R3.5 Report on programme accreditation

Pack Alliance | European alliance for innovation
training & collaboration towards future packaging

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1. Introduction

One of the essential conditions for the success of the European economy is the marked reduction of competency gaps, which are a barrier to the development of many sectors of the economy. Therefore, an urgent task for all educational and training institutions in Europe is to enrich the high-quality educational offer. It will be of particular importance for the economy to obtain qualifications for EQF level 5 which will play an increasingly important role in technologically advanced economy. The study conducted in 15 countries shows that EQF 5 qualifications – at the crossroads between VET, Higher education and general education – play an important role in providing access to employment and career advancement, as well as enabling further learning and progression to and within higher education (CEDEFOP, 2014). EQF level 5 qualifications are attractive to learners as they open up prospects on several fronts, such as direct employment, career advancement and further education. The simultaneous orientation of these qualifications towards advanced technical and managerial skills makes them valuable to employers. Typical level 5 qualifications are delivered as part of a short cycle of higher education (within or linked to the first cycle-Bachelor's level) (Description of the eight EQF levels). EQF level 5 qualifications constitute a "bridge" between qualifications obtained after graduation from secondary school and qualifications, which are obtained after completing the first-cycle studies. Nevertheless, still in many countries (e.g. four countries (Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain) participating in PackAlliance project) EQF level 5 qualifications are acquired outside higher education institutions: in vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training, general education or entirely outside the formal education and training system. Currently, higher education offers almost exclusively the full qualifications required to be obtained full-time studies. Rapidly falling demand for part-time studies, most of which are used by those already working, states a clear signal that the offer of higher education is not well suited to the needs of those people. However, it is difficult to imagine the popularization of the education system for a lifetime, which would abstract from the needs of those wishing to enlarge their portfolio of qualifications while continuing work. Furthermore, there is a growing need to acquire international qualifications that meet the requirements of the European labour market. In these circumstances, Pilot PackAlliance Programme at Level 5 seems very crucial as it combines courses leaded by academics and practitioners (industry) "jointly" offered by different HEIs in four European countries (Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain). The requirements and procedures for PackAlliance Programme-level accreditation vary between national systems. This has

made accreditation of this programme a challenge. The main difficulties, associated with the accreditation of Level 5 EQF can be related with different approaches to Level 5 EQF in national educational contexts between four countries (Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain) participating in PackAlliance project and even between HEIs. HEIs in four European countries (Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain) can not carry out an official level 5 EQF programme. For example, in Poland an initiative among the rectors of Polish universities was established, the aim of which is to legally regulate the introduction of level 5 to higher education. Therefore, according to "Common Internal Quality Assurance Systems" (Incarnato & Garofalo, 2021, p. 6, 8) PackAlliance Programme can be considered as an SLP in the sense that the Erasmus+ project E-SLP defines it (Dunn, Marr, Henderikx, Antonaci, & Ubachs, 2020).To support the recognition of SLPs and ensure alignment to the EQF it is recommended that the following "principles of recognition" are embedded into curriculum design. SLPs should be designed at EQF levels 5-8. *Currently, governments/accreditation agencies in Italy, Spain, Poland and Finland (the 4 countries participating into PackAlliance project) do not require an accreditation for this type of programme* (Incarnato & Garofalo, 2021). Therefore, even if we do not aspire to accreditation at the moment, following the recommendations and steps necessary to obtain it can: greatly facilitate the recognition of credits taken and, if at some point the possibility of accreditation opens up in one or all of the countries, the project will have already done some work in that direction. Hence, it can be assumed that the aim is to create a suggestive "Roadmap to Accreditation/Evaluation of the Education Activity".

2. Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviation / Acronym / Term	Description
ECAHE	European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SLP	Short Learning Programme
QEHEA	Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Partner shortname	
P1-Campus Iberus	Partner 1 - Campus Iberus (Spain)
P2-Ecoembes	Partner 2 - Ecoembes (Spain)
P3-AGH	Partner 3 - AGH University of Science and Technology (Poland)
P4-Synthos	Partner 4 - Synthos Group (Poland)
P5-TAMK	Partner 5 - TAMK Tampere University of Applied Sciences (Finland)
P6-Pyroll	Partner 6 - Pyroll Group (Finland)
P7-Proplast	Partner 7 - Consorzio per la promozione della cultura plastica - Proplast (Italy)
P8-UNISA	Partner 8 - Università degli Studi di Salerno (Italy)

3. Definitions

Accreditation is defined as *the issuance by the subject-specific committee of the assessment report on the running and delivery of the degree programme, which is based on all evidence available to the evaluation body, in particular the site-visit report* (AQU Catalunya, 2021).

Qualification "*the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards*" (Becker, 2020).

Recognition is defined as "*a formal acknowledgement and acceptance by a competent authority of the value of a (foreign/joint) educational qualification with a view to access education or employment*" (Becker, 2020).

Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) "*are a group of courses (units, modules or other learning building blocks) with a common subject focusing on specific needs in society which can be used as stackable elements of larger formal degrees targeting non-traditional and adult learners. The E-SLP project focusses on online, flexible and scalable SLPs in the European context"* (Dunn, Marr, Henderikx, Antonaci, & Ubachs, 2020).

4. Procedure for PackAlliance Programme Evaluation (Accreditation)

Since it is "jointly" offered programme a suggestive framework for the evaluation (accreditation) procedure was created as a result of the work undertaken by the consortium HEIs in Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain (Fig. 1). Procedure for PackAlliance Programme Accreditation reflects the Starndards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (2015).
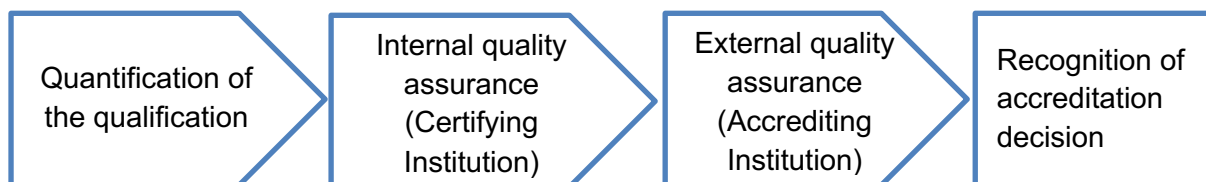

Fig. 1. Operational scheme of the suggestive framework for the accreditation procedure

4.1. Quantification of the qualification

The PackAlliance Programme qualification is intended to upskill both current employees and recent graduates by providing advanced technical and/or management skills. Students enrolled in this type of programme are already employed and are seeking to upgrade their management competences to enable them to perform team leader roles in the organisations in which they work.

PackAlliance Programme consists of 4 modules:

- *New materials and biomaterials (led by Polish partners)*
- *Eco-design and novel manufacturing processing (led by Italian partners)*
- *Citizen and Consumer engagement (led by Finnish partners)*
- *Residue management and valorisation (led by Spanish partners)*.

Each participating HEI will enroll 15-20 students to the pilot Postgraduate Programme, reaching at least 60 students. The course will be designed to obtain 30 ECTS credits (20 ECTS for theoterical framework and 10 ECTS for challange-based learning). Syllabus for the qualification was prepared to recognise learning outcomes.

The name of the qualification is **Specialist in the circular economy of plastic packaging.** This qualification should be entered in the study programme of the 4 countries participating into PackAlliance project.

The graduate of the PackAlliance Programme will receive the skills and knowledge to support the transition towards the circular economy in the plastic packaging sector. The specialist will have both theoretical knowledge from plastics packaging and practical skills to respond to the needs of the labour market. The specialist obtain knowledge about effective mechanism how to manage industrial processes in different EU countries.

The alumni of the PackAlliance Programme will gain the knowledge, skills, competence in the four areas:

- new materials and bio-based materials include the issues related to the knowledge of the possibilities of using innovative materials, including biomaterials in the plastic packaging industry;

- eco-design and novel manufacturing processing focused on strategy elements, methods and new production technologies to develop packaging solutions that are easy on the environment and conserve resources;

- residue management and valorisation, concentrated on the issues related to the end of life of plastic packaging materials;

- citizen and consumer engagement discuss communication, interaction, and engagement, focusing on the consumers of plastic packaging and, more broadly, the citizens.

The aim of practical part, based on project-based learning CHAINs (CHAllenges INnovation teams) is to develop innovative case studies for different types of packing industry.

After finishing the programme, the alumni will be ready to face the challenges in the local, regional, national and international level. Transversal skills and industry information of the process will be provided to the alumni, which may be applied to increase competitiveness of companies and implement circular economy approaches. The programme includes various environmental, social and economic assessment tools, through which the effective management mechanism can be implemented.

4.2.   Internal quality assurance (Certifying Institution)

The internal quality assurance measures for this programme have already been included in "Common Internal Quality Assurance Systems" (Incarnato & Garofalo, 2021). It also should be added that according to quality assurance of the programme the certifying authority will check that the learning outcomes of the training programme are met (e.g. Dean at 4 HEIs from Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain). Finally four Rectors of HEIs participating in PackAlliance Project (Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain) should sign the certificates.

4.3.   External quality assurance (Accrediting Institution)

According to Incarnato and Garofalo (2021) *"European guidelines to regulate/simplify external quality assurance of "Joint Short Learning Programmes" do not currently exist"*. However, according to quality assurance of the programme (Incarnato & Garofalo, 2021) HEIs participating in PackAlliance Project from Finland, Italy, Poland and Spain should undergo external quality assessment. External QA valid for PackAlliance Programme may be carried out by a specific evaluation scheme of the external evaluation body. This evaluation should be taken into account as part of the path towards a hypothetical accreditation, but not as an accreditation itself.

4.4.   Recognition of accreditation decision

When PackAll programme students obtain their certificates we can facilitate their recognition by following a quality procedure consistent with European quality guidelines for university studies.

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