The Bologna Process in Ireland: Successes and Challenges

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Impact of Major Initiatives

• The Bologna Process has had major impact in Europe in the areas of:
  • Degree Structures
  • A System of Credits
  • Quality Assurance
  • Student Mobility
  • National Qualifications Framework
  • Recognition of Qualifications
Degree Structures

• Implementation of a structure of degrees at Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral level hugely important in EHEA
• It did not involve much change for Ireland
• It helps to provide a transparent system for learners, especially those outside Europe
• It aids transferability and mobility
System of Credits

• Many Irish HEIs had adopted the European Credit and Accumulation System (ECTS) in 1990s
• The decision by the Bologna Process to adopt such a system was no problem for Ireland
• All Irish HEIs now use ECTS
• There is not a uniform approach to number of study hours needed to earn 1 credit (varies between 20 and 30 hours)
Quality Assurance

• Bologna Process has led to the agreement of Standard Guidelines for QA in Europe
• Before the Bologna Process, Irish universities were less likely to have formal QA system than other higher education institutions
• The Irish Universities Quality Board was established to bring QA to Irish universities
• Irish Higher Education Quality Network established in 2003 to share best practice [Universities, Institutes, Ministry, Students Union]
QA Guidelines

- Policies & procedures for QA
- Involvement of students and other stakeholders
- Mechanisms for approval and review
- Students assessed by published criteria
- QA of staff, qualified and competent
- Learning resources for students
- Information gathering and analysis
Student Mobility

• BP facilitated greater mobility by students
• Easier to transfer credits when all HEIs use the same system (ECTS)
• Mutual recognition of awards makes it easier for students to move
• New target for mobility is 20% of all graduates to have studied abroad for at least part of programme by 2020 (very challenging for Ireland)
The National Framework of Qualifications – award-types and awarding bodies
Titles of Awards

Level

10 – Doctoral Degree
9 – Masters Degree & Post-graduate Diploma
8 – Honours Bachelor Degree & Higher Diploma
7 – Ordinary Bachelor Degree
6 – Advanced Certificate & Higher Certificate
5 – Level 5 Certificate
4/5 – Leaving Certificate
4 – Level 4 Certificate
3 – Level 3 Certificate & Junior Certificate
2 – Level 2 Certificate
1 – Level 1 Certificate
National Framework

• Awards should be based on learning outcomes achieved rather than on a “time served” basis
• Ideally, awards of professional bodies should be included alongside the awards of education and training award bodies
• Historic awards as well as current awards should be placed in the framework
• There should be no distinction between education and training awards
• Publicising the framework is necessary to ensure employers and learners are familiar with the framework
National Qualification Frameworks

• All countries were supposed to publish NFQ by 2010 but there has been some slippage
• NFQ must be compatible with Bologna Framework; Ireland was first to demonstrate this (in 2006)
• NFQ must also be compatible with EQF: Ireland has demonstrated this
• NFQ benefits learners by making explicit where qualifications stand
# Frameworks of Qualifications

## EQF and Bologna Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Levels</th>
<th>Bologna Framework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Short cycle within the first cycle</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>First Cycle</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Second Cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Third Cycle</td>
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Recognition

- Within countries, NFQ is an important tool of recognition of learning
- Between countries, compatibility of frameworks with EQF and Bologna framework is an aid to recognition
- Diploma Supplements for all graduates are meant to aid recognition of awards throughout Bologna region (47 countries)
- Lisbon Recognition Convention sought to allow professionals to practise in other countries. New unit in many countries to assist those seeking recognition.
Diploma Supplement

• It was agreed in Berlin (2003) meeting that all graduates would be issued with a Diploma Supplement automatically & free of charge
• It should be issued in local language and a major language
• Same format in every country
• Can be issued electronically or hard copy
• An aid to mobility and recognition
• Not a big success in Ireland so far; some HEIs do not issue DS automatically but do so on demand
Recognition of Prior Learning

- RPL often used for admission or progression towards an award
- 22 of 47 Bologna countries have some form of RPL for admission
- 29 countries allow RPL for credits
- Usually only partial credit, few ECTS
- Need a formal, published procedure for assessment and recognition of RPL
- Ireland ahead of most countries re RPL
Recognition of Qualifications

• Within countries, NFQ is an important tool of recognition of learning
• Between countries, compatibility of frameworks with EQF and Bologna framework is an aid to recognition
• Diploma Supplements for all graduates are meant to aid recognition of awards throughout Bologna region (47 countries)
• Lisbon Recognition Convention sought to allow professionals to practise in other countries; ratified by Ireland in 2004.
• New units established in many countries to assist those seeking recognition.
Implications for Design of Programmes

• All programmes to meet Bologna and NFQ requirements
• To be written in terms of Learning Outcomes
• New moves to develop Joint Degrees
• Problems for countries replacing Masters degree programmes (5 years) with 3+2
• Effect on funding of move to 3+2 (where Bachelor degree programmes had zero tuition fee)
Possible Future Developments

• New objectives flagged at Leuven/Louvain and Bucharest meetings of ministers
• Issues include Access, Lifelong Learning (LLL), Employability, Student-centred learning, Research, Mobility, Funding, Better Career Services
• Access Targets; Ireland has National Access Office to set targets and monitor
• LLL: to be an integral part of education systems; requires strong partnerships with employers; see EUA Charter on LLL
• Employability improved by work placements: But are they feasible during economic recession?
Future Developments (contd)

• Student-centred learning (rather than teacher-centred)
• Research: need to align EHEA with ERA
• Student Mobility; new target of 20% challenging for Ireland. Current imbalance between inward and outgoing is 2.5:1
• Funding is contentious issue with radically different approaches in different countries
• Better Careers Services in universities
Ensuring Staff Qualified and Competent

- Many Irish HEIs have established Learning & Teaching Centres, starting in 1999
- Centres offer courses for teaching staff in teaching methods and assessment
- Some HEIs make it compulsory for staff to gain certification in pedagogy & assessment
- Centres also train staff in eLearning and use of technology
- In Dublin region 8 HEIs share L & T resources
Challenges Ahead for Irish HEIs

- Mobility: achieving 20% of graduates studying abroad
- Student-Centred Learning; who will monitor?
- Lifelong Learning flexible learning pathways
- Employability through work placements
- Close co-operation with employers: what structure?
- Improved career services: who pays?
Useful websites

• Bologna Communiques: www.ehea.info/
• Irish NFQ: www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/
• HEA website: www.eurireland.ie
• Irish Higher Education Quality Network www.iheqqn.ie/publications/
Questions

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