The Bologna Process in Ireland: Successes and Challenges

Frank McMahon
Technological University Dublin, frank.mcmahon@tudublin.ie

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The Bologna Process in Ireland: Successes and Challenges

Dr Frank McMahon
Bologna Expert (Ireland)
and
Former Director of Academic Affairs
Dublin Institute of Technology

Istanbul, September 2013
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

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<th>EQF Levels</th>
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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.
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
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• 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.iheqnn.ie/publications/
Questions

frank.mcmahon@dit.ie