



# Learning outcomes based Higher education The Flemish Community experience

ASEM Seminar  
Berlin  
15/16 April 2010

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HIGHER EDUCATION



## Introduction

- State of development of the National Framework for Higher Education
- Learning outcomes in relation to the National Qualification Framework (NQF)
- NQF - SWOT- analysis
- The DSD Project “Description of the Discipline specific Subject Descriptors”
- Features of a DSD
- Procedure
- Added Value and uncertainties

# European context

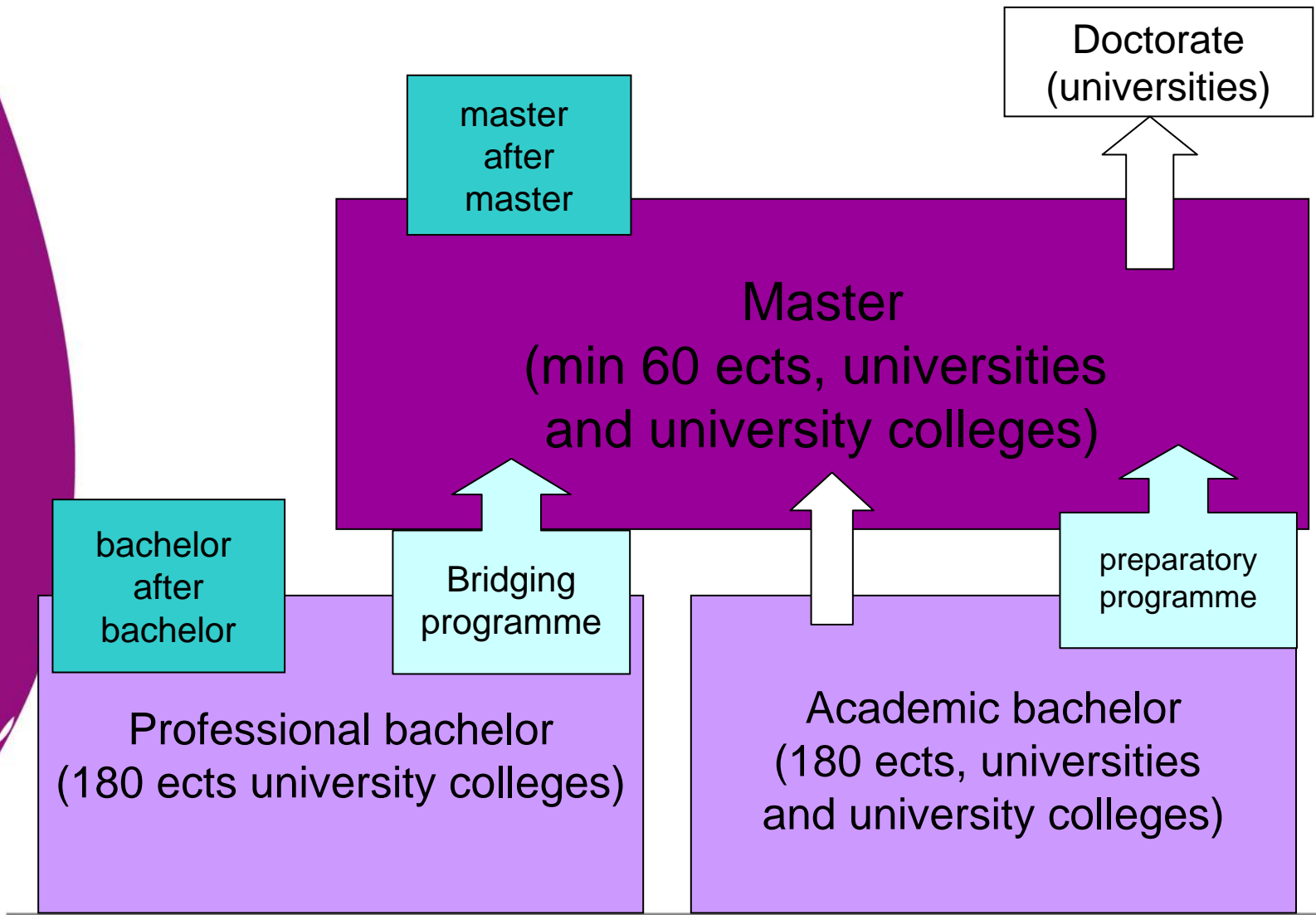
- Bologna process:
  - A learning outcome oriented curriculum reform
  - A Qualification framework for Higher education: Bergen 2005
  - Dublin descriptors
- European Qualification Framework for Life Long Learning

# Higher Education in Flanders

- In Belgium, the three communities hold the authority and responsibility for education (including university research)
- In 2003, the Flemish Community issued a decree to implement the Bologna declaration and to introduce the bachelor –master structure.

# General framework

- Associate degrees / short cycle degrees: 90-120 ECTS-ranges
- Bachelor degrees: 180 ECTS
- Master degrees: 60-120-180-240 ECTS
- PhD degrees 4 years research
  
- Binary system:
  - universities and university colleges;
  - professional oriented bachelor degree courses
  - academic oriented bachelor and master degree programmes
  
- Flexible learning paths
- Output based funding



# The institutions of Higher education An overview

- 6 universities and 22 “university colleges”
  - 3 public and 3 private universities
  - 8 public and 14 private university colleges
  - Short cycle degrees are organised in separate institutions.
- Staff:
  - Academic and research staff: 19.100
    - 12.00 in the universities
    - 7.100 in the university colleges
  - Administrative and technical staff: 8.500
    - 6.500 in the universities
    - 2.000 in the university colleges
- Students registered in 2008-2009: 180.000
  - 70.000 in the universities
  - 110.000 in the university colleges
  - Participation rate (short cycle degrees excluded)  
57,8% of the 18 years old population.

# Quality Assurance System

- Evaluation of programmes not of institutions
- Internal QA
  - Self-evaluation report
- External QA
  - Independent external peer review of a programme under the responsibility of the umbrella organisations (EQAR registered)
  - Site visit
  - Public report
- Accreditation
  - by the Binational Accreditation Agency NVAO (The Netherlands & Flanders)
  - YES or NO official decision based on the public report

# National Qualification Framework

- European qualification framework for HE  
Self-certification-process  
(compatibility with the EHEA framework)
- National qualifications framework for HE  
Link with the EU recommendation on EQF for LLL  
Flemish QF encompassing  
all levels and sectors of education  
Process of validation by accreditation agency

# National Qualification framework - Levels

NQS	EQF	Higher education qualifications
5	5	Associate degrees / short cycle degrees
6	6	Bachelor
7	7	Master
8	8	PhD degrees

# National Qualification Framework

## Learning outcomes

- Level descriptors
- Discipline specific learning outcomes (DSLO) or discipline specific subject descriptors
- Learning outcomes study programmes
- Learning outcomes of course modules

# National Qualification Framework

## Level descriptors

- Level descriptors for professional bachelors and academic bachelors en masters, PHD-degrees
- Based on the Dublin descriptors
- Accreditation frames
- Accreditation criteria en facets

# National Qualification Framework Implementation on institutional level

- Learning outcome curriculum reform
- The Flemish Bologna Promoters
- HEI – initiatives
- Project : Description of the ‘Discipline specific learning outcomes’

# NQF – SWOT-analyse

- Internal elements of the NQF:

Strengths  
Weaknesses

- External elements of the NQF:

Opportunities  
Threats

# National Qualification Framework Strengths

- The development of the NQF was an opportunity for all the stakeholders in HE to discuss the generic descriptors and reference points of a Bachelor and Master programme and to make clear what a Bachelor and Master stand for.
- The NQF is also the starting point for the further development of the learning outcomes for each specific HE qualification programme (and programme component).
- The NQF was also a very useful input for the development of the framework for the external quality assessment and the accreditation.
- The NQF contributes to the transparency of the Flemish binary HE system, specifically the professional oriented programmes and the academic oriented programmes. It confirmed the total integration of the professional oriented Bachelor degree programmes into the HE system.

# National Qualification Framework Weaknesses

- Due to the generic nature of the Dublin descriptors, the NQF is not very useful for employers and the labour market.
- The generic nature of the NQFs seems also to be of less use to facilitate the de facto recognition of foreign degrees & study programmes and the recognition of prior learning.
- The consolidation of the binary system is at the same time a strength but also a weakness; it seems that not all disciplines are or professional oriented or academic oriented, like the degree programmes in the study field fine arts and music and the degree programmes industrial engineering which are defined as academic oriented programmes.

# National Qualification Framework Opportunities

- EQF for LLL provides a good opportunity to develop the learning outcomes of the individual qualification by translating the generic descriptors into the discipline specific learning outcomes.
- The growing need to facilitate the recognition of degrees in the EHEA and the recognition of prior learning is part of the LLL dimension. LLL also provides the opportunity for the further development of the NQF.

# National Qualification Framework Threats

- The further development of the NQF leading to the harmonisation & standardisation of the content may leave too less room for diversity of the programme and may threaten the academic autonomy of the education providers. This could endanger the acceptance of the NQF.
- Bureaucratisation of the processes involved could endanger the innovation in HE.
- The low engagement of the employers is a threat.

# National Qualification Framework Discipline Specific Learning Outcomes

- each qualification will be linked to generic level descriptors
- comparable to the benchmark statements in the UK
- developed and proposed by the higher education institutions and their representative organisations
- validated by the accreditation agency
- automatically accepted in the National Qualification Framework

# National Qualification Framework Discipline Specific Learning Outcomes

Advantages of this method of working:

- Institutions remain responsible for the description
- Autonomy of each institution for the curriculum offered remains intact
- Strong international benchmarking is possible, crucial for the validation of the accreditation agency
- Accreditation frames for the study programmes known before the Self Evaluation Report

# NQF: Learning outcomes at the level of the study programmes

- Learning outcomes of study programmes at the institutional level
  - Autonomy of the institutions for the study programmes offered
  - Learning outcomes study programmes in line with the DSLO
  - The Council of Flemish University Colleges and the Flemish Interuniversity Council, acting as QAA, are responsible for evaluating the learning outcomes and specifications of each study programme with the level descriptors of the qualification framework.
  - The NVAO, the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders established by international treaty, is responsible for the accreditation based upon the outcomes of the external part of the QA procedure undertaken by the QAA mentioned above.

# The DSLO-project

- Implementation of the decree
- Initiative taken by the HE representative organisations
  - Joint initiative of the universities and university colleges
  - In close cooperation with the accreditation agency
  - In close contact with the government and the administration
  - Open to all relevant stakeholders:
    - \* Students
    - \* Labour market
- Scope: ca 650 programmes to be described between 2010 and 2017-2018
- 2010 : 2 pilots :
  - building technology & civil engineering
  - Communication management & communication science

# Definition of learning outcomes

- Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, to understand and to do after completion of a process of learning and of the way (s)he is able to demonstrate what was learned. (Decree 2009, introduction)

# Features of a DSLO

- Compliant to the Flemish National Qualification Framework
- Global
- Generic
- Prototypical (non exhaustive)
- Distinctive
- Assessable
- Dynamic
- Sustainable
- Base for international benchmarking

# The DSLO and the institution

- DSLO = generic
- DSLO provides space and autonomy for profiling by each institution
  - additional learning outcomes, compatible with the DSLO
  - own approach to learning and teaching
  - organisation of course modules
  - design of course modules
- A framework not a straitjacket

# Procedure

- 2010 - 2018
- Ownership: the programmes and the institutions
- Supported by
  - Steering committee
  - Experts from HEI
  - Specific staff
  - Guidelines
- Clusters of related programmes
- Timing in line with the quality assurance schedule

# Procedure step 1

- Task force: representatives of the programme  
all institutions offering the programme are represented
- Writing down a proposal for the DSLO
  - Common effort
  - Consensus
  - A common methodology (cf. guidelines)
  - Based on international sources
  - (if relevant) Conformity with specific regulations related to the profession
- Start of revision procedures
  - At last before new quality assurance site visits

## Procedure step 2

- Working group for a cluster of programmes
  - One representative for each programme
  - Tuning of the distinct DSLOs
  - Similarities and differences
- Panel of stakeholders
  - Check with students
  - With employers,
  - With an international panel

## Procedure step 3

- Proposal is submitted to the VLIR-VLHORA steering committee
- If approved the DSLO is sent to the accreditation agency for external validation
- After validation, the DSLO is registered in the national qualification framework

# Added value

- For the Higher Education in Flanders
  - Auto-regulation of the field
  - Transparency
  - Similarities and differences between programmes
  - Stability and dynamism
  - Basis for recognition of prior, formal, informal and non-formal learning at programme level
- For the H.E.I.
  - Ownership of curriculum development
  - As regards site visit panels
  - External stakeholders
  - Regulatory initiatives

# Added value in the Bologna process

- Vertically: structuring the successive steps in a field:
  - Bachelor - Master
  - Short degree - Bachelor
- Horizontally :
  - Specify the position of programmes in a field:  
e.g. Chemistry / Biochemistry / Chemical engineering
  - Determining the position of 'isolated or unique programmes':  
e.g. Wood technology
  - Providing a discipline specific interpretation of the level descriptors for professional and academic oriented programmes

# Uncertainties

- Is there a danger for standardisation?
- Do institutions still have the chance to profile themselves?
- Is the learning outcomes framework sufficient?  
e.g. aims such as leadership, orientation towards LLL
- How to work with multiple clustering?  
e.g. chemical, electronic, mechanical engineering, ...
- 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?



More information

<http://www.vlhora.be>

<http://www.vlir.be>

Thank you for your attention

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