



Aligning national against European qualifications frameworks: the principles of self-certification

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**Bologna Seminar, Tbilisi State University
27-28 November 2008**



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Irish context

- “ Bologna developments taking place in the context of a general reform of the qualifications system
- “ new legislation, new structures, new awards
- “ development of a National Framework of Qualifications



Irish National Framework of Qualifications ...

- É a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in Ireland
- É one framework to encompass all awards for all aspects of education and training
- É a simple, transparent frame of reference



New legislation, new structures

- É Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999
- É three new organisations, 2001
 - É National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
 - É Further Education and Training Awards Council
 - É Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- É rationalisation of the range of awarding bodies (bodies with the statutory power to award qualifications)



Dual approach to framework development

- “ strong legislative base . legitimisation
- “ stakeholder approach: consensus-building and consultation
- “ dual approach enabled
 - “ comparatively rapid development
 - “ implementation across all elements of the education and training system



The Framework in outline

- É architecture: Levels, Award-types, Named Awards
- É a structure of 10 levels
- É level indicators
- É 10 level grid of indicators, defined in terms of 8 dimensions of knowledge, know-how & skill and competence (sub-strands)



National
Framework
of Qualifications

Creaitoire Náisiúnta na gCáilíochtaí

Verification of compatibility with EHEA framework

- “ two pilot cases of self-certification: Ireland and Scotland
- “ steering committee established February 2006
- “ draft report for consultation published, June 2006
- “ stakeholder workshop, 3 October 2006
- “ report completed November 2006



Steering Group members

- “ National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- “ Irish Universities Association
- “ Dublin Institute of Technology
- “ Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- “ International experts (2)



Draft verification report contents

- “ Verification of criteria
- “ Verification of procedures
- “ Appendix 1: Comparison of the Dublin descriptors with the award-type descriptors in the Irish National Framework of Qualifications
- “ Appendix 2: Analysis of non-outcomes issues which are relevant to verifying the compatibility of the Irish Framework with the Bologna Framework



Criterion 1: Responsibility for framework

- “ National Qualifications Authority of Ireland established in 2001 with legal remit to develop a National Framework of Qualifications



Criterion 2: Link with cycle descriptors

- “ detailed background work on comparing national with Dublin descriptors prepared in Spring 2005
- “ higher education short cycle qualification included (Higher Certificate)
- “ ordinary bachelors degree and honours bachelor degree . both first cycle qualifications but at different levels in the national framework, giving different access to second cycle programmes in Ireland
- “ two kinds of masters programmes at the same level in the national framework (research and taught)



Criterion 3: Learning outcomes and ECTS links

- “ learning outcomes required by the Qualifications Act
- “ national descriptors expressed in terms of learning outcomes
- “ all Irish HE awarding bodies operate credit system in line with ECTS



Criterion 4: Procedures for inclusion in national framework

- “ policies and criteria established and published by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- “ all Irish HE bodies now using framework descriptors as descriptors of the awards they make



Criterion 5: QA systems and the framework

- “ three separate but linked QA systems in Irish HE
 - “ Universities . Irish Universities Quality Board
 - “ DIT . Qualifications Authority
 - “ other HE providers . HETAC
- “ Irish Higher Education Quality Network
- “ HETAC and DIT award standards linked to the framework by statute and monitored by their QA arrangements such as programme accreditation and review
- “ Universities revised their *Framework for Quality in Irish Universities* to incorporate the qualifications framework



Criterion 6: Referenced in diploma supplements

- “ Irish framework levels referenced in Diploma Supplements
- “ Bologna framework cycles referenced in Diploma Supplements



Criterion 7: Responsibility of parties clear

- “ responsibilities laid out in legislation and worked through in the development of the national framework
- “ responsibilities understood nationally



Verification of procedures

“ Each of the six procedures is addressed:

- The competent national body/bodies shall certify the compatibility of the national framework with the European framework.
- The self-certification process shall include the stated agreement of the quality assurance bodies in the country in question recognised through the Bologna Process
- The self-certification process shall involve international experts
- The self-certification and the evidence supporting it shall be published and shall address separately each of the criteria set out
- The ENIC and NARIC networks shall maintain a public listing of States that have confirmed that they have completed the self-certification process
- The completion of the self-certification process shall be noted on Diploma Supplements issued subsequently by showing the link between the national framework and the European framework



Conclusion from the verification process

- “ **compatibility verified between Irish awards and the Bologna cycle descriptors**
 - “ limited progression from some first cycle awards (ordinary bachelors) to existing second cycle programmes
 - “ the fact that the relationships between the two types of first cycle degrees are (generally) understood domestically does not suffice . international transparency is the whole point and this requires detailed explication



Lessons from the verification process

- “ international dimension to verification adds credibility/transparency
- “ parallel verification with peer (e.g. Ireland and Scotland) adds to international dimension
- “ technical analysis of qualifications can be quite complex
- “ data on international progression to/from Bologna-style qualifications are sparse
- “ legacy questions need to be considered in national frameworks



Further Information

- “ Framework website: www.nfq.ie
- “ National Qualifications Authority of Ireland: www.nqai.ie