

Report of a Discussion Forum
on
Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Enhanced European Co-operation in
Vocational Education and Training

15 October 2003, Gresham Hotel, Dublin

The aim of the discussion forum was to update stakeholders in Irish vocational education and training on developments in Europe in relation to the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and on the linkage with developments in Ireland. It was an opportunity for Irish stakeholders to consider latest developments and to make an input into further planning.

The Discussion Forum was hosted by the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the National Qualifications Authority on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The forum was chaired by Seán Ó Foghlú, chief executive, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. It was attended by a range of participants engaged in education and training including state agencies, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, awarding bodies, providers and representatives from the private sector. The agenda and attendance list are attached at appendix I and Appendix II.

Introductions to the Copenhagen Process and the forum were made by Pauline Gildea, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Science and by David Barry, Principal Officer, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Pauline Gildea welcomed participants and underlined the Department of Education and Science's involvement in and commitment to the Copenhagen process. She referred to the relationship between this and lifelong learning and the development of the national framework of qualifications systems. The Department's involvement in the Future Objectives process for Europe's education and training systems, which addressed issues that are also under discussion in the Copenhagen process, was also referred to.

David Barry noted that significant progress had been made in advancing the key areas of quality assurance, transparency and credit transfer since the previous national briefing and consultative meeting on enhanced European co-operation in vocational education and training, held in September 2002. The forum was held in the context of the voluntary, bottom up approach that underlines the philosophy of the Copenhagen process. He stated that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment views the process as one that is firmly rooted in the labour market. It also has a key interest in promoting the mobility of workers within the European Union, which requires the removal of barriers. In this regard, he noted the various initiatives underway including the proposed directive on the recognition of professional qualifications, the action plan on skills and mobility and the various instruments introduced to support these policies, such as the European CV, Europass and the certificate and diploma supplements.

Despite these developments, Mr. Barry indicated that there was a perception that progress in the Copenhagen process had been much slower than expected. He stated that the single biggest obstacle in place was the cumbersome recognition processes. He stated that a European knowledge area and labour market cannot exist without a transparent, user friendly and predictable system for the recognition of qualifications across internal borders in the current and enlarged EU. It was noted that a European area of lifelong learning emphasises the need for individuals to be able to move

freely between countries, sectors, jobs and institutions. This requires the building up of trust and respect for each member state's qualifications and it was important that simple and appropriate transparency tools are developed for this.

He noted the presence of the two key Departments at the forum and acknowledged the close co-operation of the two Departments at both national and EU levels. At the Community level, he noted the need to seek out education and training solutions going beyond the scope of national qualifications in order to meet the challenges associated with internationalisation. In conclusion, he noted the opportunity to focus on the interim report on the Concrete Future Objectives, which will reflect the developments and progress being achieved under the Copenhagen process, to be presented to the spring European Council under the Irish Presidency.

Overview of Copenhagen Process

Dr. Anna Murphy, Director of Framework Development, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland then gave an overview of the Copenhagen Process. She initially set out the context for the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002. This emerged from the work of the fora established by the EU Commission and CEDEFOP between 1998 and 2001. Chief among these was the Transparency Forum which led to the establishment of national reference points and certificate supplements. This was followed by a policy conference, June 2002 at which the member states, European Economic Area countries, future member states and the social partners agreed to cooperate to develop practical measures to achieve the aim of becoming the world's most dynamic knowledge based economy by 2010, as set out by the European Council. The Copenhagen Declaration itself was signed by Ministers representing 31 countries, and the European Commission in November 2002.

Dr. Murphy then outlined how the Copenhagen Declaration is being implemented. The overall Copenhagen Co-ordination Group will make an interim report on progress in the coming months. Working groups on transparency, credit and quality have been set up. The Authority and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) are involved in the follow up initiatives. The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training is looking at the specific issue of sectoral qualifications. She also noted that the vocational education and training perspective is being examined in working groups on lifelong guidance and improving education and training for teachers and trainers within the context of the Future Objectives process. There is also a technical group on the validation of non-formal and informal learning which also reports into the Future Objectives process. The work of these groups can be followed on the virtual communities that have been established for each (see below for links).

The vision for the future of awards across Europe is one of greater comparability and compatibility of the awards systems. This would facilitate international competitiveness, the mobility of workers and learning opportunities and the attractiveness of Europe for learning.

Those involved in policy development at the European level include ministries, vocational education and training institutions, learners, qualifications and regulatory agencies, social partners and the European Commission. She noted that this policy development is also linked to developments in Ireland and involves the two Departments, the Authority and FETAC. Consultation had also taken place with the wider stakeholders at key stages both before and subsequent to the Declaration. The Copenhagen process interacts with the consideration and implementation of a number of policy approaches at national level, including the development of the national framework

of qualifications, adult education and lifelong learning. Of particular interest is the interaction between European and national policy on credit, qualifications and quality assurance. This is outlined further in the specific presentations below.

Other relevant developments at European level include the Future Objectives process for education and training systems which aims to make European education and training a world reference by 2010 and the Bologna process, which aims to create a European area for higher education and make qualifications easily readable, compatible and comparable. It was also noted that there is a draft EU directive on the recognition of professional qualifications which aims to replace the many existing sectoral and general directives that exist at present.

In conclusion, she noted that European developments provide both a context and ideas for moving forward. It is important to continue the co-operation and consultation with stakeholders on these developments at national level. There is positive interplay and mutual information between European policy developments and those at the national level.

Many present welcomed the involvement of the two Departments and stakeholders in the Copenhagen process. For example, it was stated that mobility of workers is and has been a major feature of the construction sector. Representatives of this sector had previously worked with CEDEFOP on measures to support mobility in the 1970s and 1980s. Of particular interest were the issues of non traditional learning and competence. There was a specific call for the social partners in the policy process.

Quality Assurance

Barbara Kelly, Director of Awards and Standards, Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) then provided an update on the working group on Quality Assurance in the Copenhagen process. The Declaration called for the promotion of cooperation and building best practice, with a particular focus on exchanging models and methods and establishing common criteria and principles. The actions to be achieved include a systems approach to quality assurance and the development of quality indicators within the overall objective of developing a common quality assurance framework. The working group has agreed that this quality framework would consist of: a model based on common core criteria, the methodology of self assessment, external monitoring and measurement indicators. These indicators would be used to see if quality assurance has been achieved. The model involves setting and implementing goals, monitoring and evaluating attainment of these goals and a system to respond to the findings. This overall approach to quality assurance should result in mutual trust, transparency and credit transfer. The approach envisaged by the group is voluntary and member states would independently select procedures and methods for their quality assurance. It is envisaged that they would report progress, on a voluntary basis, every two years to the Copenhagen Coordination Group.

The indicators envisaged for the quality assurance framework include: the number of providers within each state that apply the quality assurance system; participation and completion rates; investment in trainers; the prevalence of different groups of learners in vocational education and training (VET); the destination after training and the utilisation of acquired skills.

Ms. Kelly noted that the approach to quality assurance in Ireland is consistent and that Europe is very interested in Ireland. Quality assurance is embedded in legislation in Ireland. FETAC has included its approach to quality assurance in its strategic plan. Ms. Kelly noted that consultation is

underway and procedures are to be tested with providers in many sectors. This work will lead to a policy document in summer 2004, with providers submitting quality assurance procedures for agreement in winter 2004. This will be followed by monitoring and evaluation in summer 2005.

One of the main advantages of the FETAC approach is that it is generic - it relates to all types of providers. If this approach works in Ireland, it is expected that it can work in Europe where it is thought that as providers differ and the vocational education sector is organised differently, it will be difficult to get a generic system of quality assurance. The working group noted that it is important that quality assurance systems are appropriate to size and type of provision. It is envisaged that each member state could translate the common principles and criteria into practical initiatives and, in doing so, work towards a common quality assurance framework. Ireland is unique in adopting a comprehensive approach to further education and training that includes credit, quality and a national framework of qualifications.

In the discussions, it was stated that quality assurance is central to mutual recognition agreements. A quality assurance system is needed as a basis for building trust. It was also noted that the existence of numerous quality assurance systems can cause problems. It was acknowledged that the new approach at European level to quality assurance brings opportunities. It was noted that the working group is also taking into account work in the Bologna process and the work of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), particularly as concerns self-evaluation.

In response to queries about the stakeholder involvement in developments concerning apprenticeship, it was clarified that the Institutes of Technologies are represented on the FETAC quality assurance group. It was noted that FETAC, in the context of the national framework of qualifications, it is to set standards for its awards which will include the awards attained on completion of apprenticeship. Quality assurance underpins standard setting and provision and providers have to be involved in the debate.

Barbara Kelly also noted that the social partners closely involved in European work on quality assurance and are involved in FETAC's work. She indicated that FETAC would be organising a quality assurance seminar in 2004 which would involve its stakeholders.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer in Vocational Education and Training

Edwin Mernagh, Development Officer, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland gave a presentation on Credit Accumulation and Transfer. He noted that the word 'trust', which had been used by other speakers, would appear again in his presentation. He set out that the main objective of the technical working group on credit accumulation and transfer is to develop a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training. This aims to support labour market mobility, the recognition of non formal and informal learning and the transfer of recognition of learning between national vocational and education training. He outlined the membership of the technical working group, which has met four times since November 2002. It comprises 12 countries and the social partners, and is supported by the European commission, CEDEFOP, the European Training Foundation and consultants from the University of Kassel.

As part of its work, it is also considering the relevance of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to vocational education and training. The group is investigating the development of reference levels for qualifications, common principles for certification and common measures. This

work will take into account the experience and ongoing work in CEDEFOP and in the regulated professions.

The group reports to the Copenhagen Co-ordination Group and to the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training and to the European Commission. It will finalise an interim report by end October 2003, outlining the basis for a concrete action to meet the credit transfer objective.

The group has examined a number of approaches to meeting its objective. There has been much discussion of terminology such as the definition of qualifications, notional learning time and unitisation. The question of building trust in different systems and fields of learning is seen to be critical to building a credit system. From an operational point of view the issue of assessment and measuring learning and credit is important. The use of the concept of 'notional' learning time is perceived to be difficult and an alternative being considered is that of 'learning density'. The difficulties refer to assessing formal programmes and on-the-job learning. While ECTS benefits from, in the main, full time participation in learning, vocational education and training involves a wider range of learning contexts which result in differing learning densities. In relation to certification, it was noted that the acceptance of certification procedures is linked to the issue of quality and quality assurance.

Mr. Mernagh stated that a key concept in the work of the group was that of developing 'zones of mutual trust' which would accept differences between national systems and operate both between levels of learning and fields of learning. The group's strategy is to undertake a small-scale investigation of zones of mutual trust, with links between credit and outcomes and definition of levels, in the short term. In the medium-term, it aims to develop a basic operating scheme for vocational education and training which could be the basis of agreement between cooperating partners. A study of this was begun, in September 2003, by the University of Kassel. The scheme and different approaches to credit transfer at upper secondary level vocational education and training, including apprenticeships would also be tested in this phase. Work would also begin on developing a set of principles for a coherent European credits and qualifications meta-framework.

The long term strategy of the group is to develop a European credits and qualifications meta-framework. The working group recommends that this may be achieved by creating a typology of knowledge, skills/tasks and competences within or linked to a coherent European credits and qualifications meta-framework. As part of this work, a study has been launched in September 2003 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in the UK. In addition, the establishment of a standing network of qualifications research and development bodies, moderated at European level, will be promoted. It was also noted as important to link this work with relevant work in other areas, especially transparency, non-formal learning and guidance.

Mr. Mernagh highlighted the relevance of the work of the working group for Ireland and the opportunity it presents. Presently, there is no single national system of credit in vocational education and training in any European country. The recommendation for a meta-framework is in confluence with developments in Ireland, as the national framework of qualifications in Ireland is has a levels referent and is based on the outcomes of knowledge, skill and competence. In addition, there are advantages to be gained from the existence of a single awarding body for further education and training, FETAC. There is also a similarity in the debate about credit arrangements in Ireland and Europe. For example, there is no single comprehensive national system of credit and there are differing understandings of terminology, specifically in relation to units and modules. There is also the issue of the acceptability of 'notional' learning time and effort. As a result of current developments regarding the national framework of qualifications, Ireland is well placed to take a

lead role in European developments. It is already being used as a study example for the research mentioned above.

In the discussion which followed, impatience was expressed about the delay in developing a national credit system for further education and training. It was stated that it was needed for progression as much as for mobility, both within and out of further education and training. It was also noted that there is a need to build coherence between the emerging credit system for further education and training and that in higher education and training. Mr. Mernagh stated that, while ECTS may not necessarily be a suitable model for further education and training, there needs to be integration with it. In the Irish context, reference was made to the national approach to credit which the Authority is developing with stakeholders and to the different stages in the development of credit arrangements in higher education, where the ECTS model exists and is generally accepted as the basis for moving forward, and in further education and training, where there are different understandings and limited traditions in the use of credit.

In response to a question on the possible role of the Leonardo initiative, it was stated that recommendations regarding networks of awarding/qualification bodies and the testing of a scheme were seen as potential Leonardo projects.

In relation to a question on learning density, it was stated that the concept was not being put forward as a solution but as an issue that had to be accommodated. There was a suggestion that it was important to include all learners in whatever structures are developed, particularly adult learners, non-nationals and learners with disabilities. It was stated that it was important that accessibility and diversity is incorporated in the design credit from the outset. The collaboration between the Departments present and providers was acknowledged as supporting this inclusion. It was further stated that the national framework of qualifications is unique in focussing on outcomes and on access, transfer and progression. There was also a diversity of award types to facilitate all learners and it was important that the awarding bodies are responsive to all needs. It was noted that while the Copenhagen process is driven by the lifelong learning agenda and the overarching issues have to be first resolved; the approach must be an inclusive one.

In response to a question on levels, it was clarified that any development of levels in the broad meta-framework for vocational education and training will fit with the cycles of higher education in the Bologna process so that there are links to the first cycle in particular. Regarding the possible impact on FETAC, Barbara Kelly stated that a major (and necessary first) step in developing a credit system for further education and training will be the development of the awards system in the context of the national framework of qualifications and, in particular, the concept of minor awards. This will facilitate recognition and progression for learners. The work of the technical group will be of relevance to the development of the awards system and of credit by FETAC as well as to the development of a national approach to credit in Ireland.

Transparency of Qualifications

The final presentation was an update on transparency of qualifications developments by Cynthia Deane, of Options Consulting. The work on transparency was about increasing and improving mobility of citizens who hold qualifications between countries, trades, sectors or companies. It was also about improving mobility from learning to work and between levels of learning, especially in the context of lifelong learning.

Transparency of qualifications was also important in achieving the strategic goal of a making Europe's education and training systems a world class reference by 2010. She noted that the term 'transparency' was chosen in preference to recognition is not acceptable as a concept in many countries, as it is seen as meaning forcing, harmonisation. Transparency can also be seen to facilitate comparability, credit transfer, consistency and quality.

It was noted that Ireland has been closely involved in the development of transparency related instruments at European level for many years and these will support developments at national policy level. These developments include ECTS, National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs), National Reference Points (NRPs), Diploma supplement, Certificate supplement, Europass training, projects in Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Socrates and national and sectoral initiatives.

The European forum on transparency was established in 1998 to move from project-based approach to developing policy on transparency, based on consensus. The actions of the forum (1998-2002) included the development of the certificate supplement, the network of national reference points, design of a European CV and work on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The certificate supplement differs from the diploma supplement in that it is not individualised but is linked to each qualification, involves a common format, contains information that is generic and is easy to translate. The establishment of national reference points was completed in 2002. As well as being a first point of contact on national systems of vocational education and training, they implement and promote transparency. The main achievements of the Forum were to link separate initiatives and the technical and political aspects of transparency. It also achieved consensus among member states thereby creating a positive climate for progress.

This work of the Forum has culminated in the present proposal for a decision on a single framework for transparency under the title of 'Europass'. This is a framework which will have at its core the European CV, links to the certificate and diploma supplements, the previous Europass training (now called MobiliPass) and the Language portfolio. These documents will be linked both on-line and in hard copy format.

Ms. Deane stressed that is important to implement the Europass framework by providing structures, resources and communications. She noted the need to achieve transparency at national level and to adopt a transparency approach to driving the implementation of the national framework of qualifications. In conclusion, she identified the opportunity for Ireland to provide good examples of practice that can influence the direction of policy at European level.

In discussions after the presentation, it was clarified that the format for the certificate supplement came from a Leonardo project, which had an Irish lead partner (the former National Council for Vocational Awards). It is expected that that will be a convergence in the near future in the format for the certificate supplement. It was asked whether an award, on its own, could not provide the information required by an employer. In response, it was stated that the transparency forum is not starting with a clean sheet and there are legal issues in the different countries regarding the wording that goes on a parchment which must be facilitated. In addition, while a customised competence statement is ideal, it is not achievable. Ms. Deane noted that the European CV belongs to the learner who controls what goes on it. In response to a question on the extent of the implementation of the instruments, it was stated that the certificate supplement has been tested in many countries, including Ireland, and that Germany, Austria and Denmark are the most proactive in its use. A proposal for Europass is being put to the European Commission for its agreement in October/November and is expected to be agreed by the member states in 2004. At the same time, it

is being tested. The question of the prior use of the ‘Europass’ title (for vocational education and training mobility) was also raised. In reply it was stated that a pragmatic approach had to be taken and that it was important to communicate and market the new Europass instrument.

Concluding Remarks

In concluding, Seán Ó Foghlú noted the other dimensions to the Copenhagen process: guidance, sectoral developments and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. He noted that the Authority is working with FETAC and with the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on the various initiatives. The Copenhagen process is part of an on-going overall process to develop education and training systems in Europe. It was important to note that Ireland is in general agreement with the approaches at European and international levels to quality assurance, credit and qualifications. The implementation of European initiatives is linked to developments in Ireland. He noted the need for consultations between a number of agencies including FETAC, FÁS and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland on the implementation of Europass. The importance of linking further education and training and higher education and training, especially in the context of the employer’s viewpoint, was also noted. To this end, he stated that the Authority will host a conference under the Irish Presidency on the common themes and approaches in European developments across higher education and vocational education and training. The national approach to the recognition of awards was also outlined and the involvement of the awarding bodies and national stakeholders was highlighted. This approach involves the Authority being the preliminary point of contact and acting in a referral mode. It was also noted that, while the Copenhagen process is not specifically about schooling, aspects of schooling are covered by the future objectives process which has working groups on lifelong guidance and improving education and training for teachers and trainers. In this context it was noted that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is included on the key consultative groups set up by the Authority in developing the national framework of qualifications. Finally, it was noted that while the Copenhagen process might appear bureaucratic, it is moving ahead and is bringing coherence and clarity to a complex situation. The Authority executive undertook to publish a report of the meeting and weblinks to the virtual communities that exist for the various working groups under the Copenhagen process.

Related Websites

Copenhagen process: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/copenhagen/index_en.html

Virtual communities for the Copenhagen process: <http://www.cedefop.communityzero.com/>

Forum on Transparency: <http://www.cedefop.gr/transparency/default.asp>

Europass: <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int>

Irish certificate supplement: <http://www.eurocert.ie/>

European Commission - education and training: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_en.html

Appendix I

Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Enhanced European Co-operation in Vocational Education and Training

Agenda for Discussion Forum

15 October 2003, Trinity Room I, Gresham Hotel, Dublin

The aim of the discussion forum is to update stakeholders in Irish vocational education and training on developments in Europe in relation to the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and on the linkage with developments in Ireland. Irish stakeholders will have an opportunity to consider latest developments and to make an input into further planning.

The Discussion Forum is being hosted by the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the National Qualifications Authority on behalf of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The conference will be chaired by Seán Ó Foghlú, chief executive, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

- 9.30 Introduction by David Barry, Principal Officer, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Pauline Gildea, Principal Officer, Department of Education and Science
- 9.45 Overview of the Copenhagen Process – Dr. Anna Murphy, Director of Framework Development, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- 10.15 Update on Quality Assurance, Barbara Kelly, Director of Awards and Standards, Further Education and Training Awards Council
- 10.35 Discussion on Quality Assurance
- 10.55 Tea/coffee
- 11.20 Update on Credit Accumulation and Transfer, Edwin Mernagh, Development Officer, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- 11.40 Discussion on Credit Accumulation and Transfer
- 12.00 Update on Transparency Developments – Cynthia Deane, Options Consulting
- 12.20 Discussion on Transparency
- 12.40 General Discussion
- 1.00 Light Refreshments

**Implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on
Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training**

Discussion Forum 15 October 2003

List of Attendees

<u>Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>
David Barry	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Verushka Bequart	Industrial Development Authority
Lynda Bradshaw-Dunn	Construction Industry Federation
Avril Burgess	Léargas
Eamonn Carey	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Cynthia Deane	Options Consulting
Dermot Douglas	Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology
Tom Duff	Dublin Institute of Technology
Dawn Duffin	National Training and Development Institute
Pauline Gildea	Department of Education and Science
Lorraine Glendenning	National Centre for Partnership and Performance
Marie Gould	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Michael Haverty	Enterprise Ireland
Peter Johnson	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
Anna Kelly	FÁS
Barbara Kelly	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Carmel Kelly	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Angela Lambkin	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Luana McAnaney	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Karena Maguire	Higher Education and Training Awards Council
Peter McCabe	Construction Industry Federation
Stan McHugh	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Edwin Mernagh	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Niamh Mernagh	Department of Education and Science
Henry Murdoch	City & Guilds
Anna Murphy	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
John O Dowd	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
Seán Ó Foghlú	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Eleanor Petrie	National Parents Council
Wendy Ross	Department of Education and Science
Sarah Ryan	National Centre for Guidance in Education
Liam Ryder	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
Eamonn Stack	Department of Education and Science
Andrina Wafer	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Mary Ena Walshe	Fáilte Ireland - National Tourism Development Authority
Christine Whyte	National Disability Authority