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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]

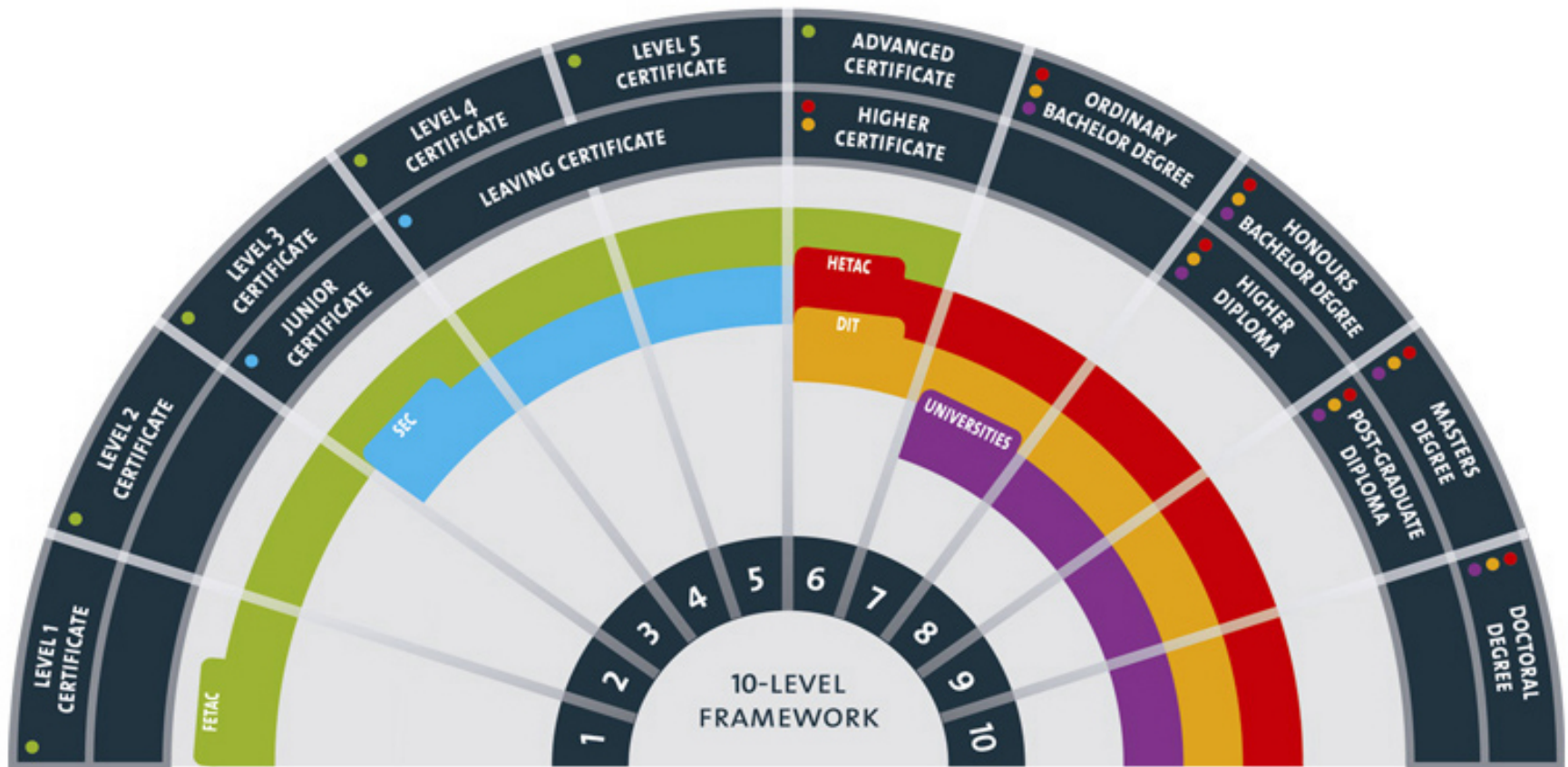
QA Guidelines

- 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

EQF Levels	Bologna Framework
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	Short cycle within the first cycle
6	First Cycle
7	Second Cycle
8	Third Cycle

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 Communiqués: www.ehea.info/
- Report on Bologna compliance 2012 (all countries): <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice>
- Irish NFQ: www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/
- HEA website: www.eurireland.ie
- EUA Charter on LLL(2008): www.eua.be
- Report on compatibility of Irish NFQ with Bologna framework: www.nqai.ie/publications_nov2006.html
- Irish Higher Education Quality Network www.iheqn.ie/publications/

Questions



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