

# A comparison of master degrees in Norway and the UK, with a focus on recognition

Attachment: Master Degree Programmes in the United Kingdom and Norway: A Comparative Reflection



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# A comparison of master degrees in Norway and the UK, with a focus on recognition

The Norwegian ENIC-/ NARIC-office<sup>1</sup> has taken the initiative to find out more about the background and the nature of the challenges we have experienced in relation to general recognition of English master degrees. Today the Norwegian office does not grant general academic recognition of English master degrees as being equivalent to Norwegian master degrees apart from the Master of Philosophy degree. Some of the applicants that apply to the office for a general recognition have formally complained on this rejection of equivalence.

Although the number of formal complaints are low, the number of Norwegian students in UK is high (3345 registered in the study year 2004/2005<sup>2</sup>), and the issue definitely is therefore also of principal interest.

The present project is funded by the European Commission and has involved the UK NARIC office<sup>3</sup> and the Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC-office. The project has been headed by the Norwegian office who also wrote the report. The views expressed and implied in the report, are those of the Norwegian office. UK NARIC has contributed greatly to the report with valuable information and comments to the report. The project started with working out the specifications for the commissioning of an expert opinion that is an important fundament of this report. The next stage was two short study visits to Norway and UK to learn more about our respective higher education systems and the national organisation of recognition of foreign qualifications. The final part of the project was writing this report. The sources used in this report are the expert opinion by Maassen& Pinheiro (2006), general information on our respective web-sites and literature on the subject. Both offices gave their comments to the first draft of the expert opinion, and these were integrated in the second and final draft of the expert opinion.

The aim of the project is to assure fair recognition. The report is only concerned with recognition of master degrees from UK, in Norway, focusing on the following aspects: differences between our HE systems, different national recognition models and a comparison of master degrees.

This report includes three parts: 1) a presentation of our respective national models of recognition of foreign educational qualifications 2) a short presentation of similarities and differences in master degree level programmes 3) conclusions and possible actions/recommendations to improve and assure the quality of recognition of UK master degrees in Norway. At the end of the report, 4) some final remarks are added.

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<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian ENIC-/ NARIC- office is administratively placed within NOKUT (a governmental body, see <http://www.nokut.no/sw335.asp>)

<sup>2</sup> HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency, <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/>)

<sup>3</sup> The UK NARIC is a member of the European network of NARICs throughout the European Union since the early 1980s. It is also the UK representative in a wider operation of European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) across Europe, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and USA. See also: <http://www.naric.org.uk/index.asp?page=79&section=6>

The expert opinion was originally intended to "Compare the 2-year Norwegian master degree with the 12-month master degree from UK and to identify and analyze the differences between them". But for reasons given in the report itself it does not contain an actual comparative evaluation of Master programmes themselves; an evaluation that would according to the authors go far beyond the scope of their study.

They thus focus on how to provide proposals with respect to how in an open European Higher Education Area, cross-country differences in degree programmes can be evaluated<sup>4</sup>.

## **1. Recognition practices in UK and Norway – a comparison**

Both the UK and Norway have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention and share features of the organization of the recognition work. Both countries have a division of labour between HEI, professional bodies and the ENIC-/NARIC- offices concerning recognition of foreign higher education. Both our HEI are autonomous regarding recognition of education for the purpose of further studies, and both countries have a number of professional bodies deciding whether your foreign qualification enables you to work as a fully qualified professional eg doctor, nurse etc.

In this report the focus will only be on the differences in the recognition done at the ENIC-/NARIC-offices and consequently in the processes and procedures at our respective offices<sup>5</sup>.

Not only the mandate but also the content of the recognition granted differs substantially. Generally speaking this difference is mainly concerned with the polarity between recognition results given in "Credits" (Norway) vs. one based on "learning outcomes" (UK). The model chosen reflects the national interest, traditions and needs of both the labour market and the HEI and other educational organisations. Both offices search for meaningful comparison with their national systems of qualifications.

Norway has chosen a model where the national ENIC-/NARIC- office has been given the right to issue formal decisions about academic recognition of foreign higher education. This is stated in the Act relating to Universities and university Colleges and has been the governing principle since 2003 when this was introduced into the Norwegian Law. Whereas the English Enic-/Naric-office gives advice or a justified recommendation called a "comparability statement" about the foreign qualification<sup>6</sup>.

### **1.1 Norwegian system of recognition of foreign qualifications**

The framework for the recognition is credits and general degree equivalence compared to system of Norwegian Higher education. The Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC-office is administratively placed within NOKUT, which is a governmental body, and the office is only dealing with recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

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<sup>4</sup> Maassen & Pinheiro (2006: p. 2)

<sup>5</sup> This report does not deal with the recognition practises at HEI. We have no material to document this. But one can perhaps expect some conclusions about this in the ongoing national surveys being carried out in the Bologna preparations under National plans for improving recognition. See p.3 Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, May 2005

<sup>6</sup> See web-site of UK NARIC: <http://www.naric.org.uk/index.asp?page=31&section=4>

The recognition of foreign education as being equivalent to accredited Norwegian higher education is governed by the Act relating to universities and university colleges of 1. April 2005 no. 15, section 3-4 (2) and section 5-1 of the Regulations concerning accreditation, evaluation and recognition pursuant to the Act relating to universities and university colleges (“the Regulations”). The act specifically divides the responsibility between NOKUT (e.g. The Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC- office) and the HEI<sup>7</sup>. Both decisions are equally valid as academic recognition and should be accepted reciprocally. The Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC-office states the results in amount of credits (ECTS) and gives general degree equivalence to the Norwegian degrees (bachelor-, master- and Phd degrees)<sup>8</sup>.

The framework for the Norwegian master degrees is laid down in national regulations (“Forskrift om Krav til Mastergrad”<sup>9</sup>); regulating amongst other things: duration, number of credits, min requirements regarding number of credits accounted for by the thesis. The main contents in this regulation are incorporated in NOKUT’s criteria’s for general degree equivalence recognition of foreign degrees.

The ministry has appointed an independent appeals board and the applicant has the right to appeal decisions made at the office. A couple of the recognition cases concerning English master degrees were brought forward to the appeals board but the board did not alter the decisions of NOKUT. All decisions by the Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC- office were made on the basis of the credits/duration principle. The English 12-months master degrees (research based ones) were generally recognized as 75 ECTS credit points on master level but no equivalence to the Norwegian master degree.

NOKUT’s decisions are based on information drawn from all available networks, including national and foreign HEI and the enic-naric network. The decisions are also based on a set of criteria that are in use<sup>10</sup>, and on the experience drawn from a large database documenting years of decisions on recognition of foreign qualifications at NOKUT.

## 1.2 UK’s system of recognition of foreign qualifications

The UK NARIC office processes individual cases of recognition of foreign qualifications. The recognition is based upon evaluation of learning outcomes achieved through all paths and progression routes. The office is therefore not only engaged in assessing higher education qualification but in recognition of all lifelong learning education. The office stresses that recognition of a given award is not a task in isolation and by that indicate a holistic approach to recognition. Recognition is “moving away from an “identity given” approach to an enhanced outcome based assessment”<sup>11</sup>.

The current recognition criteria in UK are based on a NARIC band Framework developed at the office. This framework is designed to ensure accuracy and consistency of comparability statement accorded to international qualifications. All international qualifications are

<sup>7</sup> More about the two types of recognition in Norway, see: <http://www.nokut.no/sw13120.asp>

<sup>8</sup> see: <http://www.nokut.no/sw13120.asp>

<sup>9</sup> In Norwegian only; <http://odin.dep.no/kd/norsk/tema/utdanning/hoyereutdanning/tema/kvalitetsreformen/045071-200002/dok-bn.html>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.nokut.no/sw13118.asp>

<sup>11</sup> see, <http://www.naric.org.uk/index.asp?page=25&section=4>

compared and placed on a range of 17 Bands. Band 7-17 is concerned with higher education qualifications, where Band 13-15 is related to master degrees.

The assessments of the office are consequently not credit accumulation based as this would blur the preferred focus on learning outcome. The decisions are advisory statements and not binding statements for the HEI in UK, and designed to be valuable in a national context. The assessments are done in reference to the UK interests and in comparison to the UK higher education system of qualifications.

This model of recognition has been developed by UK NARIC in conjunction with a working group<sup>12</sup>.

### **1.3 Recognition approach: a comparison between the two offices**

Although the offices share some features such as; complaint board and systematic collection of information, and to a certain extent being the gate to recognition of foreign qualifications in our respective countries, the models differ on several important aspects such as: Credits vs learning outcome model for evaluation purposes, scope of recognition (Life long learning - purposes), equivalence to national degrees, the binding decisions vs advisory statements etc. Are these differences, or the fact that both of us are doing recognition with a clear consciousness that the evaluations are designed to meet our national needs and traditions, contributing to the recognition problems?

The Norwegian general recognition statements contain a statement on credits and a statement on equivalence to the Norwegian degrees, because this is helpful for the applicants. It secures access to further studies and the labour marked and gives an idea of the size and scope of the qualification in question. Norway has long traditions for a system of flexible transfer of credits between universities and university colleges. This is well known amongst the HEI and also the labour marked. Traditionally it has been important for other providers of HE to have their education validated in form of Norwegian credits (transferable), for the same reason; credits is of great value. This has created a flexible national system of movement of students between university colleges and universities and also between universities, and providers of higher education with accredited studies. This knowledge is also widespread in the labour marked e.g. in the salary system of the teachers in primary and secondary schools. The demand for a recognition given in credits also gives the applicants the flexibility of either entering the labour marked or opting for further studies. General recognition of NOKUT is valid for both purposes.

In the UK the focus is not on a credit-based model when it comes to recognition of foreign higher education, but to provide a meaningful linkage to the closest UK awards. This does not include assessments given in credits. The UK office uses a NARIC Band Framework that is linked to a coherent set of descriptors for each Band. For instance the three Bands (13-15) relating to UK master degrees has the following descriptors: 13: "second cycle higher education programme that combine classroom-based study and research element", 14: "Second cycle higher education programme with a strong orientation towards research element" and 15: "Postgraduate research awards with significant dissertations that may form the basis of a doctoral programme".

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<sup>12</sup> see <http://www.naric.org.uk/index.asp?page=25&section=4>



This UK-NARIC Band framework has a hierarchical structure of evaluation statements. It is also important to note that the current set of descriptors have been created to facilitate discussion of each designated level and its purpose (Learning outcome). They are broad in their essence and not meant to outline specific details about pre-requisites of awards at a given level.

This secures the flexibility and relevance searched for, especially in the labour market and amongst HEI in UK concerning recognition of foreign qualifications. The comparability statements given at UK NARIC are useful both for employers, HEI and other education organisations. This gate to the labour market and studies in UK will be helpful for the holder of foreign qualifications.

In UK they have already established a National qualifications frameworks (one for Scotland and another one for England, Wales and Northern Ireland), but on master level, these two frameworks converge, so all countries in UK share the same descriptors for master degrees and hereby assuring that recognition of master degrees internally in UK running smoothly. The M-level in the NQF covers not only master degrees but also postgraduate certificates and diplomas<sup>13</sup>.

One of the important purposes of this Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) is to “maintain international comparability of standards (especially in the European Context), to ensure international competitiveness, and to facilitate student and graduate mobility<sup>14</sup>”.

If one looks closer at the 17 band NARIC Band framework designed to recognise foreign qualifications in UK, they do not correspond to the 5 levels of higher education in FHEQ (Framework for Higher Education Qualifications) directly. The Band framework for higher education is divided into 10 Bands (or levels of higher education) and master degrees further into three different levels of masters’ degrees. From British taught master degree level (band 13) via British master’s degree standard (band 14) to British master of Philosophy degree standard (band 15). So for the purposes of recognition of foreign master degree qualifications in UK, the FHEQ seems not to be detailed enough, as it contains one level for all master level degrees. The users of UK Narics services are asking for more than what the FHEQ can tell about the qualification. The needs of the labour market and others need to link the foreign master degree qualification directly to the various UK master degrees. One could therefore ask whether the FHEQ is a helpful enough transparency tool in recognition of foreign qualifications.

Given the more standardized form of the Norwegian master degree the recognition of foreign master degrees is not that complicated. Consequently, the Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC- office, to bring forth a meaningful recognition for Norwegian purposes, links the foreign master degrees to the standardized 2-year master degree and all assessment are done in comparison to this qualification.

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<sup>13</sup> See Maassen & Pinheiro (2006, p. 20)

<sup>14</sup> Maassen & Pinheiro (2006: p. 5 and p. 19) argues that the levels do “not represent an evaluation as regards the content of these programmes, and the actual level of competencies and skills”.

## 2. Comparing master degrees from England and Norway

The fact that NOKUT<sup>15</sup> does not give general recognition of master degrees from UK can perhaps be explained by differences in our educational systems or more precisely in the differences between our master degrees? The expert opinion commissioned by the project was originally meant to compare the 2-year Norwegian master degree with the 12-month master degree from UK. These two degrees are presently not generally recognized as equivalent in Norway.

Although the expert opinion on these matters had to renounce to give clear answers to this question<sup>16</sup> the report still reflects on some of the differences (and similarities) between our master degrees.

### 2.1 System differences

The higher educational system in UK is of course much larger, more diversified and with a quality span larger than in Norway<sup>17</sup>. The higher educational institutions are generally also more autonomous than their Norwegian counterparts. Although both countries have a two-cycle structure and as such are in line with the Bologna structure, there are substantial differences between the nominal duration of master degrees. Traditionally UK has focused on a 3(+4) model, but however the last 10-15 years has shown an increased number of students taking the 1-year master degree and consequently a system shift towards a 3+1 (+3) model. According to Mangset (2005)<sup>18</sup> the importance of the master degree has increased due to several reasons; massification of British higher education (the age participation rate doubles from 15%-30 % in the period 1989-1994), the research councils are more often funding 1-year master degrees and because of their desire to attract more profitable students<sup>19</sup>. When Norway reformed their higher education system in 2003 they left a 4+2 system in favour of a 3+2 +3 system. This was due amongst several things; to old graduates (because of over 8,5 years on average before graduating with a master level degree) and the signing of the Bologna Declaration.

Another part of the systems that differ are the assessment of the degree studies. Norway has formally adopted the ECTS system as from the reform in 2003 in combination with introducing the new degrees in 2003 and currently all studies are measured according to the European ECTS- system of credits. UK has not formally adopted the ECTS-system although some of their HEI translated their studies into ECTS. UK stress that their qualifications should not be measured according to a credit accumulation system, but on an outcome based system. However there are examples of use of ECTS in UK HEI<sup>20</sup>. The conclusions in the expert opinion are that the use of ECTS seems not to be in line with the standard recommendations for the use of ECTS. And as such the ECTS given in UK HEI is a bit

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<sup>15</sup> The recognition done by HEI and other bodies in Norway might deviate from NOKUT's decisions. This is unclear at the moment.

<sup>16</sup> This is because it would go far beyond the scope of the report (expert opinion) according to the authors. Instead they introduce a new idea that implies a systematic "International comparative evaluations of European degree programmes. See Maassen & Pinheiro (2006: p.2 and p. 14)

<sup>17</sup> See Maassen & Pinheiro (2006, p. 14) for information on international rankings of HEI from Norway and UK

<sup>18</sup> Mangset (2005)

<sup>19</sup> Mangset (2005: p. 168)

<sup>20</sup> Maassen & Pinheiro (2006, p.14)

confusing. Finally the National qualifications framework is an essential part of the UK education landscape whereas Norway has not yet formally introduced this transparency tool.

This short evaluation on our HE-systems indicates that they are different, but what this difference means is not absolutely clear.

## **2.2 Types of master degrees in UK and Norway – and a comparison**

The main picture is that Norway has a less diverse and more regulated framework of master degrees. UK has at least three types of master degrees, and Norway generally speaking, one common type. There are, however, some exceptions to this main picture that Norway has a 2-year full time-master degree programme and England has a 1-year (12-months) full time master degree programme. It is quite clear that UK has larger variation between different types of master degrees and greater diversity than Norway. In Norway the legal regulations gives the framework for the main structure of the master degree<sup>21</sup>. This regulation also opens up for a new type of master degree that has a duration of 1 ½ years and represents 90 ECTS credits. This master degree is experience-based, which means that admission is only given to those who can document at least 2 years of work-experience in addition to a bachelors degree.

In UK we find three main types of post graduate degrees, namely taught and research master degrees and integrated master degrees. They also include postgraduate diplomas and certificates on master level in the Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ), but they are not included in this report.

### *2.2.1 Taught masters degrees in UK, and the Norwegian counterpart*

Taught master degrees were in UK originally designed to link graduate education more closely to employment<sup>22</sup>. This degree is relatively new in UK and has grown considerably in popularity the last 10 or 15 years. The programmes normally comprises some taught modules and a dissertation. All the modules and the dissertation must be completed to obtain the full master's degree. The dissertation is normally closely connected to the taught courses. The dissertation is normally required to be about 10.000 words<sup>23</sup>. The degree is a 1-year course (and not a 12-month programme), but normally completed during two or three semesters. Examples are Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Laws (LLM).

What would the Norwegian counterpart to this degree? We have a few one-year master degrees established before the introduction of the 2-year new master degrees in 2003. They were introduced for internationalisation purposes at the HEI and are therefore usually taken by international students not entering the Norwegian labour market. They represent an exception to the pre-2003 degree system in Norway and they are very few in number. In reality Norway have no actual counterpart to this UK's taught master degree.

### *2.2.2 Research master degrees in UK, and the Norwegian counterpart*

Applicants to this type of master degrees must have a thesis topic established when applying to a research degree or attend an interview prior to starting the programme. As such research

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<sup>21</sup> Norwegian regulation only available in Norwegian:

<http://odin.dep.no/kd/norsk/tema/utdanning/hoyereutdanning/tema/kvalitetsreformen/045071-200002/dok-bn.html>

<sup>22</sup> Becher, Henkel and Kogan (1993: p. 11)

<sup>23</sup> With 450 word per page and 1 ½ spacing this would represent approximately a 22 page dissertation.

degrees are obtained through independent research done by the student and not closely connected to classes as in the taught degrees. There are no mandatory classes or courses in these programmes.

The thesis may contain 20000-40000<sup>24</sup> words and therefore it is at least double the size of dissertation in a taught degree. These degrees are normally 12 months of duration (full-time studies) and are therefore of slightly longer duration than the taught degrees. These degrees are more closely connected to further academic studies and in some cases there might be transfer opportunities to PhD studies.

The size of the dissertation would in some cases be of approximately the same size as the Norwegian master degree thesis. The national regulations for Norwegian master degrees defines a minimum credits spent on the dissertation to be 30 ECTS credits/ ½ year of fulltime studies and the maximum to be 60 ECTS/1 year of fulltime studies. Generally speaking one might assume that if the size of the master dissertation in a specific field in a Norwegian master degree is defined to be 30 ECTS, one might conclude that a research master degree from UK and a 2-year Norwegian master degree would match each other regarding the dissertation. A Norwegian master degree would still require more nominal study time/ECTS credits than the UK degree.

### *2.2.3 Master of Philosophy degree in UK, and the Norwegian counterpart*

The MPhil degree is considered to be more advanced and research oriented than the 12-months master's degrees. The degree is for candidates who have appropriate qualifications to undertake research. It usually lasts for 2 years and requires the student to produce a research paper of around 40000-60000 words.<sup>25</sup> This degree may contain taught elements in the first year but not necessarily. The subject of the thesis must have substantial significance, originality and scope appropriate to the 2 years of study required.

The Norwegian counterpart to this degree in length and duration, as well as requirements to the thesis, would be the regular 2 year master degree including a thesis representing 60 ECTS/ one year of fulltime studies. This can be assumed based on the required size of the dissertation/thesis; however it is of course extremely difficult to generalize only from the size of the thesis to a more general statement about the equivalence of these degrees, as also stressed in the expert opinion. According to the expert opinion, a comparative evaluation would have to be done on a programme level<sup>26</sup>.

### *2.2.4 Other master degrees*

In addition to the master degrees mentioned above we also find a set of more specialized master degrees in UK such as integrated master degrees (e.g.; Master of Engineering, Master of Pharmacy, which are 4-and 5-years integrated master degrees). The degree in pharmacy is regulated by European directives and therefore unproblematic with respect to recognition. The MEng and their Norwegian counterparts are different. The UK degree is a 4-year integrated master degree, whereas the master degree in Engineering in Norway is a 2-year degree on top of a three-year bachelor degree.

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<sup>24</sup> This would represent a size of the dissertation containing between 40-80 pages (450 words per page, spacing 1 ½ )

<sup>25</sup> Would represent 80-100 pages dissertation with 450 words and 1 ½ spacing.

<sup>26</sup> see Maassen & Pinheiro (2006, p. 12)

### 3. Conclusions

The expert opinion points to several system differences between UK and Norway in the Higher education sector, but these differences alone do not explain the fact the Norwegian office does not grant degree equivalence to UK master degrees (taught degrees and 12 months research degrees). One must also consider the national context for meaningful recognition of foreign qualifications and the actual difference between Norway and UK concerning the master degrees themselves. These conclusions are relevant for recognition of foreign degrees at the Norwegian office, but are not automatically applicable for the recognition done at HEI and other bodies. This report does not discuss recognition done at HEI and other bodies, due to lack of material.

#### 3.1 What is quality assured degree recognition?

The expert opinion points to the Lisbon Convention as a tool for solving recognition problems generated by system differences, based on trust between parties that have ratified the convention.<sup>27</sup> However, they question whether this “trust” between parties actually reflects the level of quality assurance one would like to have in mutual degree recognition of international qualifications. The basis of the degree recognition under the Lisbon Convention is “formal information” as opposed to what the authors refer to as “an international comparative evaluation of degree programmes in Europe”. The authors conclude that there are surprisingly few, if any examples available of studies that address questions concerning differences in learning outcome of higher education degree programmes.<sup>28</sup>

The expert opinion draws the attention to a potential conflict between a general recognition done at ENIC-/NARIC offices and the academic recognition for the purpose of further studies at HEI. Such a conflict may call for a dual solution that accepts two types of recognition. This implies acceptance for the fact that there will sometimes be variations in results depending on the purpose of the recognition.

One could ask if the introduction of National qualifications framework (under overarching framework EHEA) will shed new light on this problem. The UK NARIC response to the first draft of the Expert opinion clearly has expectations in this new European framework as a helpful tool: if the Norwegian and the UK framework of HE awards match up to Bologna expectations, then we would mutually recognise each others degrees. The situation today is that the framework is in place in UK, but not yet in Norway, and thus it is difficult to draw any conclusions yet.

#### 3.2 Different national recognition models

The UK and the Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC- offices do contribute substantially to the assessment of foreign qualifications in our respective countries. We have both adopted models that suit our respective national traditions and we have developed a type of recognition that makes meaningful comparisons with national awards. Since UK has a larger and more diverse higher education sector, they also have a more diversified recognition of

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<sup>27</sup> see Maassen & Pinheiro (2006, p. 12)

<sup>28</sup> see Maassen & Pinheiro (2006, p. 11)

foreign degrees, using three levels according to their own division of master degrees. Norway on the other hand only recognises foreign master degrees in relation to their own 2-year master degree.

The content of the recognition statements and the status differs between us. The UK NARIC office issues advisory statements whereas the Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC-offices issues binding decisions. Another difference lies in the preference of either a result stated in credits or in learning outcome. This is one of the major challenges when it comes to the recognition of the Norwegian office, however, the rejection of degree equivalence may also reflect a substantial difference.

### **3.3 Are the UK and the Norwegian master degrees substantially different from each other?**

According to the Lisbon Convention Article VI, each party shall recognize the higher education qualifications conferred in another party unless a substantial difference can be shown. The question is of course if this is the case concerning the recognition of UK one-year master degrees in Norway.

So far NOKUT has rejected master degree equivalence to both taught and research master degrees from UK. It has been granted between 60 and up to 75 ECTS-credits on master level, but no master degree equivalence. The MPhil degree from UK on the other hand, has been granted 120 ECTS credits and full equivalence to the 2-year Norwegian master degree.

What is the substantial difference between the 2-year Norwegian master degree and the taught- and research master degrees from UK? The expert opinion concludes as follows:

- on the one side, the overall organisation of programmes is rather similar and that generally speaking expectations regarding students skills and competencies does not differ substantially of the master degree holder in both countries<sup>29</sup>
- on the other side, many master degree programmes from Norway are nominally longer than the master level programmes in the UK. Norwegian master degrees represent on an average 3200-3400 hours of study time while UK master degrees represent up to 1800 hours of study time. The experts say that it is not clear at the moment what this difference exactly means in practice regarding the skills and competencies of graduates<sup>30</sup>. The use of the ECTS credits in UK is definitely not clarifying on this point. It is perhaps creating more confusion.

### **3.4 Practical conclusions for the recognition of UK master degrees in Norway**

Today's system of recognition of foreign degrees in Norway is meaningful in our national context. There are many nuances lost when moving from UK to Norway with a master degree and converting it into Norwegian recognition currency. The recognition model of the Norwegian office is based on looking into credit accumulation, nominal duration of studies and on a comparison with the regulated structure of Norwegian 2-year master degree. These

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<sup>29</sup> see Maassen & Pinheiro (2006: p. 8 and p. 10)

<sup>30</sup> see Maassen & Pinheiro (2006: p. 14)

in many ways collide with the fundamental belief in UK office that one should focus more on comparing learning outcomes.

The expert opinion has not convinced the Norwegian ENIC-/NARIC-office that the rejection of master degree equivalence is wrong. It has given a more nuanced picture of the master degree qualifications from UK. But we are still of the opinion that the difference in duration leads to a substantial difference in learning outcomes, that interferes with degree equivalence for both the taught and the research master degree. The Norwegian office will continue to grant full degree equivalence to the UK MPhil degree. The office upholds that this is a fair recognition of master degrees from UK and in line with the Lisbon Convention..

What about the idea launched by Maassen and Pinheiro (2006); International Comparative evaluations of European programmes. This clearly represents an alternative strategy to both the duration/credits and learning outcomes principles for recognition of foreign degrees, an alternative strategy that would perhaps put the content and the quality of the programs and nothing else on the agenda. According to the authors, this new approach “would address general questions that cannot be answered through the formal information on international comparability of qualifications available at the moment”<sup>31</sup>. We think this type of evaluation could be a tool for further improving the quality of the recognition of foreign degrees. On the other hand it can not replace the more general recognition of foreign degrees done by the ENIC-/NARIC network.

#### **4. Final remarks**

The process of writing this report has disclosed different perceptions/interpretations of important elements in the international framework regulating recognition of foreign degrees, between the offices.

It seems that currently the offices have different perceptions of the key concept of “substantial difference” mentioned in the Lisbon recognition Convention (art VI.1). The Norwegian office clearly states, that the different duration and scope of master degrees can constitute a substantial difference, implying a difference in learning outcomes between the two-year Norwegian master degree and the taught and research master degrees from UK of up to 12-month’s duration. This difference is an argument for not granting degree equivalence to a Norwegian 2-year master degree. The UK comments to the report clearly states that they disagree with the Norwegian understanding of the concept, and term the Norwegian use of “substantial difference”: a result of a flawed methodology. The Norwegian office disagrees with this view.

The new tools designed to facilitate recognition such as; diploma supplement, ECTS, and national qualifications framework will not remove the substantial differences that exist between second cycle qualifications or degrees. One of the ideas of the Bologna Process is to maintain diversity within a harmonised degree structure. The future of the higher education area of Europe will most certainly include various types of second cycle degrees and qualifications. These degrees will be second cycle qualifications in their own right, and recognised as such, but still differ from each other in many aspects. The UK office, in their

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<sup>31</sup> Maassen & Pinheiro (2006: p. 14)

response to this report, argues that the Norwegian refusal of degree equivalence of the one-year master degrees from UK with the two-year master degrees from Norway is at odds with the Bologna Process. The Norwegian office on the other hand argues that their recognition practices is in line with the idea of diversity of qualifications and the subsequent reflection of this in differentiated recognition.



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Master Degree Programmes in the United  
Kingdom and Norway:  
A Comparative Reflection

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“There is a recognition that whatever decision is made on the actual organisation of the postgraduate degree and on its denomination, it cannot be independent of the need for international recognition not only of the type of degrees being awarded – the content – but also of the type of institutions that are awarding them<sup>32</sup>”

## 1.1. 1. Introduction

In this report specific features of Norwegian Master degree programmes and master degree programmes offered in UK<sup>33</sup> will be reflected upon. Of special interest to NOKUT, who assigned this study to the Faculty of Education, University of Oslo, is to get input into the development of a model for handling the recognition problems of second cycle (= Masters level) degrees between Norway and UK. While the original request from NOKUT was to "Compare the 2-year Norwegian master degree with the 12-month master degree from UK and to identify and analyze the differences between them", obviously, this report does not contain an actual comparative evaluation of Master programmes itself; an evaluation that would anyhow go far beyond the scope of this study. Instead the main aim of the report is to provide proposals with respect to how in an “open European Higher Education Area” cross-country differences in degree programmes can be evaluated.<sup>34</sup>

The signing in 1999 of the Bologna Declaration by 29 Ministers of Education<sup>35</sup> or their representatives was, amongst other things, supposed to lead to a greater compatibility and comparability of European higher education systems. This was to be achieved to coordinating national higher education policies, with one of the main aims to adopt a system of “easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement”<sup>36</sup> (Bologna Declaration 1999: 3). Taking away the obstacles to students and staff mobility throughout Europe, and the establishment of a joint system of credits (such as the ECTS system) were other main aims included in the Bologna Declaration. The main outcome of the joint actions and coordinated policies should be the creation of an open European Area of Higher Education by 2010.

As a consequence in many countries, including Norway<sup>37</sup>, the degree structures have since 1999 been adapted through far-reaching reforms based on the Bologna Declaration. However, the current degree structure situation throughout the original 29 Bologna countries cannot be described as homogeneous. First of all, not all of these 29 countries have implemented all major agreements included in the Bologna Declaration yet. In the second place, many of those countries that have implemented Bologna have adapted the Bologna Declaration to their own national circumstances. The result is smaller or larger variations, especially with respect to the three-cycle degree structure. Third, some countries have paid lip service to Bologna by only superficially changing their degree structure. Finally, a number of countries apparently felt

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<sup>32</sup> Pratt, J.; Kekale, J.; Maassen, P.A.M.; Papp, I.; Perellon, J.; Uitti, M. 2004. *Equal but Different: An evaluation of the Postgraduate Polytechnic Experiment in Finland (Final Report)*. Publications of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.

<sup>33</sup> In the UK's higher education system for many aspects a distinction has to be made between the situation in Scotland and England, referring to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, in this report we take the qualifications frameworks for higher education as a starting-point. These converge across the UK at Masters level (see appendix 1). There is no difference between the descriptors for Master's degrees in different countries of the UK, and bachelor's graduates from one part of the UK can and do study a Master's degree at universities in another.

<sup>34</sup> The authors of this report are grateful to UK NARIC for providing background material (received 16 May 2006) with respect to UK Master degrees and the UK higher education system.

<sup>35</sup> Since then the Bologna Declaration has been signed by 16 additional countries.

<sup>36</sup> Bologna Declaration (1999: 3)

<sup>37</sup> Åse Gornitzka (2006) What is the Use of Bologna in National Reform? The Case of Norwegian Quality Reform in Higher Education. In: V. Tomusk (ed.) *Creating the European Area of Higher Education*. Dordrecht: Springer: pp. 19-43.

that the Bologna Declaration does not require any major adaptations of their higher education system, since their system was already a Bologna system “avant la lettre”. The UK higher education system is among those systems that have not been reformed “according to the Bologna Declaration” since 1999.

Overall, what can be observed is that instead of a homogeneous diffusion of the various elements of the Bologna Declaration throughout the countries and higher education systems involved, the implementation of the Bologna Declaration can be regarded as a form of translation into national contexts<sup>38</sup>.

The Bologna process is aimed at creating an open European Higher Education Area where recognition problems would no longer exist. However, the practice of European higher education shows that there are important remaining and new differences in degree structures between countries. This raises the question about the consequences of these variations. Is there enough trust between the Bologna countries in the sense that the differences between Master level degree structures can be taken for granted? Can it be assumed that every Master degree awarded by a higher education institution in one of the Bologna countries represents an adequate level of competencies and skills? Do national systems to assure the quality of higher education degrees, together with a European qualification framework, suffice for guaranteeing the quality of degrees comparatively? Or is there in practice a need for careful and detailed comparative evaluations of various types of master programmes between countries? If the latter is the case, how should these evaluations be conducted? In this report we take the latter position as a starting-point. We will address the issue of how to conduct comparative evaluations of Master level programmes with the Norwegian-UK case as the basis.

An important European project that addresses the Bologna challenges, for example, in the areas of degree programme comparability, and degree and programme recognition is the Tuning project<sup>39</sup>. The main aim and objective of the project is to contribute significantly to the elaboration of a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications in each of the signatory countries of the Bologna process, which should be described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile. The Tuning project has developed a methodology and a common language, reflected in the Berlin Communiqué which can serve as a common basis, and will make it possible to develop an overarching European framework of qualifications. We will come back to some of the findings of the project later on.

We will start by giving a brief description of the UK and Norwegian Master programmes. Based on these short descriptions we will reflect upon the main differences and similarities between these programmes that come to the fore through such descriptive interpretations. This will lead to a discussion of the main issues to be addressed in a comparative evaluation, with the recognition issue as its frame of reference. Finally we will make some recommendations about the way in which comparative evaluations could be conducted.

## **1.2. 2. Master Degree programmes in the UK and Norway**

### **2.1 UK Master degree programmes<sup>40</sup>**

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 20-21.

<sup>39</sup> For more information on the project, see: [http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

<sup>40</sup> Based on: Eurydice (2005) *National summary sheets on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms*. Brussels: European Commission.

UK universities are diverse, ranging in mission, size, and history. All UK universities are autonomous bodies and each determines its own admission policy and requirements. Entry is competitive and specific requirements are set for each programme. In most cases, entry requirements are specified as General Certificate of Education Advanced level (GCE A-level) or equivalent qualifications. However, many universities also welcome applications from mature students who have appropriate experience, but may lack formal qualifications. In the UK, academic qualifications are not national awards, but are granted by individual institutions. Universities have the power to award their own degrees and qualifications. Qualifications and titles used to vary between institutions. Recently a five-level framework has been introduced to provide a clearer structure to higher education qualifications and to promote consistent use of qualifications' titles (for a detailed discussion, see appendix 1).

The UK degree structure at the Master level reflects the traditional institutional autonomy, and the accompanying large diversity of degree awarded and titles used. In appendix 2 an overview is presented of the main types of Master degree structures, i.e. taught Master's degrees; Research Master's degrees; Master of Engineering; Master of Research; Master of Business Administration; Master of Laws (LL.M); Master of Pharmacy; and Master of Philosophy (MPhil). In essence most of the current UK Master degree programmes last 12 or 18 months of study (on a full-time basis). The major exception is the MPhil that lasts 24 months.

Finally, what needs to be emphasized is that UK higher education has not formally introduced the ECTS credit system (see below). UK Master programmes are not credit accumulation programmes but outcomes oriented ones. This makes comparisons with continental European Master credit accumulation programmes difficult, also from the perspective that the UK national qualification frameworks give an insight into the comparability of the structure and requirements of Master programmes, but they do not represent an evaluation as regards the content of these programmes, and the actual level of competencies and skills of the graduates.

## 2.2 *Norwegian Master degree programmes*

Previously the Norwegian first degree was awarded on the basis of a four-year programme, *candidata/candidatus magisterii*, and the second degree programme was a 1.5 or 2 year programme leading to a *cand.philol.* (humanities), *cand.scient.* (natural sciences), *cand.polit.* (social sciences), or *cand.san.* (paramedical/health education) degree. The average time it took to complete such a two-cycle degree programme exceeded 8.5 years, resulting in on average rather old graduates and high costs for the Norwegian society. This, together with the signing of the Bologna Declaration, formed the main arguments behind the reform of the degree structure.

With the reform from 2001 the former credit system where 20 Norwegian credits equalled one year of full-time studies was replaced by the ECTS system. Under the current system the average Master degree equals 1.5 or 2 years of full-time studies and stands for 90 or 120 ECTS credits. Some (professional) one year Master programmes are allowed, but the preferred system for the first two cycles is the 3 year Bachelor + 2 year Master one. Most institutions implemented this structure in the academic year 2002/2003. All were required to do so as of the academic year 2003/ 2004. Some disciplines are exempt from this structure, such as medicine, theology, psychology and veterinary science. A Ph.D programme builds on a master degree and lasts nominally three years. There are individual application procedures between each of the three levels.

As indicated, Master degree programmes in Norway are of two types: professional or discipline (i.e. research/theoretical) oriented. Either type usually includes an individual piece of research leading to a master's thesis (dissertation), representing at least 30 ECTS. As is the case with the UK, a variety of master degree types exist in Norwegian HE. An overview of the Master degrees (Norwegian names with English translations) offered by the University of Oslo is given in appendix 3. Of these Master degrees the majority concerns 2 year study programmes.

### **1.3. 3. Comparative reflection**

In this section we reflect upon the major differences, as well as similarities amongst the master degree structures of the two countries under analysis. This is a brief overview based on the detailed information included in appendices 2, 3 and 4.

#### **3.1 Degree Framework**

Generally speaking, the basis of the current Norwegian higher education degree structure consists of a 3 + 2 Bachelor/Master degree structure. There are exceptions to this (see appendix 3), but the situation is far more homogeneous than in the UK with a large number of different Master degrees, most of which are one-year degree programmes (see appendix 2). Norwegian Master level degrees on a full time (FTE) basis last for a longer period than in the UK (two years vs. one year) and encompass, as a result, a higher number of credits; 120 versus 90 ECTS, respectively. Nonetheless, exceptions do exist with some Norwegian masters lasting (FTE) for one and half years (90 ECTS), and the British MPhil programmes running (FTE) between 18 (one and a half year) and 36 months (three years), though 24 months (2 years) is usually the norm. Moreover, in Norway, special provisions are in place allowing *some* higher education institutions to award 1-year master degree programmes<sup>41</sup>, as well as the existence of internationally-oriented and experienced-based<sup>42</sup> master's degrees (representing between 60 and 90 ECTS). Both countries offer fully integrated programs (i.e. Bachelor & Master as one) lasting a minimum of five years (300 ECTS credits). In terms of regime, the UK is more prone to offer part-time options lasting the double of the ordinary time required for a FTE degree, i.e. usually around 2 years. In Norway, this is also contemplated in programmes with a stronger professional orientation<sup>43</sup>, though since the normal period (FTE) is 2 years, the length of time for a part-time programme is (normally) 4 years.

#### **3.2 Quality assessment and/or Accreditation Procedures**

As discussed in appendix 1, a "Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland" is in place. A key aspect of this framework is the provision of a set of *qualification descriptors* with clear reference points for each degree level, as well as their expected outcomes. However, these descriptors function more as 'guidelines' rather than strict requirements. As such, UK higher education institutions possess the freedom to determine if a given qualification is to be offered at the Master (M-level). Further, a thorough

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<sup>41</sup> Strict rules do apply with regard to subject area, language of instruction, etc.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion/presentation of professional master degrees across Europe see: [http://www.businet.org.uk/public/documents/PresentationMagdaBeernaertTheProfessionalMastersDegree.ppt#284,16,Collaboration with industry](http://www.businet.org.uk/public/documents/PresentationMagdaBeernaertTheProfessionalMastersDegree.ppt#284,16,Collaboration%20with%20industry)

<sup>43</sup> For example, in areas such as journalism (see the HiO example provided earlier).

review of the UK 'Code of Practice', assuring academic quality standards in HE, has also been undertaken recently. Amongst other things, institutions are required to *design, approve, supervise* and *review* a set of procedures<sup>44</sup> in light of their degree programs and awards, at all levels. UK Master degree programmes are regularly evaluated by both internal and external stakeholders.

It is of importance to point here to two relevant aspects of UK higher education, the first of which is its diversity. The differences in mission and related to that, academic quality, between UK universities is larger than the differences between Norwegian universities. UK universities are, amongst other things, more selective in student admission than Norwegian universities, more hierarchically stratified, and basic research activities are more institutionally concentrated in the UK than in Norway<sup>45</sup>.

Second, since 2002 the UK system of quality assurance consists of institutional audits. The parallel system of subject reviews (or teaching quality assessments) that have been undertaken since 1993 by a division of the funding council, have gradually been phased out. The dominance of audits over subject reviews can be interpreted as a dominance of university interests over demands for detailed public accountability. The 'code of practice' and qualification framework (appendix 1) are part of a 'set of tools' that were established to make sure that the universities will use their autonomy in a 'responsible way'. With respect to the Bologna process this implies that the UK position is that (European) programme accreditation is unacceptable, and that course based review is not a relevant tool for assuring the quality of higher education, as is expressed, for example, by the HLPF in 2003 for UK higher education as a whole: "The UK's experience with course-based review is that it is unnecessarily bureaucratic and costly. Where institutions have strong internal quality procedures, as in the UK, institutional based review/audit has proved to be effective and cost-efficient".<sup>46</sup>

In Norway, institutional accreditation is a basic requirement for offering higher education degree programmes. Those institutions without official recognition need to apply to the national quality agency (NOKUT) for *establishing* or *changing* (master) degree programmes and courses. Universities are allowed to establish their own Master degree programs. State university colleges offering Doctoral-level degrees are allowed to offer Master degree programmes in the same areas in which they are offering their doctoral degrees. Private providers need to apply to NOKUT but, as such, the larger institutions have as much freedom of manoeuvre as the state university colleges.

### 3.3 Access Requirements

In both countries general admission to a Master programme is based on the successful attainment of a relevant undergraduate (bachelor or equivalent) degree, lasting usually three years (180 ECTS). However, special conditions do apply depending on the field of studies and the institution<sup>47</sup>. For example, in Norway, the provisions allow institutions to accept students on the basis of relevant work experience, and, in some cases, a minimum average grade at the bachelor level (usually 'C') is set as a condition. In the UK, on the other hand, student access requirements differ depending on the type of Master degree, i.e. taught or research-based; with the latter type being slightly stricter. Overall, and academically speaking,

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<sup>44</sup> For example, in terms of student assessment procedures.

<sup>45</sup> This can to some extent be illustrated by pointing to Academic rankings of World Universities, e.g. the Shanghai Jiaotong University one (<http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/ranking.htm>). In the latter's 2006 ranking 7 UK universities are ranked higher than the highest ranked Norwegian university, but while all Norwegian research universities are ranked among the 500 best universities in the world, this goes for less than half of the UK universities.

<sup>46</sup> HLPF (2003) *UK position statement on the Bologna Process*: Berlin Ministerial Summit 18-19 september. In Universities (UK) (Ed.) London.

<sup>47</sup> See the example provided earlier (MSc in Economics at UiO)

the basic entry requirements to master programs are in general rather similar across the two countries. However, the institutional variation in entrance requirements is much larger in the UK than in Norway.

### 3.4 *Types of Degrees*

The categorisation of Master level programmes differs slightly between the two countries. In Norway, programmes are of two types: *professional* and/or *discipline-* (research) oriented. In either case an individual piece of research (representing at least between 30 ECTS) leading to a final dissertation (thesis) is contemplated. As for the UK, the main differentiation lies in the nature of the programmes, i.e. *taught* and/or *research*-based degrees. Whereas the former type are based on taught courses (modules) combined with a final dissertation, the latter are mostly undertaken via students' independent research endeavours, culminating in a thorough research (written) master thesis (up to 40.000 words). While the Norwegian name for a research-based Masters is usually "Master i (programme name)", the English translation of these Master degrees is to some extent comparable to the British terminology (e.g. MPhil, MSc, MA, LL.M, etc.). However, an MPhil Master degree in Norway refers to an ordinary master degree in a particular disciplinary field (usually in medicine, the humanities, social sciences, and/or educational sciences), in the English context, the category of MPhil is that of an advanced (often research-based) master program, often leading in the end to a Doctoral degree. Both the length of studies (usually 2 years FTE) as well as the type of dissertation (up to 60.000 words), make this program rather distinct from other UK Masters<sup>48</sup>.

Additionally, UK Master programmes characterised as 'MRes' (Master in Research) are absent in Norway. These usually last one year (FTE) and are composed of a 50 to 60% research element (the remaining being taught courses), followed by a thesis of 15.000 to 20.000 words. As such, an MRes is more substantial (academically) than an MA or an MSc but less so than pure research-based degrees. In its set up the MRes resembles to some extent the ordinary 2-year master programmes offered at Norwegian universities and state university colleges<sup>49</sup>, but obviously not in programme length.

Finally, the Tuning project has published a report on "the universities' contributions to the Bologna process". The report points, amongst other things, to an interesting difference between British and continental European universities in the area of chemistry: "The UK has a second-cycle on year Masters which can be referred to as more 'professional' in nature, but there does not yet seem to be a tendency in continental Europe to go down that road. Instead it appears likely that master programmes will carry 90-120 credits according to the Helsinki recommendations"<sup>50</sup>.

### 3.5 *Program Structure (Design)*

As expected, no 'one size' design structure fits all the different master programs within and across the two countries. However, some similarities can be observed. For example, Norwegian (FTE) masters are organised along (4) semesters or terms, usually composed of a set of core courses (compulsory and selective). These courses are worth between 7.5 and 15 ECTS-credits each, and are followed by a written master thesis (of 30 to 60 ECTS). The latter

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<sup>48</sup> It can in many respects be regarded as a kind of 'miniature' Doctoral degree.

<sup>49</sup> Note that the final thesis (in Norway) usually lasts between 1 and 2 semesters and represents either 30 ECTS (1 semester) or 60 ECTS (1 year). In the latter case it represents half of the total credits awarded for a master degree.

<sup>50</sup> Tuning project: J. Gonzalez and R. Wagenaar (2005), Tuning educational structures in Europe II. Universities' contribution to the Bologna process: pp. 64. (<http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>)



takes either one full semester (6 months) or a full year to complete and ranges from 50 to 120 pages, depending on the type of program, the field of studies and the particular higher education institution. Students are also given the possibility of transferring credits from a period of studies overseas, often up to one semester (30 ECTS). Moreover, at the *høyskole* (state university college) level and in certain fields (e.g. Journalism, Business), students are also free to choose the scope of their research work, i.e. *practical* or *scientific*. Despite the fact that the Master programmes are shorter<sup>51</sup> (in terms of time/credits) in the UK, the overall organisation of programmes at UK universities is rather similar to that of Norwegian higher education providers. As it happens in both countries a series of integrated (4 to 5 year) programmes do exist<sup>52</sup>. The most important differentiation (in the UK) occurs along the lines of *taught* versus *research* based programmes. While the former resemble the format adopted by Norwegian universities and state university colleges (i.e. core courses, elective courses, and thesis), the latter are usually based on one (maximum two) taught units followed by a thesis dissertation (and oral examination). Furthermore, as is the case with some (vocational) Master programmes at the *høyskole* (state university college) level (Norway), certain programmes, such as the MBA, have a strong practical component. Finally, LLMs (Master of Laws) are almost identical in both countries (if taught<sup>53</sup>), and are usually composed of three semesters (including a thesis dissertation) and represent 90 ECTS<sup>54</sup>.

### 3.6 Student Assessment

In both countries the norm is to assess students on the basis of taught courses (core and selective) and respective assignments, as well as a written Master thesis on a topic of students' interest; developed under the supervision of one (or more) members of the academic staff. The programme often culminates in the 'defence' of the research work undertaken by students via an oral examination. In the case of England, the weight given to credit accumulation (via courses) differs between types of master programme (taught or research-based), with the case of the latter type putting more emphasis on the research (thesis) dimension.

### 3.7 Expected Outcomes

Student outcomes differ by programme type, field of studies and the profile of the institution, in either country. In the UK (Scotland and England), however, the 'National Qualifications Framework'<sup>55</sup> tries to clarify the skills and competencies that are expected from students who are awarded a Master degree at a UK university. These include, but are not limited to, the following elements:

- A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.
- A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.

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<sup>51</sup> The exception being the MPhil which usually last for 2 years (FTE), though 1-year programmes also exist.

<sup>52</sup> For example, the MEng at British universities and/or the 1-tier (5 year) Norwegian master degrees at UiO

<sup>53</sup> In the UK there are a few research-based masters in law. These are usually called MA or MSc.

<sup>54</sup> See for example the LLMs at UiO <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/pubint-master/> and at Sheffield University <http://www.shef.ac.uk/law/prospectivepg/taught/llmilsprogcont.html>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp>

- Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.
- Conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - To evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline.
  - To evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

As for Norway, to the best of our knowledge, no official (qualitative) expectations beyond the fulfilment of *access criteria* and *credit production*<sup>56</sup> have been formulated by either the Ministry of Education or NOKUT. Nonetheless, according to the University of Bergen (UiB) and the University of Oslo (UiO), a Master level degree consists of a strong research element that helps prepare students for further research studies. Overall, the development of students' analytical skills, empirical analysis, as well as the (theoretical) conceptualisation of a given problem is seen as one of the core aspects of a Master degree programme in Norway. In this respect, and generally speaking, it can be stated that the expectations as regards students' skills and competencies do not differ substantially between the two countries<sup>57</sup>. However, these formal expectations cannot be seen as evidence for a comparability of the actual level of competencies and skills of the Master degree holders in both countries.

#### 1.4. 4. Overall assessment

Bearing in mind the elements presented throughout this report (briefly highlighted above), and given the limitations in terms of *time* and *scope*<sup>58</sup> of the underlying study, the following (3) aspects can be emphasized:

- The *Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* provides a common framework within which the higher education institutions have to organise their Master degree offers, especially when it comes to *quality*, the *harmonisation* of standards/procedures across the domestic landscape, and *accountability* to stakeholders. This overall Framework together with other elements that make up the so-called 'academic infrastructure' of quality assurance in the UK (appendix 1) is intended to provide a 'clearly defined limiting framework for the large institutional autonomy'<sup>59</sup> in this area.

The efforts undertaken by Norway in the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, particularly when it comes to a new (Master) degree structure, international mobility/credit recognition (via ECTS) and quality assessment, seem to indicate a very *strong* willingness by higher education stakeholders (government and institutions) to widely adopt shared (regional/international) standards<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Including a minimum individual workload of 20 to 30 ECTS.  
<http://odin.dep.no/kd/norsk/utdanning/hogreutdanning/kvalitetsreformen/045071-200002/index-dok000-b-n-a.html> ('6Krav til selvstendig arbeid').

<sup>57</sup> There are logical differences at the program/institutional level, especially given the nature of the disciplinary field/area of studies.

<sup>58</sup> This analysis focused entirely on the publicly available data/information. No qualitative aspects of any kind (interviews, visits, evaluation reports) were undertaken.

<sup>59</sup> Johanna Witte (2006) *Change of degrees and degrees of change*. Enschede: CHEPS/University of Twente.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion on the Norwegian Qualification Framework, see P. Børing and B. Stensaker (2004): Et nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk. Hva kan vi lære av internasjonale erfaringer? NIFU STEP Arbeidsnotat 5.

- Generally speaking, many Master level degree programmes in Norway are nominally longer than Master level programmes in the UK<sup>61</sup>, in the sense that, first and foremost, Norwegian two-year Master programmes represent (on average) around 3200-3400 hours of study time, while English one-year Master programmes represent up to 1800 hours of study time. While focusing solely on required hours of study does not provide a valid enough basis for coming to any conclusions about differences between Norwegian and UK Master degree holders in levels of competency and skills, it can at least be assumed that a 120 ECTS two year Master course has more content than 1 one-year 75-90 ECTS Master course. A difference of at least 30 ECTS<sup>62</sup> is not of potential relevance because of the difference in earned credits this represents, but for the possible differences in learning outcomes that might be associated with it.
- From a *flexibility* perspective our analysis indicates that the array of student options, when it comes to degree types and length of studies, is larger in the UK than in Norway. On the other hand, one has to take into consideration the role undertaken by state university colleges in the Norwegian context. For example, the fact that these institutions (also) offer more practically oriented Master programmes, both full- and part-time, then the situation is somehow levelled; though the *size* and *scope* and *number* of Master degree programmes offered in the UK cannot be directly compared with those of a small country such as Norway<sup>63</sup>.

### 1.5. 5. *Conclusions and recommendations*

Where do Norwegian Master programmes stand in relation to UK Master programmes and the other way around? One would expect this kind of question to be addressed regularly not only in the Norwegian – UK context, but throughout the emerging open European Higher Education Area. However, there are hardly any examples available of studies that address questions concerning the differences in learning outcomes of higher education degree programmes between countries and institutions, such as differences in the content, organisation, focus, level and type of competencies expected of students, and the outcomes in the sense of the acquired level of academic and other competencies and skills of the graduates. In other words, the question: *What do the academic degrees awarded by a higher education institution in a specific European country represent in comparison to the degrees awarded by institutions in other countries?* seems to be a question not addressed through specific comparative studies, but on the basis of formal written documents, and information gathered in national and institutional contexts.

As indicated in the introduction it can at least to some extent be assumed that an important part of the current basis for mutual degree recognition in Europe – at least the Europe of the 29 original Bologna countries – is trust. However, it can be questioned whether ‘trust’ provides in the end a basis that is solid enough for handling the challenges and possibly conflicts attached to the differences in degree programmes in Europe.

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<sup>61</sup> The most obvious exceptions being the case of 2-year MPhil programs and the 1-year LLM program.

<sup>62</sup> Average master credit production in Norway is 120 ECTS (2-year FTE) vs. 90 ECTS in the UK (1-year FTE).

<sup>63</sup> Bearing in mind the total number of UK HE institutions, enrolled students, and institutional profiles.

What has to be pointed to in this context is that international comparative studies of study programmes are expensive, time consuming and complex. In addition, they are in some respects politically sensitive, in the sense that not all European countries are willing to 'expose' their national higher education degree programmes to international comparative evaluations. This is from a national context understandable given that the possible outcome of such evaluations might be that there are serious differences in the level of programmes, forming a barrier for unconditional mutual recognition of the degrees awarded by certain higher education programmes. However, from a European perspective such reluctance to involve in comparative studies of programme level and quality is less acceptable, since it might undermine the foundations of the Bologna process and the creation of an open European Higher Education Area. All actors involved, from national authorities and institutional leaders to institutional staff and students, should either have a guarantee that the actual level of credits and degrees does not represent a significant variation in learning outcomes throughout Europe, or have access to valid and transparent information on relevant differences between degree programmes in Europe. This is in line with the Lisbon Convention, i.e. *the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European region*. In the explanatory Report of the Convention it is stated that:

*The diversification of higher education has led to a wide range of higher education institutions and programmes in many countries, including those privately run. This development has led to a wider range in higher education qualifications, also in the variety of quality of qualifications of the same level, but earned at different institutions or within different programmes. A knowledge of the quality of a given institution or programme is essential to determine whether a qualification issued by that institution, or on the basis of that programme, should be recognized. This Article puts an obligation on the Parties to provide adequate information on any higher education institution belonging to their higher education system, and on the programmes operated by these institutions, in order to give other Parties the necessary background knowledge to decide whether any given qualification should be recognized.*<sup>64</sup>

This does not imply a plea for a large 'measurement and information circus'. The situation in higher education in 'the Europe of 29' is not as dramatically diverse as in US higher education. In addition, the Lisbon convention facilitates the recognition of qualifications throughout Europe. The explanatory report of the Convention "provides that requests should be assessed in a fair manner and within a reasonable time. The recognition can only be refused if the qualification is substantially different from that of the host country - and the onus is on its educational institution to prove that it is"<sup>65</sup>. In line with this there are many agencies in Europe, for example, the national NARIC agencies<sup>66</sup> that provide information on the structural comparability of international qualifications. Further the Bologna process has in practice led to the removal of a large number of structural barriers to the mobility of students and staff movement.

However, as indicated the current information on the comparability of degrees in Europe mainly concerns formal information. It is in general based on written documents produced in a national context as well as evaluations and assessments conducted within institutional and

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<sup>64</sup> For more information on Lisbon Convention, see: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/reports/html/165.htm>

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the website of UK NARIC: [www.naric.org.uk](http://www.naric.org.uk)

national contexts. As of yet there is no structural mechanism for conducting international comparative evaluations of degree programmes in Europe. This implies that, for example, Norwegian and UK Master degree programmes in economics are formally evaluated within their national context, and not comparatively, or within a European context. As far as we know the last time a large comparative study on the quality of university economics programmes was undertaken including the United Kingdom (as well as in Germany and the Netherlands) was in 1991/92<sup>67</sup>. This study showed significant differences between the three countries in various aspects of the included programmes.

If we look at the information on the UK and Norwegian Master degree structures presented in this report we can complement the above general considerations with the following specific conclusions:

- a) UK higher education is more diverse than Norwegian higher education. This goes for the formal overall qualification framework consisting of five levels, for the types of Master degrees, as well as for differences in overall quality levels between universities. This implies that it is difficult to make one overall assessment of the level of UK Master degrees that does justice to this diversity.

In addition, the institutional autonomy of universities (in the UK as well as Norway) in degree programme matters is leading to great diversity in the internal organisation of Master degree programmes. In the UK the universities need to be able to demonstrate (publicly) how the design of curricula secures academic and intellectual progression. But, it is up to the institutions to decide on how to develop/implement this process, whether by a credit structure or otherwise. As such, there is no assumption (in the Qualification framework) that the internal progression should be, or is best, demonstrated by reference to the descriptors of outcomes of intermediate qualifications, since these are not necessarily used by the institutions. It is not the purpose of the framework to prescribe the internal organisation of academic programmes.

- b) Most UK Master degree programmes are 12 months programmes, while most Norwegian Master degree programmes are 18 or 24 months. It is not clear at the moment what this difference exactly means in practice, e.g. for the level of skills and competencies of the graduates.
- c) The UK Master degree system is not a credit accumulation system, but an outcome based degree system. Nonetheless, as is discussed in appendix 1 many UK universities use credit points for students transferring between programmes or institutions in England/the UK as a whole, and use ECTS (the European Credit Transfer System) for transfers within the European area and to recognise learning gained by students on exchange visits with institutions elsewhere in Europe. However, since there are no national guidelines with respect to the use of the ECTS system by UK universities, the use of ECTS by UK Master degree programmes is somewhat confusing. The following example illustrates this, even though this example is somewhat arbitrary and is only meant to illustrate the underlying issue and to be representative of UK higher education. Obviously, a more structured and valid analysis of the use of ECTS credits by UK Master degree programmes goes beyond the limited scope of this study.

In the Master of Science (MSc) programme in 'Educational Research' at the University of Exeter<sup>68</sup> (see appendix 2, p. 18) 1 ECTS credit point represents 20 hours of study

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<sup>67</sup> The study was undertaken by CHEPS, see: [www.utwente.nl/cheps](http://www.utwente.nl/cheps)

<sup>68</sup> [http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/course\\_information.php?sitscode=PTS1EDUEDU01](http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/course_information.php?sitscode=PTS1EDUEDU01)

time, while on the European continent 1 ECTS credit point represents usually around 28 hours of study time. This implies that this one-year English Master course represents an ECTS value of 90, standing for 1800 hours of study time, while a typical continental European two-year Master programme represents 60 ECTS credits per year, standing for 1680 hours of study time. There might be a satisfying explanation for this difference, but if not, it is definitely an issue that needs more attention.

### *5.1 International comparative evaluations of European degree programmes*

Taken the above considerations and conclusions as a starting-point we want to recommend that the currently available information on Master degree programmes in Norway and UK in particular, and in Europe in general, should be complemented by information that is produced through international comparative evaluations of specific degree programmes.

These international comparative evaluations should address general questions that cannot be answered through the formal information on international comparability of qualifications available at the moment, such as:

- a) What are the main differences in course and programme requirements, including entry and selection processes, and the way in which these requirements are used in the actual selection of students?
- b) What are the main differences in the organisation of the study programme, including the balance between required and elective courses; the balance between teaching hours per week/course/module and self-study; nature of examinations, etc.?
- c) What are the main differences in the support structures available to students?
- d) How do the credit point systems of the programmes to be compared relate? How many hours per week are students expected to study in the included programmes; what is known about the actual number of hours students study?
- e) How do the outcomes and use of student evaluations in the programmes to be evaluated compare?
- f) How does the level and type of competencies and skills expected of students compare? How does the actual level of competencies and skills of the graduates, as shown in their examination papers, homework, project work, assignments, and final theses, compare?

In addition to these general questions discipline or field specific questions should be developed for each evaluation, e.g. with respect to the balance of theoretical and applied contents in the programme; the level of industrial or specific professional competencies expected of students; the balance between computer simulations and hands-on laboratory work, etc.

The methodology of such international comparative evaluations could be adapted to the specific nature of each discipline/field, but can be recommended to include the following core elements:

1. Gathering of parallel information and student work samples from each programme included.
2. Intensive peer review of the material, preferably but not necessarily combined with some form of site visit.

### 3. Drafting of the overall report by an independent agency.

Since this form of evaluation is not focused on programme improvement, but on degree recognition, there is no need to ask the programmes involved to draft a self-evaluation report. Instead the parallel information mentioned can be gathered through a standard questionnaire and the provision of basic documents by the programmes included.

Structured samples of student work should be made available by the programmes in question, including assignments, project reports, and final theses. It is advisable to standardize the samples to some extent, in the sense that the topics covered and their timing within the programmes is essentially parallel/comparable.

Even though final thesis work usually varies from programme to programme in scope, complexity and content, it nonetheless gives a fair indication of the proficiency obtained by the graduates. It is recommendable to include in such an evaluation not only finished theses to be reviewed by peers, but also representative thesis abstracts.

The role of the peers is to judge the difficulty of what the students were required to do, and how well they handled their assignments.

These kind of international evaluations have of course certain limitations, related amongst other things to differences between higher education systems, institutional and department structures, programme objectives, and pedagogical approaches. Nonetheless, they produce information about the extent to which the actual level of competencies and skills of the students and graduates differ significantly or not, in other words, they provide a kind of insight in programme quality that the formal information on international comparability of qualifications available today does not provide.

Finally, a brief reflection on two developments that have to do with the issue addressed in this report.

First the objective of the Bologna process to promote European cooperation in quality assurance amongst other things, through developing comparable criteria and methodologies. Two main consequences of the attempts to realize this objective are first the development by ENQA of a set of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, submitted to the European Ministers of Education meeting in Bergen in May 2005. Second the development of a European register for quality assessment and accreditation agencies. The first development can be regarded as successful, in the sense that the ENQA report has been accepted generally by the European higher education community and is widely used in national and institutional contexts. The second development is more controversial, and relates to the issue who should be in charge of quality assurance in European higher education, the national authorities or the institutions. The development of a European register of quality assessment agencies is expected to lead to a shift of quality assessment focus from the national to the European level. As such it could lead to an improvement of the information available on degree programmes in Europe. However, the next stages in this development are rather unclear, while the main debates around the issue seem to indicate a development in the direction of strategic accreditation, instead of a European level quality assessment arena, with the comparative programme and degree evaluations discussed above.

While most ‘Bologna signatory countries’ try to find a balance in quality assurance between the demands for public control and institutional autonomy/self-governance English higher education has gone through a development where a parallel system of subject reviews and institutional audits was transformed into a system based on institutional audits. This has been the basis for the English/UK rejection of the above mentioned European level proposals concerning the establishment of a European system programme accreditation, as expressed by HLPF: “The UK would resist attempts to introduce a European system of external course evaluation, a single pan-European quality system or form of course-based system”<sup>69</sup>. However, these fundamental differences in the organisation and implementation of quality assurance do lead to questions addressed throughout this report and elsewhere. The answers to these questions cannot only be found by pointing to the satisfying working of these national systems.

The second reflection concerns the topic of qualification frameworks. As presented in appendix 1, the UK has developed a qualification framework for its education system. Also other European countries, such as Denmark and Ireland, have introduced such a national framework, while the European Commission strongly promotes the development of a European Qualification Framework. In essence these frameworks represent attempts to develop indicators and descriptions linked to the competencies expected at each ‘level’ in the framework. As indicated, for example, by Børing and Stensaker<sup>70</sup> with respect to higher education the development of these qualification frameworks implies a threat to the autonomy of higher education institutions. Apart from that, qualification frameworks might improve the formal structural information on higher education degree programmes, but they still do not provide the substantive comparative information addressed above in the proposed methodology for international comparative evaluations of European degree programmes.

Therefore we want to maintain our recommendation concerning international comparative evaluations of degree programmes in Europe. Neither qualification frameworks, nor strategic accreditation at the European level will in the end produce the information needed to make a substantive assessment of the extent to which the actual level of competencies and skills of European students and graduates differ significantly between degree programmes and countries.

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<sup>69</sup> HLPF (2003) *UK position statement on the Bologna Process*: Berlin Ministerial Summit 18-19 september. In *Universities (UK)* (Ed.) London.

<sup>70</sup> P. Børing and B. Stensaker (2004) *Et nasjonalt kvalifikasjonsrammeverk. Hva kan vi lære av internasjonale erfaringer?* Oslo: NIFU STEP, arbeidsnotat 5.



## Appendix 1: The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England

In the UK, two higher education (HE) qualification frameworks (implemented in the academic year 2003/04) exist; one covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>71</sup>, and a separate one for Scotland<sup>72</sup>. One of the main aims of the introduction of the frameworks was to bring national consistency into diverse degrees and degree titles that higher education institutions were offering based on traditions, and rooted in their inherited autonomy in awarding degrees. There are five levels of higher education qualifications awarded by higher education institutions across the UK. In ascending order, these are: the Certificate (C-level), Intermediate (I-level), Honours (H-level), Masters (M-level) and Doctoral (D-level) levels.

Regarding *Master-level* degrees, the focus of this report, the current framework indicates that these shall be based on studies “at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline”<sup>73</sup>. As such, during their (M-level) studies, students are expected to have shown originality in the application of knowledge and understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They are also required to be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and show originality in tackling and solving problems. Moreover, according to the framework, students *shall* possess the qualities needed for employment in complex and unpredictable professional environments and be able to show sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative.

Overall, Masters level degrees in the UK are awarded after the successful completion of taught courses, programmes of research, or a mixture of both. Most Masters programmes last at least one year (if taken full-time, FTE), and are taken by students with one (or more) Honours degrees or its equivalent. Longer, research-based programmes (usually 2 years FTE) often lead to the degree of MPhil (Master of Philosophy). Some Masters degrees (e.g. in science and engineering) are awarded after extended undergraduate programmes that last, typically, a year longer than Honours degree programmes. Also at this level are advanced short courses, often forming parts of Continuing Professional Development programmes, leading to *Postgraduate Certificates* and *Postgraduate Diplomas*. A special note (by the QAA) is given to the fact that MAs (Master of Arts) granted by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge are not per se, academic qualifications.

The *Honours* (H-level) degrees<sup>74</sup> mentioned above form the largest group of HE qualifications in the UK. Typical courses last for three years (if taken full-time) and lead to a Bachelors degree with Honours, under titles like ‘Bachelor of Arts’ (BA(Hons)) or ‘Bachelor of Science’ (BSc(Hons)). Also at this level are short courses and professional ‘conversion’ courses, based largely on undergraduate material, and taken usually by those who are already graduates in another discipline, leading to *Graduate Certificates* or *Graduate Diplomas*.

According to the National Qualifications Framework, public confidence in academic standards requires (public) understanding of the achievements represented by HE

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp>

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/SCQF/default.asp>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp> (Executive Summary)

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp> (for a detailed description of honours level degrees)

qualifications. In light of this objective, the qualifications framework is designed to ensure a consistent use of qualification titles across the UK. Its main *purposes* are:

- to enable employers, schools, parents, prospective students and others to understand the achievements and attributes represented by the main qualification titles;
- to maintain international comparability of standards (especially in the European context), to ensure international competitiveness, and to facilitate student and graduate mobility;
- to assist learners to identify potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning (LLL);
- to assist higher education institutions, their external examiners, and the Agency's (QAA) reviewers, by providing important points of reference for setting and assessing standards<sup>75</sup>.

Regarding the number of levels, the framework has *five* main ones; three of which are undergraduate and two are postgraduate. Each stage within any framework of qualifications, be it school, vocational or higher education, is referred to as a 'level'. In practice, most such levels represent bands of qualifications sharing similar outcomes. In order to convey the relative position of these levels it is convenient to number them '1' to '5'. However, there is a need to avoid confusion with the numbering of levels in the framework of school and vocational qualifications managed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority<sup>76</sup> (QCA), and with the numbered levels of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework<sup>77</sup>. Further, according to the QAA, it is necessary to make it clear that, despite different numberings, at Honours level and above there is equivalence between the frameworks for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and for Scotland. As such, levels will normally be referred to by the initial letter of the descriptive title, with the same letters (H, M and D) being used for the equivalent levels in both higher education qualifications frameworks. Thus, the *five* levels being used are<sup>78</sup>:

<b>1. Certificate</b>	<b>C- level</b>	Certificates of Higher Education
<b>2. Intermediate</b>	<b>I- level</b>	Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas
<b>3. Honours</b>	<b>H- level</b>	Bachelors degrees with Honours, Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas
<b>4. Masters</b>	<b>M- level</b>	Masters degrees, Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas
<b>5. Doctoral</b>	<b>D- level</b>	Doctorates

The framework also provides for a set of *qualification descriptors*. These exemplify the outcomes of the main qualification at each level, and demonstrate the nature of change between levels. As such, they provide clear points of reference at each level, and describe outcomes that cover the great majority of existing qualifications. Descriptors are organised

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* part 1; 'the framework'.

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.qca.org.uk/>

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/SCQF/2001/default.asp>

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp> ('number of levels in the framework')

along two main parts. The *first* part is a statement of outcomes, i.e. the level of achievement which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. This part will be of particular interest to those designing, approving and reviewing academic programmes. They will need to be satisfied that, for any programme, the curriculum and assessments provide all students with the opportunity to achieve, and to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes. On the other hand, the *second* part is a statement of the wider abilities that the typical student is expected to have developed. This data is of assistance to employers, and other stakeholders with an interest in the general capabilities of holders of the qualification.

Each descriptor sets out the outcomes for the main qualification at each level, usually a degree. At some levels there may be more than one type of qualification. The title 'degree' should be used only in respect of qualifications at *Intermediate, Honours, Masters* and *Doctoral* levels, which are awarded for achievement of the full outcomes set out in the relevant descriptor. A qualification from a short, non-degree programme, having outcomes that correspond to some aspects of a descriptor *might* be placed at the same level as the main qualification to which that descriptor refers. For example, a short course may have outcomes requiring the demonstration of understanding and critical awareness of some current problems at the forefront of an area of professional practice, but as such, not a practical understanding of research techniques. It is up to the institution itself to (reasonably) determine that a given qualification should be at 'M level' (Masters). If so, then the titles of 'Postgraduate Diploma' and/or 'Postgraduate Certificate' could eventually be used.

The framework sheds light on the particular qualification descriptor to be adopted by Master degree ('M level') programmes. As such, these are to be awarded to students who have demonstrated the following skills<sup>79</sup>:

- i. A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.
- ii. A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.
- iii. Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.
- iv. Conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - a. To evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline.
  - b. To evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Hence, in light of the qualifications framework, holders of the Master level qualification are expected to: (a) deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences; (b) demonstrate self-direction and originality in

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. (Annex 1: 'Qualification Descriptors')

tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level; (c) continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level; and, (d) possess the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development<sup>80</sup>.

Further guidance on the expectations for degrees in particular subjects can be found in *subject benchmark statements*, produced mostly for the Honours level (according to the QAA other statements will be produced for other levels where there is significant taught provision in a given subject). In areas where there is no benchmark statement, or where more than one such statement may be relevant, the statements of generic outcomes contained in the qualification descriptors provide a particularly important point of reference. This is so since many academic programmes aim to develop general and specific skills, and these are not explicitly addressed in the qualification descriptors; as many skills, and the extent to which they need to be developed, are discipline or profession specific. In those cases, they are addressed more appropriately in subject benchmark statements and individual programme specifications.

In light of the qualifications framework, providers of higher education programmes need to be able to demonstrate (publicly) how the design of curricula secures academic and intellectual progression. But, it is up to the institutions to decide on how to develop/implement this process, whether by a credit structure or otherwise. As such, there is no assumption (in the framework) that the internal progression should be, or is best, demonstrated by reference to the descriptors of outcomes of intermediate qualifications, since these are not necessarily used by the institutions. It is not the purpose of the framework to prescribe the internal organisation of academic programmes. However, the design of academic programmes has to make some assumptions about the amount of learning that is likely to be necessary to achieve the intended outcomes. In some cases this will be expressed in terms of *study time*, for example a number of academic years, in others this will be expressed through *credit rating*.

Within an overall programme (any level), the learning outcomes required for a degree are unlikely to be achieved in less than the equivalent of one academic year's full-time (FTE) study, which addresses those outcomes directly. For example, an extended undergraduate programme might have units of Masters level credit equivalent to study over (one) half of an academic year. That is unlikely to be sufficient to enable a student to match fully the expectations of the *Master* degree descriptor, in which case an *Honours* degree would be the appropriate award for successful completion of the programme. Successful achievement of the full Master's outcomes are required if students are to be awarded a Master degree. Similarly, an ordinary degree programme that offered units of Honours level work equivalent to half a year's study only, would be unlikely to enable a student to demonstrate achievement of full Honours level outcomes. Giving another example, a programme leading to a *Graduate Certificate* or *Graduate Diploma* might have some 'M level' outcomes, but use of the Postgraduate title for the award would be justified *only* if most or all of the outcomes were assessed at the Master (M) level. Hence, a degree can and should (*only*) properly be awarded by institutions when and if the expectations of the relevant qualification descriptor have been met or exceeded.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. ('Descriptor for a qualification at Masters (M) level')

When it comes to the minimum or typical *volumes of learning* by reference to units of credit, the qualifications framework does not specify any requirements. This is related to the fact that not all UK-based institutions currently use credit arrangements, and that there is no *single* credit structure that is of universal application across England. The outcomes associated with a qualification, according to QAA, should be understood in a rather “holistic way”, and their achievement should be demonstrated directly. In that sense, the national qualifications framework for Scotland is much more concrete and homogeneous when it comes to credit production and transfer across the domestic system<sup>81</sup>.

According to a recent official report shedding light on the situation in England, progress towards the objectives set in the Bologna process, a universally applied ‘Credit and Qualifications Framework’ is only in place in the case of Wales<sup>82</sup>. The QCA (see above) is currently developing a credit system titled “the Framework for Achievement” intended for further education in England, which will articulate with higher education. Overall, there is a widely, but not universally, used HE credit system in England and Northern Ireland. As such, degrees and other HE qualifications are legally owned by the awarding institution rather than the government(s). Many institutions use credit points for students transferring between programmes or institutions, and use ECTS (the European Credit Transfer System) for transfers within the European area and to recognise learning gained by students on exchange visits with institutions elsewhere in Europe. As for the situation in Scotland, credit accumulation and transfer within the country is comprehensively covered in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework<sup>83</sup> (SCQF), whereas cross-border recognition is based on the ECTS<sup>84</sup>.

With respect to specific guidelines, *three* aspects are considered important, in the context of *quality assurance*:

- 1) Awarding qualifications, i.e. “qualifications should be awarded to mark the achievement of positively defined outcomes, not as compensation for failure at a higher level, or by default.”.
- 2) Positioning qualifications within the framework, i.e. “institutions should be able to demonstrate that each of their qualifications is allocated to the appropriate level of the framework.”.
- 3) Naming qualifications, i.e. “institutions should ensure that the name given to any qualification represents appropriately the level of achievement, reflects accurately the field(s) of study, and is not misleading”.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp> (Appendix 2)

<sup>82</sup> [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national\\_impl/00\\_Nat-rep-05/National\\_Reports-England-Wales-N-Ireland\\_050113.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-England-Wales-N-Ireland_050113.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/SCQF/2001/scqf.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national\\_impl/00\\_Nat-rep-05/National\\_Reports-Scotland\\_050124.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-Scotland_050124.pdf)

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp> (part 2 ‘specific guidelines’)

## Appendix 2: Part II - Types of UK Master's Degree Programmes

### 1.6. Taught Master Degrees

Taught Master's degrees in the UK also include research elements. The entry requirement is a Bachelor (Honours) degree along with relevant experience, skills and knowledge. Taught Master's degrees prepare students to conduct and engage critically with research in an independent and professional manner. Programmes normally comprise some taught modules and an extensive dissertation. All the modules and the dissertation must be completed to obtain the full Master's degree. The taught modules are designed to enable students to work through theory to practical techniques to dissemination. The taught modules should be studied in order to ensure this progression through the course. The dissertation draws on, and deepens the understanding of, the taught modules. These types of degrees are expected to be completed within one year of full-time (FTE) study or two years of part-time study. Some universities use a credit system to structure the degree programmes. Master's degrees in the UK are made up of 180 credits (90 ECTS). The dissertation generally counts for 60 credits (30 ECTS). For example, the Master of Science (MSc) in 'Educational Research' at the University of Exeter<sup>86</sup> is built up of four taught modules and the dissertation, as detailed in the table below:

Courses	Credit Value	ECTS Value	Study Hours
4 Taught Courses	30 credits	15	300
	30 credits	15	300
	30 credits	15	300
	30 credits	15	300
Dissertation (10,000 words)	60 credits	30	600

The 300 study hours in each taught module includes 30 hours of contact time with tutors, 70 hours directed study, 100 hours preparing assignments and 100 hours of independent study. The 30 hours of formal teaching sessions and tutorials are not enough to complete the course and a high level of independent and group work is expected to gain the necessary depth of knowledge. Students attend lectures, seminars, workshops and complete group tasks and student presentations. Lectures are used to give a broad introduction, overview, and explanation of key concepts. Seminars are used to deepen understanding of key concepts. Workshops are integrated with lectures to allow practical investigation of specific research techniques. The 600 hours spent on the dissertation comprise group seminars, individual tutorials, reading, design and execution of research study, analysis and interpretation of data and preparation and write up of dissertation. The dissertation module includes 60 hours of contact hours with tutors, 140 hours directed study, 200 hours preparing dissertation and 200 hours of independent study

<sup>86</sup> [http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/course\\_information.php?sitscode=PTS1EDUEDU01](http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/course_information.php?sitscode=PTS1EDUEDU01)

## Research Master Degrees

Whereas it is not a requirement for students to have a thesis topic established when applying to a taught Master's programme (above), research degree applicants must have a very clear idea of their thesis topic beforehand. As such, research degrees are obtained through independent research, i.e. via a thesis and a viva voce (oral) examination. The research work and the thesis are normally completed and submitted within 12 months of full-time (FTE) study or 24 months of part-time study. The degree of Master by Research is suitable for high quality students with a good first degree in a relevant subject, who have a clearly defined research project which is planned before the candidate commences study. Students are allocated a supervisor they meet regularly to discuss the research project and the writing of the thesis. Students can attend all relevant seminars and workshops organised by the university and have access to all the general academic facilities of the university. Students are also supported by a programme of research methods training; however, there are no classes to support students in a research degree.

Due to its research emphasis, applicants to these types of programmes *must* either attend an interview or submit sample written work prior to starting the programme. Research students must also have prepared a subject which meets the criteria of being original and significant but which is specific and sufficiently confined in extent to be capable of being researched and written up, in the form of a thesis, within one year. The dissertation is individually tutored by a supervisor from the university. The length of the thesis varies between universities and study areas. The thesis may be between 20.000 and 40.000 words. The format and length is determined in discussion with the supervisor. The supervisor is monitoring the progress of the research and thesis and is responsible for guiding the direction of students' research. Research Master's degrees are often of particular interest to students who wish to conduct research relevant to their paid employment. The study is often undertaken part-time whilst working. Students need to be highly motivated, well organised and focused to complete this type of study. Research students at Master's level study independently in the same way as Doctoral students, only for a shorter time and not in as much depth. Some Master's degrees by Research may count towards PhD study at institutional discretion.

## Master of Engineering (MEng)

A Master of Engineering (MEng) degree is an integrated master's programme in engineering which provides an extended and enhanced programme of study that is designed for high achievers. The period of study is equivalent to at least four years of academic learning (five years in Scotland) and the programme of study is both *broader* and *deeper* than a corresponding Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) Honours degree. MEng programmes are usually designed as a preparation for professional practice and have an increased emphasis on industrial relevance. Project work within an MEng programme would include both an individual research/design project as well as a more wide-ranging 'group project' with greater industrial involvement. There is also a 'Group Design Project' ideally with a cross-disciplinary or international flavour. Increased *breadth* is provided by study of additional technical subjects and by study of, for example, business, management and industrial topics. Increased *depth* can be provided by both specific study at master's level and integrative study of work already undertaken at honours degree level (Level H). These components may typically be distributed throughout the later stages of an integrated programme of study, with

relevant learning outcomes associated with the integration of broad technical aspects, and with working in a co-operative venture.

The MEng is different in principle from an MSc (Master of Science) in engineering since the former programmes are concerned with both broadening and strengthening knowledge and understanding and integrating these in application. MSc programmes in engineering, on the other hand, are typically designed as stand-alone programmes to extend the depth of study in a relatively closely-defined discipline. The MEng must not be perceived as simply an 'add-on' year to a bachelors degree with honours. The programme of study should be designed as an integrated whole from entry to completion, although some of the earlier parts may be delivered in common with a parallel honours degree. Transfer between programmes leading to BEng Hons and MEng programmes is usually possible up to the end of the second year of a four-year programme. Entry to MEng programmes may be subject to performance criteria that indicate likely progression to the more demanding outcomes expected for the award of a master's degree.

### **Master of Research (MRes)**

The Masters in Research (MRes) is a postgraduate degree with an approximate 50-60% research element. It enables students to develop generic research knowledge and skills whilst pursuing a subject-based research project. It serves as a qualification in its own right and as a preparation for higher level research (i.e. PhD). The MRes programme is modular and involves both taught and research components. The programme is a 12 months full-time (FTE) study or 24 months part-time. Each taught module typically requires attendance for one three-hour session per week. In the taught core modules, students are introduced to approaches to research across a range of disciplines and to the organisation and funding of research in these areas. Students then go on to specialise in research methodology in a chosen subject area/discipline. This is followed by subject-based modules. These subject modules support the work for the dissertation.

The MRes in Marine Biology from the University of Plymouth in conjunction with the Marine Biological Association of the UK (MBA) consists of 180 credit points (90 ECTS) and is built up of three periods<sup>87</sup>. The first period (12 weeks) includes core modules that concentrate on providing students with general research skills. Students then choose two optional modules from a relevant selection. This period counts for 60 credits (30 ECTS). Periods 2 and 3 (30 weeks) comprise one module on project planning, and the majority of the time is spent on a research project and dissertation. The dissertation counts for 110 credits (55 ECTS). Each taught module is worth 10 credits (5 ECTS). (See table below for details on the above programme).

Period 1 – 12 weeks	6 taught modules	60 credits / 30 ECTS
Period 2	Project planning	10 credits / 5 ECTS
Period 3 – 30 weeks	Dissertation	110 credits / 55 ECTS
Total		180 credits / 90 ECTS

An MRes dissertation is more substantial than in a taught MA or MSc course, and research work is supported by a number of components designed to enable students to develop skills in formulating research proposals and communicating research outcomes to professional

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.mba.ac.uk/PDF/MRes2005.PDF>



audiences. Students work with a specialist supervisor during the dissertation period. The requirements for the MRes dissertation are not so detailed as for purely research-based degrees. A typical MRes dissertation of between 15,000 to 20,000 words provides the major research focus of the programme and is an opportunity to develop a research proposal to support a PhD registration.

### **Master of Business Administration (MBA)**

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) is a career development generalist programme for individuals who have significant relevant postgraduate work experience to build on the learning process. These programmes are usually one-year programmes, based on an undergraduate degree in any subject. The work experience required for entry is at least two years with the typical entrant having substantially more than this. The main emphasis of these programmes is on leadership through strategic management. While the academic level is positioned no differently from that of other Master's degree programmes, there is a strong practical and professional orientation to the curriculum. MBA degrees are essentially generalist in nature although a limited amount of specialisation may be included.

The overall objective of MBA programmes is to educate individuals as managers and business specialists. Graduates will be able to ground their new knowledge within the base of their professional experience. They will be able to reflect on, and learn from, prior experience and be able to integrate new knowledge with past experience and apply it to new situations. MBA students are also expected to challenge preconceptions and to remove subject and functional boundaries so as to handle complex situations holistically. They should also have particular strengths in analysing, synthesising and solving complex unstructured business problems. In addition to being able to communicate their findings, students should have developed the skills to implement agreed solutions effectively and efficiently. They should therefore, have strongly developed interpersonal skills and to be able to interact effectively with a range of specialists.

MBA at Aston University (Programme Structure)

1.6.1. Foundation (10 weeks)	1.6.2. 5 modules	1.6.3. 500 learning hours
1.6.4. Integrating (10 weeks)	1.6.5. 5 modules	1.6.6. 500 learning hours
1.6.7. Elective (10 weeks)	1.6.8. 5 modules	1.6.9. 500 learning hours

As an example of the above, the MBA at Aston University<sup>88</sup> consists of 12 taught modules: Five foundation modules, five integrating modules and two elective modules plus project workshops (see table below). Full-time (FTE) students will complete up to five modules each term, starting with the foundation modules and moving onto the integrating and elective modules in terms two and three. Each module is based on 100 learning hours with 30 to 40 class hours per module. Generally, part-time students follow two modules each term. In addition to the basic contact time of 3 hours for each module per week, students usually set aside at least twice this amount of time per module for private study, i.e. reading and preparation for presentation and assignments.

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.abs.aston.ac.uk/newweb/programmes/mba/>

### **Master of Laws (LL.M)**

The LL.M is offered both as a taught course as well as research-based. The LL.M. Degree is a one-year course lasting three terms. The admission requirement for both types of degrees are a first or upper second class Honours degree in Law or a degree with an adequate law component. The LL.M by Advanced Study is a taught Master's degree, which offers opportunities for specialist legal study, and the development of research skills through the production of a dissertation. Academic staff is available to assist students with the units they study, however, students are responsible for their own learning. There is a focus on student-centred learning, which means that students may be expected to learn parts of the syllabus on their own without the benefit of discussion in seminars. The taught LL.M programme comprises two parts. Part I consists of four taught units, all of which are conducted by way of seminars. Each unit consists of around ten seminars, which generally last for two hours at fortnightly intervals. The basic method of instruction is through lectures and seminars. Units may be examined by a written examination sometimes together with an assessed essay. Part II of the degree consists of a dissertation on a legal topic. In this part of the degree, the learning process is entirely student-led. The dissertation counts for approximately 12,000 to 20,000 words.

The LL.M course at the University of Liverpool<sup>89</sup> (for example) follows a modular structure. Candidates must successfully complete 180 credit points (90 ECTS) in order to complete the degree. Taught modules count for 120 (60 ECTS) credit points. A module in Legal Methodology (15 credit points) (7.5 ECTS) is compulsory, leaving students free to choose modules to the value of 105 (57.5 ECTS). The Dissertation counts for 60 credit points (30 ECTS). There are two semesters of 4 modules each and the summer semester is spent on the dissertation. The degree may also be studied on a part-time basis over twenty-four months.

The LL.M by research, on the other hand, can be completed in a minimum period of study of one year for full-time (FTE) students and two years for part-time students. The main part of this programme is a dissertation, which is written on a specialist legal topic and consists of not more than 50,000 words. In the dissertation, candidates must show evidence of training in and application of the relevant legal principles and method and satisfy the examiners that he or she is acquainted with the published work relating to the subject of the dissertation. Students must pass a viva voce examination and research students are also required to attend a series of seminars, which aims to provide them with the necessary tools to undertake a diverse range of research topics. Students may study one taught LL.M unit. This requires preparation, attendance and participation, but does not involve any written work or examinations. At the end of the first year of the LL.M by research, university advisers make a decision on whether a student is ready to proceed to PhD study.

### **Master of Pharmacy (MPharm)**

The UK Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree is regulated under the Pharmacy Act 1954 and is now, in part, also governed by EU directive 85/432/EEC and recommendations of the EU Advisory Committee on Pharmaceutical Training. The MPharm is an integrated programme incorporating both undergraduate and post-graduate study. It takes a minimum of five years to complete; four years at university and a year of practical training. During the four years at the university, the number of hours of training should total at least 3,000 directed and supervised by the academic staff. The degree course also has a very strong vocational element and at

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<sup>89</sup> [http://www.liv.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught\\_courses/llm.htm](http://www.liv.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught_courses/llm.htm)

least 35% of the course take the form of practical training. At least one third of the whole course should be occupied by the components, which collectively deal with the actions, uses and manufacture of drugs and medicines, and a broad balance should be maintained between the other sectors of the course.

As such, students have responsibility for their own lifelong learning both within the degree course and as a basis for later continuing professional development. Furthermore teacher-practitioners and visiting lecturers from community, hospital and industrial pharmacy practice, and appropriate persons from other health professions, are involved in teaching/support for learning and assessment. The degree course features a variety of teaching approaches chosen to meet stated learning objectives, including: lectures, practical classes, workshops, seminars, tutorials, interactive small group teaching, IT-based teaching and learning, work-based learning, independent assignment-based learning, auditable and directed private study, team work and project work.

Assessment of student achievement is based on formal written examinations, summative practical assessments, laboratory reports and written reports, problem-solving exercises, oral presentations, individual planning, conduct and reporting of project work and essay assignments. Other assessment methods can also be: literature surveys and evaluations, collaborative project work, preparation and displays of 'posters' reporting project work, reports of external placements, personal portfolios of learning achieved, computer-based assessments, self and peer assessment. The programme contains a personally directed research project covering about three to six months under the supervision of the academic staff. Students must present a paper or dissertation on the project.

### **Master of Philosophy (MPhil)**

The Master of Philosophy<sup>90</sup> (MPhil) is considered to be higher than the 12 months Master's degrees. The MPhil usually lasts for 2 years and requires the student to produce a research paper of around 40,000 to 60,000 words. Many MPhil degrees have a significant taught element in their first year whilst others are purely research based. The MPhil is for candidates who have appropriate qualifications to undertake research (normally a good first degree and some research experience) but who cannot undertake the 3 years of full-time (FTE) resident study required for the PhD. The MPhil requires the submission within 3 years from the date of registration of a thesis investigating a subject approved by the University. The subject must have substantial significance, originality and scope appropriate to the period of 2 years study required. Students may also enter MPhil study after having completed a UK taught Master's degree. It is also possible to convert the MPhil study to PhD study at institutional discretion. A supervisor from the university is responsible for guiding the direction of students' research, and for ensuring that they are on schedule.

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<sup>90</sup> For a comprehensive list of UK MPhil programmes visit: <http://www.educationuk.org/>

### Appendix 3: Norwegian Master degree programmes

Master degree programmes in Norway are of two types: *discipline* (i.e. research-based) and *professional* oriented<sup>91</sup>. Either type usually includes an individual piece of research leading to a master's thesis (dissertation), representing at least 30 ECTS. As is the case with the UK context, a variety of master degree types exist in Norwegian HE, even though the actual diversity in Norway is smaller than in the UK. The following overview of the Master degrees currently offered by the University of Oslo gives an indication of the nature of the Norwegian Master degree structure (the names are provided in Norwegian with the English translation):

- a) Master i (programnavn)/Master of Philosophy in (English translation of the programme name)** on the basis of a 2-year study-programme offered by the faculty of Theology, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Social Sciences and/or the Faculty of Educational Sciences
- b) Master i (programnavn)/Master of Science in (English translation of the programme name)** on the basis of a 2-year study programme with a basis in mathematics or natural sciences offered by the Faculty of Medicine, or the Faculty of Mathematics/Natural Sciences.
- c) Master i farmasi/Master of Pharmacy** on the basis of a study-programme in pharmacy offered by the Faculty of Mathematics/Natural Sciences.
- d) Master i informatikk/Master of Informatics** on the basis of a 5-year study programme and **Master i informatikk/Master of Science in Informatics** on the basis of a 2-year study programme in informatics offered by the Faculty of Mathematics/Natural Sciences.
- e) Master i odontologi/Master of Dentistry** on the basis of a study programme in dentistry offered by the faculty of Dentistry.
- f) Master i samfunnsøkonomisk analyse/Master of Economic Theory and Econometrics** on the basis of a 5-year study programme and **Master i samfunnsøkonomi/Master of Philosophy in Economics** on the basis of a 2-year study programme in economics offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences. samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet.
- g) Master i kultur- og samfunnsfagutdanning/Master of Philosophy and Education** on the basis of a specific 5-year study programme.
- h) Master i realfagutdanning/Master of Science and Education** on the basis of a 5-year specific study programme.
- i) Master of Laws in (programnavn)/Master of Laws in (name of programme)** on the basis of a specific programme of 60-90 credit points offered by the Faculty of Law.
- j) Master i (programnavn)/Master of Arts in (English translation of the name of the programme)** on the basis of a 1½-year study programme for an experience-based master degree.
- k) Master of Arts in (programnavn)/Master of Arts in (name of the programme)** on the basis of a specific study programme of 60-90 credit points.

Below we present an overview of the *admission requirements, program structure, and objectives* of four different master programmes (MSc, MPhil and MA) across the university and the university-college sectors in Norway.

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<sup>91</sup> See: Norwegian Ministry of Education: Forskrift om krav til master grad:

<http://odin.dep.no/kd/norsk/dok/hoering/hoeringsnotater/045061-080002/dok-nn.html>

See also: Pratt, J.; Kekale, J.; Maassen, P.A.M.; Papp, I.; Perellon, J.; Uitti, M. 2004. *Equal but Different: An evaluation of the Postgraduate Polytechnic Experiment in Finland (Final Report)*. Publications of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council.

### ***Master of Science (MSc) in Economics at the University of Oslo (UiO)***

The programme is offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences (Department of Economics). Its length is 2-years full time (FTE) which equals to 120 ECTS, of which 30 ECTS are allocated to a final thesis dissertation<sup>92</sup>. The programme is an international one and is taught entirely in English. As such, it provides rigorous training in modern economics covering a broad range of topics from micro- and macroeconomics, methodology and demography; encompassing both mandatory as well as optional courses.

As far as *entry requirements* are concerned, admission to the program is based on a Bachelor's degree in Economics (180 ECTS -credits), or equivalent, i.e. a university degree of at least three years of study. Moreover, students are expected to have attended at least one and a half years (i.e. 90 ECTS) of their undergraduate studies in economics, including mathematics as well as fundamentals of probability calculus and statistics. According to UiO, students *must* possess a bachelor's degree including the following requirements: (a) 6 ECTS in mathematics; (b) 10 ECTS in statistics and methods; (c) at least 67 ECTS in economics, but the total amount of courses in economics, mathematics and statistics and methods *must* amount to 90 ECTS-credits. (Amongst the courses in economics, at least 48 ECTS must be within microeconomics and macroeconomics, with at least 20 ECTS in each of these categories). Students are also requested to provide an official explanation about the grading and credit system at their previous universities (preferably credits translated into ECTS-credits). They must also provide UiO with an overview of their average scores when compared to other peers in the same institution (e.g. is the student among the 30% best of the peer graduates?). As for language requirements, international students who are non-native (English) speakers must document their proficiency in the English language prior to admission (e.g. TOEFL scores<sup>93</sup>). There is a set of special requirements in the case of Norwegian students, though generally speaking, these do not differ dramatically from the ones imposed to their foreign peers.

In terms of the program's *structure*, the MSc in Economics encompasses 9 subjects in total (each one worth 10 ECTS-credits), together with a master's thesis of 30 ECTS-credits. The master students are obliged to include mandatory subjects within each of the following *four* special fields: microeconomics; macroeconomics; mathematics; and, econometrics<sup>94</sup>.

Equivalent credit transfer (recognition) of one or more of the above courses prior to attending the program is contemplated. As for the optional courses, these are geared towards preparing students with their specialization areas, including the relevant topic (theme) for their final master thesis. Overall, students are recommended to undertake 3 courses (of 10 ECTS-credits) per semester, with the final (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> semester) one being dedicated to the development of their final thesis. The latter is tutored by a teacher, a professional or research economist appointed by the department, and aims at giving students first hand training with applied economic analysis and professional writing. The thesis should require about half a year's work (50 to 60 pages), and is to be submitted for assessment within the announced deadline at the end of the program. The program culminates with students taking an oral exam around the topics covered (or related to) the subjects taught throughout the program, as well as the thesis.

As for the expected *outcomes*, the program emphasizes the essentials of economics, with teaching pitched at a high technical level. As such, students are expected to achieve a high level of professional knowledge in economic analysis, by use of mathematics, statistics and

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/samfokon-master/>

<sup>93</sup>

<http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.fab2360b1645a1de9b3a0779f1751509/?vgnnextoid=69c0197a484f4010VgnVCM1000022f95190RCRD>

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/samfokon-master/om/oppbygging-gjennomforing.xml>

econometrics. The program also provides students with a thorough understanding of the relationships between cycles and economic development, and/or: how markets function, what are the motivation factors in firms and employment market, how income is made and distributed, economic politics and principles for theories and data in economics, etc. At the end, students are required to be able to analyze advanced economic problems. Overall, according to UiO, the program gives students a solid knowledge in relevant economic theory and improves their ability to interpret and to have a critical attitude towards other studies, as well as to be able to process their own empirical data analysis.

Students are also stimulated to take a period of studies overseas<sup>95</sup>, usually around the 3<sup>rd</sup> (spring) semester. One term with economic subjects abroad provides students exemption for three optional subjects in the program (i.e. 30 ECTS credits), as long as there is no overlap between the courses taken in Oslo and the ones based overseas. Overall, graduates of the program are considered to be highly qualified for pursuing a wide range of careers in economic consultancy, the financial sector, government service, and domestic and international, economic organizations. Typical tasks for an economist will be economic analysis within both public and private sectors. Students wishing to continue their studies at the Doctoral level are required to have taken a series of mandatory subjects within the *four* fields of specialization<sup>96</sup>, mentioned earlier.

### ***Master of Arts (MA) in English language at the University of Bergen (UiB)***

According to UiB's program information to prospective (Master) students, whereas the Bachelor's degree programmes introduce students to basic theory and method, Master programmes have a more specific scientific goal, consisting of a research element preparing students for further research in later studies. The teaching is also different from that of lower (undergraduate) degrees since there is a core subject, and it usually takes place in smaller groups focusing on educational discussions<sup>97</sup>.

The aim of the 2-year graduate (Master) programme in English<sup>98</sup> is to improve students' skills, knowledge, and insight in English studies in general and in the student's area of specialization (linguistics, literary or cultural studies) in particular. In order to be admitted into the program, students must have completed a university first degree (the equivalent of a three-year BA<sup>99</sup> degree) with a specialization in English. Such specialization should correspond to at least three terms of full-time (FTE) study and include courses in the areas of linguistics and literature.

In terms of its structure, the MA in English consists of *four* core courses, each equivalent to 15 ECTS credits, and a 60-ECTS-credit thesis (70 to 110 pages). As such, students are expected to fulfil the programme's course requirements in their first year and complete their thesis in the second. Courses at the graduate level are designed to focus on selected topics from English linguistics, literature in English, cultural studies in an English-language setting, or an interdisciplinary topic combining any of these. Students are subject to certain requirements regarding the combination of courses taken within their degree. For example, one of the four compulsory courses must be one of the standard survey courses in theory and method in either linguistics or literary studies. The survey course must be in the same discipline as the thesis. Students are also required to take *three* additional master's courses in

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/samfokon-master/om/utenlandsopphold.xml> (for a list of formal partners)

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.uio.no/studier/program/samfokon-master/om/jobb-og-studiemuligheter.xml>

<sup>97</sup> [http://students.uib.no/?mode=show\\_page&link\\_id=145&toplink\\_id=15](http://students.uib.no/?mode=show_page&link_id=145&toplink_id=15)

<sup>98</sup>

[http://students.uib.no/?link\\_id=294&sublink\\_id=&toplink\\_id=15&mode=show\\_page&content\\_id=412&modus=vis\\_studieprogram&kode=MAHF-ENG](http://students.uib.no/?link_id=294&sublink_id=&toplink_id=15&mode=show_page&content_id=412&modus=vis_studieprogram&kode=MAHF-ENG)

<sup>99</sup> Bachelor of Arts degree

specialized topics like linguistics, literary studies or cultural studies (at least one course must be in the same discipline as the final thesis).

### ***Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Maritime Archaeology at NTNU<sup>100</sup>***

The international MPhil program hosted at the ‘International Centre for Maritime Archaeology’,<sup>101</sup> focuses strongly on international co-operation, comparative perspectives, and an interdisciplinary approach<sup>102</sup>. Amongst other things, the programme focuses on such areas as: ‘Maritime Aspects of Culture’, ‘Boat and Shipbuilding Technologies’, ‘Archaeological Oceanography’, etc. The programme lasts for two years (4 semesters) of full-time (FTE) study, and starts in the autumn term. The (120 ECTS) credits are divided between courses comprising a total of 60 credits and a Master thesis of 60 credits. Applicants to the program are expected to hold a Bachelor’s degree in Archaeology, or an equivalent degree with a sufficient emphasis on topics related to Archaeology. Candidates with an equivalent bachelor’s degree in Arts/Social Sciences and other relevant subjects (e.g. Geology, Geophysics, Marine Technology or Oceanography) *may* also apply (only if the candidate has completed a satisfactory number of courses in Archaeology). Master candidates are also expected to have completed a minimum of 20 ECTS credits of basic courses in Archaeology from NTNU, or equivalent courses (i.e. at least a third of one year of full-time study). An English proficiency test must be included. Applicants must pass either the TOEFL with a minimum paper score of 550 (230 computer) or IELTS with 6.0 or better<sup>103</sup>. Norwegian applicants must have passed the required exam in English language (“Engelsk Grunnkurs”) in the Norwegian Upper Secondary School system (‘Videregående’).

In terms of its *structure*, the programme is divided in 4 semesters (or terms)<sup>104</sup>. In the first term, students take *two* core courses, one worth 15 ECTS credits and the other 7.5 credits. Students are also expected to attend a module termed ‘thesis seminar’ as part of their final thesis dissertation. In the second term students undertake *three* core courses (of 7.5 ECTS each) as well as a ‘thesis seminar’ module. The third term is composed of *two* core courses (7.5 ECTS each) and the ‘thesis seminar’. Finally, the last (fourth) term is totally dedicated to the completion of students’ final thesis (60 ECTS credits). Each one of the courses terminates in an exam. Normally each 15 ECTS-credits is composed of 4 hours of teaching per week in the form of lectures and seminars. After the first year of studies, the international candidates are given the opportunity to go back to their home countries to do field-work, in those cases where this is a necessary condition for the completion of their final master theses.

### ***Master Programme<sup>105</sup> in Journalism at the Oslo University College (HiO)***

This Norwegian language programme is offered by the Department of Journalism, Library and Information Science<sup>106</sup>. Around 30 students are accepted every year. The programme prepares individuals for the critical analysis of the role of the media in society, as well as socio-cultural, historical, esthetical and technical aspects surrounding the field. The programme provides students with adequate research competence. *Admission* into the

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<sup>100</sup> Norwegian University of Science and Technology: <http://www.ntnu.no/indexe.php>

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.hf.ntnu.no/maritime/>

<sup>102</sup> [http://www.studier.ntnu.no/rw\\_index\\_sprog.php?sprog=MPMARARK&type=HOVED](http://www.studier.ntnu.no/rw_index_sprog.php?sprog=MPMARARK&type=HOVED)

<sup>103</sup> Citizens from Ireland, the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand do not have to submit TOEFL/IELTS test results. This is also the case for applicants who have spent at least one year in either of these countries, attending higher secondary school or university.

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.hf.ntnu.no/maritime/maprogram.htm>

<sup>105</sup> No indication is given on the type (category) of the degree but it is assumed (given international practice) that this program equals to a MA (Master of Arts) degree.

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.hio.no/content/view/full/35553>

program is based on the successful completion of a bachelor's degree (or equivalent), with a minimum average grade of 'C'<sup>107</sup>.

In terms of *structure* (and organisation), the program is composed of 120 ECTS credits, of which 60 are associated with taught courses and the remaining with the final Master's thesis. Of the first 60 credits, 20 are linked to *compulsory* courses during the first semester of studies. Students are free to choose whether their study program is to be based on a *traditional approach* (i.e. along individual courses and thesis) or instead focus their studies on a more *research-oriented* study plan. In the latter case, students are integrated in active research networks in the field and acquire study credits according to their respective contributions/performance (i.e. seminar presentations, written essays, etc.) As for the final *thesis*, lasting a full academic year, it should not surpass 100 pages of length and can either be a scientific (research) oriented work in the field or, alternatively, a practically-oriented journalistic work (assignment) combined with a thorough analysis; in the latter case not more than 65 pages. A maximum of 30 ECTS credits (half a year or a semester) can be transferred from (relevant) studies taken overseas. As for the courses, these are organised along *three* (10 ECTS) compulsory courses and two courses worth 15 ECTS each. The remaining credits are associated with students' final thesis (60 ECTS), either practical or theoretically oriented. An attractiveness of the programme is that it can be taken on a part-time basis (up to 4 years<sup>108</sup>). However, this is not an advisable route for those students who have chosen to follow the research-oriented program.

#### **Appendix 4: ECTS**

ECTS, the European Credit Transfer System, was developed by the European Commission to provide common procedures to guarantee the full transferability of credits for university studies abroad in order that they might count towards a final qualification in the home country. It provides a way of measuring and comparing academic merits and transferring them from one institution to another.

The system is based on three core elements: information (on degree programmes and student achievement), mutual agreement (between the partner institutions and the student) and the use of ECTS credits (to indicate student workload). In itself, ECTS in no way regulates the content, structure or equivalence of degree programmes. The credits are simply a value allocated to course units as a means of describing the workload required to complete the course/module.

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<sup>107</sup> As per the new European system of A-F, with 'E' as the minimum passing grade.

<sup>108</sup> Information provided directly by HiO