

## **Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications**

(Produced by the German Rectors' Conference, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and adopted by the Standing Conference on 21 April 2005)

## **Foreword**

### **The development of a national Qualifications Framework**

The aim of the Bologna Process is to create a system of transparent and comparable higher education qualifications. The introduction of a two-tier study structure is an important instrument to this end. There is wide-reaching consensus among the countries who have committed to the Bologna Process as regards the quantitative requirements for Bachelor's and Master's degrees (Bachelor's degree 180-240 ECTS credits, Master's degree 60-120 ECTS credits), the nomenclature of the two study levels (Bachelor's and Master's degrees, or corresponding national designations), and certain fundamental principles (employability, internationalisation, etc.). One challenge for the future shape of the European Higher Education Area is achieving general agreement on the qualifications profiles to be attained for specific degrees, and universally understandable designations (standard terminology).

In the Berlin Communiqué (September 2003) the European education ministers agreed to “elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems, which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile.” They also undertook to “elaborate an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area”. This European Framework can only define general qualifications. Acceptance of the European Framework will depend on whether it provides added value as regards the desired transparency. It is intended, therefore, to

- bring together the national Qualifications Frameworks, which form the core of the European framework,
- guarantee the transparency of an increasingly diversified higher education system and take account of the need for comprehensibility by students and employers, and
- describe the diversity of qualifications in Europe.

### **What is a Qualifications Framework?**

A Qualifications Framework is a systematic description of the qualifications offered by the education system of a particular country. It incorporates:

- a general description of the qualifications profile of a graduate holding the corresponding degree,
- a list of the desired learning outcomes,

- a description of the competences and skills which the graduate should possess, and
- a description of the formal aspects of a training level (workload in terms of ECTS credits, admission criteria, designation of the degrees, formal entitlements).

Previously German degree programmes were described above all in terms of course contents, admission criteria and duration of study. A Qualifications Framework, however, enables their description in terms of the qualifications which graduates should have acquired once they have successfully completed the degree. This reflects the shift from an input focus to an output focus, and is intended to promote the transparency of the education system.

A Qualifications Framework serves the following goals:

1. Increased transparency, comprehensibility and improved comparability of the degree programmes on offer – both national and international – by
  - ⇒ clearly setting out the qualification profiles,
  - ⇒ defining entry and exit points, and overlaps between study and training processes,
  - ⇒ clarifying alternative educational processes, the relative positioning of qualifications to each other and the possibilities for development in the education system.
2. Improved information for prospective students and employers.
3. Support for evaluation and accreditation
  - ⇒ by defining reference points.
4. Simpler curriculum development
  - ⇒ by providing a reference framework which must be completed specific to the subject.
5. Greater comparability of qualifications in the European and the international context.

## **Explanation of the current draft**

The present Qualifications Framework focuses initially on higher education and also describes interfaces with vocational training. Building on this first fundamental classification, in the coming years the Qualifications Framework is to be developed for other sectors of the education system (particularly vocational training and continuing education).

## **Guidelines**

In drawing up the Qualifications Framework particular importance was attached to the following guidelines:

a) Compatibility with a European Qualifications Framework

The debate on a national Qualifications Framework was closely coordinated with the developments at European level and the establishment of other national Qualifications Frameworks. Compatibility with a European Qualifications Framework is a key goal.

b) Subject-independent descriptors

The subject-specific structure of the Qualifications Framework resides in the subjects and higher education institutions. To this end, the Qualifications Framework is to be viewed as a reference framework.

c) Descriptors independent of higher education institution type

The Qualifications Framework does not distinguish fundamentally between *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences) on the one hand and universities and equivalent higher education institutions on the other. The different educational objectives of these types of higher education institution should not, however, be challenged, but should be harnessed for the development of the new structures.

d) Involvement of all relevant groups

In order to generate broad acceptance for the Qualifications Framework, feedback was sought from all stakeholders concerned (faculty and departmental conferences, students, employers and employees, accreditation agents) right from the development phase.

## **Explanation of the categories**

The division into categories was undertaken in accordance with the Tuning Project, a transnational project which for a number of years has addressed the description of subject-specific qualifications. The Dublin Descriptors, developed by the Joint Quality Initiative, were also employed as an additional reference point. Learning outcomes are included in both of the categories selected here (knowledge and understanding, and ability). The category *Knowledge and understanding* describes the competences acquired with regard to subject-specific knowledge acquisition (specialist competence). The category *Ability* covers the competences which enable a graduate to apply knowledge (methodological competence), and to perform a knowledge transfer. Communicative and social competences are also included in this category.

### **International initiatives**

- Joint Quality Initiative (informal network for quality assurance and accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's programmes; Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom) => Dublin Descriptors (definition of qualifications to distinguish between Bachelor's and Master's programmes)
- European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA)
- Tuning Project 2001 – 2004 => (generic und subject-related competences)
- Bachelor-Master Generic Qualification Initiatives
- EUA Master degrees survey (Andrejs Rauhvargers, Christian Tauch, September 2002)
- NARIC-ENIC Meeting, January 2003, Brussels, on issues relating to recognition of the new qualifications
- Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP), 2002-2003, coordinated by ENQA (development of criteria for transnational external evaluation)

### **Other Qualifications Frameworks**

- Danish Qualifications Framework
- Irish Qualifications Framework
- UK Qualifications Framework
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

## Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications

*NB: This draft is restricted initially to higher education qualifications. In future it is to be extended to cover the overall school system and the vocational training and lifelong learning sectors.*

Degree system in the European Higher Education Area		
Degree levels	Formal aspects	Qualifications conferred by higher education institutions Higher education degrees and <i>Staatsexamina</i> (State examinations) <sup>1</sup>
1st level: Bachelor's level	Degrees at Bachelor's level: 3, 3.5 or 4 years' full-time study or 180, 210 or 240 ECTS credits; All degrees qualify graduates to apply for Master's degrees	B. A.; B. Sc.; B. Eng.; B.F.A., B. Mus, LLB <i>Diplom (FH)</i> [ <i>Diplom</i> degree awarded by a university of applied sciences], <i>Staatsexamen</i> [State examination]
2nd level: Master's level	Degrees at Master's level: normally 5 years' full-time study or 300 ECTS credits; in multi-cycle degree programmes 1, 1.5 or 2 years or 60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits at Master's level; Types of Master's degrees: more practice-oriented, more research-oriented, artistic profile, teaching career profile; all degrees qualify graduates to apply for a doctorate <sup>2</sup>	M.A., M. Sc., M. Eng., M.F.A., M. Mus., LLM, etc. <i>Diplom (Univ.)</i> [ <i>Diplom</i> degree awarded by a university], <i>Magister, Staatsexamen</i> [State examination] Non-consecutive Master's and Master's programmes which are designed for continuing education <sup>3</sup>
3rd level: Doctoral level	(Degrees generally build on a Master's-level degree, i.e. 300 ECTS credits or more) <sup>4</sup>	Dr., Ph.D.

<sup>1</sup> See list in Annex 1. *Staatsprüfungen* [State examinations] are as a rule assigned to the second level of study; however the following special rules apply: degree programmes leading to a *Staatsprüfung* cover a standard study period of 3 years (primary school or primary level and lower secondary level teaching careers, which may be assigned to the 1st level of study) to 6.5 years (medicine); this is equivalent to 180 - 390 ECTS credits.

<sup>2</sup> For artistic degree programmes at *Kunst- und Musikhochschulen* (Universities of Art/Music) this entitlement applies only under certain conditions.

<sup>3</sup> The degree designations for non-consecutive Master's and Master's programmes which are designed for continuing education are not prescribed and are not limited to the given degree designations, e.g. MBA.

<sup>4</sup> Particularly qualified holders of a Bachelor's degree or a *Diplom (FH)* degree [*Diplom* degree awarded by a university of applied sciences] may also be admitted directly to doctoral studies.

**Level 1: Bachelor's level (180, 210 or 240 ECTS)**

Knowledge and understanding	Ability (developing knowledge)	Formal aspects
<p><u>Extending knowledge:</u></p> <p>Graduates' knowledge and understanding build on the level of the higher education entrance qualification and extend significantly beyond this.</p> <p>Graduates have proven their broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scientific principles of their field of learning.</p> <p><u>Consolidating knowledge:</u></p> <p>Graduates have a critical understanding of the key theories, principles and methods of their degree programme and are able to consolidate their knowledge vertically, horizontally and laterally. Their knowledge and understanding corresponds with the state of specialist literature, but should, at the same time, include some consolidated areas of knowledge of the current state of research in their field of learning.</p>	<p>Graduates have acquired the following competences:</p> <p><u>Instrumental competence:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can apply their knowledge and understanding to their occupational or professional context and can develop and advance solutions to problems and arguments in their subject area.</li> </ul> <p><u>Systemic competences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can collect, assess and interpret relevant information, in particular on their degree programme;</li> <li>- They can draw scientifically-founded conclusions that consider social, scientific and ethical insights;</li> <li>- They can independently organise advanced learning processes.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Admission requirements:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- higher education entrance qualification (see Annex 2)</li> <li>- in accordance with the regulations of the Länder on admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification<sup>5</sup></li> </ul> <p><u>Duration:</u> (incl. thesis) 3, 3.5 or 4 years (180, 210 or 240 ECTS credits)</p> <p>Degrees at Bachelor's level represent the first qualification for entry into a profession.</p> <p><u>Postgraduate options:</u> Master's level programmes (outstanding results can even lead directly to Doctoral level programmes), other continuing education options</p> <p><u>Transferring from vocational education and training:</u></p>
	<p><u>Communicative competences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can formulate specialised positions and solutions to problems and can defend these through argument;</li> </ul>	<p>Qualifications and competences acquired outside higher education institutions and proven by examination can, on starting a degree programme at a particular higher education institution, be</p>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (publisher): *Synoptische Darstellung der in den Ländern bestehenden Möglichkeiten des Hochschulzugangs für beruflich qualifizierte Bewerber ohne schulische Hochschulzugangsberechtigung auf der Grundlage hochschulrechtlicher Regelungen* (Synoptic presentation of the opportunities available in the Länder for access to higher education by vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification on the basis of higher education institution regulations). Version: March 2003

<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>	<b>Ability (developing knowledge)</b>	<b>Formal aspects</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can discuss information, ideas, problems and solutions with specialists and non-specialists;</li> <li>- They can take on responsibility in a team.</li> </ul>	credited on the basis of an equivalence testing procedure to the amount corresponding to the requirements of the respective degree programme <sup>6</sup> .

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Gemeinsame Empfehlung des BMBF, der KMK und der HRK an die Hochschulen zur Vergabe von Leistungspunkten in der beruflichen Fortbildung und Anrechnung auf ein Hochschulstudium* (joint recommendation by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Standing Conference and the German Rector's Conference to the higher education institutions on the award of credits in further vocational education and crediting them to a higher education degree programme of 26 September 2003.

**Level 2: Master's level (300 ECTS credits, after a Bachelor's level degree 60, 90, 120 ECTS credits)**

Knowledge and understanding	Ability (developing knowledge)	Formal aspects
<p><u>Extending knowledge:</u></p> <p>Master's graduates have a proven level of knowledge and understanding that normally builds on the Bachelor's level and significantly consolidates or extends this. They are able to define and interpret the special features, limits, terminologies and schools of thought in their field of learning.</p> <p><u>Consolidating knowledge:</u></p> <p>Their knowledge and understanding form the basis for the development and/or application of independent ideas. This may be more practice-oriented or more research-oriented. They have a broad, detailed and critical understanding of the latest state of knowledge in one or more special areas.</p>	<p>Graduates have acquired the following competences:</p> <p><u>Instrumental competence:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can also apply their knowledge and understanding as well as their problem-solving skills to new and unfamiliar situations that lie in a broad or multidisciplinary context relating to their academic subject.</li> </ul> <p><u>Systemic competences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can integrate knowledge and handle complexity;</li> <li>- They can make scientifically-founded decisions and draw conclusions, also on the basis of incomplete or limited information, and in so doing can consider social, scientific and ethical insights that also derive from the application of their knowledge and their decisions;</li> <li>- They can independently acquire new knowledge and ability;</li> <li>- They can carry out independent scientific or applied research projects in a largely self-directed and/or autonomous manner.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Admission requirements:</u></p> <p>For degree programmes leading to a first degree (<i>Diplom, Magister, Staatsexamen</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- higher education entrance qualification</li> <li>- in accordance with the regulations of the Länder on admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification<sup>7</sup></li> </ul> <p>For Master's level: first higher education qualification providing qualification for a profession at not less than Bachelor's level, plus additional admission requirements to be laid down by the higher education institution</p> <p><u>Duration:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for Master's programmes 1, 1.5 or 2 years (60, 90 or 120 ECTS credits)</li> <li>- for degree programmes leading to a first higher education qualification 4, 4.5 or 5 years, incl. thesis (240, 270 or 300 ECTS credits)</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (publisher): *Synoptische Darstellung der in den Ländern bestehenden Möglichkeiten des Hochschulzugangs für beruflich qualifizierte Bewerber ohne schulische Hochschulzugangsberechtigung auf der Grundlage hochschulrechtlicher Regelungen* (Synoptic presentation of the opportunities available in the Länder for access to higher education by vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification on the basis of higher education institution regulations). Version: March 2003

Knowledge and understanding	Ability (developing knowledge)	Formal aspects
	<p><u>Communicative competences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can communicate their conclusions, the underlying information and their reasons to specialists and non-specialists both clearly and unambiguously on the basis of the state of research and application;</li> <li>- They can discuss information, ideas, problems and solutions at a scientific level with specialists and non-specialists;</li> <li>- They can take on lead responsibility in a team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for degree programmes leading to a <i>Staatsexamen</i><sup>8</sup></li> </ul> <p><u>Postgraduate options:</u></p> <p>Doctorate, continuing education options</p> <p><u>Transferring from vocational education and training:</u></p> <p>Notwithstanding the requirement for a first higher education qualification providing qualification for a profession, qualifications and competences acquired outside higher education institutions and proven by examination can, on starting a degree programme at a particular higher education institution, be credited on the basis of an equivalence testing procedure to the amount corresponding to the requirements of the respective degree programme<sup>9</sup>.</p>

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Gemeinsame Empfehlung des BMBF, der KMK und der HRK an die Hochschulen zur Vergabe von Leistungspunkten in der beruflichen Fortbildung und Anrechnung auf ein Hochschulstudium* (joint recommendation by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Standing Conference and the German Rector's Conference to the higher education institutions on the award of credits in further vocational education and crediting them to a higher education degree programme) of 26 September 2003.

**Level 3: Doctoral level**  
**300 ECTS +**

<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>	<b>Ability (developing knowledge)</b>	<b>Formal aspects</b>
<p><u>Extending knowledge:</u>            Doctoral graduates have a systematic understanding of their research field and have mastered the skills and methods used in research in this field</p> <p>They have a comprehensive knowledge of the relevant literature.</p> <p><u>Consolidating knowledge:</u>            By presenting a scientific paper or thesis they have made an independent contribution to research that is capable of extending the borders of knowledge and can stand up to national or international review and examination by experts and specialists in the field.</p>	<p>Doctoral graduates have acquired the following competences:</p> <p><u>Instrumental competence:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can independently design and carry out significant research projects with scientific integrity.</li> </ul> <p><u>Systemic competences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can independently identify scientific questions and issues;</li> <li>- They can critically analyse, develop and synthesise new and complex ideas;</li> <li>- They can advance the social, scientific and/or cultural progress of a knowledge society in an academic or non-academic professional environment.</li> </ul> <p><u>Communicative competences:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They can discuss findings and results from their special fields with colleagues, and can communicate these to an academic public as well as to the general public;</li> <li>- They can lead a team.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Admission requirements:</u>  <i>Master (Univ., FH)</i> [Master's degree awarded by a university, Master's degree awarded by a <i>Fachhochschule</i> (university of applied sciences)], <i>Diplom (Univ.)</i> [<i>Diplom</i> degree awarded by a university], <i>Magister, Staatsexamen</i> [State examination], outstanding Bachelor's degree or outstanding <i>Diplom (FH)</i> [<i>Diplom</i> degree awarded by a university of applied sciences]</p> <p>Additional admission requirements are set by the faculty.</p>

**Overview:**     *Staatsexamen* [State examinations]

- Primary school or primary level teaching careers (6-7 semesters)
- General teaching careers at primary level and at all or individual lower secondary level school types (7-9 semesters)
- Teaching careers at all or individual lower secondary level school types (7-9 semesters)
- Upper secondary level (general education subjects) or *Gymnasium* teaching careers (9 semesters)
- Upper secondary level (vocational subjects) or vocational school teaching careers (9 semesters)
- Special educational teaching careers (8-9 semesters)
- Law (9 semesters)
- Medicine (13 semesters)
- Dentistry (11 semesters)
- Veterinary medicine (11 semesters)
- Pharmacy (8 (-9) semesters)
- Food chemistry ((8-) 9 semesters)

**Overview: Higher education entrance qualifications**

- *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* [general higher education entrance qualification]
- *Fachgebundene Hochschulreife* [qualification entitling holder to study particular subjects at a higher education institution]
- *Fachhochschulreife* [qualification entitling holder to study at a *Fachhochschule* (a university of applied sciences)] (can be for a particular subject or degree programme)
- Land-law regulated options for admission to higher education for vocationally qualified applicants without a higher education entrance qualification