



Erasmus+ - Key Action 2  
Capacity Building within the Field of Higher Education

## **TIGRIS Project**

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***Report on outcomes and recommendations of the “Workshop on the Bologna Process and the Implementation of ECTS at Kurdish HEIs”,  
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<b>ORGANIZATION NAME:</b> UGOE	<b>AUTHOR:</b> Jakob Hedderich		
<b>APPROVED:</b> Dr. Uwe Muuss; Dr. Marian McCarthy; Dr. Carlos Machado			
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Author(s)	Jakob Hedderich		
Contributors			
Contact name			
E-mail address	jakob.hedderich@zvw.uni-goettingen.de		
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## 1. Current status

As it stands, several universities in Kurdistan Region of Iraq have already begun implementing ECTS at their institution and subsequently the shift towards a learning-outcome-based model of teaching and learning.

Charmo University and University of Raparin seem to be the universities having progressed the most in this area. Also, Duhoc Polytechnic University as well as other Polytechnic universities in Kurdistan have started the implementation process at several colleges and institutes.

Charmo University as well as University of Raparin during the third day of the workshop presented their approach to implementing ECTS. According to the evaluation and assessment of the experts present as well as the TIGRIS project coordinator, the efforts made and results achieved by the universities are impressive already.

In addition, it was noted by the experts that a high level of expertise regarding the Bologna Process already exists in the universities in question.

## 2. Critical assessment

However, several major points of critique exist:

- § First, it has to be noted that the transformation process is happening at each university individually without any form of institutionalised consultation/coordination between the universities or the universities and the KRG Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) or guidelines and standards by the MHESR in place.

In the eyes of the experts, it is highly questionable that such a major transformation process lacks any form of central coordination or regulation.<sup>1</sup>

- § Despite ECTS being implemented at several universities already, the workshop on the Bologna Process and the implementation of ECTS at the University of Raparin presented the first opportunity, in which foreign experts were consulted and able to review the work done. Thus, the implementation process actually stands on its head with consultation and review usually being conducted prior to implementation.

The lack of prior consultation might not only be detrimental to the success and quality of the implementation process, but reinforces the overall impression that the implementation is rushed.

- § Though a high-level expertise regarding the technicalities of the Bologna Process and the calculation of ECTS exists within some Kurdish universities already, the workshop at the

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<sup>1</sup> As it was established during the workshop, the existing procedure has each university developing its approach individually, which then is approved of by the MHESR for implementation.

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University of Raparin has shown that the transformative challenge, the Bologna Process and its implementation poses to Kurdish Higher Education is not fully appreciated.

The shift towards a student-centred approach and the adoption of a learning-outcome-based system implicate no less than a cultural paradigm shift in teaching and learning for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which requires dedicated long-term support action and structures if to be successful. As it stand, such support is lacking.

- § The contemporary approach towards the Bologna Process and the implementation of ECTS by Kurdish universities mainly focusses on the calculation of ECTS. Here, the implementation of ECTS is treated more as an arithmetical exercise simply converting the previous system based on contact hours into ECTS.

However, Kurdish stakeholders should be aware that Bologna is a holistic system and that the introduction of ECTS in Kurdistan Region of Iraq cannot be separate from reform in module & programme design, teaching & learning as well as assessment.

### 3. Recommendations

- § The MHESR together with the universities should form a dedicated working group that develops a common framework for the implementation of the Bologna Process in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (guidelines and standards) to streamline the implementation process. Here, the already existing expertise within some Kurdish universities should be applied. Decisions taken should e.g. concern a standardised student's workload (fixed number or range of hours)<sup>2</sup> as well as Grading System, which should be developed and adopted for all KRG universities.
- § The MHESR together with the universities should appoint and train a group of dedicated Bologna Experts for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq who consult on and promote the implementation of the Bologna Process. As a more institutionalised and comprehensive alternative and aiming at long-term sustainability, the MHESR could also establish a dedicated Bologna Training Centre that takes on these responsibilities. Complementary, Kurdish universities should appoint their own in-house Bologna Experts as well as a central Bologna coordinator that coordinates the transition process at the university.
- § Iraq as well as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq lack a National Qualifications Framework, which is one of the main reference points when developing study programmes and defining learning outcomes as well as competences to be acquired during study. Therefore, the development of such a framework is highly advised but due to its nature lies in the domain of the MHESR/Kurdish Regional Government as well as the institutions of the national Iraqi Government. Here, the MHESR should push for a development of such a framework. The

<sup>2</sup> As could be established during the workshop at University of Raparin, so far all Kurdish universities adopted a standardised workload of 25 hours.

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recent adoption of a new Qualifications Framework for Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) in Iraq is a promising sign in this regard.

- § In the wake of the transition to a learning-outcome-based system, the MHESR needs to revise its regulation of students' examination, since contemporary forms of assessment applied in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq such as the heavy reliance on terminal exams as well as quizzes are inadequate to assess especially affective and psychomotor learning outcomes. Therefore, new forms of assessment for affective and psychomotor learning outcomes must be devised.
- § In light of the transformative challenge the transition to a learning-outcome-based system poses to higher education in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the MHESR should consider establishing a dedicated regional Centre for Teaching and Learning, which supports the paradigm shift by introducing the relevant scientific research to Kurdistan and promotes and supports the transition via organising scientific conferences as well as training programmes with international experts of the field.

Additionally, Kurdish universities should also consider establishing institutional Centres for Teaching and Learning to build local capacities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) thereby creating the necessary conditions to have local champions, leadership and ownership.

- § In the eyes of the experts as well as the coordinator, modules and study programmes in terms of learning outcomes and competences need to be closer linked to the needs of the labour market as well as society, thereby increasing employability and use for society as a whole. Therefore, closer cooperation with external stakeholders is advised. Developing dedicated mission statements as well as clearly defining aims and objectives for study programme can help in establishing, if a programme meets the needs of society and the labour market. In general, when designing modules and study programmes, the main goal for Kurdish universities should be to train professionals, not just scientists.
- § Since writing learning outcomes for modules and programmes is a challenging task especially in an early implementation phase, a (peer) review process for checking the learning and programme outcomes should be established. Due to a lack of experience in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, foreign experts should conduct the reviews in the beginning. In the TIGRIS project, European project partners could be approached in this matter.
- § Due to the fact that a full membership to the Bologna Process / EHEA is lacking the requirements necessary,<sup>3</sup> the current approach for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the MHESR should be not to join but to follow the Bologna Process by aligning the Kurdish Higher

<sup>3</sup> E.g. being able to become a party to the European Cultural Convention or the full commitment to and implementation of the goals and principles of the Bologna Process / the EHEA.

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Education sector with the Bologna Process as close as possible. To facilitate a future membership, the MHESR should establish a National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In establishing a single office for the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the MHESR would follow the example of Belgium, which due to its federal state structure has three NARIC centres.<sup>4</sup>

§ For Kurdish universities that so far have not begun implementing ECTS, the following approach is advised: Since implementing ECTS is a complex and work intensive process, it is important not to be overambitious. Therefore, it is recommended that Higher Education Institutions aiming at implementing ECTS start with a pilot project, e.g. by starting with one study programme in a faculty or department with motivated staff willing to take on the additional workload. One-page course descriptors should be developed detailing the number of credits, the learning outcomes, assessment methods, scientific literature to be used etc. After that, the programme developed should be reviewed by a third party experienced in the implementation of ECTS. For example, this could be a European partner university or an expert of the field. Based on the feedback, the programme should be revised and then implemented. Having completed this process and with the experience gained, the implementation of ECTS for other programmes, departments or faculties can be initiated.

Learning outcomes of modules must be linked to programme outcomes. Therefore, a coherent drafting process must be set up including consultation and coordination of people involved in the drafting process. Attention should be paid that learning outcomes of all 6 levels (Bloom's Taxonomy) are included and that active verbs are used. In general, the number of learning outcomes should not exceed 8 (rule of thumb). The formulation of mission statements as well as aims and objective for each programme can help in defining the learning outcomes, which in return should be written in such a way that anyone (e.g. parents) understand the module's/programme's core content, outcome and objective.

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Dr. Uwe Muuss  
Head of International Office &  
TIGRIS Project Coordinator  
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen



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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.enic-naric.net/belgium.aspx>.

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