European Commission
Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs

Economic Policy Committee

Efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure on tertiary education in the EU

ANNEX : COUNTRY FICHE IRELAND

**Joint Report by the Economic Policy Committee
(Quality of Public Finances)
and the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs**

Table of contents

Author: John Lynch, Special Advisor on International Education, Higher Education Authority

Brief characterization of the tertiary education system

1. Main features

Higher education is seen in Ireland as having played a key role in the economic development and social transformation of Ireland over the past half century from an impoverished agricultural society in the mid-twentieth century to a prosperous, export led, high growth, high tech economy in the first decade of this century. From the mid-1960s, the Irish government, in the context of its economic development strategies, invested in the growth of a strong binary higher education system. This consists of: seven Universities, mainly publicly funded, which are mainly concerned with undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, together with basic and applied research; fourteen Institutes of Technology(IoTs), also publicly funded, whose main work is in higher certificate and ordinary degree programmes, but which also offer honours bachelors degree, postgraduate degree programmes and carry out applied research; a number of other state aided institutions (including teacher education colleges); and a small number of private Independent Colleges providing courses leading to professional qualifications, as well as recognised diploma and degree awards .

From a very low base in the 1960s, participation rates in higher education had grown to approximately 67% by 2008. Of the 191,000 students in the publicly funded higher education sectors in 2008/09, just over 57% were in the seven universities, 36% in the IoTs and the remaining 7% in the other state aided colleges. While growth in participation rates is in line with government policy and future planning, growth in absolute numbers – due also to population growth - is straining available government funding resources and is forcing demand for greater efficiencies or for other sources of funding.

Qualitative explanation behind the main variables, in particular graduation rates, quality measures and scores for the main indicators relevant for efficiency, e.g. the scores for the Funding Rules Indicator, the Evaluation Indicator and the Staff Policy Indicator. Provide details if, for example, one dimension is particularly determinant for the score of an indicator, for example if the staff policy indicator mostly reflects the degree of autonomy of tertiary education institutions on hiring/dismissing staff, or on promoting and establishing incentives and salaries.

1/ TEACHING	Ireland										
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Academic staff per 1000 inhabitants relative to the average	1.95	2.04	2.06	2.34	2.46	2.74	2.89	2.31	:	:	:
Number of students per 1000 inhabitants	36.4	37.7	40.1	40.9	42.1	42.7	43.1	41.6	:	:	:
Number of students (graduate and post-graduate) per 1000 inhabitants	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
From public institutions	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
From private governement-dependent institutions	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
From private independent institutions	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Ratio of students per academic staff	18.7	18.5	19.5	17.5	17.1	15.6	14.9	18.0	:	:	:
Number of graduates per 1000 inhabitants	9.72	10.27	10.61	11.39	10.88	12.8	12.93	13.48	:	:	:
Ratio of graduates per 1000 academic staff	5.0	5.0	5.2	4.9	4.4	4.7	4.5	5.8	:	:	:
Standardized recruiter view indicator (graduates' employability as perceived by recruiters)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	1.14	:	:	:
Standardized peer view country indicator (quality perceptions among peers)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	1.23	:	:	:
PISA scores	:	:	514	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Average total time spent by students in order to obtain a BA degree	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Average total time spent by students in order to obtain a MA degree	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Remuneration of a tenured university professor with 10 year seniority	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:

2/ RESEARCH											
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Publications per 1000 inhabitants	0.47	0.47	0.51	0.53	0.6	0.61	0.73	0.78	:	:	:
	1998-2002	1999-2003	2000-2004	2001-2005	2002-2006	2003-2007					
Quality of research (position in the ISI citation index)	3.35	3.55	3.61	3.85	:	:					
% of research done in cooperation with industry	:	:	:	:	:	:					

3/ EXPLANATORY FACTORS FOUND RELEVANT FOR EFFICIENCY											
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Main categories of composite indicator											
Funding Rules Indicator	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	5.9	:
Evaluation Indicator	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	6.7	:
Staff Policy Indicator	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	7.9	:

4/ EXPENDITURE											
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total public expenditure on tertiary education institutions as a percentage of GDP	1.30	1.35	1.45	1.28	1.20	1.11	1.14	1.13	:	:	:
Total expenditure per student (€)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Private expenditure on tertiary education institutions as a percentage of GDP	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:

Total expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	4.82	4.51	4.29	4.27	4.29	4.39	4.72	4.77	:	:	:
Private expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	:	0.46	0.42	0.34	0.28	0.31	0.32	0.29	:	:	:
Funds from non-public sources as % of total income (fees, earned income, investment, other)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Tuition fees as average of the cost of tuition	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Percentage of funds received by private government-dependent institutions from public sources	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Total public expenditure on grants, loans, and other programmes to cover education and/or maintenance of students (universal programmes / by categories such as merit or socio-economic status)	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:

Source: Eurostat, OECD, UOE and Member States.

2. Structure of institutions and funding arrangements

The higher education system in Ireland comprises the university sector, the institutes of technology and the colleges of education, all of which are substantially state-funded, autonomous and self-governing. In addition there are an increasing number of independent private colleges offering professional qualifications, as well as a range of recognised diplomas and degrees.

Universities

The universities are essentially concerned with undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, together with basic and applied research. The majority of funding (>80%) into the University sector comes from government.

Under the Universities Act (1997), the universities are autonomous institutions. The act sets out their statutory objectives and functions. According to the Act, the objects of a university shall include—

- to advance knowledge through teaching, scholarly research and scientific investigation,
- to promote learning in its student body and in society generally,
- to promote the cultural and social life of society, while fostering and respecting the diversity of the university's traditions,
- to foster a capacity for independent critical thinking amongst its students,
- to promote the official languages of the State, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish language and the preservation and promotion of the distinctive cultures of Ireland,

- to support and contribute to the realisation of national economic and social development,
- to educate, train and retrain higher level professional, technical and managerial personnel,
- to promote the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research,
- to disseminate the outcomes of its research in the general community,
- to facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education, and
- to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university.

Within these objectives and within their individual budgets, the universities have the freedom to innovate and to develop programme provision in anticipation of, and in response to, the economic, social and cultural needs of the community and student demand.

Universities make decisions regarding programme provision on the basis of perception of student demand and perception of national needs and in the context of their own institutional mission and strengths.

Under the Universities Act (1997), the Governing Bodies of the universities must have representation from local and national government, as well as industry and business interests.

Also, under the 1997 Act, the universities have a remit to promote access and equality.

Institutes of Technology

The main work of the Institutes of Technology is in higher certificate and ordinary degree programmes, although institutes of technology are now offering an increasing number of honours degree programmes and postgraduate programmes. There is also a growing involvement in regionally oriented applied research within the institutes of technology. The IoT sector receives >90% of its funding from government.

The Institutes of Technology Act (2006) came into effect in February 2007. Its main purpose was to provide for the transfer of the funding and regulatory responsibilities for the institutes from the Department of Education and Science to the HEA, subject to overall Ministerial and Government policy. The practical implications of this are that the HEA has assumed funding and a range of other roles in respect of the institutes. The Report of an OECD Review team in 2004 recommended this re-designation to facilitate greater autonomy to the institutes of technology and to allow for the development of a unified and coherent framework across the higher education sector. The designation is intended to ensure the necessary parity of esteem between the two sectors and encourages the growth and evolution of a diverse range of institutions.

The IoTs, which evolved from Regional Technical Colleges, have a long tradition of close links to local government and industry in the composition of their governing bodies, in the appointment of staff and in the development of their programmes and curricula.

Independent Colleges

The Independent Colleges are autonomous, privately owned and managed institutions. They are teaching institutions which run both full and part time courses to prepare students mainly for externally accredited awards. Their awards are accredited by various Irish and overseas awards bodies, professional institutions and universities, including the Irish government's statutory awards agencies (HETAC and FETAC).

3. Governance and regulatory framework

The Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and development body for higher education and research in Ireland and is also responsible for the allocation of Exchequer funding to the Universities, Institutes of Technology and other designated colleges. It also has a number of statutory review functions in relation to the higher education sector. The HEA advises the government on allocation of state funding to higher education, distributes that funding to the designated institutions and monitors how it is spent. The HEA has the responsibility for reviewing universities' strategic development plans, their quality assurance procedures and their equal opportunities policies and implementation.

As noted in I.2 above, within this overarching funding and monitoring context, under the Universities Act (1997), the universities are autonomous institutions and make decisions regarding programme provision on the basis of perception of student demand and perception of national needs and in the context of their own institutional mission and strengths. Each university has a Governing Body which is the final decision maker on governance issues. The composition of the Governing Bodies for each of the universities is defined in the Universities Act (1997) to include representation from university management, staff, local and national government and industry.

Within the limits of core budgetary resources available to them research priorities are decided by academic staff within the institutions. However, over the past decade, government has made major resources available through the research funding mechanisms described in 4.1 below. Colleges compete for these funds which are distributed according to government/agency priorities.

Under the Institutes of Technology Act (2006), the HEA assumed funding and other roles in respect to the IoTs. The HEA manages and monitors the budget allocation to the IoTs and works with them to develop strategic priorities in the context of national policy objectives.

While the Institutes of Technology Act (2006) enhanced academic freedom and autonomy to the institutes, it gave the HEA monitoring and accountability functions similar to those it has with the universities. The IoTs have governing bodies whose composition is defined in the 2006 Act.

Establishment of a new institution of higher education

1.1 Under the Universities Act (1997) section 9 (1) the government can appoint a body, the membership of which shall be recommended by the HEA and shall include international experts and national experts, including employees of universities to which this Act applies, to advise the HEA on whether, having regard to the objects and functions of a university under sections 12 and 13, an educational institution should be established as a university.

1.2 On the advice of the body and the recommendation of the HEA, the Government may, by order, provide that the institution shall be a university for the purposes of this Act and, on the making of the order, it shall be established accordingly. However, the Government shall not make an order unless the proposed order has received the approval of both houses of the Oireachtas.

1.3 A university established under the Act shall be a body corporate with perpetual succession and an official seal and have power to sue and may be sued in its corporate name and to acquire, hold and dispose of land or any other property.

1.4 The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 included an amendment to the 1971 HEA Act under section 5 which stated the Minister may appoint a body, with advice of the HEA, on whether, having regard to the objects and functions of the institutions of higher education currently in existence should be designated as an institution of higher education. Like the Universities Act 1997, such an order requires the approval of both houses of the Oireachtas.

1.5 Under the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 an amendment was made to the 1971 HEA act to widen the definition of an institution of higher education. An institution of higher education means any of the following: a university; a college of a university; a college to which the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006 apply; Dublin Institute of Technology; Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland; Royal Irish Academy; such educational institutions as may designated by order under section 5.

4. System's strengths and weaknesses

[This section is a summary done by the Higher Education authority of the achievements and challenges of the Irish Higher Education sector for their Strategic Plan 2008-10. A new National Strategy for Higher Education is in preparation and is due to be published during 2010]

Continuing expansion of higher education opportunities

The expansion of Irish higher education has continued over recent years with consistent growth, which raised the entry rate to higher education from 44% in 1998 to 65% in 2008. This general increase in participation has been boosted by significant increases in participation among many groups that traditionally had very low participation levels, e.g. students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and students with a disability. Notwithstanding the considerable progress that has been made, much work remains to be done in the area of achieving equality of access to higher education.

The economic demand for skilled graduates is also rising and the need for continuing expansion of higher education into the future is very clearly articulated in the National Skills Strategy, which aims to achieve a higher education entry rate of 72% by 2020. The importance of higher education for economic competitiveness is also recognised in the Enterprise Strategy Group's targets to secure a leading status in the OECD in terms of graduate output.

Continuing expansion of higher education will require significant progress on the lifelong learning agenda. The National Skills Strategy notes that "Ireland's relatively low participation rate in continuous learning is cause for concern". Enhancing the educational attainment of the existing workforce through the provision of meaningful lifelong education opportunities will be a key challenge for Irish higher education over the coming period.

Transformation of the research landscape

Infrastructural investments and strategic developments in research have resulted in a transformation of the research landscape in Irish higher education over recent years. Higher education expenditure on R&D (HERD) increased by almost 107% between 2000 and 2004; over the same period HERD as a percentage of GNP increased from 0.27% to 0.40%. There has been huge expansion in research infrastructure, including the creation of 97,000m2 research space, 24 new research centres and 4,600 user spaces, all of which was made possible through the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI).

The PRTLI has facilitated the emergence of institutional, research strategies and have encouraged specialisation in particular areas, as well as strategic collaboration between

institutions. Further consolidation and growth has been taking place over the course of the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (2006 – 2013) [SSTI], which has demonstrated the government's commitment to sustained and substantial investment in research and development. A key target of the SSTI is to achieve a doubling of PhD graduates by 2013. The key challenges into the future include ensuring that the renewed focus on research leads to enhancements of teaching and learning within higher education institutions and the achievement of greater levels of commercialisation of research outputs.

Quality and relevance of Irish higher education

The higher education sector has demonstrated its relevance to the Irish economy by consistently producing graduates that are sought after by employers and also by adapting to emerging skills needs, e.g. skills needs in the medical therapies. The sector is characterised by a quality-assurance culture. The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) have facilitated the development of this culture.

Among their other functions, the HEA and the NQAI carry out important overview functions in relation to quality assurance. Positive findings emerged from the independent European Universities Association (EUA) review of quality assurance procedures in Irish universities and also from the reviews of HETAC and the DIT. It is an on-going challenge to continually enhance quality and to promote a culture of sustained, quality improvement in the higher education sector. Of particular importance is the need for greater involvement of students in quality-assurance processes.

Legislation to establish a new integrated qualifications and quality assurance agency which will absorb the functions of the NQAI, HETAC, FETAC, and quality assurance functions of the IUQB and the HEA is currently being drafted and is expected to be published shortly.

Reform of the grant allocation model

The Irish government seeks to fund institutions so that their contribution to national objectives are maximised. Our funding policies are based on the principle that institutional performance is enhanced when institutional autonomy is preserved within a context of strong accountability measures with respect to the use of public funds and the achievement of national outcomes. Our objective is to reward institutions that adopt a strategic approach, that collaborate with other institutions and that proactively seek out collaborative partnerships. Over the course of the last strategic plan, considerable achievements were made in building greater levels of accountability, fostering strategic approaches and enhancing institutional collaboration.

Key achievements over the course of the last strategic plan include the introduction of a system of consolidated accounts in the universities and the design and implementation of a revised, Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) for the universities where funding very clearly follows the student. The model will bring greater accountability, transparency and coherence into the grant allocation system. In addition, there has been a greater emphasis on competitive, funding allocations which explicitly encourage collaboration – e.g. the Strategic Innovation Fund and the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions. Such funding processes have brought about significant shifts in institutional mindsets. There is now recognition throughout the sector that successful institutions are those that collaborate and engage in meaningful partnerships with other institutions.

In the coming period, it will be vital to build on these achievements and to further develop the funding model to facilitate transferable credit-based learning within a lifelong learning framework. This will support flexible provision, interdisciplinary studies and enable learners to combine subjects across disciplines and even across institutions. Immediate priorities include the development of a grant allocation model, built on comparable principles, for the institutes of technology. It must meet the needs of the institutes and also the transparency and accountability needs of the HEA and Government.

The Irish government will also incorporate an element of performance funding into the core grant allocations to reward institutions according to their achievement of national outcomes. Finally, institutions will need to implement more strategic and innovative approaches to raising private funding. The HEA has a role to play in encouraging and supporting institutions to diversify their funding sources.

Strategic development in the national interest

The competitive funding processes (PRTLI and SIF) noted above have been highly successful in encouraging institutions to develop focused and challenging strategies and supporting those institutional strategies. Higher education institutions that adopt a strategic approach to their activities and which seek to build on existing strengths and core activities rather than seek to become involved across the full spectrum of higher education activities have enjoyed success in these processes. While the principle of collaboration is now well embedded in research activities, there is a need for institutions to engage more collaboratively in relation to existing activities (rather than just collaborating on new activities) and fundamental teaching and learning functions.

There is much progress to be made in ensuring that our higher education institutions adopt a sectoral perspective, as well as an institutional perspective. Institutions need to identify their own unique strengths and seek to build on these strengths in contributing to the overall objectives of a higher education sector comprising a diversity of provision. In realising their broader missions, higher education institutions should be encouraged to build relationships

within society and the community, with a view to informing their strategies and consistent with national objectives. A National Strategy for Higher Education is currently being developed. This will clarify national priorities and key outcomes which will provide institutions with a framework within which to develop their strategic plans over the next two decades.

Explanatory factors for efficiency

1. Staff Policy

1.1. Hiring/Firing

Irish higher education institutions enjoy a lot of autonomy and make their own decisions on the hiring and dismissing of staff, within the framework of the national employment laws. However, staffing numbers, levels and costs form part of the strategic plans of public colleges and are subject to monitoring/approval by the HEA.

1.2. Wages

In the public sector colleges, there are approved levels of remuneration, fees, allowances and expenses. However, there is an Agreed Framework between the universities and the HEA for departures from these levels in exceptional circumstances.
The private colleges are free to set their own levels of remuneration, subject to national minimum wage and equality legislation.

2. Output flexibility

2.1. Course content and exams

The universities enjoy academic freedom with regard to course provision and course content. The universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology have full authority to devise and conduct their own examinations and to confer academic awards. In the non-university sector each institute of technology, following agreement of its quality assurance procedures with HETAC, validates its own programmes. Additionally each institute, under delegated authority, under the Qualifications and Training Act, 1999, grants its own awards. Most IoTs have delegated awarding powers up to Level 9 (Masters) on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and about half of them have delegated awarding powers up to Level 10 (Doctorate).

In line with recent legislation and policy developments, State-supported tertiary institutions are required to prepare strategic plans, which enunciate the institutions objectives over a wide

range of academic issues. Typically each tertiary education institution sets out its mission statement incorporating a general statement of its objectives. Then, under a range of headings, the institutions make clear their objectives for academic programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. They articulate their objectives on styles of teaching, which nowadays encourage more varied approaches involving lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops, and demonstrations. The incorporation of information and communications technologies is now much promoted. Individual academic departments are required to establish their course structures with aims and objectives for each course, as well as the modes of assessment being employed. Each institution is required to state its procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and research as quality assurance of departments, faculties and the institution itself is now de rigueur.

The public has easy access to the documents, which reflect a significant change in the institutional culture of tertiary education. Quality assurance, transparency and accountability have become much more embedded. This leads to much greater public awareness of the objectives of the institutions and how they go to work to achieve these objectives.

The universities are obliged under the Universities Act, (1997) to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures. Until now the HEA has had a statutory function to assist universities achieve their quality assurance objectives; to review and report on the quality assurance procedures developed by the universities and to be consulted by the universities in their review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures. In doing this they worked closely with he Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) which was established by the universities to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing quality assurance procedures and processes, in line with best international practice and to facilitate the conduct of reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and their outcomes. However, as noted earlier, in October 2008 the Government announced its decision to establish an integrated qualifications and quality assurance agency to take over the functions of the NQAI, HETAC and FETAC. The new organisation will also take responsibility for the external quality assurance review of the universities as carried out until now by the IUQB and HEA.

The private Independent colleges are not subject to government regulation in relation to their courses but have to meet the requirements of the awards bodies from whom they seek recognition for their programmes.

2.2. Offer of short studies and other diversifies studies

The IoTs offer a wide range of 2-year Higher Certificate programmes, postgraduate diplomas, 1-2 year Masters courses and programmes leading to professional qualifications. The universities offer a small number of undergraduate certificate/diploma courses, as well as an

increasing number of postgraduate diploma programmes and 1-2 year taught masters programmes.

Institutions in both the university and IoT sectors offer access/foundation programmes to increase participation from underrepresented student groups. These are generally of 1 year duration and allow successful students to enter full degree programmes. The private Independent Colleges offer many 1-2 year programmes leading to a variety of certificate and diploma awards.

In the context of its commitment to lifelong learning and to equality of opportunity and access for underrepresented groups to higher education, the government has been encouraging the expansion of part-time/flexible learning opportunities, diversification of entry route and a range of other support measures under the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013.

In addition, the process of modularisation and symmetrisation of programmes, which is well advanced in all higher education institutions, facilitates the expansion of flexible opportunities for students to engage with higher education.

2.3. Student choice

Generally students have a variety of choices within their study programmes and there are flexibilities from year to year on specialisations or subject students may choose. In some programmes leading to professional qualifications (such as medicine, engineering, law) the professional regulatory bodies specify mandatory curriculum requirements.

There has been a long tradition of part-time programmes available in Irish higher education institutions, both public and private, mainly at postgraduate level in the universities, but also at undergraduate level.

Distance learning opportunities in higher education have been available in Ireland for thirty years both through Oscail and through the Open University. In recent years, provision of distance learning has expanded greatly in the universities, IoTs and the Independent Colleges. Most of our institutions now have well established policies for the recognition of (unaccredited) prior learning in their admissions procedures.

Notwithstanding Ireland's keen appreciation of the importance of lifelong learning in the context of the knowledge society, as articulated in a wide range of reports since 2000, one of the major bottlenecks for Irish adults wishing to engage with higher education is the very limited provision and choice of part-time, flexible, learning opportunities at undergraduate level (NFQ levels 6 to 8). This has left the system inflexible by international standards and less well equipped to address the evolving education and skills needs of the workforce. Figure

1 shows the proportion of students enrolled in full-time and part-time courses in universities and institutes of technology in 2007-8. Only 12% of undergraduate students are enrolled on part-time courses – the majority of whom are enrolled on Level 6 and 7 courses in institutes of technology. The current low level of part-time study opportunities limits the accessibility of higher education for working adults and adults with caring responsibilities. It also limits the study-options available to traditional school leavers, who may prefer to, or need to, combine work and part-time study. The availability of part-time and flexible study opportunities is particularly poor at undergraduate level in the universities.[1]

Figure   1

Universities and Institutes of Technology 2007-08
Enrolments (number of students)
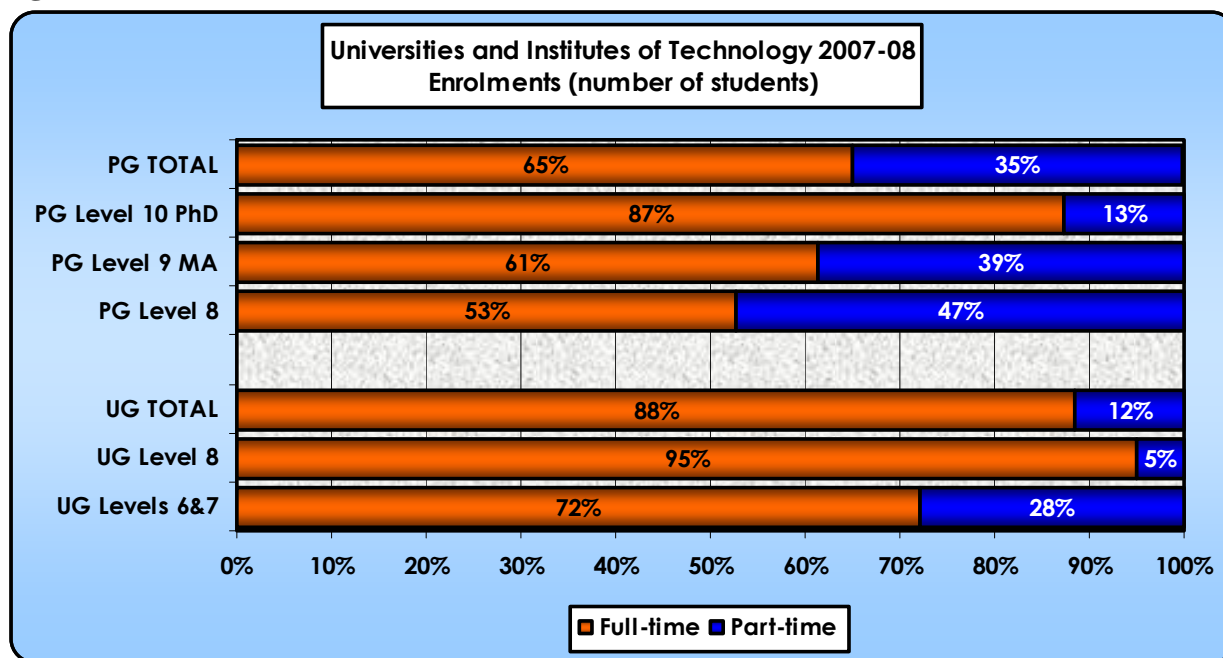
The majority of institutions have developed entry routes and quotas of reserved places for mature students. These are generally defined as applicants to higher education who are over 23 years of age (on the 1 of January in the year of entry), who may not have achieved the same entry requirements as school leavers. Institutions vary in their criteria for mature student admission. General information on entry requirements is available on the Qualifax website (www.qualifax.ie) which is managed by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. In most instances, credit is given for prior work experience, particularly if it has some relevance to the intended course of study. Interviews are held, samples of written work may be sought and some institutions[2] hold entry examinations.

A number of colleges offer pre-entry 'access/'foundation" courses to prepare mature learners for entry to tertiary education. Since the launch of a National Framework of Qualifications there has also been increased progression by students with further education awards to higher

---

[1] Only 3 per cent of the 72,600 undergraduate degree students (Level 8) in Irish universities are categorised as part-time. The situation is somewhat better in the Institutes of Technology sector where 16 per cent of undergraduate students are categorised as part-time. However, this is low in the international context and is particularly low in the context of the roles and responsibilities of institutes to address regional skills needs.

[2] http://www.ucc.ie/en/mature/prospective/msap/

education (approximately 10% of entrants in 2007). The National Access Office estimates that at least one third of higher education entrants who apply on the basis of a further education award are mature learners.

There are also increased levels of transfer and progression within higher education by holders of tertiary level certificate or diploma level awards on to degree-level studies. It is worth noting that institutions with quotas for mature students report that in general those students perform well in their studies. The majority of institutions have access offices. Many also have mature student offices and disability support services Learning support centres, counsellors and career guidance personnel act as a support infrastructure for all students while also focusing on the specific needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and those with disabilities.

In 2008 the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education[3] set a target to increase proportion of full-time mature students in higher education from 13% (in 2006) to 20% by 2013. It also set targets for increased participation by mature learners in full and part-time higher education (from 18% to 27% by 2013).

The core objectives of the plan include the progression of the lifelong learning agenda in Ireland through the development of broader routes of entry to higher education, a significant expansion of part-time/flexible courses (from 7% to 17% by 2013), in tandem with financial measures to address the student support implications of lifelong learning.

Institutions admit students with certain education backgrounds to other education programmes, allowing for changes in the field of specialisation, particularly on taught Masters programmes, many of which welcome students from a variety of different disciplinary backgrounds. Most of our institutions now have well established policies for the recognition of (unaccredited) prior learning in their admissions procedures.

2.4. Numerus clausus

There are a number of professional degree programmes for which there is a very high demand and which are expensive to fund. These include medicine, veterinary and dentistry. The government restricts the number of Irish/EU students who can be admitted to on to these.

There are a number of professional degree programmes for which there is a very high demand and which are expensive to fund. These include medicine, architecture, pharmacy, veterinary and dentistry. The government restricts the number of Irish/EU students who can be admitted to on to these. In the case of medicine, colleges can recruit a certain number of non-EU students provided their fees cover the full economic costs of their education and training.

---

[3] HEA, 2008

In other cases, colleges decide on the number of places they can offer each year, based on staff and other resources available. In this context, the recurrent Grants Allocation Model (RGAM) is relevant. The RGAM is the model on which the HEA allocates recurrent funds to the colleges. It is based on student numbers and 'weighted' according to the level of education and the type of programme being taken.

2.5. Regional/ European/ global mobility

The following chart gives the percentage of students in the university sector by region of domiciliary origin (in all cases the institution is based in the area with the highest percentage of students).

Full-Time Undergraduate Enrolments by Origin and College of Study: Irish Domiciled Students for the University Sector

Province	UCD	UCC	NUIG	TCD	NUIM	DCU	UL	MIC	SPD	MDI	NCAD	RCSI	St Angelas's
Connaught	6.8	1.6	59.8	6.1	6.5	6.2	12.9	13.6	13.9	12.0	1.6	7.6	61.9
Leinster	77.5	7.3	16.2	78.3	82.2	80.1	16.2	5.9	66.4	74.4	94.8	38.2	12.6
Munster	8.8	90.7	15.4	8.6	3.4	5.4	69.4	80.0	5.3	7.2	2.0	7.9	13.2
Ulster	6.3	0.3	8.0	6.9	7.9	7.9	1.4	0.4	12.0	6.4	1.6	2.3	12.1
Unknown Ireland	0.6	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0	44.0	0.2
Sum	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

➤ As in previous years the proportion of Irish domiciled students from Dublin increased in nearly all institutions.

➤ NUIG is the most diverse university with 40.2% of its cohort's domiciliary of origin outside of Connaught.

Until two decades ago, there were very few dedicated student residences in Irish colleges. While the universities and some other colleges now have campus accommodation, places are limited and expensive and the majority of students living away from home live in private rented accommodation.

Ireland has not had a strong tradition of students expecting to live away from home, possibly due to the higher costs and to the very limited financial support available.

While there have been well established articulation routes between courses at all levels in the technological sector and reasonable transfer arrangements between it and the universities, the Qualification (Education and Training) Act (1999) and the subsequent development of the National Qualifications Framework has provided clear articulation routes between education programmes throughout the whole education sector. This is greatly facilitating student mobility and enhancing lifelong learning opportunities.

In 2008/09, the percentage of non-Irish educated students on full-time programmes in the Irish universities and IoTs was 8.2%. Of these, 32% were from EU member states and 90%

were in the university sector (where 12% of full-time enrolments were from outside of Ireland).

We recognise qualifications from all other Member States and indeed all non- EU countries. There is no cost for the service; the only expense incurred by the applicant is the cost of translations of documents where applicable. The average length of time for recognition varies depending on the award - in cases where we are familiar with the award, these are 'instant responses' and the applicant received a statement within about 7 days. Instant response countries include those awards published on the Qualifications Recognitions website and other qualifications that we have received in large numbers in the past and are satisfied with the   established   comparability. (http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/int_qual_databse/index.html)

In general, Irish higher education institutions are very open to recruiting teaching and research staff from other member states. The institutions use their own recruitment procedures and make their own recruitment decisions. In some areas teachers/researchers (such as medicine, engineering) might need to get recognition from specific professional institutes or councils (such as the Irish medical council, the Teaching Council and various institutes of engineers). Costs and length of procedures would vary.

There are possibilities of exchange with institutions in other regions and Member States. Most courses in Irish HE institutions are member of ECTS and short term exchanges, such as through the Erasmus exchange programme, are normally given full recognition. Some exceptions may arise where professional regulatory bodies do not fully recognise training in other jurisdictions. Similarly, students transferring to Ireland on a longer term basis, can be given full recognition for studies carried out in other regions or member states. The existence of the NARICs, the ECTS and, more recently, the NQFs and EQF greatly facilitate this mobility.

3. Evaluation

3.1. Institutional evaluation

a)   In the context of their overall strategic plans, which include research (as well as teaching, staff development, etc), the universities are obliged under the Universities Act, (1997) to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance, and to arrange for a review of the effectiveness of these procedures. The HEA has a statutory function to assist universities achieve their quality assurance objectives; to review and report on the quality assurance procedures developed by the universities and to be consulted by the universities in their review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures. The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) was established by the universities to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing quality assurance procedures and processes, in line with best

international practice and to facilitate the conduct of reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and their outcomes.

The HEA and the IUQB engaged the European University Association (EUA) to undertake an extensive, independent and objective review of quality assurance in Irish universities with the assistance of experts from Europe, America and Canada. To complement the EUA review process the HEA put in place a high level reference panel comprising stakeholders external to the universities to provide the EUA review teams with an Irish context to the review.

The findings of the QA review, indicate that the universities have gone well beyond the legislative requirements set out in the Universities Act, 1997, in putting in place strong, functioning quality assurance procedures, which are operating successfully. There is now a need to build on these foundations and move to the next stage of development. The EUA review and the reference panel reports highlight a number of important areas where further progress needs to be made. These include:

- Linking QA processes more coherently with strategic planning processes
- Involvement of students and other stakeholders
- Enhancement of QA processes and procedures generally

b) A high proportion of research funding available to the universities and IoTs comse through the new structures (established since the late-1990s and described above in I.1.) to which the colleges make competitive research proposals. The HEA and the Research Councils (IRCSET and IRCHSS) and Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) have comprehensive procedures for the evaluation of tenders, the awarding of research contract and for the follow up evaluation of research projects, involving Irish and international experts. The process is competitive and is subject to entirely international peer review.

4. Funding rules

4.1. Public funding

The HEA funding framework is divided into discrete elements:

- **Core funding** linked to student numbers and types but distributed on a block grant basis - i.e internal allocation of funds is at the discretion of the institution. Money should 'follow the student' and recognise the broad cost differences between different types of courses
- **Funding allocated on a competitive basis** over a three-year interval to institutions or groups of institutions stimulating collaborative responses to particular policy issues. This funding meets 50% of the cost of these activities, with the remainder supplied by the institutions (with an undertaking to move to 100% of the activity cost on

completion of the approved HEA funding cycle, usually three years after project initiation).

- **Major new initiatives to be funded on a competitive basis** e.g new faculties, research programmes etc
- **Tuition Fees** for certified eligible full time undergraduate students

HEA Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) Universities

The HEA allocates core (operational) funding to the universities using the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM). The model allocates core funding by utilising a transparent formula-based mechanism. (Approximately 25% of the core grant is allocated based on research metrics.) The core funding is allocated as a block grant to cover teaching, scholarship, research and supporting activities within institutions.

The allocation is based on a standard per capita amount in respect of weighted student numbers in four broad subject price groups. Student numbers in the four groups are weighted to reflect the relative cost of the subject groups. The standard per capita amount depends on the total level of funding received each year. Total available funding divided by total weighted student numbers equals the standard per capita amount.

A further weighting is given for research students. Part-time students are weighted, either according to credits as a proportion of full-time credits, or to course duration as a proportion of full-time course duration.

Research

In addition to weighting research students, 5% is top-sliced from the aggregate grant for all institutions, exclusive of the grant in lieu in tuition fees. This top-sliced amount is allocated as follows –

- 75% in proportion to proportion of Ph.D. and Masters research degrees awarded and
- 25% in proportion to proportion of research income per academic staff member, earned by each institution.

Further consideration will be given to increasing the 5% top-slice over time.

Pensions

Technical adjustments are made to reflect the different approaches to pension funding that exist within the sector at present.

Special Circumstances

Special circumstances which give rise to exceptional costs such as the TCD copyright library and small or specialist institutions are recognised.

Performance Related Element of Recurrent Grant

Following the establishment of an expert group to develop a National Strategy for Higher Education, it was agreed that the performance element of the model would be developed after the publication of the strategy. The group is due to report in 2010.

Institutes of Technology

Responsibility for funding the Institutes of Technology transferred to the HEA in 2007. The HEA are working on developing a funding model for the sector currently that will have similar principals to that in use for the university sector but will be tailored to suit the particulars of the institutes. The core grant for the institutes is currently allocated on a historical basis which is based on pay and non pay budgets and changes to the sectoral allocation. Institutes also participate in competitive funding processes for research and development grants and receive funding for certified eligible undergraduate students ('free fees).

4.2. Impact of quality assessments on funding

One of the areas that the Strategic Plan 2008-10 focused on was accountability through performance funding. One of the proposed outcomes of the strategic plan is to reach agreement on and implementation of performance funding as an integral element of the funding model for universities initially and all other HEA funded institutions ultimately. A key objective is to link the allocation of funding to the achievement of national objectives and to provide measured improvement in institutional performance and accountability through performance funding. Much work has been done in developing elements of performance funding to be integrated into the funding model under the planned new National Strategy for Higher Education.

4.3. Private funding

4.3.1. Tuition fees and/or households

Subject to certain residency regulations, Irish/EU students do not currently pay tuition fees for undergraduate courses in publicly funded HE colleges, though fees are payable in the Independent colleges.

However, students in the public colleges pay an annual registration fee, intended to cover non-tuition support costs (e.g. sports, recreation, etc).

Given scarcity of public resources to fund higher education, there have been calls from senior academics and industry figures to re-introduce tuition fees for Irish/EU students. The Government is currently opposed to the reintroduction of fees. Contrary to international trends the proportion of private investment in higher education in Ireland has declined over the past fifteen years (from 30% in 1995 to 15% in 2008).

4.3.2.   Business, other

Ireland has low levels of private investment by international standards and the proportion of private investment has declined over recent years. This runs directly counter to developments internationally where there is a definite trend towards increasing private contributions to the costs of higher education. In addition to a review of student contributions to the costs of higher education that is currently underway, internationalisation of Irish higher education is currently underdeveloped and this offers an opportunity to diversify the resource base for higher education while enriching our campuses and wider society with greater cultural and intellectual diversity. The HEA also advocates a greater emphasis on philanthropy as a means of diversifying the resource base for higher education.

4.3.3.   Grants/loans

There are a broad range of bursary or scholarship schemes in operation which provide an opportunity for students or potential students to access additional financial support if they meet the criteria. Schemes are available which are specifically targeted at students with limited means, students with disabilities and students from minority ethnic groups.
The maintenance grant is the main source of financial help available from the Irish State for students in full-time Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs) and full-time higher education undergraduate/postgraduate courses. Support is available to eligible students in most colleges in Ireland as well as eligible Irish students in many colleges in Northern Ireland, the UK and other EU States. For eligible students, the maintenance grant is there to help with the various costs of participating in further or higher education. Students on part-time courses, access or foundation courses (in higher education institutions) and short courses are not eligible to apply for a maintenance grant. Family and/or personal income is a key factor that will be assessed when a student applies for a maintenance grant but there are also some other conditions. In the academic year 2008/9, 33% of full-time undergraduate students were in receipt of maintenance grants.

5. Impact on Employability

The most recent of a regular HEA survey of graduates in employment showed that by 2008 only 3% of 2007 graduates were seeking employment. This compared at the time with a national unemployment rate of almost 6%. Other surveys have shown that wage differentials become significant as people get older. One recent survey showed that graduates under 25 earned about 20% higher wages than non-graduates, but that increased to almost double in the 50-60 year age group.

While a number of our universities have periods of work placement during their programmes, the majority rely on careers offices, special events and informal contacts to link their students to the labour market.

The Institutes of Technology have a specific mission to promote and support regional economic development. In fulfilment of their mission, they maintain a high level of interaction with enterprise in course development and in the identification of future skills needs.

At the national level, the government in 1997 established the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). It advises the Irish Government on current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labour market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. It has a central role in ensuring that labour market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met. The EGFSN reports to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Minister for Education and Science.

6. Recent and planned reforms of the tertiary education system

6.1. Description of recent reforms

Significant developments in recent years in the reform of higher education include:

- **The Universities Act (1997)** which provided for greater autonomy for the universities, set out the objects and functions of a university and established internal and external structures for their governance, quality assurance and accountability, while providing a legislative framework to preserve their academic freedom, diverse tradition and institutional autonomy.
- **The Institutes of Technology Act (2006)** which provided for greater institutional autonomy, improved governance and provided a statutory guarantee of academic freedom. As part of this, it brought the IoTs under the aegis of the Higher Education Authority, away from direct control by the Department of Education and Science.

- **The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999)** which established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The NQAI has responsibility for all certified awards in the non-university sector and collaborates closely with the university sector. It promotes a lifelong learning paradigm and facilitates access, transfer, progression and quality throughout the education system. It also has established and manages the Irish National Qualifications Framework and is working on the articulation between the Irish framework, the European Qualifications Frameworks and other national frameworks to promote greater international academic and labour mobility.

Research funding. As Irish governments in the 1990's began to see Ireland's economic future as dependent on the development of a knowledge based economy, it realised the need to invest heavily in the establishment of a strong research infrastructure.

- From the late 1990s the Irish government has made large scale investments available on a competitive basis to the higher education institutions for research through the **Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI)** operated by the HEA, the Irish Research council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET) and the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Science (IRCHSS).
- In addition in 2000, **Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)** was established to support research in biotechnology, information and communications technology and sustainable energy and energy-efficient technologies development.
- The **Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (2006 – 2013)** is investing in science, technology and innovation programmes to ensure that "Ireland by 2013 will be internationally renowned for the excellence of its research, and will be to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation driven culture".

6.2. Planned reforms (or reference to ongoing policy debate)

National Strategy for Higher Education. Over the past decade, Ireland has put in place the architecture for ensuring quality and relevance in higher education, for facilitating lifelong learning, for promoting access and equality in education. However, in the light of the increasing demands on the system and its importance for positioning Ireland in a competitive global knowledge economy, the Minister for Education and Science has launched (in 2009) a process to develop a new **National Strategy for Higher Education** which will set out a blueprint for the development of the sector of the next two decades.

Ireland by 2013 will be internationally renowned for the excellence of its research, and will be to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation driven culture