Guideline for Applying Tuning – CALOHEE Qualifications Reference Frameworks for Higher Education in Europe in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe

2023

Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe (CALOHEE)

Tuning Educational Structures in the World

The name TUNING was chosen for higher education projects and initiatives to reflect the idea that universities do not look for uniformity in their degree programmes or any sort of unified, prescriptive or definitive curricula but simply for points of reference, convergence and common understanding. The protection of the rich diversity of higher education in Europe and the world has been paramount in the Tuning initiative from its start in 2001 and in no way seeks to restrict the independence of academic and subject specialists, or undermine local and national academic authority.

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Guideline for integrating CALOHEE Qualifications Reference Frameworks in Higher Education Quality Assurance Policies

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The introduction offers the arguments for publishing this *Guideline for integrating CALOHEE Reference Frameworks in Higher Education Quality Assurance Policies*.

This chapter introduces the ESG as an important means for internal and external quality assurance. It focusses on the relevance of the Why, How and What questions of quality assurance.

This part is the core of the Guideline. It introduces three types of reference frameworks. First the *CALOHEE General Qualifications Reference Frameworks* for the short, the first, second and third cycle, e.g. the levels 5-8 as defined in the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. Second, purpose and role of the *Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks* are explained and third - as a deepening of these frameworks - the *Subject Area Assessment / Learning Outcomes Reference Frameworks.*

Based on the order of the ESG of its so-called standards for QA, the relevance and contribution are showed for applying the CALOHEE instruments both for internal and external quality assurance.

Making the point that the contribution of the CALOHEE Reference Frameworks is key for internal and external QA today and tomorrow.

Guideline for Applying CALOHEE Qualifications Reference Frameworks in ESG

1. Introduction

This paper *explains the added value* of the CALOHEE General Reference Frameworks for Internal and External Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The new CALOHEE frameworks are meant as an addition to existing ones and have been developed by an international group of higher education experts, covering all educational sectors reaching from performing and creative arts to medical education and engineering to respond to current developments in higher education and society at large.

It also *offers guidance* how to use these Frameworks for enhancing quality assurance (QA). It is therefore of relevance for both individual Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Quality Assurance and Accreditation Organisations. The Frameworks as well as the Guideline intend to contribute significantly to developing and improving the internal quality culture of HEIs and offers international defined state-of-the-art quality references for external QA.

In the context of the Bologna Process since 1999 and the development of a EHEA a number of key instruments have been developed to make higher education programmes comparable and compatible and to enhance their quality. We distinguish the:

- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
- Qualifications Frameworks for the short, first, second and third cycle
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

In addition, of high relevance is the Lisbon Recognition Convention of 1997 and more recent additional documents, which offer the framework for the recognition of degrees and period of studies.

Besides the Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA (FQ of the EHEA), endorsed in 2005, the European Union has developed its European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), established in 2008. The descriptors as applied in the first mentioned framework are based on the so-called Dublin Descriptors approved in 2004. For both overarching European frameworks, as a consequence and follow-up, National Frameworks have been defined in all countries which composes the EHEA.

Overtime, having two competing and possibly conflicting types of frameworks has not proved to be very helpful. Furthermore, the present frameworks are 15 to 20 years of age and are not fully aligned anymore to the current educational and societal context.

This Guideline offers first a short explanation of the roles of the (1) European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and (2) the Qualifications Frameworks to define what marks high quality degree programme in higher education.

2. European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance

The ESG were adopted at the Bologna Ministerial Conference in 2005. Revised ESG have been approved in 2015. They are the backbone and framework for QA in the EHEA, and define clear roles for all parties involved. It distinguishes three parts:

1. *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for internal quality assurance*
2. *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for external quality assurance*

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3. Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for Quality assurance agencies

Internal quality assurance is the responsibility of HEIs. The ESG defines 10 standards expected to be met. The ESG also has defined purposes and principles. Four purposes are distinguished:

(1) Set a common framework for QA systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;

(2) Enable the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education in the EHEA;

(3) Support mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;

(4) Provide information on QA in the EHEA.

These intend to cover and be of relevance for the broad range of political and HE systems and socio-cultural and educational traditions. In addition, four principles have been formulated:

(1) HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality of their provisions and its assurance;

(2) QA responds to the diversity of HE systems, institutions, programmes and students;

(3) QA supports the development of a quality culture;

(4) QA takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

The ESG purposes and principles explain *why* international agreement about QA procedures and mechanisms are so important for building a robust EHEA. In final analysis they all intend to build and evidence mutual *trust and confidence* of a HEI and its programmes and modules/units offered, conditional for recognition of learning by third parties. Third parties are defined as other HEIs and (potential) employers. Besides offering accountability, there is the aim of quality enhancement, which assumes an established 'quality culture' in a HEI.

Acknowledging that the purpose of learning is multi-fold, that is personal development, preparing for active citizenship and future careers (e.g. workplace) also *how* learning and teaching is expected to take place according to the ESG by embracing the concept of 'outcome based learning'. The concept is outlined in the 2009 Ministerial Louvain-la-Neuve / Leuven Ministerial Communiqué of the Bologna Process. This paradigm shift from expert or teacher-driven education to student-centred and active learning implies a direct intervention in the ways higher education and degree programmes are organised, implying substantial reforms. The concept is detailed in particular in the ESG Standards nr. 1.2 *Design and Approval of Programmes*, nr. 1.3 *Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment*.

For this Guideline for integrating CALOHEE Reference Frameworks and Quality Assurance Policies also the Standards nr. 1.4 *Student admission, progression, recognition and verification* and nr. 1.9 *On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes,* are of high relevance.

What is (to be) learned is not directly covered by the ESG although it is stipulated in the fourth principle as well as in the Standards 1.2 and 1.9 that QA should take into account needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

In terms of admission, recognition and credit mobility, the *what* question is probably the most relevant one. It is key in not only identifying the level of learning, but also its content, as defined in the intended (programme) learning outcomes. For deciding on the appropriate level, the ESG standard 1.2 refers to the *Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA* and the

aligned national qualifications framework for higher education. The overarching European framework dates from 2005 and its descriptors - for the short, first, second and third cycle -, were developed in the period 2001-2004 by the Joint Quality Initiative, a group of QA and Ministerial experts from a sample of EU countries having most experience. The competing EQF for LLL established in 2008 is not mentioned in the ESG 2015 document. For the EQF also national frameworks have been developed in all EHEA countries. The EQF operates with 8 levels of which 5 to 8 is relevant to HE. The Diploma Supplement, an obligatory addition to the diploma certificate, requires to include the appropriate level of the degree. The descriptors of the overarching European and national frameworks have not been updated since their launch. Only limited changes have been made to the EQF to improve its meaning and understanding.

In addition to Part 1 of the ESG, *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for internal quality assurance,* this CALOHEE Guideline also offers attention to Part 2, *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for external quality assurance*, in particular the Standards 2.1 Considerations of internal quality assurance, 2.4 Peer-review experts and 2.5 Criteria for outcomes.

3. CALOHEE Reference Frameworks

The ESG purposes and principles, as outlined above, have been leading when developing and implementing the Tuning-CALOHEE projects since 2016, taking also into account the outcomes of the Tuning Sectoral Frameworks for Social Sciences and Humanities, prepared in the period 2008-2012. These in return took lessons from the *Tuning Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes* for a substantial number of disciplinary fields, or in Tuning jargon subject areas, which were published in the years 2008-2012.[1] Most of these documents are based on large scale transnational surveys which identified the key subject specific and generic competences for a particular subject area. The overarching qualifications frameworks and the Tuning ones, although being complementary and supporting each other, were developed in parallel. As a result, they were not fully aligned.

Since the frameworks were introduced, the thinking about learning and learning priorities, has developed further, due to further digitalization, the flexibilization of the labour market and new societal challenges, expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals. Although the present frameworks are accepted as they have been defined, there is reason to have a fresh look at them. One of the challenges for the higher education sector in Europe, which can be perceived as a weakness, is the existence of the two competing overarching frameworks. Another weakness is that both frameworks are rather general and do not cover more current insights regarding societal responsibilities of the learner.

The project *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe*, in short CALOHEE, was initiated in close cooperation with DG Education and Culture of the European Commission to find more reliable ways to evidence actual learning. The ultimate aim was and is to develop sufficient common ground to make

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[1] Architecture, Art History, Business, Chemistry, Creative and Performing Arts, Civil Engineering, Creative and Performing Arts, Earth Sciences, Education and Teacher Education, European Studies, Gender Studies, History, Humanitarian Assistance, Literature Studies, Linguistics, Mathematics, Medicine, Music, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physics, Psychology and Religious Studies.

transnational tests to measure and compare learning. To allow for such a mechanism several steps had to be made. The first was to turn the perceived weaknesses of having two overarching frameworks into a strength by combining the basic philosophies and principles into one integrated model covering all three cycles of learning, as well as the short cycle, that is the EQF-levels 5-8, without undermining or challenging the existing ones. The principles applied in constructing the model are explained in the paper Tuning-CALOHEE *General Qualifications Reference Frameworks for Higher Education*, which also contains the general frameworks for the EQF levels 5-8 / cycles of the FQ of the EHEA.

In short, the model is based on two legs, the *vertical one* outlining the 5 or 6 dimensions / descriptors of the FQ of the EHEA and a *horizontal one*, involving the EQF descriptors. The basic philosophy applied is that <u>in all learning</u> there is always a knowledge / knowing /understanding component, a skills / application component and an autonomy and responsibility component, which also involves 'attitude'. These three components organise and express the progression of learning, 'knowledge' being the foundation and 'autonomy and responsibility', expressing authority, being the most ambitious.

This model has been used to make a second step, to develop Tuning-CALOHEE *General Qualifications Reference Frameworks for Higher Education* (GQRFs) as well as *Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks* (SAQRFs). In deviation to the existing two frameworks the term 'reference' has been added, to express that they define standards, but that there is room for motivated flexibility to do justice to, at the one hand, educational cultures and national specificities and, on the other hand, the mission of a particular HEI and the profile of individual programmes. The addition of 'reference' is also in line with qualifications frameworks developed in other parts of the world more recently.

The GQRFs and SAQRFs allow for integrating new societal developments, resulting in forward looking frameworks, but also allow to distinguish three sub-levels – reflecting direction and progressions routing of learning - within the existing cycles. As a result, the descriptors are more precise and current and therefore a better reference for todays and tomorrows societal needs. Because, both the GQRF and SAQRF are still rather general, a third step was made, the development of *Subject Area Assessment / Learning Outcomes Reference Frameworks* (SAARFs), containing better measurable indicators, to support the SAQRF. As a result, three fully aligned types of reference frameworks haven been prepared for now five disciplinary fields: Civil Engineering, History, Nursing, Physics and Teacher Education. At the end of 2023, the same set will be available for an additional six subject areas: Business Studies, Creative and Performing Arts, Information and Communication Technology, International Relations, Medicine and Occupational Therapy. All, will be supported by a revised - 2023 edition - brochure *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in ….*

The SAARF is in practice a break-down or detailing of the descriptors as included in the SAQRF. The SAARF is following the same CALOHEE logic and model as the SAQRF and the GQRF, but adds sub-descriptors to the descriptors. This offers not only better measurable descriptors at programme and module/unit level but also a *menu* from which each degree programme can make its choice, taking into account mission and profile. It is not intended that every sub-descriptor is included and covered by a degree programme. Sub-descriptors offer insight in breadth and deepness of the item to cover. It might also offer variety in content and/or theories and methodologies to teach and learn. A SAARF is supported by suggested best practices for learning, teaching and assessment to develop and meet the intended learning outcomes. It is meant as a tool box to select the most appropriate learning, teaching and

assessment strategies, methods and approaches. Respecting the concept of outcome-based education, that is student-centred and active learning, it is assumed that learning, teaching and assessment are fully aligned.

The SAQRFs and SAARFSs developed or in development, cover all six sectors of learning in higher education, that is *creative and performing arts, humanities, social sciences, health care, natural sciences and engineering*. This is important, because these sectors construct a variation of mind sets relevant for society at large. All of these sectors operate not only a different domain of knowledge, but also have their own theoretical frameworks and methodologies.

In summary, the backbone for deciding *what* is expected to be learned, are the following Tuning-CALOHEE frameworks:

- *General Qualifications Reference Frameworks (GQRFs)*
- *Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks (SAQRFs)*
- *Subject Area Assessment / Learning Outcomes Reference Frameworks (SAARFs)*

Each of these frameworks have their own role in QA procedures.

Because these *reference* frameworks are forward looking, they are both aspirational and inspirational. An initial analysis of present degree programmes in five academic fields, shows that the knowledge/knowing/understanding component is always present although depths might differentiate between programmes. There is more variety in level regarding the skills / application component. The autonomy and responsibility component - although very important to bridge higher education to potential employment and societal involvement – requires, in most of the degree programmes analysed, more attention to meet the needs of learners and society.

4. How to use the CALOHEE frameworks in practice?

Following the distinction made by the ESG, the role of the three types of CALOHEE frameworks is different for internal QA, external QA and for Quality Assurance Agencies. This CALOHEE Guideline focusses in particular on internal QA, and, derived from it, on external QA.

4.1 ESG part 1: Standards and guidelines for Internal quality assurance

> **Standard 1.2 Design and approval of programmes:**
>
> Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

To interpret the standard the ESG offers a guideline and a set of indicators. Degree programmes are expected to develop subject specific and generic competences, defined as

academic knowledge and skills including transversal ones. Programmes need to be designed with the 'institutional strategy' – which is not defined in the ESG document – in mind; having 'overall programme objectives' and explicit learning outcomes'; involving students and other stakeholders; offer clarity about the expected student workload in (ECTS) credits; enable smooth student progression; and include well-structured work placement opportunities where appropriate.

Furthermore, it is suggested to assure the degree programme reflects the four compatible purposes of HE as defined by the Council of Europe:

1. preparing for employment,
2. active citizens in democratic societies,
3. ensure personal development and
4. the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.[2]

Finally, it is advised to benefit from external expertise and reference points.

Regardless whether the FQ of the EHEA or the EQF for LLL is applied in formulating programme learning outcomes, it is strongly advised to complement these with the CALOHEE frameworks as follows.

General Qualifications Reference Frameworks for Higher Education (GQRFs):

1. Use the General Qualifications Reference Frameworks as the key tool for creating a quality culture. These state-of-the-art frameworks offer the indicators for deciding not only the level of qualifications, but also for general learning content (knowledge, application of knowledge and autonomy and responsibility) required for today and tomorrow; responding to the question '*what*' to be learned to meet international defined academic and disciplinary standards. They can be used for diagnostic purposes, that is as checklists for deciding whether progression routing is in place both horizontally and vertically and as tools to check whether degree programmes are meeting the needs of society after graduation and/or the entrance conditions (prerequisites and co-requisites) or 'learning incomes' for the successive cycle of learning.
2. Use the General Qualifications Reference Frameworks as the references in the formal institutional approval processes of degree programmes. Following the GQRFs descriptors guarantees that graduates will be both knowledgeable and skilled and can act with authority at the level of the degree awarded according to international standards.
3. Use the General Qualifications Reference Frameworks as general reference points in the process of programme design and/or enhancement and the formulation and/or enhancement of programme learning outcomes.

Subject Area Specific Qualifications Reference Frameworks (SAQRFs):

1. Use the Subject Area Specific Qualifications Reference Frameworks as meta-reference frameworks for the design of new or enhancement of existing degree programmes. These frameworks are based on international dialogues of experts involving organisations of professionals and other stakeholders.

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[2] Education at the Council of Europe, Skills and qualifications for life in a democracy (2016): https://rm.coe.int/16806ce22e

2. Use the Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks model and the formulation of descriptors as a robust basis for defining the learning outcomes for each degree programme. In case the SAQRF is not (yet) available, select one which comes closest to the degree programme involved. For multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary degree programmes it might be necessary to look at two different existing SAQRF to define the programme learning outcomes.

    Applying the CALOHEE format assures full alignment of the programme learning outcomes with the appropriate SAQRF and GQRF, but also with the existing European Qualifications Frameworks. Because, each programme has its own mission and profile, degree learning outcomes will show broad variation between agreed limits. Changeable formats are made available online which allow for tailoring of SAQRF descriptors for individual degree programmes.

3. Compare the present degree programme learning outcomes (in case available) based on either the FQ of the EHEA or the EQF for LLL with the most appropriate SAQRF. Make adjustments to the descriptors of the SAQRF to do justice to the degree programme involved. In doing so respect the 15 or 18 boxes of the table as included in the CALOHEE model. Although, it is possible to include two or more descriptors in one box, avoid making the set of programme learning outcomes unnecessary complex and long. Be aware when formulating programme learning outcomes these should be measurable.

Subject Area Assessment / Learning Outcomes Reference Frameworks (SAARFs):

1. Use the most relevant Subject Area Assessment / Learning Outcomes Reference Frameworks to fine-tune the programme learning outcomes and to (re)formulate module / unit learning outcomes. See for identifying the most appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategies, approaches and methods EQF Standard 1.3 below.

2. Select the most appropriate sub-descriptors for the degree programme involved, taking into account mission and profile. From its start in 2001, the Tuning initiative has promoted the idea that each degree programme should have its own profile, doing justice to local and national needs, meeting at the same time international standards. Tuning has also highlighted the need for flexibility to allow for individualised learning profiles, that is variety in the outcomes of the learning process, to do justice to the individual strength and interests of the learner. Flexible learning paths require a combination of majors, minors, optional course units and electives. These can also be micro-credentials, as is showed below.

3. In formulating degree programme learning outcomes as well as module / unit learning outcomes make use of the topics identified as sub-descriptors as well as their formulation.

> **Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**
>
> Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach**.**

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Also, for this Standard an ESG guideline and indicators are offered. The focus is on the role of the student in the learning process, that is motivation, self-reflection and engagement, having consequences for design and delivery of study programmes as well as the way assessment is organised. This implies that the interpretation of student-centred learning is active learning, <u>not</u> on the outcomes of the learning process. *This focus is a limited interpretation of student-centred learning which does not take into account and does do justice to the learning most relevant for preparing for a societal role,* which implies that the learning process is not only meant to make a learner knowledgeable, but also skilled and able to operate autonomously and take responsibility.

The ESG indicators are tailored to the learning and teaching process, not the outcome of it, that is the <u>relevance</u> of *what* has been learned for the workplace and active citizenship. Student-centred learning implies according to the guidelines: flexible learning paths, variety of pedagogical methods (not defined), varies modes of delivery, autonomy of the learner, guidance and support from the teacher, a major relationship between learner and teacher and evaluations resulting in adjustments.

Substantial space is devoted in the ESG to assessment, which is related to students' progression and their future careers. Assessment is expected to take into account that assessors are familiar with current methods, transparency and consistency of assessment and marking, offering feedback, achievement of learning outcomes. Although student-centred education is related to (constructive) alignment of learning, teaching and assessment, this is not highlighted in the ESG. An obvious shortcoming.

Tuning introduced the concept of student-centred and active learning European wide from 2001, to prepare student well for a knowledge-based society, future employment and active citizenship, besides personal development. Tuning surveys showed over time a skills and competence gap between HE learning and the needs of society which resulted at several moments in substantial unemployment and continuous hindering of economic-social development.

Today, high level generic skills and competences, such as critical thinking, teamwork, project work, leadership, entrepreneurship among others are perceived as crucial in HE learning, teaching and assessment. For obvious reasons these have been incorporated in the Tuning-CALOHEE GQRFs, SAQRFs and SAARFs. In the context of Standard 1.3, the SAARF is most relevant, because its descriptors and sub-descriptors are supported by the most appropriate modes of learning, teaching and assessment, expected to be fully aligned, to achieve the intended learning outcomes. It is suggested to apply the following actions:

Subject Area Assessment / Learning Outcomes Reference Frameworks (SAARFs):

1. Use the descriptors and its sub-descriptors as an instrument to design or update the degree programme and or (part of its) content. Be aware that designing, implementing and enhancing a degree programme is teamwork. The descriptors and sub-descriptor are handy tools to develop progression routing in a programme.
2. When designing a programme start with defining or updating the programme learning outcomes, before deciding on its modules or unit structure. Module and unit learning outcomes are derived from the programme learning outcomes.
3. Select for the degree programme the most appropriate examples of best practice for learning, teaching and assessment. Adjust these to assure a good fit, doing justice to the programme and its programme and module/unit learning outcomes. Keep in mind

that examples of best practice are meant to inspire the team of teachers involved and responsible, to develop the strategies, methods and approaches best suitable for the programme.

> **Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification**
>
> Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

The ESG guideline and indicators make a distinction between student progression and instruments for admission, recognition and completion and certification. Access policies, admission processes and criteria have to be implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. HEIs should have a student tracking system in place, as well as a fair recognition system, respecting the Lisbon Recognition Convention for both periods of studies and prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal).

It is also highlighting that awarding of the degree is based on the accumulation of the student's period of studies. The degree certificate should be substituted with documentation explaining 'the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed'.

Student admission, recognition and certification of studies and study periods implies documentation. This documentation involves not only the level of learning, but also 'what' has been learned expressed in achieved learning outcomes. Within a programme of studies 'entry conditions' to obtain access to the next unit, module or phase might be applied. Prerequisites and co-requisites for a next cycle / EQF level, degree programme or module/unit can be formulated as achieved 'learning incomes'. These detail the learning thought necessary to undertake the forthcoming studies successfully.

The process of admission, recognition and certification require well formulated learning outcomes to make fair judgements. Here the CALOHEE frameworks, offering reference and a systematic approach, are expected to be of help. They offer insight in not only the formal level of learning expressed in a cycle / ESG level required, but most of all identify *what* is expected to be learned. Well formulated learning outcomes, meeting international standards, are a condition for fair recognition. An agreed model to organize the learning outcomes, e.g. the CALOHEE frameworks, facilitate the process.

In case of a diploma certificate, it is suggested to include the programme learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement applying the Tuning-CALOHEE table. Also, in documenting credit mobility and offering certificates for micro-credentials, it is thought advisable to use the CALOHEE model. This is in the interests of the learner, HEIs and (potential) employers and other stakeholder.

Micro-credentials deserve special attention here. They can be initiated by a HEI and be either a part of existing course offerings or an addition at any cycle / level (EQF 5 to 8). Setting-up micro-credentials can also be the result of learner/market demand. In both cases, it is relevant to decide on the workload involved, expressed in ECTS credits, and to define appropriate learning outcomes. The aim of a micro-credential might be to upgrade existing knowledge with new knowledge. Its purpose might also be to actually train new knowledge

and skills which is at a higher level than knowledge acquisition. The aim of a micro-competence could also be to offer training taking real world practices as a basis. It is the role of the provider / HEI to identify the appropriate cycle / EQF level as well as the three types identified above, each offering a different set of intended learning outcomes. In this context, the GQRFs offer a robust response to the experienced problem that the present QFs are not able to distinguish level of learning and outcomes in a first cycle of 3 to 4 years, a second cycle of 1 to 2 years and a third cycle of 3 to 4 years.

Standard 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

The ESG guideline distinguishes content of the programme, which should take into account current research as well as needs of society, besides obvious elements as students' workload, success rate, procedures for assessment, student satisfaction and the learning environment. In the reviewing and revising process students and other stakeholders should be involved. The aim is to keep degree programmes and learning up-to-date.

The international Tuning-CALOHEE GQRFs, SAQRFs and SAARFs have been established to offer reference to decide whether existing programmes are indeed meet the needs of the learner, the labor market and society at large. These frameworks can not only be used as tools to develop state-of-the-art degree programmes, micro-credentials and learning in general, but also as a diagnostic tool to check what are the strengths and weaknesses of existing programmes. Applying this reference frameworks will help to identify gaps in learning. '*What*' is learned and '*how*' the learning is organized, are important indicators to decide whether the degree programmes and the learning involved is (still) relevant for meeting needs. Applying the CALOHEE reference frameworks is an effective and convincing instrument for QA and should be part of the institutional quality culture.

4.2 Part 2: Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance

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Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

ESG guidelines define external quality assurance as a check on internal quality assurance, but also as a recognition and supporting instrument that quality standards and guidelines are met. As explained before, the ESG response well to the *why* and *how* questions of quality assurance. To decide on level and quality of content, *what* is studied and at *what* level, the ESG is depending on national qualifications frameworks and consequently the Framework for

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Qualifications of the EHEA. Or, as an alternative, the ESG for LLL and related national frameworks.

Being now 15 to 20 years of age and not having been updated on the basis of new insights *what* the learning is expected to compass in the world of today and tomorrow, the CALOHEE Reference Frameworks should be received as a welcome addition. Its model and tables do not challenge the existing overarching European and national frameworks but are meant to complement taking into account recent societal developments. They are also meant to be forward looking. This is of high relevance because learners starting today, will graduate years from now.

In external QA a distinction is made between institutional and programme evaluation and accreditation. Quality Assurance Agencies and Organisations might be specialized in one or the other or in both. For institutional QA and accreditation, the General Qualifications Reference Frameworks for Higher Education are of most relevance. They offer flexible standards of what might be expected from their degree programmes to be relevant for society.

For programme evaluation and accreditation, the Subject Area Qualifications Reference Frameworks are meant as a key instrument to judge whether these are up-to-date, in academic terms but also the extend to which current societal and labor market developments are taken into account. Regarding the learning, teaching and assessment strategies, methods and approaches the Subject Area Assessment Reference Frameworks are meant to be of service. The information collected and showcased about best practices might also be helpful for institutional QA and accreditation. They show which formats fit best to develop subject specific as well as generic knowledge, skills and competences.

> ### Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts
>
> External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

The ESG guideline identifies informed independent peer experts as the core of external quality assurance, involving academics, students and employers/professional practitioners. Involvement of international experts is desired.

Experience during the last decades has showed that the role of peer experts is a challenging and challenged/debated one. To arrive to balanced and fair judgements the team of experts needs to be large enough and well composed. The same number of people give the same number of opinions. Therefor international developed and agreed reference benchmarks are of high importance. This was a major reason for developing the QAA Benchmark Standards and initiating the Joint Quality Initiative and the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project in the first years of the 21st century.

The GQRFs, SAQRFs and SAARFs offer peer experts complementary tools to decide whether quality standards are met. They are sufficiently flexible to do justice to different missions, profiles and approaches. At the same time, they identify the core of *what* is expected to be learned to be awarded a qualification which is not challenged and allows for 'automatic' recognition. They offer a sound foundation for obtaining access to the next level of learning

and allow for fair judgement whether the programme learning outcomes match the 'learning incomes' of the programme selected for further studies.

> ***Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes:***
>
> Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

The ESG guideline expresses the impact external QA might have. To assure equity and reliability outcomes of external QA it needs to be based on predefined and published criteria, which are applied consistently and are evidence-based.

Expectation about the role of HEIs as well as the outcomes of the degree programmes and learning offered have evolved over time. As a result of the introduction of student-centred and active learning, replacing expert or teacher-driven education, perceptions of what makes good and relevant HE education has changed over the last decades. The criteria applied for both internal and external QA have to keep up with those developments. These are not only process steered but also relate to the outcomes of the learning process. Also here the CALOHEE frameworks should be welcomed as a very useful addition to existing instruments.

5. In conclusion

In the Quality Assurance discourse it is often argued that a HEI and its programmes should be judged in its own right. However, at the same time the concept of outcome-based learning has been introduced, requiring learning outcomes at programme and module/unit level, preparing for personal development, but also explicitly for the world of work and active citizenship. This sets limitations to the independency of HEIs, in which frameworks are guiding.

In addition, there is the ever-changing context in which HEIs and QA are operating. This context is well formulated in the ESG of 2015: "Higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global competitiveness. Given the desire for European societies to become increasingly knowledge-based, higher education is an essential component of socio-economic and cultural development. At the same time, an increasing demand for skills and competences requires higher education to respond in new ways".

No better arguments for showing the relevance of the 2023 Tuning-CALOHEE GQRFs, SAQRFs and SAARFs in creating and/or enhancing a quality culture and implementing QA successfully.