Preamble

Aligning and Checking the Alignment of a Higher Education Study Programme's Learning Outcomes with a National Qualifications Framework:

A Guideline for a Guideline

IMPORTANT: This Guideline **is not** intended for <u>direct</u> implementation by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAs) adopting it as an operational manual. Rather it is intended to be a support document for those audiences to help them to prepare, or revise, their own bespoke guidelines in the first instance, and subsequently prepare or revise, detailed local policies and procedures.[1]

This document is based on an appreciation of quality management in higher education and a recognition that, whatever the legal or cultural context, a HEI has primary responsibility for its own qualifications and educational undertakings. Whilst legal requirements for external accreditation may arise which result in certain decisions being taken external to an institution, nevertheless institutions have the initial and persisting responsibility to ensure high standards according to a model of scholarship and quality management of their own determination. In contemporary European language, this is known as internal quality assurance or internal quality management.

Specifically the Guideline offers insights about developing (or adapting) a higher education study programme[2], typically a Bachelor Degree, a Master degree or Doctoral qualification and aligning its learning outcomes to the outcomes established in a National Qualifications Framework, or in the absence of a National Framework, the Bologna Higher Education

---

[1] ***This Guideline is an outcome of a work package, under the*** TEMPUS ALIGN ***transnational project between Armenia, Russia and Ukraine and their EU partners from Flanders - Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Poland and the UK, as well as members of Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). Align aims to share contemporary models of good practice around the development of study programme learning outcomes and their quality management in the context of a study programme approval process which maps the study programme to a qualifications framework, or in its absence to the Dublin Descriptors and any relevant national field standards taking into consideration sectoral standards of professional, regulatory or statutory bodies.***

[2] The Align project documentation uses the term 'academic programme (AP)'. This guideline uses the term 'study programme', to avoid confusion about differences between 'academic' and 'vocational' programmes both of which may be provided by a HEI.

Framework and the Dublin Descriptors.   This is a specific quality management process, and is one of many in an institution's quality infrastructure. It is normally an integral part of a study programme approval process.

Guideline Audience

This Guideline therefore has three primary audiences for whom different sections may have greater interest:

> ➢ the teacher in a Higher Education Institute (HEI)
> ➢ a HEI member of staff with specific responsibilities for quality management[3] (QM)
> ➢ a member of staff in an external quality agency (EQA), and external peer reviewers

Guideline Assumptions

The study programme approval process described does not dictate whether it is managed by a HEI's QM staff, or by an EQA, or whether the process is repeated, where an external process follows an internal one. Whichever model is adopted it typically culminates in a formal accreditation/approval.

The process described follows a contemporary standard international model, and is broken into seven steps. Step two (Section 8.2) is the focus of this Guideline and focuses on *the criteria* for aligning a study programme's intended learning outcomes with a National Framework (or the Bologna Framework and Dublin Descriptors) and how they might be expanded in *a set of questions* and used in a *self-evaluation* and subsequently in an external evaluation. The same criteria can guide the respective processes in order to minimise duplication, but sub-sets of criteria may have more relevance to differing audiences (e.g. internal and external).

Standard academic referencing has <u>not</u> been followed.

---

[3] The Align project document frequently uses the term 'quality assurance'. This Guideline uses the term 'quality management' to reflect a broader understanding of the area.

Contents

Appendices – In separate documents

1. Some key definitions

Term	Definition	Source
Alignment	The alignment process, for the purpose of this Guideline, is a process to determine whether an award made by a legitimate awarding body can be recognised to be at a designated Level in a National Framework of Qualifications (or in the absence of a Framework to the Dublin Descriptors for a First Cycle (e.g. Bachelor), Second Cycle (e.g. Master) or Third Cycle (e.g. Doctorate) qualification.	Align project
Study programme	A study programme of education and training refers to **any process** by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes programmes of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment. A study programme offers learners learning opportunities by which they may attain particular educational goals, by engaging in learning activities in a learning environment. The goals are expressed as the intended study programme learning outcome. A study programme is normally comprised of *modules or units*. A major degree programme (e.g. Bachelor, Master, Postgraduate Diploma) will normally require some kind of 'cohesion generating' process which integrates constituent modules, or units, so that the *minimum intended programme learning outcomes* are supported. The cohesion generating process should establish the epistemological and cultural identity of the study programme. It should also coordinate alignment of activities with the *minimum intended programme learning outcomes* and introduce learners to the broader community of practice to which they aspire. In the development of a new study programme the link between the intended learning outcomes and the created modules or units is established explicitly.	Glossary, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland Quality & Qualifications Ireland, *General Validation Handbook, Revised 2013*[4]

---

[4] http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/HET%20General_Programme_Validation_Manual%20Revised%202013.pdf

Learning Outcomes	There is a difference between **Learning Outcomes** and **Intended Learning Outcomes.**	
Intended Learning Outcomes	**Learning outcomes are:** a learner's knowledge, skill and competence change as a result of learning. (In principle, learning outcomes may describe the change in knowledge, skill or competence in an individual (differential form). They may also mean the cumulative result of all learning, including prior learning at the time of entry to the study programme (integral form). The outcomes expected at level N are those specified at that level <u>in addition to</u> the sum of those at lower levels.	
	Intended Learning Outcomes represent the educational Outcomes: goals. They describe the learning outcomes that the programme coordinator or teacher *intends* that learners will attain as a result of teaching and *learning activities*	
	Intended learning outcomes must always include the *minimum intended learning outcomes*.	
	Actual learning outcomes achieved by a learner should include at least the minimum intended learning outcomes; they will typically include additional outcomes.	
	Intended programme learning outcomes set out the outcomes expected across the entire study programme leading to an award. Thus an intended study programme learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, the skills they will have and be able to use.	
Qualifications Framework	A description of mutual relations between qualifications, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications for learners and the societies in which they live. In particular it describes the hierarchy of qualifications levels – each qualification is linked to one of these levels	

Descriptors	General statements indicating the learning outcomes relevant to a qualification at a given level, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.	
Level Descriptors	Learning outcomes employed as generic statements that describe the characteristics and context of learning.	
Module/unit	Modules and units are synonymous. They are small discrete portions of a study programme with their own specified learning outcomes which are assessable. Some countries specify rules for size of a module/unit which leads to differentiation between them.	

A more complete Glossary is in Appendix One.

2. Set of international sample documents to support the development of a learning outcomes approach

A detailed resource pack/bibliography is available in Appendix Ten. Here is a shorter list of documents which can be used to offer guidance for specific aspects of developing a study programme and using a transparent and verifiable approval process.

Quality Assurance – Quality Management
➔ Guideline for developing a Quality Assurance Manual – see http://projects.kahosl.be/qpm/qualityManual.html
➔ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2014 – 2015* http://issuu.com/revisionesg/docs/esg_-_draft_endoresed_by_bfug
➔ INQAAHE *Guidelines of Good Practice for Quality Assurance Agencies (GGP)* *http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaahe---guidelines-of-good-practice[1].pdf*
➔ *The Quality Code*, UK QAA Quality Code http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code

Study programme Evaluation
➔ *Guidelines for assessment of study programmes at Bosnia-Herzegovina Universities* developed within ESABIH Tempus project

Learning outcomes; Taxonomies and verbs for articulation of study programme and module/unit outcomes

➔ National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2010, *Learning Outcomes handbook*

Assessment

➔ UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), 2012, *A Marked Improvement Transforming assessment in higher education*
(http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/assessment/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf)
And

➔ HEA information sheet: *Assessment methods and descriptors*

And three UK HEA posters

➔ *The assessment spectrum*

➔ *Assessment Types*

➔ *Purposes of Assessment*

Credit & Workload

➔ Wagenaar, R. (2010) *Bologna and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): Role of Learning Outcomes and Workload in European Perspective.*

➔ Tuning Templates, prepared by Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, *Workload Calculation*

Student Centred Teaching and Teaching for Effective Student Learning

➔ European Students Union, *Time for a new paradigm in education: Student Centred-Learning Toolkit*

➔ Clarke, J. (1995) *Suggestions for effective university teaching*

➔ Online Programme on Becoming a Better University Teacher
http://www.ucdoer.ie/index.php/Category:Becoming_a_Better_University_Teacher
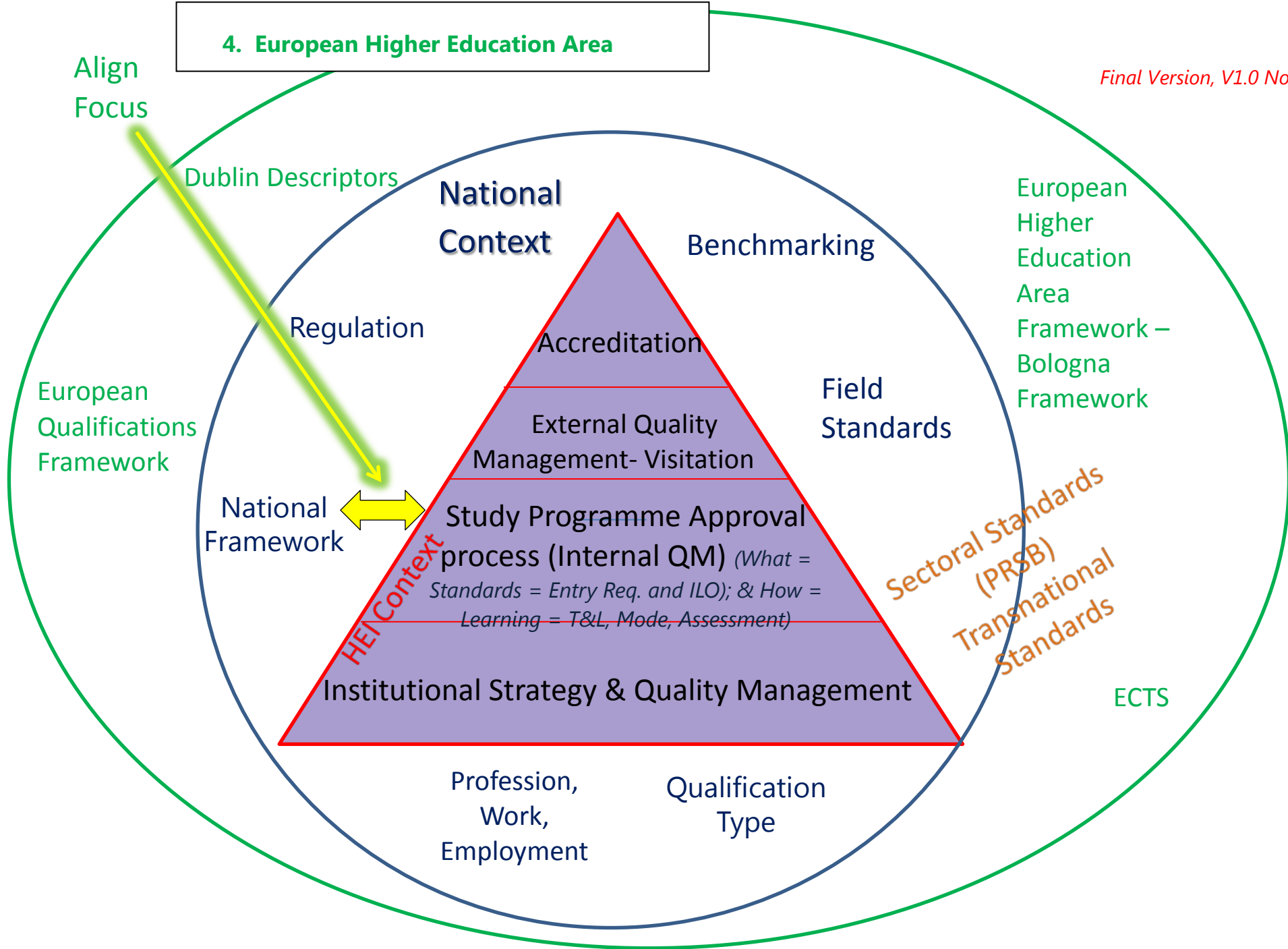(covers Constructive Alignment – Biggs)

3. A Learning Outcomes Approach to Higher Education: Some Principles

1. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the autonomy and responsibility for defining their own objectives and deriving from them coherent and clear graduate attributes. Study programmes are designed and provided by establishing associated learning outcomes which should be in line with the mission statement and profile of the HEI including its regional context.

2. The internal quality management of a higher education institution must be designed to support a learning outcomes-based approach to educational provision.

3. A commitment to a learning outcomes-based quality management approach enables the alignment of learning outcomes of study programmes to outcomes defined in a National Qualifications Framework (or in its absence to the EQF or the Dublin Descriptors).

4. The achievement of learning outcomes is central to the contemporary quality approach; teaching and the whole study environment must be student-centred, which means that student needs and students' learning have to be the point of reference for every quality standard.

5. Learning outcomes of study programmes should be aligned with the national (education system, sociological specificities etc.), legal (stipulations by competent bodies such as ministries etc.) and socio-economic environment (needs of society and persons for work) and where relevant any professional, regulatory or statutory body (PRSB) at national or international level.

6. The use of the learning outcomes enables clear distinctions to be made around a study programme's qualification, e.g. Bachelor/Master, or a study programme's orientation, e.g. vocational or academic.

7. The establishment of learning outcomes for a study programme can assist in making international comparisons between programmes.

8. The number of learning outcomes set for a full study programme is typically limited between 8 and 15.

9. Each module/unit on a study programme also has defined learning outcomes which are also designated at an NQF level. Not all modules are required to be at the same level as the award level, e.g. if there 24 modules units on a EQF Level 6 Bachelor programme, it is probable that some of those modules will be at lower levels, e.g. 4 or 5.

10. Each module/unit and programme is given an appropriate credit weighting reflecting workload of both contact hours and independent study.

11. Each study programme and each module/unit requires a distinct assessment strategy which is fair, valid and reliable and makes use of both formative and summative assessment, retaining a commitment to assessment for learning.

12. A student's potential to achieve an intended learning outcome is mediated through the provision of the study programme, i.e. the mode, the teaching and learning environment, human and physical resources, curriculum and essentially the assessment, etc., all of which must be verified as being fit for purpose, through a transparent quality management process.

13. Learning outcomes and associated curriculum adapted to the NQF or the Dublin descriptors demands that more attention is given to generic competences (soft skills), research activities (final work) and internationalisation than is typically the case at the moment in the more traditional study programmes.

Align
Focus

Dublin Descriptors

National
Context

Benchmarking

European
Higher
Education
Area
Framework –
Bologna
Framework

Regulation

Accreditation

European
Qualifications
Framework

Field
Standards

External Quality
Management- Visitation

National
Framework

HEI Context

Study Programme Approval
process (Internal QM) *(What =
Standards = Entry Req. and ILO); & How =
Learning = T&L, Mode, Assessment)*

Sectoral Standards
(PRSB)
Transnational
Standards

Institutional Strategy & Quality Management

ECTS

Profession,
Work,
Employment

Qualification
Type

1998

In 1998 four education ministers participating in the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the University of Paris (Sorbonne Joint Declaration, 1998) shared the view that the segmentation of the European higher education sector in Europe was out-dated and proposed to engage in a voluntary process to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

1999

This proposal was formalized one year later in Bologna, by 30 countries (The Bologna Declaration, 1999). This process today includes no fewer than 47 participating countries, out of the 49 countries that have ratified the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe (1954).

2003

In 2003, Ministers with responsibility for higher education gathered in Berlin to review progress in the Bologna Process. They called on each participating country to develop a national framework of qualifications. They also called for the elaboration of an overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. For the purposes of brevity, this Framework will be referred to as the Bologna Framework.

2005

Subsequently in Bergen in 2005 Ministers adopted the **Bologna Framework – i.e., the European Higher Education Area Framework.**

The **first, second and third cycles** established in the Bologna Process are the key elements of the overarching framework. These cycles can be best understood by reference to **internationally acceptable descriptors** which have been developed jointly by stakeholders across Europe – the so-called "**Dublin descriptors**". They are of necessity quite general in nature. Not only must they accommodate a wide range of disciplines and profiles, but they must also accommodate, as far as possible, national variations in how qualifications have been developed and specified. Qualification descriptors are usually designed to be read as general statements of the typical achievement of learners who have been awarded a qualification on successful completion of a cycle.

2003-04 - Dublin Descriptors

The Dublin Descriptors were developed by a group called the Joint Quality Initiative and were adopted as the cycle descriptors for the Bologna Framework (the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area). They offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with awards that represent the end of each of a Bologna cycle which was in draft form at this time. They are known as the 'Dublin Descriptors' after the meeting in which they were agreed, in Dublin, March 2004.

The descriptors consist of a set of criteria, phrased in terms of competence levels, which enables one to distinguish in a broad, general manner between the three cycles identified. The following are the five criteria:

➢ Acquiring knowledge and understanding
➢ Applying knowledge and understanding
➢ Making informed judgements and choices
➢ Communicating knowledge and understanding
➢ Capacity-development to enable continuing learning

2008 European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (EQF) acts as a reference framework for different countries' national systems. It is **a meta-framework**. The EQF <u>does not</u> replace national systems and <u>does not</u> include individual qualifications. It has two principal aims: to promote citizens' mobility between countries and sectors, and to facilitate their lifelong learning. It was developed in the years 2004-2007 and formally adopted as a Recommendation by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The EQF is based on the learning outcomes of knowledge, skill and competence.

Frameworks Side by Side

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (EQF) **(2008)**	**Bologna Framework of European Higher Education Area (2005)**	**Dublin Descriptors** **(2004)**	**Relevant Qualification**	**Relevant National Field Standard** **CAN BE INSERTED BY EACH COUNTRY**	**Relevant Sectoral Standard** **CAN BE INSERTED BY EACH COUNTRY**	**NFQ CAN BE INSERTED BY EACH COUNTRY**
Level 1	-	-				
Level 2	-	-				
Level 3	-	-				
Level 4	-	-				
Level 5	-	-				
Level 6	First Cycle	**Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:** ➤ <u>have demonstrated</u> knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon and their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study; ➤ <u>can apply</u> their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically	**Bachelor** Typically include 180-24- ECTS credits			

		demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study; ➤ <u>have the ability to gather and interpret</u> relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; ➤ <u>can communicate</u> information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; ➤ <u>have developed</u> those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.				
Level 7	Second Cycle	**Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:** ➤ <u>have demonstrated</u> knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's level, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; ➤ <u>can apply</u> their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related	**Master** Normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits – minimum of 60 ECTS credits at the second cycle level			

		to their field of study; ➢ <u>have the ability to integrate</u> knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements; ➢ <u>can communicate</u> their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously; ➢ <u>have the learning skills</u> to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.				
Level 8	Third Cycle	**Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:** ➢ <u>have demonstrated</u> a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; ➢ <u>have demonstrated</u> the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; ➢ <u>have made a contribution</u> through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or	**Doctorate** No credit currently allocated			

		international refereed publication; ➢ <u>are capable of critical analysis</u>, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; ➢ <u>can communicate</u> with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise; ➢ <u>can be expected to be able to promote</u>, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society;				

5. National Contexts

HE/QA Features at a glance	Armenia	Russia	Ukraine
1. Population	about 3,000,000	about 143,500,00	45,439,800
2. Framework – date, levels	ANQF was approved by RA Government on 31st March, 2011. ANQF has 8 levels. But the framework is currently under revision. Subject benchmarks are in place.	The project is not approved yet. There is a Plan for 2016 for a sectoral framework.	Yes – 10 Levels Not aligned to EQF Junior specialist – 2 years Bachelor – 5-6 years Specialist – 1- 1.5 year Master – 1-2 years
3. Self-referencing status	After having the self-certification working group's external experts comments the framework currently is under the revision.	N/A	Higher educational institution
4. QA Agency	National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation	a) National Accreditation Agency (NAA); b) National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA); c) Accreditation Centre of the Russian Association for Engineering Education (AEER); d) Centre for Public Accreditation of Law Education; e) Law Academy at the Moscow State University; f) AKKORK (Agency for Higher	Accreditation Commission of Ukraine

HE/QA Features at a glance	Armenia	Russia	Ukraine
		Education Quality Assurance and Career Development)	
5. No of HEIs	73 HEIs 21 State Institutions 4 Intergovernmental 36 Private Institutions 4 branches of foreign Public HEIs 5 branches of foreign non Public HEIs	593 state HEIs 486 private HEIs	803
6. No of students in HE	90,000	6,300,000	2,053,000
7. Autonomous Degree-Awarding institutions?	Degrees in the country are awarded by HEIs themselves according the following procedure: The graduation Committee is formed. The chief of the Committee is signed by the Ministry of Education and Science and the members of the Committee are signed by the Rector of the HEI. According to the resolution of the Committee degrees are awarded.	2 universities (Lomonosov Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University has the right to issue their own diplomas); 9 Federal Universities+29 Research Universities acquired autonomous status according to the new Law on Education dated 29 December 2012.	There are 137 autonomous degree-awarding institutions.
8. National Accreditation of programmes – is it mandatory? Agreed process? Are the criteria written – are	Study programme accreditation is a **voluntary process** undertaken by TLIs. However, this process is mandatory for the academic programmes that offer medical sciences, both at public and private institutions. It examines specific programmes of study, rather than an	1. National State Accreditation of programmes is **mandatory**, the process is agreed with the Ministry of Education and Science of the RF and the Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science	Yes. It's **mandatory** for all HEIs. It's agreed according to the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. They aren't available in English yet. Private universities undergo this procedure in case they wish to issue

HE/QA Features at a glance	Armenia	Russia	Ukraine
they available in English?	institution as a whole. The process is regulated by the Statute on Accreditation is adopted by the RA Government. The accreditation criteria and standards are also adopted by the RA Government and they are available in English.	(Rosobrnadzor). The criteria for the national state accreditation of programmes are not available in English. 6. NCPA conducts public accreditation of educational programmes, which is totally voluntary. The criteria for public study programme accreditation are not agreed with the Ministry or the Federal Service, though according to the Law of the FR organizations that conduct public accreditation have the right to set their own criteria, moreover, NCPA's standards and criteria are in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-	diplomas of the state standard.

HE/QA Features at a glance	Armenia	Russia	Ukraine
		ENQA). NCPA's standards and criteria are available both in Russian and English.	
9. **National accreditation of institutions - is it mandatory? Is there an agreed process? Are the criteria written – are they available in English?**	**<u>Institutional accreditation is a mandatory</u>** process for both private and public institutions. It allows for periodic evaluation of how well an institution is operating and whether it serves the mission for which it was established. The process is regulated by the Statute on Accreditation which is adopted by the RA Government. The accreditation criteria and standards are also adopted by RA Government and they are available in English.	**<u>There is no such a notion as National Accreditation of institutions</u>**. According to the new Law on Education there is a state accreditation of Educational ACTIVITY conforming to the requirements of educational programmes, but such accreditation is neither considered nor called institutional. All educational programmes offered at the HEI and with at least one cohort should undergo accreditation which is conducted by a group of experts. The process is agreed with the Ministry of Education and Science of the RF and the Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor). The criteria are not available in English.	Yes. **It's mandatory for all HEIs**. It's agreed according to the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. All HEIs must be licensed before they can offer tertiary-level education programmes. To be granted a licence, a HEI must meet the required standards set by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which relate to infrastructure, resources, staff and programmes. They are not available in English yet.

HE/QA Features at a glance	Armenia	Russia	Ukraine
10.Are there national subject standards/bench mark statements for subjects/fields of study? Set by whom? When? Who overseas them? What rules are there?	Yes, there are. Set by Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia (MoES) in 2001. MoES overseas them. Subject standards include the minimum content and study period, maximum capacity of study load, and standards for learning outcomes.	There are Federal State Educational Standards (subject), set by the Ministry of Education and Science of the RF on 1 March, 2012. FSES shape the contents of education and establish the required quality of the content of education (curricula and syllabi); the teaching and support staff; the information provision of the teaching and research process (modern sources of information and different types of available support – printed and electronic – which correspond to the content of course programs as well as means of information transmission, storage and use); the actual knowledge and skills of graduates (minimum requirements in regard to the level of knowledge and skills of graduates).	The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine sets standards for higher education for every education level and fields of study. There are a collection of regulations that define requirements for qualification and degree levels. There are benchmark statements for fields of study which describe what a course offers, its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in a certain field of study. They are set by Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Program Specification is a description of the course, including the names of the modules. It also includes general provisions, descriptions of common tasks and goals of the course. They are set by Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine or both Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and HEI. According to the regulations for studying programs accreditation the program is to comply with studying field standards. Studying field standards in

HE/QA Features at a glance	Armenia	Russia	Ukraine
			their structure include subject standards that have to correspond to QFs.
11. What regulatory relationship if any is there between the QF and the Accreditation Process and the subject standards?	The first standard of the first criterion in the institutional accreditation deals with the Qualification Framework. The standard is *"The institution has a clear, well-articulated mission that represents the institution's purposes and goals and is in accordance with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework".* The first criterion of the study programme accreditation also deals with the National Qualifications Framework. The criterion is *"The program is in concord with the Armenian National Qualifications Framework (ANQF), national qualifications descriptors, and state academic standards as well as is in line with the institution's mission".*	N/A	QF describe the main knowledge, skill and competence i.e. what an individual is expected to know, understand and be able to do following successful completion of a process of learning. Each subject standard is based on national QF and should be reviewed if they change. Accreditation Process based on QF includes examining skills and abilities of students according to the subject standards.

6. Institutional Context: Internal (HEI-owned) Quality Management

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are generally autonomous institutions, albeit within regulatory contexts. The autonomy means that they are responsible for their own activities and for the standards and outcomes of those activities. Establishing a model of quality assurance or quality management in setting standards for processes and practices, in ongoing monitoring of those processes and in their periodic review has become the norm in higher education. Whilst a HEI may also be subject to external review through a particular regulatory context, its first responsibility is to manage its own affairs in a coherent and responsible way. And where public monies are made available to HEIs, it is reasonable that their processes be transparent and offer confidence to the public on the efficacy of the investment made. A central focus of a HEIs quality management system is the study programme.

Following the development of a study programme (according to a learning outcomes approach) by a team of academic staff (according to an institutionally defined model) a HEI usually presents the study programme for a **formal accreditation process**. Checking the alignment of a study programme's learning outcomes with a framework (NQF or EHEA/Dublin descriptors) generally takes place during this process according to a particular country's regulatory context. The process can be owned by the study programme provider (a HEI) **or** by an external agency or by the ministry of education.

Where the formal process is owned by an external agency, a HEI should also have an 'internal' approval process based on self-evaluation. That internal process may mirror the external agency one using its criteria and framework, thus providing a mock/pilot for an agency process, or it may be different.

However these study programme processes are most meaningful when embedded in a well-understood and **coherent internal quality management system**. Prior to looking at the processes by which a study programme is aligned to a National Framework (or EHEA/Dublin Descriptors, below are some questions a HEI may wish to pose for itself.

6.1 Indicators of internal quality management[5]

6.1.1 Is the overarching environment and governance of the HEI one which ensures high standards?

a) Is there a system of transparent governance in place with appropriate stakeholder, including student, representation?

b) Is there a clear strategic planning and a resource allocation model in place?

c) Is responsibility for decision-making clearly assigned to persons with the appropriate levels of authority?

d) Is there clarity on the mission and purpose of the HEI?

e) Is there clarity on the HEIs regulatory context and external obligations?

f) Does the HEI demonstrate an understanding that higher education and training is a collegial, international, progressive endeavour, that changes, adapts, improves and sometimes copes with external threats and stresses?

g) Has the HEI the competence and capacity to fulfil the role assigned to it in a sustainable way?

h) Are the designated education and training facilities appropriate?

i) Does the HEI have an open intellectual community that values critical reflection and fosters personal and professional development for learners and staff?

j) Are staff are appropriately qualified and experienced?

k) Is there a system of criterion-based decision-making?

l) In general does the pedagogic style incorporate good practice?

m) Does the HEI have peer relationships with the broader community of higher education and training?

n) Does the HEI have a culture and practices underpinning access to, progression from and transfer within higher education and training?

o) Does the HEI assign credit in a transparent way?

p) Is there good availability of support services for learners?

q) What type of external examining or external moderation of assessment or the study programme occurs?

---

[5] Adapted and adopted, with permission, from HETAC *Registration Policy* 2008 and HETAC *Procedures for the Registration of Providers* 2011

6.1.2   Does the HEI have robust quality management and quality enhancement policies, procedures and practices for all study programmes? Is there is internal quality management system which ensures that study programme intended learning outcomes are monitored, and reviewed effectively? Are these quality management processes available to all staff, learners, and the public in a simple and clear way?

For example are there policies and procedures for quality management which meet effective standards for internal quality management within higher education institutions, such as those set out in Part 1 of *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (2014-2015)*[6]

i.e. do the quality management policies and procedures of the HEI address:

1. Policy for quality assurance
2. **Design and approval of programmes**
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
4. Student admission[7], progression, recognition and certification
5. Teaching staff
6. Learning resources and student support
7. Information management
8. Public information
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
10. Cyclical external quality assurance

6.2 Two Key Areas around Study Programmes

There are many more approaches to internal quality management of a HEI, but *this* is just an overview and a prompt for HEIs in the development of their own model. This Guideline focuses on the ***Design and Approval of a Study Programme*** only. However it should be noted that a process for the Approval of a Student Programme, must be complemented by **a process for ongoing monitoring** and by **a process for periodic review**. The latter processes ensure that the study programme is achieving what it is intended to achieve and provides a mechanism to make changes to (or discontinue) a study programme to assure the intended outcomes.

---

[6] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*[6] (Endorsed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group in September 2014, Subject to approval by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015) http://issuu.com/revisionesg/docs/esg_-_draft_endoresed_by_bfug
[7] The use of the word 'entry' may be more inclusive than 'admission'.

7. Seven Steps of an Alignment Process, i.e. a Study Programme Design & Approval Process

This document **Guideline for a Guideline** - *Aligning or Checking the Alignment of an academic study programme's learning outcomes with a Framework* examines a typical accreditation/validation process as this is where alignment takes place.

The guideline has broken the **study programme design and approval process into seven steps**. This structure inevitably leads to a consideration of matters broader than learning outcomes, but learning outcomes remain at the heart of this exercise and are the focus of steps one and two. Under each step some guidance will be provided. This can be used to inform the development of local policies and procedures by the HEIs and EQA who will be drawing on this document to develop their own documentation. The principles stated at the outset inform the approach adopted.

 At this point in time, the Guideline is agnostic on the ownership of the study programme approval process – approval may reside wholly in a HEI, or be complemented by external accreditation.

A formal accreditation/validation/study programme approval process, which always addresses *more than the alignment of programmes intended learning outcomes* to a framework level, typically has the following elements:

1. **Development or Design of a study programme** and the writing of a proposed study programme document (setting standards), bearing in mind the *set written criteria* for its self-evaluation and approval.

2. **Self-evaluation**: analysis of a proposed study programme, relevant data collected and stakeholder feedback *against set written criteria*, possibly leading to a revision of the drafted intended learning outcomes, and the development of a modified or new study programme, which is presented in a written document for consideration by a panel of experts/peers.

3. **Peer review:** establishment of a small team of independent experts/peers who conduct a site visit to the HEI's campus to meet with the self-evaluation team (i.e. the study programme team) to consider the self-evaluation and the proposed study programme *against set written criteria* for study programme approval.

4. **Written report:** A formal written report is prepared. It normally includes an overarching recommendation on whether to approve or further revise the proposed study programme, as well as detail capturing elements of good practice or suggestions for further improvement. The report is written by referring to the criteria and citing evidence for judgements made.

5. **Responding to a report:** A formal written response from the provider (HEI) of the study programme, addressing improvement suggestions made by the peer reviewers, and where appropriate including a revised study programme document.

6. **Formal decision** is taken by the appropriate decision-maker.

7. **Publication** of findings and the newly approved study programme.

Seven Steps of Study Programme Design & Approval, incorporating the Alignment of Learning Outcomes

1 Propose a Study Programme

Establish what is the desired qualification (BA, etc.), and any regulatory or professional context.

Suggest entry requirements; intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each module.

Propose the assessment of the ILOs at both programme and module level.

Propose the optimum teaching and learning environment including staff and the mode of provision.

2 HEI prepares a self-evaluation of the study programme

Analysis of Proposed Study Programme by Programme Team against set criteria, following the collation & consideration of relevant data and following stakeholder consultation

Amendment of the proposed programme in light of analysis & consultation

Preparation of written Self Study and associated programme document for internal QM coordinators

3 HEI and/or Agency conducts an External Peer Review

HEI QM unit, or EQA or both sequentially establish a small team of peer reviewers, external to, and independent of the HEI

The proposed programme is considered; a site visit is conducted and all of the teaching team and management meet the panel.

The peer reviewers consider the documentation and content of meetings in light of set evaluation criteria

4 External Peer Reviewers write a report of the Evaluation

The peer review panel draft a written report basing findings and recommendtions on set criteria & citing evidence for conclusions

A decision is made, or a formal recommendation is made to the appropriate decision-maker

Good practices and suggestions for improvment should be made

5 HEI Responds to the Evaluation Report & its Findings

The Academic Staff of the HEI prepare a formal response to the Report, responding to the suggestions or required improvements.

The Academic Staff of the HEI prepare a revised programme addressing the findings of the peer reviewers

The response and revised programme are sent to the decision-maker

6 The Formal Decision-Maker considers the Report & Response and makes a decision

The decision-maker considers the Peer Review Report and its recommendations; the Respose of the HEI including the revised document and a formal decision is made whether to approve (accredit, validate) or not.

7 The findings, decision & reports are published.

All parties (HEI & EQA) publish Reports & approved programme

8 Elaboration of the Alignment Process, i.e. Study Programme Design & Approval Process

8.1   Developing a study programme and writing a study programme document

The academic's or teacher's challenge is to present his/her subject to a new cohort of learners so that they will be excited and engaged by the field - this has been at the centre of academia for centuries. Today, amongst other things, this involves the writing of a study programme with well-articulated learning outcomes so that it can be verified to meet national and international standards, and to be a high quality learning experience for students.

Designing a programme has many critical elements, and a detailed programme proposal can only be established following detailed reflection and analysis such as proposed in step 2, the self-evaluation of a proposed study programme against explicit, elaborated criteria, following stakeholder consultation, data collection and an environmental analysis. However prior to this some outline matters may be considered.
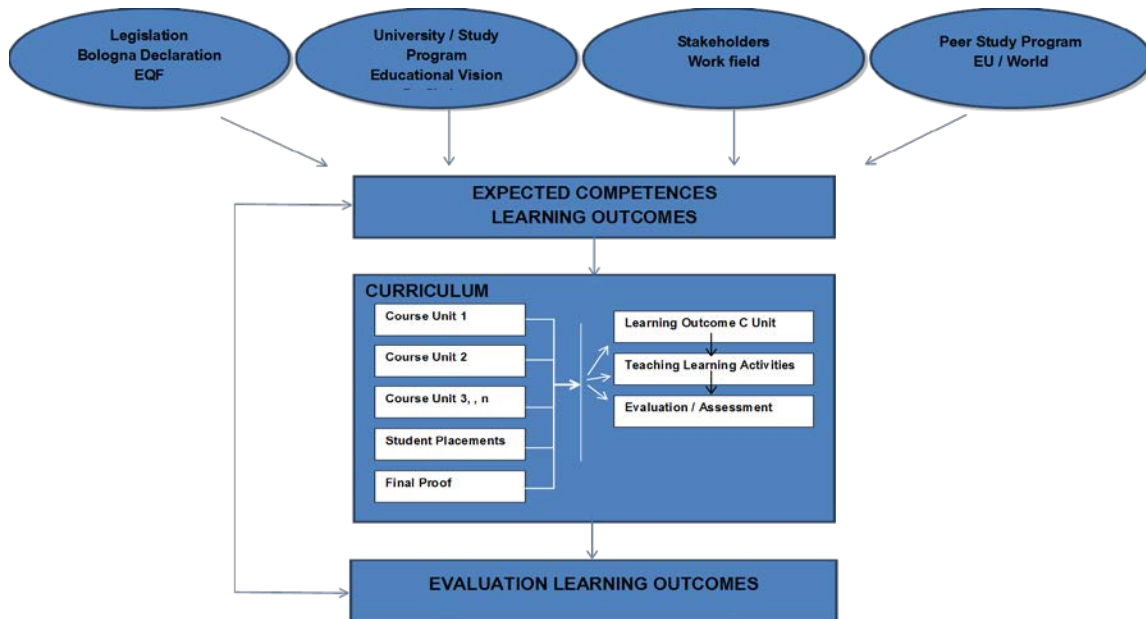
Establish what is the desired qualification (BA, etc.), and any regulatory or professional context.

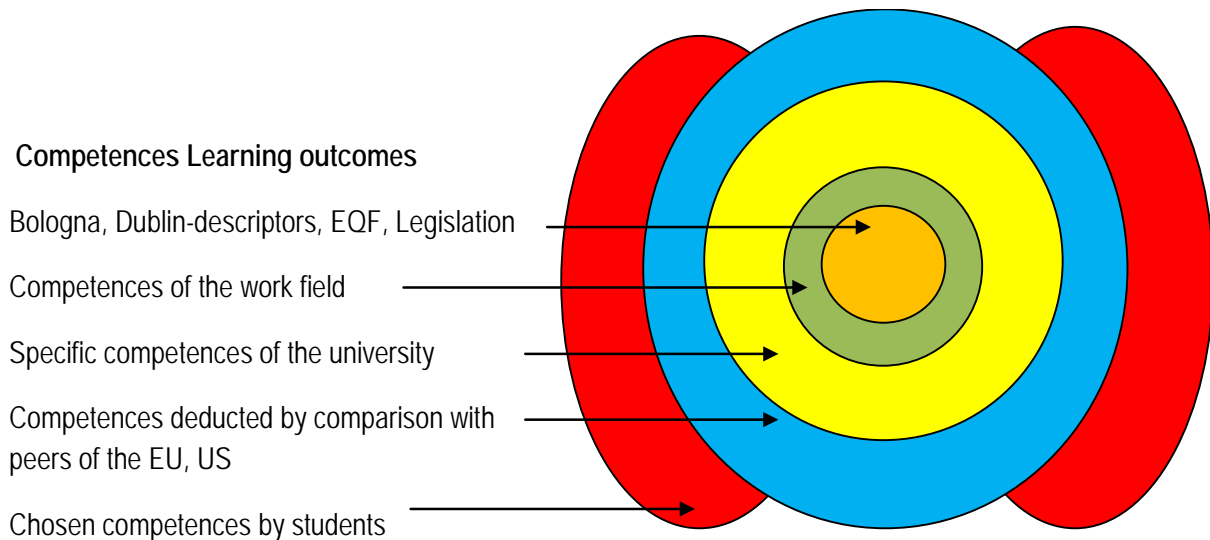*Suggest entry requirements; intended learning outcomes for the programme and for each module.*

Propose the assessment of the ILOs at both programme and module level.

Propose the optimum teaching and learning environment including staff and the mode of provision.

1 In establishing the qualification, or reassessing one already established, consider what the learners are expected to have achieved at the end of their studies in the context of ...
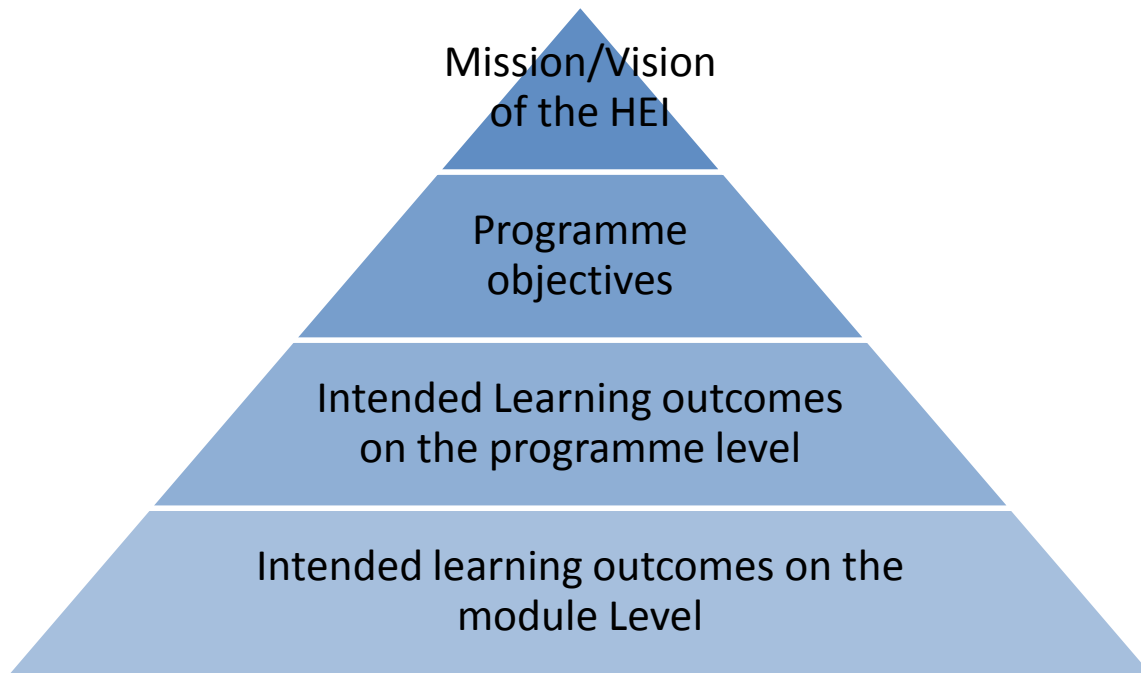
2 Consider ...

Competences Learning outcomes

Bologna, Dublin-descriptors, EQF, Legislation

Competences of the work field

Specific competences of the university

Competences deducted by comparison with peers of the EU, US

Chosen competences by students

2: Look at the modules that constitute the programme and suggest the relationship between them. Use the module/unit and programme template documentation (see Appendix Four).

3:   Consult pages 7-15 of the NUIM Handbook (Appendix Six) for verbs to be used in establishing Learning Outcomes. Consider:

```
                    Mission/Vision
                     of the HEI

                    Programme
                    objectives

              Intended Learning outcomes
                on the programme level

           Intended learning outcomes on the
                      module Level
```

4:   Look at assessment models and options – see UK Higher Education Academy Documents (Appendix Seven). Look at the models for Student Centred Learning in the European Students Union guide in Appendix Nine.

5: Consider how the mapping of the assessment to the module/unit and programme learning outcomes. Use the template in the Programme Handbook in Appendix Five or the matrix in the NUIM LO Handbook in Appendix Six.

6: Consider staff competencies required; whether the programme is online, by distance, etc.; what equipment/resources are required; how much time is required.   Consult models for Student Centred Learning in Appendix Nine.

8.2   A Self-evaluation

In higher education quality management, a self-evaluation is process of systematic and critical self-analysis leading to judgments and/or recommendations regarding the quality of either an institution or a study programme. This guideline is looking at study programme evaluation. Self-evaluation is basically a collective reflection providing an opportunity for quality enhancement. The resulting report further serves as a provider of information for a review team, an external peer-review panel appointed to conduct an independent, external evaluation.

The self-evaluation of a study programme is typically conducted by the academic owners of the study programme with support from quality management staff. It involves the systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and the holding of moderated interviews with lecturers and students; the constructive analysis (not description or restatement) of the information collated in *light of specific set criteria for the approval (alignment of learning outcomes) of a study programme*; resulting in two outputs:

➔ A written report encapsulating the findings and improvement recommendations, in order to make a statement about quality.

➔ Complemented by a Study Programme Handbook/Study Programme Document

Appendix Five of this Guideline presents a single integrated sample template for these two outputs. It can be used as both template for the Self Study Report and also, at the end of the process, the programme element can be readily translated into the Student Programme Handbook.

The key components to enable the development of an effective self-evaluation process are:

1)   **the setting of criteria** (each criterion has an intent, a requirement to be met) – this must be done by the HEI (see sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 for suggestions). What is the purpose of the evaluation – what key questions is the evaluation seeking to answer?

2)   Identifying **the relevant information/data which needs to be collected** to ensure the criteria can be effectively responded to, and the optimum mechanisms for collecting it

3)   Identifying **the relevant stakeholders** and how they should be consulted and their feedback incorporated into effectively responding to the criteria

4)   **Establishing standards** by which it can be demonstrated the intents are minimally met

5)   agreeing the participants in the processes and their roles

6)   establishing what judgements and decisions can be made and what evidence is required to support these

7)   revising according to feedback received

8)   finally preparing results in clear and agreed formats (Self-Study Report and Proposed Study Programme Handbook)

8.2.1   Criteria for the Design & Approval of a study programme (embedding the alignment of Learning Outcomes)[8] – To be used during the Self-Evaluation

Hereunder are suggested broad criteria for the approval of a study programme (including the alignment of learning outcomes). They are followed in the next section by detailed questions to aid in their development. Each HEI or EQA may wish to adopt these or a version of them to assist in developing or amending current local processes.

A deep understanding of these criteria will enable the academic and his/her quality management colleagues to develop a study programme with clear standards, an effective learning environment. They should be used in:

- the development of a study programme
- the self-evaluation
- the internal evaluation
- the external evaluation

---

1.   Standards:

1 (a)   An outcome standard is set: The minimum intended study programme learning outcomes must be consistent with
  ⇒   any relevant subject/field standards <u>and</u>
  ⇒   any National Qualifications Framework <u>or</u>
  ⇒   the Dublin Descriptors.

1 (b)   An entry standard is set: The prerequisite learning for participation in the study programme and any other assumptions relating to the study programme's prospective
      learners must be made explicit.

2.   Learning: a study programme is a process which enables prospective learners to attain specified minimum intended study programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently in terms of learner effort via:
      2 (a)   study environment
      2 (b)   mode of learning
      2 (c)   staff support
      2 (d)   workload
      2 (e)   resources
      2 (f)   assessment

---

[8] Adapted with permission from *HET Core Validation Policy And Criteria 2010*, QQI, Revised 2013.
http://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/%E2%80%8CInitial%20Validation/HET_Core_Validation_Policy_and_Criteria_Revised%202013.pdf

8.2.2 Converting the Criteria for the Design & Approval of a Study programme (embedding the Alignment of Learning Outcomes) into Self-Evaluation Questions

In order to address the criteria in a self-evaluation of a study programme one must consider many concepts and details underpinning the overarching criteria statements. A sample set of questions that one might pose to oneself, or that an external panel may pose, to assess one's compliance with these are presented. **A self-evaluation should critically answer the questions asked.** The answers can be in the Report and/or the Study Programme Handbook.

Criterion 1a: Outcome Standard is set: The minimum intended study programme learning outcomes must be consistent with any relevant subject/field standards and any National Qualifications Framework or the Dublin Descriptors.

Criterion 1 (b)   An entry standard is set: The prerequisite learning for participation in the study study programme and any other relevant assumptions relating to the study programme's prospective learners are made explicit.

To map or align a study programme to a Framework (or the Dublin Descriptors) it is necessary to know 'where learners start' and 'where they get to'.   To test if one is addressing these alignment criteria ask, and answer with evidence for answers:

1.1   Is there evidence that the minimum intended study programme learning outcomes are consistent with any applicable subject/field standard and any relevant National Qualifications Framework, or in the absence of a NFQ the Dublin Descriptors?

1.2   Do the intended learning outcomes of the study programme correspond with the descriptions of Bachelor/Master level in the NQF or in the Dublin Descriptors?

1.3   Are the entry requirements for this study programme clear and in keeping with national norms?

1.4   Since awards standards are cumulative, can it be clearly demonstrated that the study programme's prerequisite learning specification includes the knowledge, skill and competence specified at lower Framework levels?

1.5   Do the intended learning outcomes emphasise *profound learning* outcomes much more than *transient learning* outcomes? (*Transient learning outcomes are those which are relatively easily acquired and date more quickly. An example of this kind of learning might be skill in the use of a particular software package—one learns how to operate the software without much concern about why the user interface is the way it is or about the underpinning algorithms or data structures. Profound learning takes longer to acquire*

and dates more slowly if at all—it changes a person significantly. Examples of this include learning to speak a modern language, to play a musical instrument or to be proficient in mathematical methods. This perspective is only an approximation but can be a useful alternative way of thinking about kinds of learning and approaches to learning.)

1.6   Do the intended learning outcomes correspond with national legislation and international recommendations?

1.7   Have the study programme, module/unit and programme unit learning outcomes have been specified describing what a student will know and be able to do at the end of the module/unit or of a unit?

1.8   Are the intended learning outcomes appropriate to the intended professional field (work field) of a graduate of this study programme?

1.9   Do the study programme learning outcomes correspond appropriately to the type (academic, vocational, professional) of qualification and the demands specific for the domain?

1.10 Do the learning outcomes of the study programme correspond with the requirements set by professional colleagues, both nationally and internationally, and by members of the relevant domain's community of practice?

1.11 Do the learning outcomes correspond with the needs of a beginning professional in the particular discipline?

Criterion 2 a - e (see special section on **2f**, Assessment)

Learning: a study programme is a process which enables prospective learners to attain specified minimum intended study programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently in terms of learner effort via:

>   2 (a)   study environment
>   2 (b)   mode of learning
>   2 (c)   staff support
>   2 (d)   workload
>   2 (e)   resources

Remembering that a study programme is a process which takes place in a particular environment and in a particular context, ask, and answer with evidence:

2.1 Has careful attention been paid to curriculum and study programme design and content?

2.2 Are the learning outcomes at study programme level underpinned by learning outcomes at module/unit level or programme unit level?

2.3 Has the study programme has been developed so that the study programme learning outcomes are visibly mapped to specific modules or programme units.

2.4 What evidence is there that the target/prospective learners may achieve the intended study programme learning outcomes?

2.5 Is the study programme's strategy for enabling learners to move from the minimum access standard to the minimum intended study programme learning outcome explicit, realistic and viable?

2.6 Are the study programme's content and learning environment appropriate to the study programme's intended learning outcomes? Specifically

(a) Are the study programme's staff (assessors, teachers, etc.) as a group must be competent to enable learners to develop (achieve) the intended study programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements and expert in their respective disciplines?

(b) Are the staff members who are to provide both academic and administrative support for the provision of this study programme familiar with any national standards?

(c) What training/induction has been provided for these staff members?

(d) What are their precise roles and responsibilities?

(e) Are the nominated persons competent to fulfil their roles?

(f) Is the study programme's learning environment (physical, social, and intellectual and recognising that the environment may be virtual)

- and its resources, such as libraries and online databases and physical resources, such as laboratories, equipment, study areas and studios;

- and human resources, such as tutors, counsellors, advisors and peers where applicable

- and other supports

consistent with the intended study programme learning outcomes?

(g) How are learners represented and how is feedback obtained?

(h) Is the study programme content including reading lists, lecture notes, and any other material used by the study programme appropriate?

(i) Does the study programme make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities?

2.7 Does the study programme *involve* authentic learning opportunities to enable the achievement of the intended study programme learning outcomes?

2.8 Is the study programme to be provided in a way that its intended learning outcomes can be reliably and efficiently attained by the learners?

2.9 Is it reasonable to expect that all learners who are judged qualified to access this particular study programme should be able to graduate from it subject to their making a reasonable effort and complying with the study programme's conditions?

2.10 In the case of a modular study programme the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints should be explicit and appropriate in light of the intended study programme learning outcomes. Are there effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways?

2.11 Does the study programme compare well against benchmarks (where appropriate)?

2.12 Has clear information been prepared for students on the intended learning outcomes of all modules, content, study and learning methodology, assessment, credits, learning materials, etc. presented in a clear study programme handbook (see model provided) or ECTS module/units' description files?

2.13 Is the proposed information about the study programme as well as its procedures consistent with national policies?

2.14 Is there clear information about career opportunities arising from the study programme? (E.g. The presentation of the study programme should not lead learners to presume that successful completion of the study programme will entitle them to enter a particular profession or progress to another study programme unless this is actually the case. If, for example, the study programme is designed to meet the educational requirements of a regulated profession or recognised professional body this should be stated explicitly.)

2.15 Are the study programme's use of ECTS or other Credit systems and provisions for recognition of prior learning consistent with any national policy on these areas?

2.16 Does the study programme meet genuine education and training needs?
   (a) Does the HEI have evidence that the study programme meets the proposed target learners' education and training needs?
   (b) Is the study programme as a process and the intended study programme learning outcomes adequately informed by the views of appropriate stakeholders such as learners, graduates, lecturers, employers, relevant advisory bodies, social and community representatives?

(c) What research has been conducted for the provision of this study programme in the area in which it is to be provided?

(d) Can the HEI demonstrate that the proposed study programme compares favourably with other programmes already in place?

(e) Where the HEI is either part of the public service or its study programme is publicly funded, can it demonstrate that in developing the study programme it has given due regard to relevant public policy?

2.17 Is the study programme viable?

(a) Does the HEI have a viable delivery/business-plan for study programme? (*This is important for several reasons. For example if the study programme assumes a certain cohort size it may not function as planned if either insufficient or excessive numbers are recruited.*)

(b) Does the HEI have satisfactory contingency arrangements for adapting to changing circumstances or coping with failure of the study programme (having due regard for the interests of learners)?

(c) Is the study programme consistent with the provider's mission and strategy?

2.18 Has the mode of learning – distance, electronic, part-time, full-time, blended, etc. been clearly stated and is it appropriate to the cohort of intended participants and the intended learning outcomes.

2.19 Is there recognition within the study programme team that a different mode of provision constitutes a different study programme, and each type of provision is unique?

Criterion 2 (f) Assessment[9]

Learning: a study programme is a process which enables prospective learners to attain specified minimum intended study programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently in terms of learner effort via: 2(f) Assessment

---

2.20 Has a *study programme assessment strategy* been provided for the study programme as a whole and *module/unit assessment strategies* for each of its constituent modules?

2.21 Are the study programme **and** module/unit assessment strategies (**for both formative and summative assessment**) both clear and appropriate? Do they provide for the verification of the attainment of the intended learning outcomes?

---

[9] Some questions taken from
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/assessment/A_Marked_Improvement.pdf (Appendix Eight)

2.22 Are all the study programme and module/units intended learning outcomes capable of being assessed?

2.23 Are all assessments fair, valid, reliable and transparent? Does the assessment design process ensure valid assessment of the intended learning outcomes?

2.24 Are assessment decisions in relation to design, development and variety made within a study programme context and focused on study programme learning outcomes?

2.25 Is assessment for learning given emphasis in relation to assessment of learning?

2.26 Can the assessment satisfactorily verify whether the students have realised the learning outcomes of the components of the curriculum in a way that is insightful for students?

2.27 In respect of a master's study programme, is there a thesis in which the student shows analytical capacity or an independent problem-solving capacity at academic level?

2.28 Are the study programme's procedures for assessment of learners consistent with any institutional or national assessment regulations?

2.29 What arrangements are in place for External Examiners, where this model of monitoring is utilised, and what other mechanism is in place to monitor and review the maintenance of study programme standards?

2.30 Are you confident that assessment tasks demand high standards of learning?

2.31 Is assessment and feedback planned within and across programmes to ensure appropriate student preparation and practice before summative assessment takes place?

2.32 Is there an emphasis on assessment for learning over systems focused on marks, grades and reliability?

2.33 Is it evident in the study programme design that there understanding of the limitations of explicit assessment standards?

2.34 Are students encouraged to participate in disciplinary communities?

2.35 Is there an emphasis on building students' assessment literacy through a learning process in which they internalise, apply and reflect on assessment standards?

2.36 Do local disciplinary communities play a role in facilitating collaboration about assessment standards?

2.37 Are there appropriate student representation opportunities and student feed-back opportunities? Where the study programme is being provided in more than one location including another jurisdiction how is this managed?

2.38 Have the specific needs of different modes of provision and types of higher education been considered, e.g. distance, part-time, online, professional, vocational, academic, etc.

8.2.2   *Collecting Relevant Data for the Self-Study*

In light of the criteria for the design and approval of a study programme (above) it is clear that a HEI will need to collect and analyse certain data. A critical feature of this exercise is the wise choice of WHAT data. What is required to answer the questions posed. This may vary depending on the nature of the HEI and the proposed programme, but typically would include amongst other things:

- Student Statistics
    - Entry numbers
    - Graduating numbers
    - Employment status
    - Level of performance
    - Persistence levels
- Funding
    - Fee levels
    - Funding available
    - Fee payment levels
- Data on Comparative Programmes or Institutions
    - Number of similar programmes – regionally, nationally, internationally
    - Number of applicants to/graduates of similar programmes
- Employment opportunities for graduates of this type of programme

8.2.4   Consulting with stakeholders and considering institutional mission and other environmental issues

[10]Every new programme has to be planned and delivered within many (often competing and changing) contexts --- intellectual, professional, financial, institutional, national. The planning team seldom exercises any great influence on many (if any) of these domains. Yet we cannot ignore them: they are very likely to affect the success of the programme in many different ways. It makes sense to do everything possible to optimise the environments in which our degree programmes can be nurtured. One way of thinking about this is to undertake a 'stakeholder analysis', and to repeat this kind of exercise as often as is needed. E.g., http://www.rwssp.com/Publication/TAN%20Tool%207.8%20Stakeholder%20Analysis.pdf

Here are some of the questions to be asked during engagement with key stakeholders:

1. Within the HEIs

Will there be the managerial and administrative support needed?

- the qualification fits well with our HEI's strategic plans, priorities & USPs …
- there are senior managers who champion this particular study programme …
- we are confident that the learning resources & facilities will be available …
- market research has shown us the scale and nature of student demand …
- sustainability (for HEI) & affordability (for students) are in business plan …
- the collateral impact of the degree is positive and appreciated …
- A risk assessment has been done: all is well!

2. Societies

How would key 'external' stakeholders … current & potential employers, professional associations, public bodies, government agencies, international organisations, media … be persuaded that this degree was vital to the public interest?

- They have been involved and listened to throughout the planning processes …
- employability & enterprise are embedded in the curriculum and assessments --- career planning, placements, internships, business planning …
- work-based learning activities are available for part-time students …
- the study programme sees higher education as local and global …
- the achievements of students will be showcased in the media …
- our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be informed by external views of what these should be …
- high 'value for money' can be shown
- external stakeholders are involved in many aspects of the degree …
- professional associations will recognise the awards …
- national/international benchmarks have been applied …
- the programme makes good use of technology and emphasises digital literacy …

---

[10] Taken directly from AHATMA *MASTER IN HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT.* *DEVELOPING LEADERS AND MANAGING EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION.*   See www.mahatma.am

3. The programme/teaching team

Does the programme/teaching team work together?

- there is a shared vision about the kind of Community of Practice (micro-culture) that the team wants to build for *and with* our degree students …
- the study programme is progressive, and *more* than the sum of its parts (modules) …
- the teachers, administrators and supporters of learning all work as a team …
- individuals understand their distinctive roles and responsibilities …
- similar programmes elsewhere have been studied and advice has been welcomed from others …
- Any training and support needs have been identified and addressed …
- the success of the study programme will be professionally important to the team …
- the study programme is supported by extra-curricula events/activities …

4. Prospective Students

What is known about them?

- the details of the demographics, the nature of demand …
- their needs, knowledge & abilities, backgrounds & experiences, expectations, passions & interests …
- their preparedness for postgraduate study, learning styles, language abilities …
- their personal, academic & career aspirations …

Have they been involved in discussions about the design of the programme?

- patterns, place, pace, topics, modes of study and assessment …
- role of technology-supported learning (distance, online, intensive) …
- internships, placements, work-based learning assessments …

Some articles which may be useful to read

Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards of learning and teaching in HE - A report to HEFCE by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (Open University), NOP Research Group and SQW Ltd, 2003. http://oro.open.ac.uk/11876/4/

Chenicheri Sid Nair Patricie Mertova, (2009), "Conducting a graduate employer survey: a Monash University experience", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 17 Iss 2 pp. 191 - 203 http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1108/09684880910951390

8.3 Writing the self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation team drafts a document to accompany the proposed Study programme Handbook/Study programme Document which addresses each of the criteria for aligning a study programme identified in section 8.1. Appendix Five offers a model.

The self-evaluation report is considered to be the main vehicle for the unit to convey information about the alignment of the study programme with the NQF. But equally, and perhaps even more importantly, it is serves as a critical reflection of the study programme in terms of its management procedures and the manner it handles in using learning outcomes as a central value in the strategic development of the curriculum. Therefore, the self-evaluation report should not be only descriptive, but needs to be evaluative and synthetic, that is, it should evaluate strengths and weaknesses in introducing learning outcomes. In addition, the analysis should take into account the recent introduction of the new curriculum based on learning outcomes and the NQF, but it also has to anticipate future developments.

With regard to **each criterion for aligning a study programme,** the study programme team, i.e. the self-evaluation team typically should conduct a SWOT analysis, identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This should lead to action plans for improvement, and a revised study programme according to the improvements identified. Specifically it would be good to include:

- The most important strengths of the study programme
- The most relevant opportunities for improvement and the corresponding remedies
- A brief outline of the fundamental policy options of the study programme as a continuation of ongoing developments in aligning to the NQF.

At the end of the report conclusions should be presented. The report should then be sent to the external experts via the HEIs internal quality management mechanisms.

8.4 External Peer Review

An external peer review can happen twice, or a modified version can happen. Firstly the HEI may wish to establish a peer review panel to evaluate its programmes according to its and any national criteria. On completion of this internal process, and the implementation of any improvements which arise, the HEI may submit the study programme for external evaluation by an External Quality Assurance Agency.

Peer review is a process whereby following the collection of relevant information by internal academic and support staff, and its analysis, **under the criteria for aligning a study programme** (as identified in section 8.2.2), leading to the preparation of a written report with the associated Study programme Handbook/Study programme Document, i.e. the self-evaluation, a subsequent external evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, academic peers, representatives of the work field and student representatives. It usually requires a number of distinct stages:

a) the appointment of peer reviewers and assignation of roles
b) the analysis of the self-study report and evidence obtained during a site visit **according to the criteria for aligning a study programme** (peer reviewers should be trained on the criteria)
c) the conduct of a site visit
d) the preparation of a formal initial report with recommendations
e) the consideration of a HEI's response to the formal report
f) the preparation of a final report and final recommendations for submission to the decision-making body
and
g) perhaps a subsequent follow-up (12 months) by the same peer review panel or by the entity which appointed the peer review panel

A HEI (or external agency) has written guidelines for the all of these steps, or any other elements in the process which may be relevant to its context.   The HEI (or external agency) must also have explicit statements on the authority of and decisions available to panels. It should be clear exactly what the panel is being asked to do, to whom it is accountable and what are its precise functions.

Some guidance on Who can be peer reviewers? and the Site Visit is provided in Appendix Three.

8.5 The Report of the External Panel

A formal written report, including a recommendation on whether to approve or further revise a study programme, and capturing elements of good practice or suggestions for further improvement is prepared. Typically this is prepared by a nominated secretary, though some models involve each member of the panel preparing a particular section and the HEI or Agency collating and generating a comprehensive report.

The report should be clear, **explicitly address the evaluation criteria for aligning a study programme**, and cite relevant evidence for conclusions and judgements. It should refer to the various sources of relevant information such as:

- The Self-evaluation Report and any appendices
- Minutes from interviews and internal discussions
- The panel's judgements

Normally a report is revised several times, taking into account panel members' remarks, prior to a final version being sent to the HEI or agency.

8.6 The HEI Responding to a Report

When a HEI or the study programme team (self-evaluation team) receives a formal report from a peer review panel, they should consider the detail in an open and considered manner. In addition to providing the panel with information on any incidental factual inaccuracies, a formal response from the provider (a HEI) of the study programme, including a revised study programme document addressing suggestions made by the peer reviewers should be developed.

8.7 Making Decisions Based on a Report

In this process it is important that all parties are clear on the nature of the recommendations made, and the responsibilities of the HEI and study programme team in responding to them. It should be clear where formal lines of authority and decision lie, and what the local or national regulatory contexts are. For example, can a study programme team reject the advice of an evaluation panel, or who is the actual decision-maker in respect of validating a study programme?

8.8 Final Report, Publishing Findings, Providing Public Information

When the HEI has prepare a formal response to the evaluation panel's report, that response including a revised study programme is normally sent to the evaluation panel to see if it addresses the matters raised in the evaluation panel's report. Where the evaluation panel is satisfied that the revised study programme meets the validation criteria, the evaluation panel

makes a final decision (or recommendation to the decision-maker) whether to validate the study programme or not.

The evaluation panel's report, the HEI's response and the evaluation panel's final decision/recommendation are typically published on the HEI's website and also that of any relevant agency. The duration of the approval proposed (where relevant) should be published along with any monitoring or follow-up mechanism.

9   Conclusion

It is hoped that this Guideline can serve as a reference guide for HEIs and EQAs in developing their own suites of literature to support them in the processes of approving and aligning learning outcomes with a qualifications framework.