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NATIONAL REPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

A national steering group has been established to oversee the implementation of the Bologna Process. It is chaired by the Department of Education and Science and has nominees of the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU), the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology (COD), the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

Furthermore, later in 2003, it is planned to host a national conference of all stakeholders, building on the success of the first conference organised for the Department of Education and Science by the Higher Education Authority in 2001.

CURRENT STATUS OF EACH OBJECTIVE

Objective 1: **Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system;**

The part of the objective calling for the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees is also relevant under the second objective which concerns the two cycles system of degrees – undergraduate and postgraduate – and it is considered that this part falls to be considered under the second objective.

Accordingly, the implementation strategy for this objective primarily concerns the introduction of the Diploma Supplement. The Department has now established a separate working group on implementing diploma supplements. The composition of this group (in addition to the members of the national steering group) includes Ireland's national co-ordinator on the Diploma Supplement as well as the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This is intended to ensure that there is a link with the implementation of Certificate Supplements in further education and training. This is very important from Ireland's perspective as it reflects the complementary nature of the Bologna process and the Copenhagen process (on vocational education and training). The new working group will also collaborate with the Universities, who have established their own group – consisting of staff from the Examination/Registrar's Office from each institution – to implement the Diploma Supplement as swiftly as possible across the university system.

Objective 2: Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and postgraduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries.

Ireland generally fits in with the very flexible model set out in the Bologna declaration. The key issue here is what is really meant by the first cycle and second cycle.

In relation to the system based on two main cycles, the Irish view emerging is that there is a need to recognise that there is a range of standards associated with the completion of first cycle while there are more consistent standards associated with completion of the second cycle. It is considered by Ireland that there is a need to look further at the standards associated with the cycles. The aim here would be to follow up on the work undertaken in a number of different areas relating to both standards and credit (e.g., the Dublin Descriptors developed by the Joint Quality Initiative, the work on Master programmes undertaken by Tauch and Rauhvargers) and the conclusions of the 2003 Helsinki and Copenhagen Bologna Conferences. Thus, we hope to come to a picture of the real impact of the two cycles being introduced.

The Dublin Descriptors are the outcome of a collaborative exercise, involving Dutch, German, Flemish, UK, Irish, Spanish, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian agencies, which was entitled the Joint Quality Initiative and led to outcome descriptors for the first cycle of Bologna (Bachelors Degree) and the second cycle of Bologna (Masters). However, it is important to note that the Dublin Descriptors represent an informal agreement and there are further European developments anticipated.

Irish academics have also participated in Phase I of the 'Tuning educational structures in Europe' project, which was sponsored jointly by the European University Association and the European Commission, and which addressed several of the Bologna action lines, including the adoption of a system based on two cycles, the adoption of a system of easily and readable degrees and the establishment of a system of credits. More specifically, the project made progress in identifying points of reference for generic and subject-specific competences of first and second cycle graduates across a range of disciplines in the Humanities and Sciences, and should contribute to the development of a common European language to aid curriculum design and evaluation in the future. Work in this regard will be further developed in Phase II of the project.

The development of the national framework of qualifications is also relevant. The work of the NQAI in this area is well advanced and has been guided by developments in relation to awards systems in Europe, including the emerging broad understanding of some award-types under the Bologna process.

The Authority has determined the initial major award-types for each of the ten levels in the framework, as follows:

LEVEL	AWARD TYPE TITLES
10	Doctoral Degree
9	Masters Degree and Post-graduate Diploma
8	Honours Bachelor Degree and Higher Diploma
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
6	Advanced Certificate and 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

Note:

- *The titles of the initial major award-types are part of the framework determinations made by the Authority. The Authority has further decided that the two awards Councils – Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council - should implement the titles as determined, and the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology should be requested to implement the titles.*
- *Advanced Certificate is the title of the further education and training award-type at level 6, and Higher Certificate is the title of the higher education and training award-type at that level.*

The outline framework therefore contains fifteen award-types. The Authority has also determined the general outcomes associated with these award-types, which must be used by the two award Councils and the Dublin Institute of Technology in the development of their awards. It should be noted that the Authority has no role in setting the standards of the awards of the Department of Education and Science and the universities. However, it is through the award-types and their associated general outcomes that these awards can be accommodated on an agreed basis in the framework.

The Authority has determined that awards at levels 7 to 10 will be made by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the universities. At level 6, the Advanced Certificate award will be made by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, and the Higher Certificate award will be made by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology. At levels 3 to 5 awards will be made by the Department of Education and Science (Examinations Commission). At level 5 and below, the Further Education and Training Awards Council will make awards.

The framework, however, does not impose any requirements in relation to the duration of programmes, rather, the emphasis is on the development of outcomes.

Discussions are underway in relation to determining a timetable for the implementation of the framework.

Objective 3: Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the European Credit Transfer System – as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by the receiving institutions concerned;

The ECTS system is, effectively, already incorporated into the previous awards system of HETAC and is implemented in many programmes in the Dublin Institute of Technology and the “newer” universities i.e. Dublin City University and University of Limerick. The use of ECTS in other education institutions is confined to students under the ERAMUS and SOCRATES programmes.

However, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has recently established a Technical Advisory Group on Credits. The Terms of Reference of the group are as follows:

The task of the Technical Advisory Group is to assist the Authority in the consideration of the possibilities for the development of a system or systems for credit accumulation and transfer to complement the national framework of qualifications, and the appropriate roles of stakeholders in such developments.

The aim is that the group will be a technical one and will assist the Authority in reviewing the existing systems in place. Moving from this, the group will assist the Authority in looking at possibilities for development.

The group is chaired by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, with a nominee from the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology (COD), the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Foras Áiseanna Saothar (FÁS – National Training and Employment Service) and the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer Services (NICATS).

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has moved towards defining a national approach to credits. In general, the approach supports the operation of the national framework of qualifications, particularly with regard to meeting the needs of learners in a lifelong learning context. It will facilitate, for example, credit accumulation, credit transfer and processes for the recognition of prior learning, as well as complementing the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland’s policies on access, transfer and progression. The approach will also take account of credit arrangements already in use in Ireland, and aim to accord with ongoing developments in Europe in relation to credit systems, including the Bologna process.

Objective 4: Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:

- For students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services;
- For teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training without prejudice to their statutory rights;

Mobility concerns students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff. Mobility applies within institutions, between institutions within the State and between different States.

In relation to international mobility, the Higher Education Authority co-ordinates Irish participation in EU schemes on mobility of students and teachers. Ireland's commitment to the ERASMUS programme is demonstrated in the appendix, which indicates that our participation in ERASMUS is above the European average. In addition, it will be noted that the numbers of incoming students and teachers significantly out-number those out-going. (Again, this underlines our commitment to the principles of mobility, as EU funding is provided only in relation to out-going students.) Within available resources, Ireland will continue to support students availing of these opportunities.

An Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in 2001 commissioned a study on benchmarking mechanisms and strategies to attract researchers to Ireland. Some further work in this area is currently being undertaken by the Higher Education Authority in conjunction with other stakeholders.

Objective 5: Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance, with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies;

Ireland has a binary system of Higher Education. In the university sector the Higher Education Authority (HEA) has oversight of quality assurance while in the higher education sector outside of the universities the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) is the competent body for almost all institutions, apart from Dublin Institute of Technology which makes its own awards.

The Universities Act, 1997, which came into force in June 1997, specifically requires each university "to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university". This model, which recognises institutional autonomy, is one of self-assessment. It must include the evaluation, at least once in every 10 years of each department and, where appropriate, school of the university and any service provided by the university, by employees of the university in the first instance and by persons, other than employees, who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. Furthermore, the procedures must include assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university, and the procedures must provide for the publication in such form and manner as the governing authority thinks fit. A governing authority must implement any findings arising out of an evaluation carried out in accordance with procedures established under this section unless, having regard to the resources available to the university or for any other reason, it would, in the opinion of the governing authority, be impractical or unreasonable to do so. In addition,

each governing authority must, at least every 15 years, having regard to the resources available to the university and having consulted with the Higher Education Authority, arrange for a review of the effectiveness of the procedures provided for by this section and the implementation of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures and publish the outcome of such a review.

In 2003, the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities published "*A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities – Meeting the Challenge of Change*". One of the principal recommendations was the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board. Its aim, which builds on the legislative framework in the Universities Act 1997, is to promote best practice in quality assurance through out the university sector.

On a wider level, the Higher Education Authority has a statutory role under the Act to assist the universities in the achievement of their objectives generally. Furthermore, it may review the quality assurance procedures established and may publish a report on the outcome of any such review – a process which is conducted in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The first such review of quality assurance procedures will be undertaken by the Higher Education Authority in 2003/04. It also provides earmarked funding under the National Development Plan, to the universities to facilitate the development of quality assurance procedures and processes. A particular objective of this funding is to facilitate the development of a sectoral approach to quality assurance, which can be benchmarked against best practice in Europe and internationally.

Quality Assurance in institutions outside the University sector (such as Institutes of Technology) is subject to the oversight of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. The Council's predecessor, the National Council for Education Awards developed the Quality Assurance system since 1972. It involves the review of institutions and programmes, including the accreditation of programmes. Programmes accredited included short cycle sub-degree programmes as well as those for Bachelor, Master and Doctor degrees. The Council has established the ECTS system as the standard credit system in the extra-university sector. The Council is a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the European Accreditation Network, the Joint Quality Initiative and as host of the 2003 biennial conference of the International network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education organised the European Regional Meeting of that body.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 has been enacted. The Act established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council. The Act contains quality assurance procedures for any provider with programmes validated by either of the two awarding councils or with the delegated authority from an awarding council to make awards itself. The new quality assurance procedures provide that the quality assurance procedures must be agreed between the appropriate Council and the provider. The procedures must include regular evaluation by national and international experts and evaluation by learners. The provider must implement any of the findings arising from the application of the procedures that the awarding council determines. The effectiveness of the procedures must be reviewed on a regular basis by the council. In addition, the Act also requires the Dublin Institute of Technology to agree quality assurance procedures with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which will include the regular evaluation of its programmes of education and training and ancillary services by national and international experts and learners. The Authority will consider the findings arising out of such

evaluations and may make recommendations to the Dublin Institute of Technology, which it will implement. The Authority will also review the effectiveness of these procedures.

The Higher Education Authority and Higher Education and Training Awards Council are members of the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies while the National Qualification Authority of Ireland is an associate member. The new Irish Universities Quality Board is also seeking membership.

Objective 6: **Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.**

There are now many examples across the Irish Higher Education system of courses being developed which have a compulsory year /semester abroad built into them. In addition there is an increasing number of joint Masters degrees on offer, which span a number of institutions and countries. One such example is the European Master's Programme in International Humanitarian Assistance, which is a one year inter-university, multidisciplinary postgraduate programme offered in seven Universities across the EU:

- Department of Agribusiness, Extension and Rural Development, University College Dublin
- Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium
- Université d'Aix-Marseille III, France
- Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany
- Universidad de Deusto, Spain
- Uppsala Universitet, Sweden
- Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands

In addition to initiatives such as above, each institution is required to set out a European Policy Statement under the SOCRATES/ ERASMUS programme. This encompasses the Institution's strategy in relation to incorporating a European dimension into its policies, programmes and activities.

Objective 7: **Life-Long Learning**

In October 2002, a detailed report on Life-Long Learning was produced by a taskforce composed of representatives from the Further and Higher Education Sectors, industry, community groups and key Government Departments. In determining the most appropriate strategies, it defined Life-Long Learning as:

"The State and citizens working in partnership, should achieve the skills, motivation, supports/ tools, resources and time to engage in learning on a lifelong basis, and thus enrich lives and develop a more prosperous, more inclusive society"

From this vision, while the Task Force made a series of recommendations in respect of the wider education system, it included a number of recommendations, which complement the Bologna Process. These include:

- Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) as part of an overall access, progression and transfer framework;
- Promotion of guidance strategy on multi-agency basis, as one of the key areas to increase awareness;
- Promotion of flexibility – longer opening, more flexible tuition (distance learning, eLearning etc) - in terms of delivery of learning;
- Development of specific initiatives in all institutions to respond to identified skills deficits;

The Government, in its most recent agreement (*Sustaining Progress – Social Partnership Agreement 2003 – 2005*) with the ‘Social’ partners, have agreed to the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force, as resources permit.

Complementary initiatives that are also contributing to the development of a lifelong learning culture in Higher Education in Ireland, include the funding of projects in the universities, under the Higher Education Authority’s Targeted Initiatives schemes, which are aimed both at improving access to and facilitating progression within the university system, and the establishment, under the auspices of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, of the national framework of qualifications. The latter, in particular, is being designed with a view to facilitating the development of a lifelong learning society, and is being accompanied by a complementary set of national policies on access, transfer, progression and credit, which will meet the needs of all learners and which will enable them to undertake learning throughout their lives.

Objective 8: Higher Education Institutions and Students

Reflecting the Department’s partnership approach to education, students are represented on, *inter alia*, the Governing Bodies of Higher Education institutions established in statute, the Higher Education Authority, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council.

However, this approach has been further advanced through the recent policy initiatives on quality, where the proposed system recognises the importance of students in the process, particularly in reviews of academic Departments and of units that directly provide services to students. This approach is underpinned by legislation, including the Universities Act, 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

Objective 9: Promotion the Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

Ireland shares this objective. While the objective does not seek to restrict signatory states from the promotion of their education system, for example, as part of trade delegations to third countries, Ireland sees this activity in the context of both the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the Steering Group is evidence of Ireland’s commitment to the achievement of the objectives of the Bologna Process. However, given the impact of the ‘dynamic’ process in European signatory States, it is clear that a more structured framework is required to support the process as it advances towards 2010. The addition of further objectives

increases the need for this structure to emerge. Ireland would like to see this proposition advanced as part of the future agenda of the Bologna process.

APPENDIX

Table 1: STUDENT MOBILITY

	1999 - 2000	2000 - 2001	2001 - 2002	2002 - 2003
Total Outgoing Students	1,689	1,648	1,708	1758 *
Total Grant Allocation	€1,393,296	€1,411,261	€1,372,057	€1,424,743
Total Incoming Students	3,075	3,166	3,231	Not Available

* Provisional figure

Table 2: TEACHER MOBILITY

	2000 – 2001	2001 - 2002	2002 - 2003
Total Outgoing Teachers	132	151	145 *
Total Grant Allocation	€169,532	€184,665	€84,643
Total Incoming Teachers	203	214	Not Available

* Provisional figure

Table 3: ERASMUS MOBILITY 2001/ 2002

Home Country	% of Student Population	% of Teacher Population	Home Country	% of Student Population	% of Teacher Population
Belgium	1.27	3.63	Netherlands	0.87	1.85
Denmark	0.93	1.38	Austria	1.16	2.08
Germany	0.81	0.77	Portugal	0.76	2.36
Greece	0.47	1.48	Finland	1.22	4.32
Spain	0.95	1.39	Sweden	0.76	1.22
France	0.90	1.50	United Kingdom	0.42	1.50
Ireland	1.06	1.49	Iceland	1.52	2.09
Italy	0.79	1.23	Liechtenstein	3.46	3.17
Luxembourg	4.27	0.00	Norway	0.51	1.57
EU Average				% of Student Population: 0.78%	% of Teacher Population: 1.4%

Source: EU Commission