

**BOLOGNA PROCESS
TEMPLATE FOR NATIONAL REPORTS: 2005-2007**

A. Background information on your Higher Education system

Details

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Date	
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Main achievements since Bergen

Higher education in Armenia is currently facing the pressure of reforms as well as tremendous opportunities for development. The main foci of the Government of Armenia (GoA), the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), and the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are introduction of a two-cycle degree system, a credit transfer and accumulation system, and a Diploma Supplement system; strengthening of Doctoral Programmes as a bridge between higher education and research area; and creation of a recognition body and national quality assurance agency.

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

In May 2005, the Armenian ENIC/NARIC was established by government decree to develop an equitable recognition system of qualifications for use both at the national and organizational level. After studying the European system, the Armenian version of the Diploma Supplement was developed. Presently, it is under discussion in the MoES as well as in HEIs. According to the timetable approved by the GoA, the DS will be officially issued by the HEIs starting from 2007.

2. System based on two main cycles

A system based on two cycles, bachelors/masters, was introduced by the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education (2004) and by a government decree (2004) that all state universities present programmes as bachelors and masters degrees. It is planned that by 2010 all universities, including private institutions, will base programs on two cycles.

3. Establishment of a system of credits

In December 2005, there was a special decree of the government: On The Introduction of Credit System. As directed in Decree Six, state universities started implementation of the credit system stage by stage. The following has been accomplished thus far: the State Engineering University has a four year experience in their Master's Programme; Yerevan Linguistic University, as a pilot project, has introduced the credit system in one educational

programme both for the bachelors and masters degrees; the other three universities are reviewing their academic programs according to a credit system. All six universities jointly developed recommendations on implementation of the credit system.

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Education and Science has appointed a working group that will develop ECTS on the national level, prepare guidelines on how to implement the ECTS, and organise training for university ECTS coordinators. The ECTS guide has been translated and presently is being published.

In the second half of December, the Ministry of Education and Science is organising a conference on ECTS. All six universities will make presentations on their achieved results and develop recommendations on how to organise learning with the credit system.

4. Promotion of mobility

The mobility among the students and staff is not high as there are legal and programmatic barriers that hinder the process. The existing academic programmes strongly regulate the transfer of students from one profession to another by a special government decree which sets certain limitations. The effects of the implementation of ECTS and DS to promote the mobility of the transfer of students to foreign universities based on bilateral agreements is limited, and not all of the European mechanisms (ERASMUS) promoting the international mobility of students function in Armenia.

The MoES encourages cooperation directly between HEIs. According to the statistics, about 10% of university professional staff and students are involved in various mobility programmes each year.

5. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance

According to the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education, a special unit of the MoES conducts licensing and accreditation of private HEIs. A working group was formed by the MoES that will develop a national quality assurance system according to the European recommendations. It is planned to create an independent quality assurance agency.

The universities themselves are aware of the importance of creating internal mechanisms for quality assurance and institutional improvement. They are becoming increasingly introspective and analytical about their strengths and weaknesses and the need to develop a culture of constant improvement through periodic evaluation.

6. Promotion of European dimensions in higher education

New research centers were created in several universities. The staffs of the centres are also involved in the teaching process. Graduate programmes such as art studies, theology, social work, and humanitarian professions are newly opened and expanded

Life Long Learning

Some elements of life long learning as defined by the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education of Armenia are available as supplementary postgraduate programmes based on earned professional education and do not lead to a formal credential. The purposes of these programmes are to improve qualifications and to bring skills up to date. Internal corporate training with a similar purpose is also organized. Additionally, there are several non-governmental organizations for adult learning. The development of distance learning and e-learning with the introduction of ECTS at the universities will largely promote learning

opportunities for all ages, including continuing education, correspondence courses, and recreational activities.

Participation of students and higher education institutions in the Bologna Process

The Ministry has supported the initiative of student unions to create a national student union that will apply for membership to ESIB. The students are actively represented in university governance. Groups were formed in all universities to encourage the Bologna process within each institution. Several universities are members of EUA.

Doctoral studies as the 3rd Bologna cycle

Doctoral studies are defined by the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education as the 3rd Bologna cycle. It is intended to increase academic programmes and duration of studies to make them comparable with the 3rd Bologna cycle.

National organisation

The Ministry of Education and Science is the main authority responsible for higher education. As a direct result of joining the Bologna process, there have been certain structural changes in the Ministry. A special Department for Policy and Strategic Planning and a Coordinating Committee of Bologna Promoters comprised of stakeholders were formed.

The following working Groups were established according to priority issues: ECTS, national qualification frameworks, quality assurance, financial issues, and Degree System.

All Armenian HEIs report to the Ministry. Primarily, funds are allocated from the state budget according to number of students and research activities on a competitive basis. HEIs are becoming more autonomous and self governing in the selection of professions and specialisations, curriculum development, implementation of new teaching methodologies, strategic planning, marketing activities, and establishment of contacts. It is worth it to mention that changes occurred in the top governance of the HEIs comprising from the representatives of university staff and students, founders and the MoES. University Councils are authorised to define policy, approve the budget, and affirm the election of Rectors. Special units have been formed in all HEIs that are responsible for policy and its implementation according to the Bologna action lines. The process to create Registrar's offices has begun in the universities as well.

There are 20 public and 72 private universities. 28 private universities are accredited and eight are accredited on the basis of one academic programme.

There are four types of higher education institutions: university, academy, institute, and conservatory. There is no formal division between professional and academic degrees. Despite the type of institution, all of them function under the same legal framework.

Partnership

A committee for coordination and promotion of the Bologna process in Armenia was

formed within the MoES and is composed of stakeholders from interested ministries, public and private HEIs, the business community, the banking sector, students, and trade unions.

The MoES signed a “Memorandum of Intentions” with the Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs of Armenia in order to increase their role and participation in the education process. Student involvement in university governance is 25% at the university and Academic Council) and faculty/department levels.

The involvement of students is reflected in the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education (2004) and the government decree on “Composition of Governance Councils of HEIs” (2005). Representatives from Trade Unions are involved as well in all levels of university governance.

B. Main stock-taking questions, including scorecard elements

Degree system

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

7. In 1992, Yerevan State Engineering University introduced the two-cycle degree system. Later, Yerevan State University (1995) and Agriculture University (1998) revised their academic programmes according to bachelors and masters degrees. In 2005, as defined in the acting legislation, all the HEIs introduced the two-cycle degree. In the 2006/2007 academic year, 92% of all students were enrolled in a two-cycle degree system.

8. Before Armenia joined the Bologna Process, Yerevan State Engineering University introduced an educational component in doctoral studies. Later in 2005, the Law on Higher and Post Graduate Education reinforced the educational programme for doctoral students. About 10% of the 3rd cycle students follow structured doctoral programmes.

The normal length of full-time doctoral studies is 3 or 4 years, depending on how the studies are organised. This includes both classroom courses and independent research. Each student has a scientific supervisor. There are certain assessment procedures, including intermediate exams and final defence of scientific thesis. The third post-graduate cycle, which is Researcher (hetazotogh), is defined by the law but practically does not exist.

The traditional structure of doctoral programmes (Aspiratura; Doktorantura) was not reflected by the Bologna process. Gitutyunneri teknatsu (Ph.D) programmes, besides foreign languages, philosophy and some special subjects, include compulsory theoretical courses (decided upon individual plans). Each course ends with exam. The Doktorantura part of the programmes is purely individual research leading to the title of Gitutyuneri Doktor. Presently, it is being discussed to include doctoral studies in the existing national qualifications framework. Interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills are included. It has been three years since Yerevan State Engineering University started the implementation of credit points in doctoral studies as a pilot project. It is discussed to introduce the credit point for all the doctoral studies.

(Scorecard and Eurydice)

9. All first cycle qualifications give access to several second cycle programmes, and all second cycle qualifications give access to at least one of the third cycle programmes without major transitional problems.

10. There is a working group formed in the MoES to conform the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in line with the Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA. According to the timetable approved by the government, NQF will be adopted by 2009. Before the approval of the NQF in 2008, it will be widely discussed with all the stakeholders.

11. To increase the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications, employers take part in the development of academic standards and curriculum as well as final assessment of graduate's knowledge. There are no specific statistics provided, but according to a rough assessment, the employability rate is 25%-30% for the first cycle graduates. In 2006/2007, about 10% of first cycle graduates continued their education in the second cycle. It is expected that this percentage will increase up to 5% due to the growth of economy and the stable number of graduates.

Quality assurance

12. A quality assurance system comparable with the European model is not in place. Some functions of internal quality assurance such as internal assessment of programs; evaluation of the teaching process, staff and students; and external review are functional. The National Service of Accreditation and Licensing conducts the accreditation process of HEIs according to the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education. The MoES has established the working group in order to develop a national quality assurance system according to European standards and guidelines. An assessment study of the existing accreditation system was conducted by a foreign expert. The results of the study with corresponding recommendations have already been presented to MoES. According to the timetable approved by the government, it is planned to establish an independent quality assurance agency in 2007.

13. External quality assurance is conducted by the above mentioned licensing and accreditation agency. According to the regulations on licensing and accreditation, all state and private universities are required to pass an external review and accreditation process.

The state accreditation is preceded by self-evaluation of the educational institution: the administration of the educational institution prepares a self-evaluation report and submits a report to the service on its readiness for partial or full state accreditation of its specialties. Once a positive conclusion is reached, the service committee investigates all aspects of the HEI's activity by having meetings, consultations, lectures, and observations. Finally, the service provides a report to the Minister with the recommendations for accreditation. In case of negative conclusion, the HEI may reapply to the service after removal of shortcomings. Reapplication may not be made until at least one month after the conclusion of the negative report.

14. The existing external quality assurance model does not assume student participation.

The situation is reversed for institutions where students are widely involved in teaching staff evaluation, evaluation of internal management, and in some cases in the evaluation of academic programs. Taking into account the fact that students are involved in the Management Board of HEIs (Rectorate) and Academic Council, their role, in reality, is significant and includes the development of educational policy, decision making and evaluation of HEIs administrative, financial management, academic procedures, teaching programmes, scientific research and evaluation of teaching staff.

15. Presently, there is no international participation in the Armenian QA system. The newly established national quality assurance agency should include international participation, cooperation, and networking.

Recognition of degrees and study periods

16. The European DS is not yet officially introduced in our country. Presently, the country is using the old DS which is issued automatically and includes information on the courses taught with in-class hours, summative grades, the results of state exams, or/and defended thesis.

The Armenian version of the DS was developed by the ArmENIC and is currently under discussion in MoES and HEIs. According to the preliminary discussions, the DS will be issued automatically and free of charge both in English and Armenian. This corresponds to the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format.

17. On December 14, 2004, Armenia ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention with reservation. According to the timetable approved by the Government of Armenia in November 2006, working groups will be formed according to the Bologna priority issues that will carefully review the legislation and propose amendments if necessary. A number of sub-legislative acts are required to harmonize the recognition process in Armenia.

A National Information Center for Academic Recognition and Mobility (ArmENIC) was established in 2005 by special decree of the Government of Armenia. ArmENIC is a full member of the ENIC/NARIC network. According to the charter of ArmENIC, it has both decision making and advisory functions. The recognition procedures used by ArmENIC are in line with the principles of Lisbon Convention and the additional texts. ArmENIC is fully operational and the following principles are applied in practice of the first year: (i) applicant's right to fair assessment; (ii) recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; (iii) demonstration of substantial differences, where recognition is not granted; (iv) provision of information about our country's HE programmes and institutions.

ArmENIC has developed a National Action Plan For Recognition (see attached).

18. In 2003, ECTS was introduced in State Engineering University as a pilot project funded by the Open Society Institute. In 2005, there was a special decree of the government "On Implementation of Credit System in HEIs" according to which all HEIs started introducing the credit system. According to the decree, national guidelines should be elaborated on for the organization of study processes using ECTS as a national credit and accumulation system.

Only American University of Armenia is using the American credit system.

19. As mentioned above, the ArmENIC has developed a National Action Plan For Recognition.

Lifelong Learning

(Scorecard)

20. Some elements of life long learning as defined by the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education of Armenia are available as supplementary postgraduate programmes based on earned professional education and do not lead to a formal credential. The purposes of these programmes are to improve qualifications and to bring skills up to date. Internal corporate training with a similar purpose is also organized. Additionally, there are several non-governmental organizations for adult learning. The development of distance learning and e-learning with the introduction of ECTS at the universities will largely promote learning opportunities for all ages, including continuing education, correspondence courses, and recreational activities.

21. Higher education institutions in Armenia do not yet operate a full fledged credit system based on ECTS, hence the notion “flexible learning path” will be put forward after the system is in place. Only then will Armenian universities be able to create new combinations of disciplines without official permission. These flexible paths will allow universities to meet the needs of the personal profiles and of the ever-changing job market.

Joint degrees

20. The current legislation has no legal or other obstacles for establishing joint programmes and the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, but the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Education does not specifically refer to joint degrees. Presently, three Armenian state universities, together with an American University, are jointly implementing a pilot master’s degree programme for information technologies.

C. Current issues in Higher Education

Higher education and research

23. Currently, about 40% of research is carried out in the universities and the rest is conducted in the scientific institutes of the National Academy of Sciences. The development trends are directed to increase the research in the universities. In particular, there are already several newly established research centers in the universities. The new concept paper for the development of science in Armenia, which is under discussion, foresees the increase of the synergy between higher education and the research sector.

24. The percentage of doctoral candidates taking up research careers is low due to lack of real motivation. The Ministry is actively taking steps to increase that number.

The social dimension

25. There is a special programme directed to socially disadvantaged groups approved by the Government of Armenia. Children without parents and the children of victims of military conflicts have been given simplified procedures for admission to universities; for disabled groups, the education is tuition free. There is a flexible internal university

system for socially disabled groups for the reimbursement of tuition fees.
In 2006, a special decree on student scholarships and allowances, as a financial support measure as well as a rotation system, was established based on the academic achievements of students.

The monitoring of results is carried out on two levels: internally through special university commissions and by the Ministry of Education and Science.

26. There are no special guidance or counselling services to assist students, though the measures described in point 25 are directed to resolve the problems.

Mobility

27. In Armenia, policy focuses on both outward and inward mobility, though inward mobility is relatively higher. There are bilateral agreements with Russia, USA, Ukraine, China, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. HEIs themselves have agreements promoting both inward and outward mobility for students and staff. There are certain obstacles related to mobility like scarcity of financial resources, language, cultural barriers, and recognition of qualifications as well as obligatory military service for male students. The Government of RA, together with MoES, is taking measures to ensure promotion of mobility. Special regulations were developed by the government to provide the opportunity for male students to postpone military service. There are also international organisations active in Armenia that promote outward mobility.

28. Portable loans and grants are not available in our country, though the possibility of their introduction was discussed.

29. To increase inward mobility certain measures are introduced by the MoES and University. The teaching of foreign languages at universities is now obligatory, new degree courses having international dimensions are being introduced, instruction of at least some core courses in English Language are offered.

The attractiveness of the EHEA and cooperation with other parts of the world

30. To promote the attractiveness of the EHEA in Armenia, several measures have been taken:

- ✚ Armenia demonstrated the political will to join EHEA by joining the Bologna Process in Bergen 2005.
- ✚ In accordance to European market demand, new curricula were developed in several universities.
- ✚ Armenian universities are encouraged to cooperate with their European partners and to join professional associations.
- ✚ The French University in Armenia and European Regional Academy widely disseminate the EHEA principles.
- ✚ In their strategic plans, higher education institutions involve development of European dimension and studies.
- ✚ Awareness-raising meetings, workshops and seminars were conducted.
- ✚ Study visits of ministry and university staff to European countries have taken place.

Future challenges

31. In coming years, Armenia will face the following challenges:

- ✚ Full implementation of 3-cycle system
- ✚ Establishment and implementation of the European model based on internal and external quality assurance systems
- ✚ Development and implementation of a national qualifications framework

Taking into consideration the new realities, there is an urgent need to develop a new strategy for the education system reflecting all the changes.

Completed National Reports should be sent to the Bologna Secretariat by email no later than **Friday 15 December 2006**.

Please remember to attach a copy of your national action plan to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Bologna Secretariat
May 2006