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Bologna Seminar

Council of Europe Higher Education Forum on Qualifications Frameworks

Council of Europe Headquarters, Strasbourg
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Room 1

SYNOPSIS OF WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS

Directorate General IV: Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
(Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education/Higher Education and Research
Division)

Distribution: forum participants

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area: A Reminder and a View Forward

Mogens Berg, Chair of the Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks 2003 - 2007

Synopsis

The presentation will remind you of the decisions of the Bergen Ministerial Bologna Meeting,

- Adoption of the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
- Commitment of elaborating national frameworks for qualifications
- Compatibility of national frameworks with the overarching framework
- Timeframe 2007-2010

The Stock-taking 2007 showed that much needed to be done to have certified national qualifications frameworks in place by 2010.

The presentation will focus on the problem areas when establishing national frameworks such as

- Deciding for a NQF
- Designing a NQF
- Administration of a NQF
- Self-certification of compatibility

Learning outcomes, credits and qualifications frameworks

Stephen Adam, University of Westminster, UK Bologna Expert

Learning outcomes and credits play an important role in relation to both national frameworks and the overarching Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The problem is that their application is complex and prone to misunderstanding. This talk seeks to clarify their respective functions and offer hope to the bemused. It will examine what learning outcomes can accomplish and where they can usefully be applied. It will link learning outcomes to credits and credit systems (ECTS) and probe how they can interact to promote the Bologna agenda. Finally, it will explore why international progress in the full application of ECTS has been hard and why the embracing of learning outcomes is also challenging, particularly in the context of proliferating qualifications frameworks.

Peter van der Hijden, European Commission

New Zealand's Experience with Qualifications Frameworks

Frances Kelly, New Zealand Representation at the EU

Synopsis

New Zealand has worked with a National Qualification Framework since 1990. However the original developmental work was not accepted by the higher education system, which withdrew its cooperation in 1992. Subsequent negotiations led to the publication in 2001 of the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, which provides the structure to bring together all approved qualifications available in New Zealand tertiary education institutions and secondary schools.

The key purposes of the Register are to:

- Clearly identify all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand
- Ensure that all qualifications have a purpose and relation to each other that students and the public can understand;
- Maintain and enhance learners' ability to transfer credit by the establishment of a common system of credit;
- Enhance and build on the international recognition of New Zealand Qualifications.

Of potential interest to Forum attendees are the issues encountered and processes used in the development of the Register, its contents, the use being made of it by various stakeholders, including international organisations, and identification of further developments.

Issues identified include the relationship between academic and vocational qualifications; identification and description of levels and types of qualifications; use of a common credit system; framing of programmes in learning outcomes, and building academic capability to do this; and subject classification systems.

WHAT IS A QUALIFICATION?

Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe

Synopsis

In developing qualifications frameworks, one should have a clear idea of what a qualification is. The presentation will discuss why the concept of qualifications is an important one and why we look at it differently today than we would have a couple of decades ago.

The main part of the presentation will seek to give an overview of the different components of a qualification as well as the relationship between them. This part of the presentation will focus on the five main components of a qualification:

- quality
- workload
- level;
- profile
- learning outcomes;

and it will consider each component in some detail.

The final part of the presentation will focus on some challenges and unresolved issues that seem of particular importance in the development of national qualifications frameworks.

Developing a National Qualifications Framework - The Experience of Hungary

Eva Gönczi, Programme Director, Collegium Budapest, Hungary

The presentation is a report of work in progress. The challenges and the debates reflect the educational policy dilemmas Hungary has faced over the past decade and so do the choices and responses. Even though the project for establishing an National qualifications Framework has by no means been completed such occasions as the Strasbourg Forum provide an opportunity for ‘stocktaking’, which may hopefully contribute to betterment and provide useful insights for other countries with similar initiatives.

The Bologna Process found Hungary’s educational system in a state of transition with historic values, renowned centres of learning, high records of educational attainment, nonetheless with more and more definite signs of underachievement, and a higher education system which has strained all its efforts to cope with the siege of students wishing to obtain a degree. The economy – at least for a period – has been ready to absorb the fresh graduates but seems to have different expectations in terms of skills and competencies. The issue has raised queries also about the purposes of higher education as well as the role of the state in the provision.

The Bologna Process side by side with the EU initiatives, especially the “Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, gave a frame of reference for a lot of the national initiatives and the decision to develop a National Qualifications Framework is very much part and parcel of this agenda. It has been treated as a policy tool to gradually switch over to a system where students, the learning process and especially its end results are in the focus of attention so the greatest challenge is the change in paradigm to focus on the outcomes of learning on all levels of the education system. Hungarian education did have some tradition of applying learning outcomes but the huge task ahead is to harmonize the very divergent initiatives also in the different levels in a coherent framework.

Another challenge is the contradiction between how educational policy is formulated (including legislation in a publicly regulated degree system) on the one hand and the logic of the activities in educational institutions that often lack mechanisms to formulate objectives. However, the process in HE conducted by a joint effort of several ministries and HE institutions is designed and implemented in the belief that there is no chance for successful implementations unless the institutions and the quality assurance systems develop adequate internal mechanisms and indicators to apply learning outcomes. This is all taking place in a period when the emphasis in the implementation of the Bologna reforms lies very much with the institutions. The generic cycle descriptors for the three Bologna cycles are in place. However institutions should be encouraged to use the Qualifications Framework, which was designed to cater for the diversity of qualifications awarded in Hungarian higher education, as an external reference point, in their efforts to develop qualifications profiles and set targets.

What measures are needed to continue the work? The presentation will focus on the progress that has been made and will also make a few recommendations for ways forward to reach the 2010 target.

Developing and Validating National Framework of Qualifications - Issues and Pitfalls

Seán Ó Foghlú, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

Synopsis

The presentation will outline in three parts the pre-development, development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications in Ireland.

The pre-development phase will address the building of a consensus in Ireland that a National Framework of Qualifications should be developed, as well as decisions on the extent of coverage within the Framework – what areas of learning should be included. It will also address issues relating to making decisions about how Framework development should be initiated and undertaken.

The second part will look at the development phase of the Framework. It will set out the various stages in the development process and look at the research and consultation undertaken. It will demonstrate links with interdependent policy areas and look at issues which arose in the development of the Framework. It will also set out an outline of the Irish Framework.

The third part will look at the implementation of the Framework – the post-development phase. It will look at the various roles of the various stakeholders in implementation and the speed of process in implementing by different stakeholder groups. It will look at the diverse range of qualifications in the Framework and the long-term cultural changes being brought about. It will look at the ownership of the Framework, communication of the Framework and the important link between the Framework and quality assurance. It will also show how the implementation of the Framework is enabling the international recognition of qualifications. It will set out some of the challenges which are still arising in implementation and look at future plans for a study on the implementation and impact of the Framework.