is essential in order for the process to succeed!**

## 3/ STUDY PROGRAMME LEVEL

On the study programme level the most important stakeholders in developing the process of cooperation with the work field and implementing competence-based learning are the coordinator of the study programme, the teaching staff, the students, the alumni and all people from the relevant work fields, all of whom work together with the study programme.

We will specifically address the following issues, which include our recommendations:

## 1 Common understanding of the Bologna process

Different staff members interpret the entire **Bologna process** differently, which causes difficulties in implementing processes like competence-based education. Thus it will be a challenge to have a common understanding of all team members of the study programme (as well as for policy makers and the university management).

Organise training sessions (COC) and team meetings to reach a clear vision shared by all team members.

## 2 Employability (Study programme level) – Requires involvement of the whole study programme team

All staff members of the study programme need to have a clear picture about the **employability** and the requirements of the work field for graduates (i.e. profiles). We noticed that this picture is often missing.

Introduce a **system for continuous evaluation of the employability of the graduates in all study programmes**. The teaching teams and the management at the study programme level should have a joint vision of continuous contact and cooperation with the stakeholders in the professional fields of their graduates.

This can be achieved, among other ways, through the following activities: company visits, industrial tourism, work placement advising, and thesis and/or dissertation advising, as well as inviting people from the work field to assess final bachelor's or master's projects, or to serve as guest professors, on panel discussions and at job fairs. Of course, work place learning and (applied) research activities can be added in the future.

Establishing close contacts with the work field of alumni should be considered as a **basic task** of all teaching staff members.

## 3 Generic competences

The **generic competences** are very important in competence-based learning as well as for the career development of graduates (this is an important conclusion from our questionnaires as reported by the employers). Attention to this concern is important at all 3 indicated levels. During this project we learned that a systematic way to integrate generic competences into the curriculum is missing. It is left to the individual awareness of the professors. There is a lack of general vision about the importance of generic competences and a lack of knowledge about their successful integration into different course units. The challenge is to integrate the generic competences into the study programmes properly. We learned that teaching generic competences by organising specialized course units in this area is a mistake. It is better to teach the **generic competences** throughout the entire teaching process, making use of the authentic situations connected to the specific professions of the graduates.

Introduce a systematic approach to integrate generic competences into the curriculum. Some possible instruments that can be used for that purpose (e.g. competence matrix) have been developed within this project ([www.link-competences.org](http://www.link-competences.org)).

Learn and assess generic competences (team work, creativity, critical reflection, etc.) by integrating them in several existing course units rather than teaching them in separate course units.

### 3/ STUDY PROGRAMME LEVEL

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#### 4 Challenge of the assessment of competences

Teaching staff and students are used to the classical way of evaluation and exams. It is important to strengthen the evaluation and **assessment** of competences of students in order to have a more competence-based learning approach. But how do we evaluate competences, especially the generic ones, in a systematic way?

Steering the entire learning process by assessing students is a powerful tool for introducing competence-centred learning. **Competence-based assessment should also be integrated in the evaluation activities.** *The evaluation process should consist of several different evaluation methods and activities.* The assessment should be planned and described before the teaching starts. The ECTS description files can serve as a contract with the students. The ECTS description file is an important tool used to transfer and accumulate credits. In this file the content, the learning outcomes, the learning and evaluation activities must be clearly described. It is also a necessary condition for obtaining the ECTS quality label.

#### 5 Tools

For the implementation of the competence-based educational approach, staff members have to be trained in the use of adequate **tools**. One should start with very simple tools at the beginning and they should evolve into more sophisticated ones as the process progresses.

**Develop tools to help the teaching staff to manage the competence-related information.** The toolkit developed within this project can be used

([www.link-competences.org](http://www.link-competences.org)).

The improvement and adaptation of the tools is recommended after receiving feedback from the users.

#### 6 Small steps

The introduction of competence-based learning is a long process.

Please take small steps in order to reach the goal.

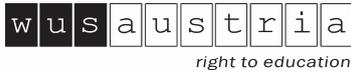
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