Credits and Learning outcomes
The Flemish Community experience

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Introduction

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

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European context

- Bologna process:

  - A learning outcome oriented curriculum reform
  - A Qualification framework for Higher education:
    Bergen 2005
  - Dublin descriptors

- European Qualification Framework for Life Long Learning

Higher Education in Flanders

- In Belgium, the three communities hold the authority and responsibility for education (including university research)

- In 2003, the Flemish Community issued a decree to implement the Bologna declaration and to introduce the bachelor –master structure.

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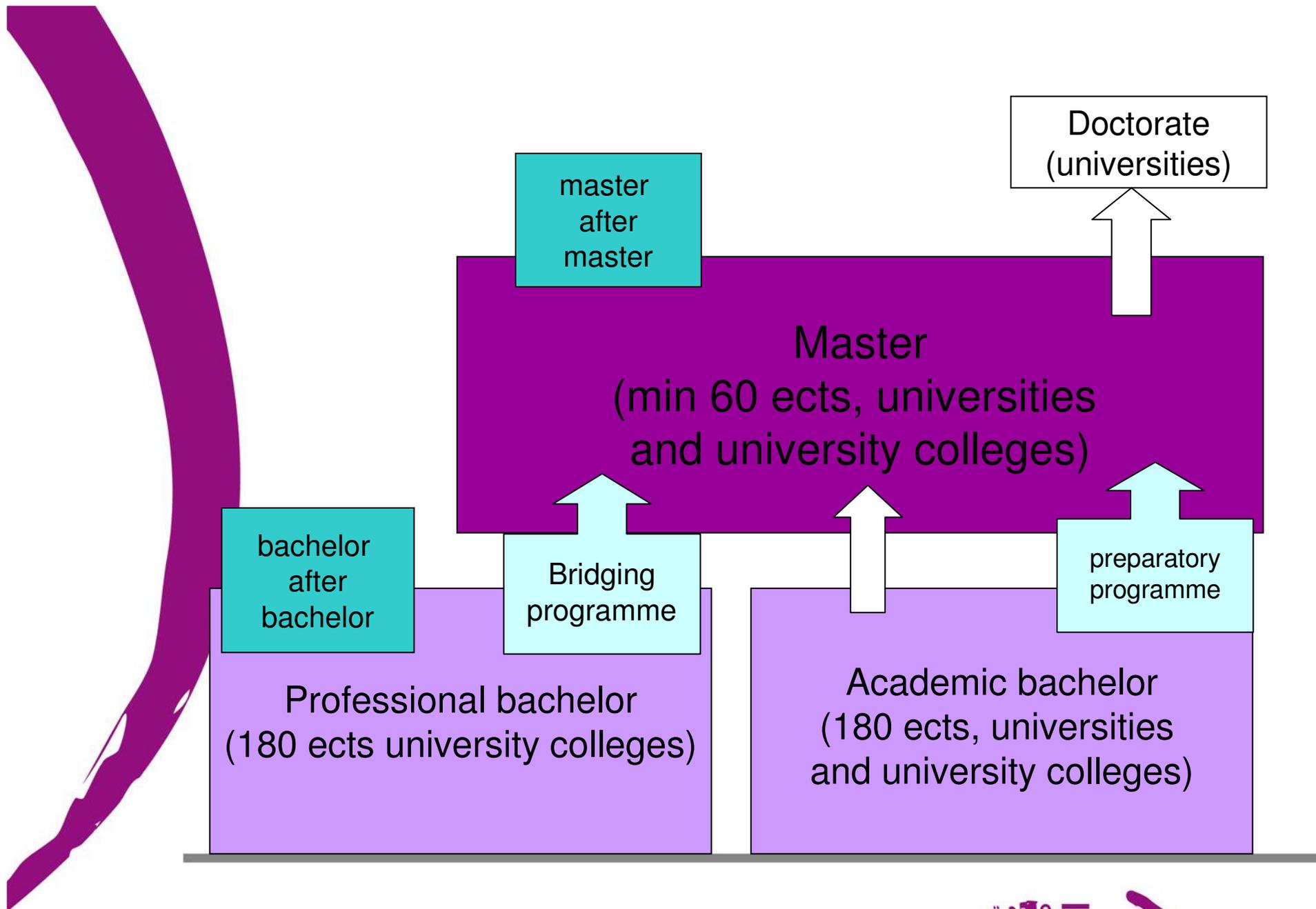of Education and Training

General framework

- Associate degrees / short cycle degrees:
  90-120 ECTS-ranges
- Bachelor degrees: 180 ECTS
- Master degrees: 60-120-180-240 ECTS
- PhD degrees   4 years research

- Binary system:
  - universities and university colleges;
  - professional oriented bachelor degree courses
  - academic oriented bachelor and master degree programmes

- Flexible learning paths
- Output based funding

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Doctorate
(universities)

master
after
master

Master
(min 60 ects, universities
and university colleges)

bachelor
after
bachelor

Bridging
programme

preparatory
programme

Professional bachelor
(180 ects university colleges)

Academic bachelor
(180 ects, universities
and university colleges)

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The institutions of Higher educationAn overview

- 6 universities and 22 "university colleges"
    - 3 public and 3 private universities
    - 8 public and 14 private university colleges
    - Short cycle degrees are organised in separate institutions.

- Staff:
    - Academic and research staff: 19.100
        - 12.00 in the universities
        - 7.100 in the university colleges
    - Administrative and technical staff: 8.500
        - 6.500 in the universities
        - 2.000 in the university colleges
- Students registred in 2008-2009: 180.000
    - 70.000 in the universities
    - 110.000 in the university colleges
    - Participation rate (short cycle degrees excluded) 57,8% of the 18 years old population.

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Quality Assurance System

- Evaluation of programmes not of institutions

- Internal QA
  - Self-evaluation report

- External QA
  - Independent external peer review of a programme
    under the responsability of the umbrella
    organisations (EQAR registered)
  - Site visit
  - Public report

- Accreditation
  - by the Binational Accreditation Agency NVAO
    (The Netherlands & Flanders)
  - YES or NO official decision based on the public
    report

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Higher Education – Flanders – Quality Assurance

- Internal quality assurance mechanisms and systems

- External quality assurance process:
  - Self-evaluation report
  - Independent external peer (academic peers but also including the students and representatives of the labour markets or the professional bodies) review of the programme under the responsibility of the umbrella organisations (EQAR registered)
  - Site visit
  - Public report with a judgement on 6 themes and 21 facets

- Accreditation: YES or NO decision based on the public report

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Higher Education - QA

- Evaluation of study programmes not institutions

- Accountability and improvement but no formal follow-up mechanism

- Cyclic system: 8 years (too long?)

- Cluster of study programmes: all history programmes, all social work programmes are reviewed by the same review team

- Accreditation framework and QA protocol

- 6 themes and 21 facets: aims and objectives of the programme, the content and the design of the curriculum; staff, facilities, internal QA process, results and output

- Assessment rules: excellent, good, satisfactory and insufficient

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National Qualification Framework

- European qualification framework for HE
  Self-certification-process
  (compatibility with the EHEA framework)

- National qualifications framework for HE
  Link with the EU recommendation on EQF for LLL
  Flemish QF encompassing
  all levels and sectors of education
  Process of validation by accreditation agency

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QF-QA

- European qualifications framework for HE (Dublin descriptors)
  - Self-certification process
- National (Flemish) qualificiations framework for HE
  - Process of validation by the accreditation agency
- Discipline specific descriptors and (intended)learning outcomes
  - Programme accreditation by the accreditation agency based on an external peer review: are the intended learning outcomes achieved?
- Study programmes at the institutional level

National Qualification framework - Levels

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

Higher Education - Recognition

- The elements that combine to make up a qualification:
  - Level
  - Workload
  - Quality
  - Profile
  - Learning outcomes

Higher Education - ECTS

- ECTS has been introduced in 1992

- ECTS as an indication of the time a student typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, practical work, self study and examinations

- 1 ECTS = 25à30 hours

- 1 academic year of full time study/formal learning: 60 ECTS

- ECTS credits are allocated to each educational component

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Higher Education - ECTS

- Nowadays: credits are awarded to individual students after the completion of the learning activities required by a single educational component and the successful assessment of the achieved learning outcomes

- A credit awarded is a certificate certifying the achieved learning outcomes; a credit is not formal awarded through a certificate after the validation or recognition of prior informal or non-formal learning

- Credits are accumulated with the view of obtaining a qualification or degree of bachelor or master

- The examination board may decide that a student can obtain the qualification even if the student has not been awarded all the credits

Higher Education - ECTS

- There is a system of validation or recognition of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal or informal learning contexts

- Credits awarded in one programme may be transferred into another programme offered by the same institution or another institution (into the same programme or another programme)

- ECTS are allocated to educational components (course units, practical work) not to learning outcomes

- DS is mentioning the course units and the ECTS allocated to the each course unit and the other prescibed issues

National Qualification Framework
Learning outcomes

- Level descriptors

- Discipline specific learning outcomes (DSLO) or discipline specific subject descriptors

- Learning outcomes study programmes

- Learning outcomes of course modules

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National Qualification Framework
Level descriptors

- Level descriptors for professionel bachelors and academic bachelors en masters, PHD-degrees

- Based on the Dublindescriptors

- Accreditation frames

- Accreditation criteria en facets

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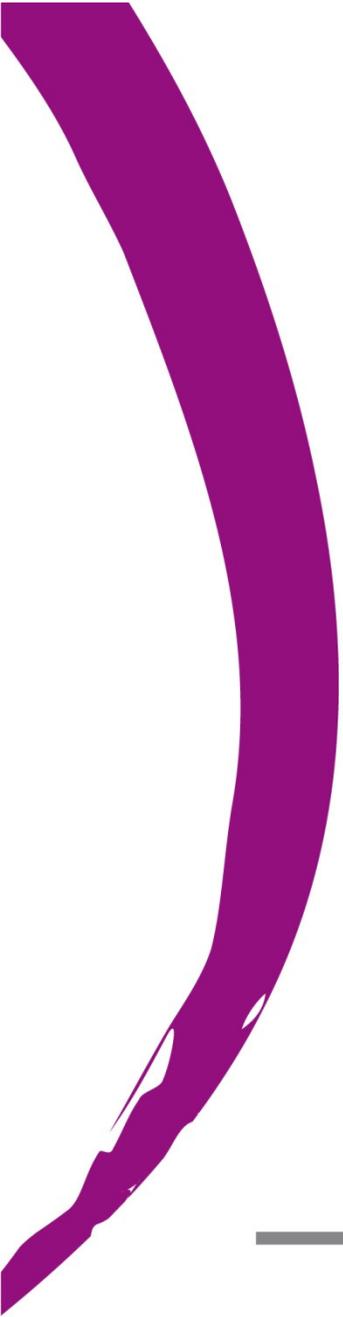
National Qualification Framework Implementation on institutional level

- Learning outcome curriculum reform

- The Flemish Bologna Promoters

- HEI – initiatives

- Project : Description of the 'Discipline specific learning outcomes'

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NQF – SWOT-analyse

- Internal elements of the NQF:

  Strenghts
  Weaknessess

- External elements of the NQF:

  Opportunities
  Threats

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National Qualification Framework Strenghts

- The development of the NQF was an opportunity for all the stakeholders in HE to discuss the generic descriptors and reference points of a Bachelor and Master programme and to make clear what a Bachelor and Master stand for.

- The NQF is also the starting point for the further development of the learning outcomes for each specific HE qualification programme (and programme component).

- The NQF was also a very useful input for the development of the framework for the external quality assessment and the accreditation.

- The NQF contributes to the transparency of the Flemish binary HE system, specifically the professional oriented programmes and the academic oriented programmes. It confirmed the total integration of the professional oriented Bachelor degree programmes into the HE system.

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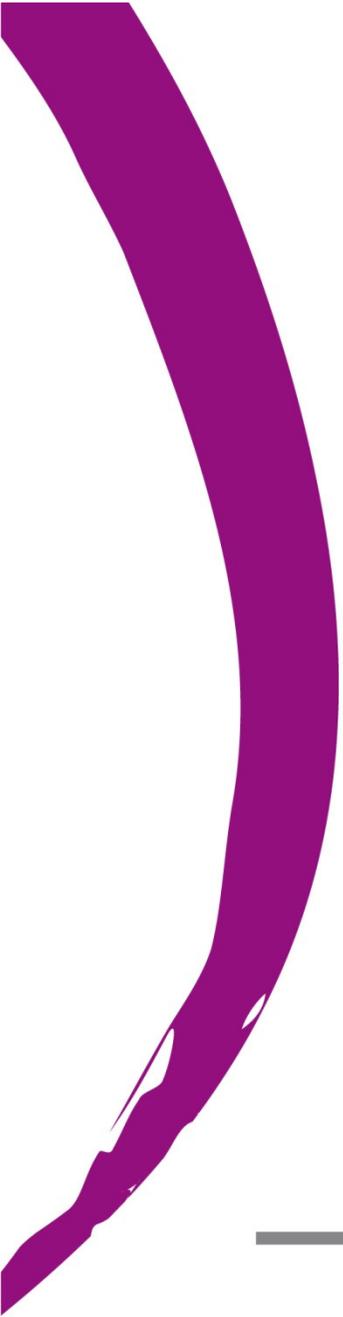# National Qualification Framework Weaknesses

- Due to the generic nature of the Dublin descriptors, the NQF is not very useful for employers and the labour market.

- The generic nature of the NQFs seems also to be of less use to facilitate the de facto recognition of foreign degrees & study programmes and the recognition of prior learning.

- The consolidation of the binary system is at the same time a strength but also a weakness; it seems that not all disciplines are or professional oriented or academic oriented, like the degree programmes in the study field fine arts and music and the degree programmes industrial engineering which are defined as academic oriented programmes.

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National Qualification Framework Opportunities

- EQF for LLL provides a good opportunity to develop the learning outcomes of the individual qualification by translating the generic descriptors into the discipline specific learning outcomes.

- The growing need to facilitate the recognition of degrees in the EHEA and the recognition of prior learning is part of the LLL dimension. LLL also provides the opportunity for the further development of the NQF.

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National Qualification Framework
Threats

- The further development of the NQF leading to the harmonisation & standardisation of the content may leave too less room for diversity of the programme and may threaten the academic autonomy of the education providers. This could endanger the acceptance of the NQF.

- Bureaucratisation of the processes involved could endanger the innovation in HE.

- The low engagement of the employers is a threat.

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National Qualification Framework
Discipline Specific Learning Outcomes

- each qualification will be linked to generic level descriptors

- comparable to the benchmark statements in the UK

- developed and proposed by the higher education   institutions and their representative organisations

- validated by the accreditation agency

- automatically accepted in the National Qualification Framework

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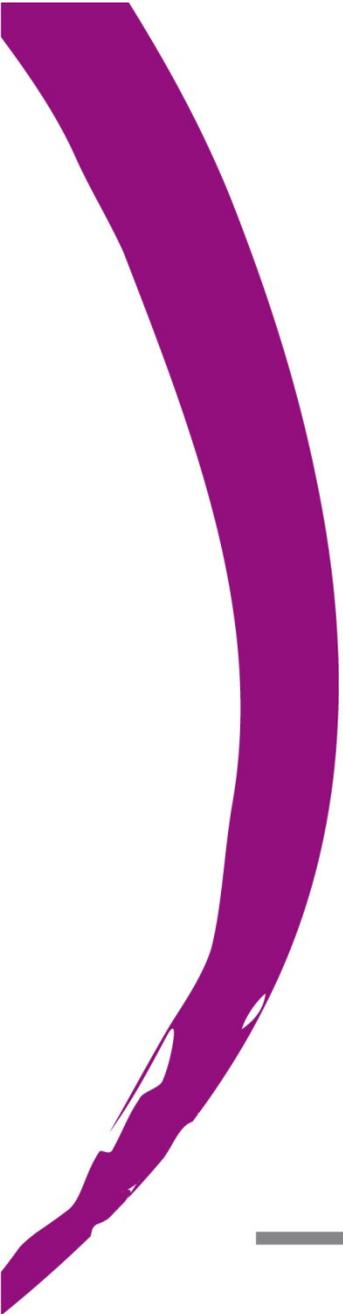
National Qualification Framework
Discipline Specific Learning Outcomes

Advantages of this method of working:

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

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NQF: Learning outcomes
at the level of the study programmes

- Learning outcomes of study programmes at the institutional level

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

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The DSLO-project

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

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Definition of learning outcomes

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

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Features of a DSLO

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

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The DSLO and the institution

- DSLO = generic

- DSLO provides space and autonomy
  for profiling by each institution

  - additional learning outcomes, compatible with the DSLO
  - own approach to learning and teaching
  - organisation of course modules
  - design of course modules

- A framework not a straitjacket

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Procedure

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

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Procedure step 1

- Task force: representatives of the programme all institutions offering the programme are represented

- Writing down a proposal for the DSLO
  - Common effort
  - Consensus
  - A common methodology (cf. guidelines)
  - Based on international sources
  - (if relevant) Conformity with specific regulations related to the profession

- Start of revision procedures
  - At last before new quality assurance site visits

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Procedure step 2

- Working group for a cluster of programmes
    - One representative for each programme
    - Tuning of the distinct DSLOs
    - Similarities and differences

- Panel of stakeholders
    - Check with students
    - With employers,
    - With an international panel

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Procedure step 3

- Proposal is submitted to the VLIR-VLHORA steering committee

- If approved the DSLO is sent to the accreditation agency for external validation

- After validation, the DSLO is registered in the national qualification framework

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Added value

- For the Higher Education in Flanders
  - Auto-regulation of the field
  - Transparency
  - Similarities and differences between programmes
  - Stability and dynamism
  - Basis for recognition of prior, formal, informal and
    non-formal learning at programme level

- For the H.E.I.
  - Ownership of curriculum development
  - As regards site visit panels
  - External stakeholders
  - Regulatory initiatives

Added value in the Bologna process

- Vertically: structuring the successive steps in a field:
  - Bachelor - Master
  - Short degree - Bachelor

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

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Uncertainties

- Is there a danger for standardisation?
- Do institutions still have the chance to profile themselves?

- Is the learning outcomes framework sufficient?
  e.g. aims such as leadership, orientation towards LLL

- How to work with multiple clustering?
  e.g. chemical, electronic, mechanical engineering, …

- How to go from the programme to the course modules?
  - Is the whole more than the sum of the parts?
  - What can be done for course modules present in different programmes?

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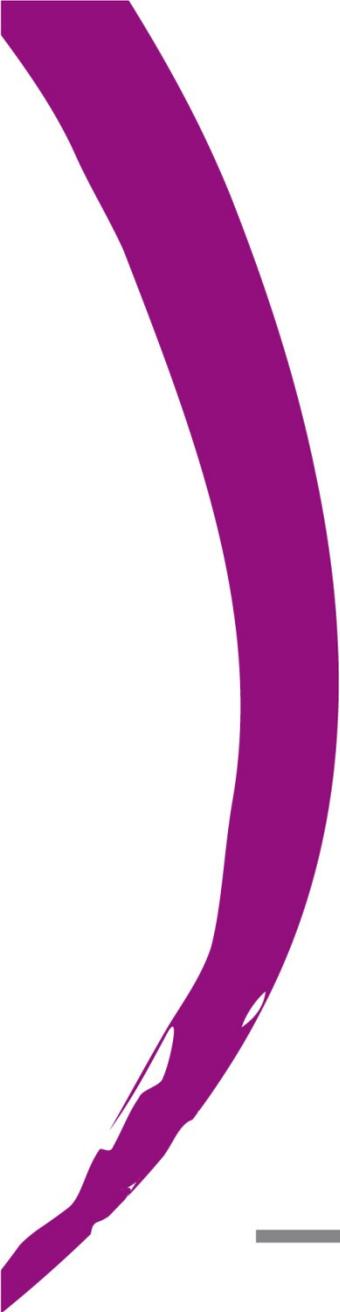
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