

Bologna Secretariat Completed National Reports and National Strategies for the Social Dimension should be sent to the Bologna Secretariat by email (secr@bologna2009benelux.org) no later than

1 November 2008.

PART I

BOLOGNA PROCESS NATIONAL REPORT: 2007-2009

Details

Country	Ireland
Date	XX October 2008.
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1. Main developments since London 2007

Please describe the important developments relating to the Bologna Process, including legislative reforms and changes in institutional structures, since the London meeting in 2007.

Much of the work to develop policies at national level in line with the Bologna agenda has been completed. The main developments since 2007 involve measures to encourage and deepen implementation of these policies at the institutional level.

a. IOT Act

The Institutes of Technology Act, 2006, (which became operational in early 2007) extended the remit of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to include the Institutes of Technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). This has created a unified strategic framework for higher education in Ireland and provides for greater autonomy for these institutes to fulfill their missions.

b. University Framework Implementation Network

- The University Framework Implementation Network was jointly established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Irish Universities Association at

the end of 2007. The purpose of the network is to deepen the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) within the university sector, primarily through the exchange of experience and practice between members.

c. Framework Implementation and Impact Study

The NQAI is currently undertaking a study on the implementation and impact of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and related policies on access, transfer and progression. The study will focus primarily on the work of the Authority, awarding bodies and providers of education and training. The Study Team aims to produce a report and set of recommendations by 30 April 2009.

d. Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN)

The IHEQN provides a forum for the discussion of quality assurance / quality improvement issues amongst the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland. Relevant developments since 2007 include:

- The publication of a Code of Practice which is intended to enable higher education institutions to set their own education provision arrangements for international students against agreed sector wide benchmarks (March 2008). Accessible from: <http://www.iheqn.ie/news/default.asp?NCID=13&NID=&NewsID=139>
- The adoption of *Principles for Reviewing the Effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Higher Education and Training, as a reference for reviews undertaken at the institutional level by bodies or agencies external to the higher education institution under review* (December 2007)

Accessible from: <http://www.iheqn.ie/news/default.asp?NCID=13&NID=&NewsID=140>

e. Strategic Innovation Fund:

The Government introduced a multi-annual Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) for higher education in 2006. The Fund is intended to be a major catalyst in bringing about substantial change and quality improvement in our higher education institutions and promoting system-wide collaboration. Projects approved under the Fund are aimed at institutional reform, enhancing teaching and learning, improving access and life long learning and enabling the development of fourth level activity. Funding of some €42m was approved in 2006 for projects under the first cycle of SIF. Further funding of over €100m was approved in 2007 under the second cycle.

f. National Involvement in EQF

The NQAI, as Ireland's National Co-ordination Point for the implementation of the European Framework of Qualifications (EQF), will oversee the referencing of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications to the EQF. The aim is to complete the process by Summer 2009.

g. Quality Review of NQAI and IUQB

NQAI was reviewed in 2006/07 and as a result was granted full membership of ENQA. The IUQB was reviewed in 2007 and the report has been published recently. This will enable the IUQB to fulfil a criterion for membership of the ENQA.

h. Amalgamation of Quality Authorities

In the Budget in October, the Irish Government announced its intentions to amalgamate the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The new organisation will also take responsibility for the external quality assurance review of the universities, a function which is currently performed by the Irish Universities Quality Board and the Higher Education Authority.

2. Partnership

Please describe the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country.

A national steering group is in place to oversee the implementation of the Bologna Process. It is chaired by the Department of Education and Science and has nominees of the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology (CoDIT), the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB), the Union of Students of Ireland (USI), the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) and the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT).

Ireland also has a team of 7 Bologna Experts who provide a resource to the wider higher education community in responding to the challenges of implementing the Bologna action lines.

a) Does your country have a national working group for Bologna follow-up¹

Yes

b) Does your national Bologna follow-up group include representatives of

Ministry	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rectors' conference	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Academic staff	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Students	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Staff trade unions	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
National Quality Assurance Agency	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Employers	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

c) Does your country have a Bologna promoters' group² Yes

d) Does your national Bologna promoters' group include representatives of

¹ A group that develops policy proposals for implementing the Bologna Process

² A group that supports/advises HEIs on implementation of the Bologna Process

In accordance with the requirements set out by the Commission in the invitation to submit for national teams of Bologna Experts, Ireland has appointed Bologna Experts that are representative of the academic staff and students of institutions. In accordance with Commission requirements they are “professionals active in higher education ... [and]... hold one of the following positions (or a combination thereof):

- Senior Academics
- Directors of Study
- Higher Education Experts
- Director of Quality Promotion
- Students

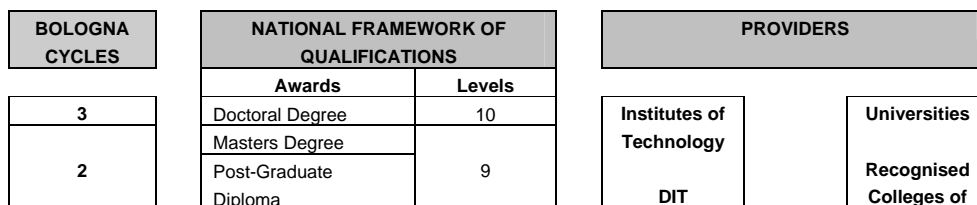
DEGREE SYSTEM

3. Stage of implementation of the first and second cycle

a) Please describe the progress made towards introducing the first and second cycles.

The first and second cycles are fully in place in Ireland. 100% of higher education students are in one of the three cycles. This has been confirmed by the verification of the compatibility of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Framework).

One of the key tasks of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 was the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications. The first milestone was reached in July 2004 with the announcement of the implementation arrangements for the framework in higher education. The Authority has determined that awards at levels 6 to 10 will be made by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology, while universities generally make the awards from levels 7 to 10.



1	Honours Bachelor Degree	8	Private Colleges and other HEIs	the National University of Ireland
	Higher Diploma			
	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	7		
	Higher Certificate/Advanced Certificate*	6		
	Further Education/Schools Awards	1 – 5	Direct entry or entry from Second Level and Further Education and Training	

*The Advanced Certificate is a further education and training award at level 6 and is not aligned with the Bologna Framework.

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

b) Please give the percentage of the total number of all³ students below doctoral level enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2007/08.

Total number of all students below doctoral level	Number enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2006/07 ⁴	% of all students enrolled in the two cycle degree system in 2006/07
158,218.	158,218	100%

Figures not available yet for 2007/2008 year.

c) Please add comments which accurately describe the current situation regarding implementation of the two cycle system in your country:

The two cycles are fully in place in Ireland. This has been confirmed by the verification of the compatibility of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (the Bologna Framework).

This self-certification of the Compatibility of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area has concluded that:

- The Irish Higher Certificate is an intermediate qualification within the Bologna first cycle.
- The Irish Ordinary Bachelor Degree is compatible with the Bologna first cycle descriptor. However, holders of Irish Ordinary Bachelor Degrees and their equivalent

³ "All" = all students who could be involved in 2-cycle system i.e. NOT those in doctoral programmes and NOT those in short HE programmes. *NB Students of ALL study fields are taken into account*

⁴ If countries have more recent data available after November 1, they can provide an update but no later than January 15, 2009

former awards do not generally immediately access programmes leading to second cycle awards.

- The Irish Honours Bachelor Degree is compatible with completion of the Bologna first cycle.
- The Irish Higher Diploma is a qualification at the same level as completion of the first cycle, and is a qualification typically attained in a different field of learning than an initial first cycle award.
- The Irish Masters Degree is compatible with completion of the Bologna second cycle.
- The Irish Post-Graduate Diploma is an intermediate qualification within the Bologna second cycle.

It is of note that there is an apparent inconsistency or paradox in the treatment of both the Ordinary Bachelor Degree and the Honours Bachelor Degree as first cycle qualifications compatible with the Bologna first cycle descriptor. The compatibility of both with the Bologna first cycle descriptor has been demonstrated in terms of the comparisons of the learning outcomes. Notwithstanding this, these awards are included at two different levels in the Irish framework, with different descriptors, and the Ordinary Bachelor Degree does not typically give access to Masters Degree (second cycle) programmes at present in Ireland.

A summary of the typical arrangements for progression are as follows:

- Entry to a programme leading to a Higher Certificate is generally for school leavers and holders of equivalent qualifications.
- Entry to a programme leading to an ab-initio Ordinary Bachelor Degree is typically for school leavers and those with equivalent qualifications. In addition, there are 1-year add-on Ordinary Bachelor Degree programmes for holders of the Higher Certificate.
- Entry to a programme leading to an Honours Bachelor degree is typically for high-achieving school leavers or holders of equivalent qualifications. In addition, there are typically programmes of 1 year add-on duration leading to Honours Bachelor Degrees for holders of Ordinary Bachelor Degrees.
- Entry to a programme leading to a Higher Diploma is typically for holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees but can also be for holders of Ordinary Bachelor Degrees. It is of note that the Higher Diploma is typically in a different field of learning than the initial award.
- Entry to a programme leading to a taught Masters degree is typically for holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees. Also in some cases, entry to such programmes can be permitted for those with Ordinary Bachelor Degrees or equivalent who have some relevant work experience. Furthermore, in some cases, entry to such programmes is permitted for people with extensive experience.
- Entry to a programme leading to a research Masters Degree is typically for holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees, typically with a high classification attained – first or second class honours.
- Entry to a programme leading to a Post-Graduate Diploma is typically for holders of Honours Bachelors Degrees but can also be for holders of Ordinary Bachelor Degrees.

4. Stage of implementation of the third cycle

Please describe the progress made towards implementing doctoral studies as the third Bologna cycle.

Please include:

- **the percentage of doctoral candidates following structured doctoral programmes including both taught courses and independent research**

The Higher Education Authority have commissioned CIRCA consultants to conduct a review of structured doctoral programmes. The result of this review will become known in late 2008 and will provide details on the percentage of doctoral candidates on structured programmes.

- **the normal length of full-time doctoral studies**

The normal length of full time doctoral programmes is three to four years. The development of structured programmes envisages four-year programmes in most instances. This is based on the provision of four year structured programmes under the Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation.

- **other elements apart from independent research that are included in doctoral study programmes - e.g. taught courses in the chosen discipline, other taught courses, teaching activities (if these are required as part of doctoral studies), etc.**
- **information on whether interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills are integrated in doctoral studies**

In a number of recently funded initiatives, the doctoral programme includes the completion of taught courses. Academics have been involved in such programmes for some time. The first national agency to introduce these innovative programmes was the Health Research Board's PhD scholars programme, which has operated for several years. In recent years, the HEA and the Research Councils have provided support for additional structured programmes that include taught courses. These programmes will become an integral part of the doctorate and include both research specific and transferable skills development opportunities.

Many students undertake teaching & demonstration activities as part of their programme.

There are also a small number of Professional Doctorate programmes, which include a substantial taught element in addition to the thesis.

A range of innovative doctoral programmes are emerging in higher education institutions in Ireland. With support from the SIF, HEIs are developing new models for doctoral programmes, this includes the establishment of graduate schools and inter-institutional and joint doctoral programmes (including a credit structure). SIF funding is also supporting trans-sectoral mobility and generic and transferable skills courses for doctoral students.

- **the supervisory and assessment procedures for doctoral studies**

All PhD students have at least one primary supervisor, responsible for overseeing the student's work and providing assistance in overcoming challenges. In some programmes,

students will have access to additional supervisory support who may provide assistance with particular issues that their expertise renders appropriate. Any supervisor of doctoral candidates must themselves hold a doctorate. Additionally, a Faculty and/or university graduate studies committee monitors the student's progress to ensure accountability of the supervision process and the resolution of any difficulties in the candidate-supervisor relationship. Typically, doctoral candidates must successfully complete an assessment including an oral and/or written presentation on their research's progress before transferring to full doctoral track. This transfer assessment takes place between twelve and twenty-four months following commencement.

In most institutions, a doctoral candidate cannot submit their work for examination without their principal supervisor's support. Upon receiving the supervisor's agreement that the thesis is worthy of submission the university/faculty convenes an examination committee. This consists of at least one internal and at one external examiner. The external examiner must be a recognised expert in the thesis area. The doctoral candidate then undergoes a viva voce, which is an oral defence of the thesis before the internal and external examiners.

○ **information on whether doctoral studies are included in your country's qualifications framework and linked to learning outcomes –**

Doctoral studies are included at Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications, and all awards included at this level conform to the level indicators and award-type descriptors set out in the Framework.

○ **information on whether credit points are used in measuring workload in doctoral studies.**

Universities are moving towards an agreement on a credit transfer agreement on the non-research elements of structured doctoral programmes. This will form the basis for recognising and giving value to whatever training elements are involved in doctoral programmes and provide the flexibility to participate actively in inter-institutional postgraduate research programmes. Accumulation of ECTS credits will not form the basis of assessment of the doctoral thesis, which remains the thesis and its contribution to new knowledge.

○ **Information on the status of the doctoral students (students, early stage researchers, both)**

HEIs would see little distinction between student and early stage researcher. This is consistent with the generally accepted European Commission definition as a person having attained the necessary qualifications to embark on a PhD and within four years' full-time equivalent of graduation. In terms of employment status, the Irish HEIs consider doctoral candidates/students as students; however, HEIs do not consider this inconsistent with their status as early stage researchers as treated in the European Researchers Charter and Code of Conduct for their Recruitment. Consequently, in 2006, the Presidents of the seven Irish universities signed the Charter and Code guidelines for the recruitment of researchers. It is worth noting that a number of PhD students are also employees of the HEI. This is the case, for example, for those taken on the European Marie Curie Initial Training Networks.

5. Relationship between higher education and research

a) Please describe the main trends in the role of higher education institutions in research in your country.

The Government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) full implementation has been costed at some €8 billion.

Key actions arising from SSTI are -

- Build on recent National Development Plan (NDP) investments to deliver a sustainable, world class research system across the spectrum of humanities, physical and social sciences;
- Deliver quality by increasing the number of research teams led by internationally competitive principal investigators;
- Upgrade existing infrastructure and develop new facilities to support research;
- Enhance postgraduate skills through a graduate schools mechanism;
- Develop sustainable career paths for researchers;
- Enhance the mobility of researchers;
- Double the number of PhD graduates by 2013;

It should be noted that the vast majority of all publicly funded research is conducted in higher education institutions although notable public research institutions such as Teagasc – The Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority, The Marine Institute, Met Eireann and the Central Fisheries' Board also conduct research.

Continued increased investment in higher education R&D has resulted in significant strides being made in the development of Ireland's third level academic base under the current National Development Plan. The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (€865m approved to date) and the initiatives of Science Foundation Ireland (around €1bn expenditure to date), in particular, have changed the scale and quality of research undertaken in Ireland and the infrastructure supporting it.

This work will continue and intensify over the coming years because investment in human capital development is viewed as pivotal to the success and sustainability of Ireland's national innovation system.

The Government's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) is an incentivised, competitive funding model to stimulate the research environment and encourage critical mass, greater inter-institutional collaboration and enhanced interdisciplinarity, thereby enhancing quality and effectiveness within higher education and research. The total allocation for SIF, over a 5 year period, is €10 million.

The key objectives of the SIF are:

- To enhance the delivery of core activities of education and research, through effective and creative institutional and inter-institutional collaboration and including, where necessary, appropriate internal restructuring and rationalisation efforts;

- To support enabling measures to prepare for the expansion and development of post-graduate education (including expansion and development of graduate schools), including both intra- and inter-institutional collaboration;
- To support innovation and quality improvement in teaching and learning, including enhanced teaching methods, programme restructuring, modularisation and e-learning; and
- To support access, retention and progression both at individual institutional level and through inter-institutional, sectoral and inter-sectoral collaboration

The significant increases in national investment in research, together with the development of a state of the art infrastructure and the growing integration of higher education research with enterprise and sectoral research, provide the foundations to differentiate Ireland as a highly stimulating place to conduct research.

b) Please outline any measures to improve co-operation between higher education institutions and other private and public institutions that undertake research. Please include:

- percentage of GDP spent on research
 - from public funds
 - from private funds
- total annual national research expenditure (expressed in national currency)
 - from public funds
 - from private funds
 - percentage of research carried out in higher education institutions (in terms of funding)
- details of the funding mechanisms for doctoral students in your country

The Government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation has been prepared on the basis of a whole of Government approach to focus on research and development in our third level institutions and in the Enterprise sector. This integrated approach will ensure that we have ambitious and coordinated actions on all fronts – while ensuring that key national targets are met.

Total R&D spending across all performing sectors (GERD) increased by 14.3% to €2.33 billion in 2006. With robust R&D spending gains now outpacing economic growth, the overall R&D intensity ratio climbed to 1.56% of Gross National Product in 2006, ahead of the 1.32% GERD intensity ratio recorded at the start of the Lisbon process in 2000. The rapid progress in R&D spending has also allowed for a narrowing of the spending intensity gap between the EU and OECD averages.

R&D performed in the business sector (BERD) rose to an estimated €1.56 billion in 2006, almost double the level recorded in 2000. The latest 17.3% annual increase between 2005 and 2006 facilitated a rise in the BERD intensity ratio to 1.05% of GNP. Higher Education sector performed R&D (HERD) climbed to just over €600 million in 2006, over 2.5 times the €238 million HERD recorded in 2000. The HERD intensity ratio at 0.40% of GNP is now in line with the EU and OECD averages. Finally government sector performed R&D (Goverd) rose to €170 million in 2006 (0.11% of GNP).

Funding for R&D activities was sourced mainly from businesses, which contributed 65.5% of funds for R&D in 2006. This was in line with the target for two-thirds of total R&D

investment to come from businesses. The next largest source of funding for R&D came from the public sector which funded 32.8% of R&D investments. A further 1.7% of R&D activity was financed from other sources.

On the human resources side, the number of employed researchers has risen dramatically since 2000, in parallel with the strong increases in R&D investment. The ratio of full-time adjusted equivalent researchers per thousand in employment has risen from 5.0 in 2000 to 6.0 in 2006, and is now in line with the EU average and only slightly below the OECD average.

c) Is there any tracking system to follow the further career of doctoral graduates?

Yes No If Yes, please specify:

Doctoral graduates in Ireland are tracked through two primary methods:

- Each university has in place its own graduate tracking system. These have until recently focused on bachelor and master level graduates, but there is now an increased emphasis at institutional level in tracking doctoral graduates also.
- The First Destination Report, compiled by the Higher Education Authority, is based on an annual survey of graduates six to nine months after graduation, including doctoral graduates. This survey presents a snap shot picture of the labour market or further study situation of students who graduated in the previous academic year, having completed a full-time course of study.

In addition to the above, the Irish Universities Study is a large web-based survey tool targeted at all university undergraduate and postgraduate students in Ireland. It operates on a longitudinal basis, and starting in 2009 should also be able to provide extensive additional information on doctoral graduates.

6. Access⁵ and admission to the next cycle

Describe the arrangements for access between the first and second cycles and between the second and third cycles.

Entry onto first cycle programmes -

- Entry to a programme leading to a Higher Certificate is generally open to school leavers and holders of equivalent qualifications, including awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).
- Entry to a programme leading to an ab-initio Ordinary Bachelor Degree is typically for school leavers and those with equivalent qualifications, including awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). In addition, there are 1-year add-on Ordinary Bachelor Degree programmes for holders of the Higher Certificate.

⁵ Access as defined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention: "Access: the right of qualified candidates to apply and be considered for admission to higher education."

- Entry to a programme leading to an Honours Bachelor degree is typically for high-achieving school leavers or holders of equivalent qualifications, including awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). In addition, there are programmes, typically of 1 year duration, leading to Honours Bachelor Degrees for holders of Ordinary Bachelor Degrees.

Entry onto second cycle programmes -

- All Honours Bachelor Degrees give access to the second cycle
- Entry to a programme leading to a Higher Diploma is typically for holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees, but can also be open to holders of Ordinary Bachelor Degrees. It is of note that the Higher Diploma is typically in a different field of learning than the initial award.
- Entry to a programme leading to a taught Masters degree is typically open to holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees. Also in some cases, entry to such programmes can be permitted for those with Ordinary Bachelor Degrees or equivalent who have some relevant work experience. Furthermore, in some cases, entry to such programmes is permitted for people with extensive experience.
- Entry to a programme leading to a research Masters Degree is typically open to holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees, typically with a high classification attained – first or second class honours.
- Entry to a programme leading to a Postgraduate Diploma is typically open to holders of Honours Bachelors Degrees, but can also be for holders of Ordinary Bachelor Degrees.

Entry onto third cycle programmes -

- Entry to a programme leading to a Doctoral Degree is typically open to holders of Honours Bachelor Degrees and holders of Masters degrees. The general model is that a holder of an Honours Bachelor Degree with a high classification enters initially onto a Masters research programme, and transfers on to a Doctoral programme after one year on the Masters research programme. In total, the number of years in the programme would generally be at least 3 years. There is also access to research Doctoral Degrees for holders of Masters Degrees whether taught Masters or research Masters.

6.1 Access and admission between the first and second cycles

Please indicate:

a) the percentage of first cycle qualifications that give access to the second cycle 100%*

* The Higher Certificate, at Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications, is an intermediate qualification within the Bologna first cycle i.e. it is a qualification which signifies completion of the higher education short cycle within, or linked to, the first cycle. There are 1-year add-on Ordinary Bachelor Degree programmes for holders of the Higher Certificate.

b) any first cycle qualifications that do not give access to the second cycle (please specify)

N/A

c) any special requirements for access to a second cycle programme in the same field of studies: please tick whether graduates must:

sit entrance exam	No
complete additional courses	No
have work experience	No

If the answer to the last point is yes, please specify what type of work experience is required:

d) any further special requirements for access to a second cycle programme in the same field of studies

NONE

e) to which students the above special requirements apply (please tick):

all students	NONE
holders of particular first cycle qualifications	NONE
students of the same field coming from other HEIs	NONE

f) which of the requirements apply to students coming from other fields of studies (please tick):

entrance exam	No
additional courses	In some cases
work experience	In some cases

6.2 Access and admission between the second and third cycles

Please indicate:

a) *the percentage of second cycle qualifications that give access to the third cycle*

100%

b) any second cycle qualifications that do not give access to the third cycle (please specify)

None

c) any measures planned to remove obstacles between cycles

Not applicable

7. Employability of graduates/ cooperation with employers

a) What measures are being taken to enhance the employability of graduates with bachelor qualifications? Please include the most recent statistical data on the employment status of graduates of all cycles.

There is a strong tradition of the relevance to the labour market of the Ordinary Bachelor Degrees and Honours Bachelor Degrees in the National Framework of Qualifications. Employers understand the nature of these qualifications and they are all considered relevant to various levels of employment.

The Government policy is to encourage learners to attain qualifications of relevance to the labour market which also provide opportunities for transfer and progression in the higher education system. It is not the aim of the Government to seek to encourage either entry to the labour market or progression to further learning on an absolute basis.

Projects supported under the Strategic Innovation Fund have included transferable and generic skills training, in addition to internship placements as a component of higher education programmes in order to facilitate the transition from third level to the workplace. Examples of these are -

- Dundalk Institute of Technology project, *Creating the Entrepreneurial Graduate*, which aims to change the way in which entrepreneurship is taught, delivered and accredited, and proposes to create entrepreneurial graduates by embedding entrepreneurship education into existing technology programmes.
- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology proposal to develop, pilot and evaluate a new model of accredited student internships as a feature of first-degree offerings. Students, their potential employers in the private, public and community sectors will collaborate and will simultaneously focus on enhanced student learning, regional skills deficits and the development of the regional innovation system.
- The Limerick Institute of Technology has been engaged in a related initiative to develop work-based learning initiatives in partnership with employers, in selected pilot courses where there is a recognised need to upskill the workforce.

“What Do Graduates Do? The Class of ...” is a report produced annually by Higher Education Authority. 89% of PhD graduates were employed nine months after graduation. The most recent report for 2005 shows that:

- 79% of 2005 Higher/University Certificate graduates went on to further study
- 46% of Ordinary Bachelor Degree/University Diploma graduates continued with further study compared to 35% of Honours Degree graduates
- Graduates who attain a First Class Honours Bachelor Degree are least likely to be seeking employment and most likely to have continued on to further study
- 3% of the class of 2005 were seeking employment in April 2006
- 2% of Honours Bachelor Degree graduates were seeking employment in 2005 compared to 3% in 2004

If your higher education institutions also provide professional bachelor programmes, please provide employability data for both types of bachelors separately

N/A

b) To what extent there is a dialogue in your country between higher education institutions and employers on:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>curriculum design, work placements and international experience</i> <p>Work placements are available on a large number of courses throughout the third level sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>accreditation/quality assurance</i> ▪ <i>university governance</i> | <p>Significant</p> <p>Significant</p> <p>Some</p> |
|--|--|

Employers are represented on the governing bodies of Irish HEIs.

HETAC engages in dialogue with employers through its governance structure (the board includes a nominee from the national employers' body), standard setting function (the expert group invariably include industry representatives), institutional review and programme accreditation (the panels invariably include representatives of industry/employers). HETAC has also extended accreditation to a variety on new and non-traditional providers of education and training, many of whom are closely linked to employers. These include professional associations to offer training such as, the Sales Institute of Ireland, the Irish Institute of Purchasing and Materials Management and the national employers body itself, the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation. In some case the in-company training carried out by employers is directly accredited (for example Thomas Crosby Holdings). Employers' bodies are routinely included in HETAC public consultations. HETAC and the institutions in the HETAC sector in turn attend events and conferences organised by and for employers.

In the university sector, an IBEC/IUA Joint Council promotes collaboration and co-operation between enterprise and universities. It provides a forum for our university heads and senior business people to discuss national and international issues of common interest to enterprises and universities.

c) Are first cycle graduates able to pursue careers in the public service on an equal footing with other graduates? **Yes**

d) Have you aligned recruitment procedures and career structures in the public service to take account of the Bologna changes?

Yes

In August 2007, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland established a policy group with representatives of all the Irish awarding bodies – the State Examinations Commission, the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the universities – to consider the role that qualifications play in recruitment and selection processes in the public sector. The policy group identified current practices in public sector recruitment which prove vague or unduly restrictive and may lead to ambiguities and inconsistencies in the use of qualifications. The Authority suggested one way to address these issues is to agree and adopt a set of Guidelines for Good Practice in the use of qualifications by public sector recruiters. The Authority proposed an approach to setting out such Guidelines for Good Practice, regarding both the specification of qualification requirements and processes to determine whether qualification requirements have been met. Adhering to such objectives will ensure fairness and consistency, appropriate interpretation, ensure practices of both employers and applicants are understood, encourage a broad range of applicants to apply for public sector posts.

8. Implementation of national qualifications framework

Please answer the questions below. Please add comments which accurately describe the current situation in your country.

a) Has the national qualifications framework been prepared⁶?

Yes

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established on a statutory basis, under the Qualifications (Education and Training Act) 1999 on 26 February, 2001. This legislation was proposed by the Minister for Education and Science, whose responsibilities include higher education. The legislation can be found here:

[http://www.nqai.ie/Qualifications%20\(Education%20and%20Training\)%20Act.%201999.pdf](http://www.nqai.ie/Qualifications%20(Education%20and%20Training)%20Act.%201999.pdf)

Section 7 of the Qualifications Act requires the Authority “to establish and maintain a framework . . . for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence”. Under section 8, the Authority is required to “establish policies and criteria on which the framework of qualifications shall be based.” Building on this, the Authority has defined the National Framework of Qualifications to be:

"The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards."

The Irish Framework was developed by the Authority in consultation with stakeholders. These stakeholders included Government Departments, Funding Agencies, Quality

⁶ A national framework of qualifications compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA

Assurance Agencies, representative bodies for further and higher education institutions, social partners, the community and voluntary sector, professional bodies and learners and the general public. This involved a mixture of consultative mechanisms including calls for public submissions on draft proposals, public conferences and workshops and representative consultative groups.

The Framework was launched in October 2003.

b) Does the framework or proposed framework include generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences? **Yes**

The Irish National Framework of qualifications (NFQ) is required in law to be based on learning outcomes (or as the legislation states, “standards of knowledge, skill and competence”) – this is set out above.

The NFQ is based on 10 levels, each of which has a specified level indicator. At each level in the Framework there is one, or more, award-types. Each award-type has its own award-type descriptor. It is the responsibility of the Authority to develop these level indicators and award-type descriptors. For each award-type a wide range of named awards have been, and will be, developed. It is the responsibility of awarding bodies to develop named awards.

The descriptors for the major award-types in the framework are based on strands and sub-strands of learning outcomes as follows:

- knowledge: breadth and kind
- know-how and skill: range and selectivity
- competence: context, role, learning to learn and insight

The descriptors for the major award-types are included in appendix 4 of the Authority’s determinations document: <http://www.nqai.ie/determinations.pdf>.

Irish higher education awarding bodies have agreed to use the descriptors of the higher education award-types as the descriptors of the awards that they make. Under section 8, the Authority is required to “establish policies and criteria on which the framework of qualifications shall be based.” The initial Framework policies and criteria have been adopted by the Authority and are available here: <http://www.nqai.ie/polandcrit.pdf>

Chapter 6 of these policies sets out the process for the inclusion of awards in the Framework as follows:

- “It is the role of the Authority to determine the level indicators and the award-type descriptors. These will form the basis for the setting of standards for named awards by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Dublin Institute of Technology.
- In relation to school and university awards, the aim is that the level indicators and the award-type descriptors in the framework will be developed in a way that will facilitate the inclusion of these.”

Accordingly, Irish higher education awarding bodies are now using the descriptors of the higher education award-types as the descriptors of the awards that they make and it is a matter for them to have processes in place for their own award-making.

The compatibility of the NFQ with the Bologna Framework has been verified following a formal alignment process. For further information please see:

<http://www.nqai.ie/docs/publications/31.doc>

c) Does it include ECTS credit ranges for the first and second cycle? **YES**

d) Has the NQF been nationally discussed with all stakeholders? **YES**

If the answer to d) is No, please answer question e):

e) has a timetable been agreed for consultations with all stakeholders?

If the answer to d) is Yes, please answer the following questions:

f) Are all formal arrangements/decisions for implementing the framework in place and have the necessary formal decisions for establishing the framework been taken?

YES

g) How far has the implementation of the national qualifications framework progressed (please tick one)

All school awards are in the Framework and all of the awards accredited by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) are in the Framework. Within higher education, all of the awards accredited by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), i.e. those of the institutes of technology and other HETAC-accredited providers, are included in the Framework.

The universities' awards (and those of the associated colleges) that conform to the following major award-types are fully in the Framework and have been since 2004:

- Ordinary Bachelor Degree at Level 7
- Honours Bachelor Degree at Level 8
- Masters Degree (Taught and Research) at Level 9
- Doctoral Degrees (PhD, professional doctorates) at Level 10
- Higher Diploma (generally conversion courses from one discipline to another that are postgraduate in time but at Honours Bachelor level) at Level 8
- Postgraduate Diplomas (generally sub-components of masters degrees that have learning outcomes that are clearly at Level 9) at Level 9

Work has also recently been completed with regard to the clarification of the Framework levels of the universities' non-major certificates and diplomas, which in Framework terms are known as minor, special purpose and supplemental awards, according to an approach agreed between the Authority and the universities, and which was published in January 2006 (http://www.nqai.ie/publication_jan2006.html).

Separate, but related, discussions are also ongoing about one particular award, the Higher Diploma in Education, with regard to its status and placement in the Framework.

h) What is the stage of progress on the self-certification of compatibility with the EHEA framework ?

Completed

Ireland undertook a pilot project of the self-certification of the Compatibility of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. This verification process was completed in 2006.

i) Has the self-certification report been published?

Yes

The final report on the "Verification of Compatibility of Irish National Framework of Qualifications with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area" was published in November 2006 and is available from: <http://www.nqai.ie/docs/publications/31.doc>

NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA (ESG)⁷

⁷ <http://www.enqa.net/files/BergenReport210205.pdf>

9. Reviewing the QA system against the ESG⁸ and national support for implementation

a) *Has your national QA system been reviewed against the ESG?* **Yes**

b) *If a review has been undertaken or is planned, please give further details of the review process.*

Quality Review of the NQAI

In 2006/07, the NQAI undertook a Quality Review, which had been commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, in association with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and which sought to evaluate:

- how effectively the Qualifications Authority has performed its principal statutory functions since its establishment;
- the suitability of the organisational structures and processes of the executive of the Qualifications Authority for the performance of its functions in the future; and
- the extent to which the Qualifications Authority, in the performance of its relevant functions, complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The review concluded that the Authority has carried out its functions effectively in both of these areas, that it fully meets the European Standards, and that it is well placed to progress to the next stage in the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications. The self-evaluation by the Authority, the comprehensive study undertaken by the Panel and the response by the Authority to the Panel's report were considered by the Departments as having been important contributions in helping to shape the future direction of policy in this important area, and to have demonstrated the high level of support from stakeholders which they considered to be a feature of the Authority's work. On foot of the review, The Board of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education decided to grant NQAI full membership of ENQA on the basis that it is a meta-accreditor of HETAC and a direct quality assessor of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

Further information on the Review is available from: http://www.nqai.ie/about_quality.html

Quality Review of HETAC

Under section 9 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 the NQAI may from time to time review the performance by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) of its functions. Accordingly, a review of HETAC was commissioned in September 2005. The review evaluated how effectively HETAC has performed its principal statutory functions since its establishment and had particular regard to the policies and procedures that the Council has developed for each function and how they are being implemented and operated. The review also established the extent to which the Council in the performance of these functions complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

⁸ ESG - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

At the conclusion of the review in June 2006, the Authority deemed that in fulfilment of its statutory review function, HETAC had performed effectively its principal statutory functions since its establishment and had developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented and are being operated as appropriate. The Authority was also satisfied that in the performance of its functions, HETAC complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Further information on the HETAC Review is available from:
http://www.nqai.ie/award_hetac_rev.html

Quality Review of the IUQB and membership of the ENQA

In 2007/08, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) commissioned an external expert group to conduct an evaluation of the Irish Universities' Quality Board (IUQB), at the request of the board of the IUQB.

The purpose of the review was three-fold:

- It sought to review the performance of the IUQB in carrying out its functions and in its execution of HEA-funded projects.
- The panel also examined the IUQB's coherence with European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- The review was developmental in intent, and aimed at assisting the IUQB in achieving its quality enhancement goals and to further develop its internal quality culture.

The review also included an evaluation of the IUQB's compliance with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The expert group concluded that the IUQB was compliant or substantially compliant in all areas of the ESG.

c) If a review process has been undertaken, did it result in any of the following:

Stakeholder consultation on changes required to the national QA system? Yes

The introduction of specific financial or other incentives aimed at improving the internal quality assurance processes in institutions?

Funding is already provided on an annual basis towards the cost of quality assurance in the higher education sector.

- *Other measures*

d) If incentives and/or other measures have been introduced with the aim of improving the internal quality assurance processes in institutions, has any evidence of the impact of these changes been gathered? Yes

The NQAI is required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 to review the effectiveness of the Dublin Institute of Technology's (DIT) quality assurance procedures on a periodic basis. In winter 2007, the DIT and the Authority agreed a revised approach to the manner in which the Institute would inform the Authority of the findings arising out of the application of its quality assurance procedures and the plans of the Institute for implementing these findings. Thus, on an annual basis the Institute now provides the Authority with the school/faculty review reports that took place during the previous academic year, as well as an update on the Institute's progress with regard to the implementation of the recommendations from the review of effectiveness

In the HETAC sector institutions operate their assessments in line with a policy on fair and consistent assessment devised and published by HETAC. This has recently been revised to explicitly address the learning outcomes approach embodied in the national Framework of Qualifications. All programme validations explicitly consider the design of assessment and its relationship to the programme outcomes. These programme outcomes are in turn linked to national standards determined by HETAC. The implementation and evaluation of policy on fair and consistent assessment of learners is one of the elements considered in HETAC's system of institutional reviews.

9.1. Internal quality assurance in higher education institutions

Describe the internal QA systems in place in your HEIs.

Universities

The Irish Universities Quality Board was established to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing quality assurance procedures and processes, in line with best international systems and to facilitate the conduct of statutory reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and their outcomes.

Internal reviews of the academic and administrative departments of universities are statutorily required and are organised by the individual universities (with the assistance of external reviewers). Reviews of the seven universities in Ireland are available at the following address: <http://www.iuqb.ie/info/reviews-of-university-depts.aspx>

Section 35 of the Universities Act 1997 lays down quality assurance requirements for the universities. The scope of the legislation is broad and covers teaching and learning, research, administration and all other aspects of activity in the university. The operation of the process can be at the level of academic departments, administration and service departments, academic programmes, student services, faculties and the institution as a whole.⁹

The unit level evaluation is to take place at least every ten years. It must include initially the involvement of employees of the university and then persons, other than employees, who are capable of making national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. Implementation of review findings is required, as finances permit

Most importantly, the Governing Authority of the university, under Section 35(4) of the Universities Act, having consulted with the HEA, must provide for a review of the effectiveness of the procedures adopted by the university for quality assurance and quality improvement (QA/QI). The Governing Authority will publish the results of such a review under Section 41 of the Act and the review report must be presented to the Minister for Education and Science, who is required to lay copies of the review report before both Houses of Parliament. In addition, the HEA under Section 49 may review the procedures established.

Guidelines for all stages of the process are available from the website of the Quality Office in each university. Following the review a Quality Improvements Plan is prepared by the unit. This generally includes a one-year plan and a five-year plan monitored over time by the Quality Officer. Over all the length of the review cycle is about seven years in most universities.¹⁰

The Institute of Technology sector

HETAC is the qualifications awarding body for third-level educational and training institutions outside the university sector.

⁹ IUQB, *Submission to the OECD Review Team on the Irish Higher Education System in Irish Universities*, p.1.

¹⁰ IUQB, *Submission to the OECD Review Team on the Irish Higher Education System in Irish Universities*, p.2-3.

Programme accreditation in Institutes of Technology and other institutions with HETAC awards is carried out on the basis of recommendations by panels of experts. These panels review documentation submitted by providers, visit the institution and make a written report. Panels vary in size, from a minimum of four, and sometimes a single panel may consider more than one programme. The panels are independent of the institution and consist of a chairperson, experts in the academic discipline(s) concerned drawn from other HETAC providers, Irish universities and higher education institutions in other countries, and industry and the public service.

The purpose is to determine whether the proposed programme will meet the standards of awards in the National Framework of Qualifications. Certificates of Programme Approval are issued either by HETAC or by an Institute of Technology under delegation of authority from HETAC with a five year validity. Programmes must be reviewed and re-accredited within five years. The awarding body is advised for this re-accreditation by an independent panel appointed by the institution for each programme.

a) How many HEIs have published a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality?

All HEIs have published strategic plans which commit to the enhancement of quality assurance and quality improvement.

b) How many HEIs have arrangements in place for the internal approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards?

All HEIs

c) How many HEIs have described their programmes in terms of learning outcomes?

All HEIs

d) Are student assessments at HEIs designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes (based on published criteria) applied in a consistent way?

Most HEIs

e) How many HEIs publish up to date, impartial and objective information about the programmes and awards offered?

All HEIs

Each institution publishes material on the programmes and awards offered in the institution. This information is available on the websites of the HEIs.

10. Stage of development of external quality assurance system

Describe the external quality assurance system operating in your country.

a) the stage of implementation of your external quality assurance system

There are three bodies in Ireland with responsibility for the periodic external review of quality assurance of public higher education - ¹¹

- IUQB (the devolved statutory responsibility is with the universities)
- HETAC (with statutory responsibility for the institutes of technology)
- NQAI (with statutory responsibility for the DIT)

The HEA may also exercise a statutory right to review the quality assurance procedures in the universities, having consulted with the universities and the NQAI.

Every five years, an external review of the effectiveness of a university's internal review system takes place. The first such audit took place in 2004-05.

External Review of Quality Assurance Procedures

The first external independent review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in Irish universities was conducted in 2005. The review was jointly commissioned by the HEA and the IUQB. The review was undertaken by the European University Association (EUA). The EUA review teams were comprised of international experts from Europe and North America. The EUA produced an individual report for each university and an over-arching sectoral report. These reports have been published separately by the EUA.

The HEA considered it important that the views of stakeholders should also be heard in this quality assurance process. Accordingly, and to complement the EUA review process, the HEA, in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), established a High Level Reference Panel, comprising of stakeholders from wider society and the economy, to provide an external perspective on the social, cultural and economic context within which the Irish universities operate. This panel met with the EUA Review Teams on a number of occasions and subsequently produced this "reflections" document on the EUA process and outcomes.¹²

The full report is available at the following address:
<http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/archive/corporate/2005/Quality%20Assurance%20Reflections%20Document.pdf>

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council has incorporated the European Standards and Guidelines in its policies and criteria for setting the standards of awards, for making awards, for delegating authority to make awards and for quality assurance. Furthermore, in July 2006, a review of the performance by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of its functions, incorporating the extent to which the Council complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, was completed by the Qualifications Authority. This information is available here: <http://www.nqai.ie/en/Review/> and here

¹¹ *ibid*, p.3.

¹² Review of Quality Assurance Procedures in Irish Universities – EUA, HEA, IUQB; chair: Mr. John Dunne.
<http://www.heai.ie/files/files/file/archive/corporate/2005/Quality%20Assurance%20Reflections%20Document.pdf> Last access: 17.32, 02/10/08

<http://www.hetac.ie/publications.cfm?sID=10>. HETAC is the first European agency to meet the European Standards and Guidelines.

The Dublin Institute of Technology has incorporated the European Standards and Guidelines into its quality assurance procedures. In June 2006, a review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of the Institute was completed by the European University Association, on behalf of the Qualifications Authority. This information is available at: <http://www.nqai.ie/en/PoliciesandProcedures/>.

b) does your external quality assurance system operate at a national level; **Yes**

c) does your external quality assurance system cover all higher education¹³ **Yes**

d) which of the following elements are included in your external quality assurance system:

- self-assessment report **Yes**
- external review **Yes**
- publication of results **Yes**
- follow-up procedures **Yes**

e) has a peer review of the national agency(ies) according to the Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA already taken place

Yes

11. Level of student participation

From the following, please indicate all aspects of quality assurance in which students are involved:

a) in governance of national agencies for QA . **Yes**

b) as full members in external review teams **Yes**

c) as observers in external review teams **N/A**

d) as part of the decision making process for external reviews **Yes**

e) in the consultation process during external reviews (eg arrangements for external reviewers to consult with students)

Yes

f) in internal quality assurance (e.g. periodic review of programmes) **Yes**

¹³ Higher education: all types of courses of study or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognised by the relevant authorities as belonging to a country's higher education system.

g) in preparation of self-assessment reports. **Yes**

h) in follow-up procedures: **Yes**

Students nominate/elect members to the Governing Bodies of Higher Education Institutions established in statute as well as the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). Student involvement is a key part of the quality assurance procedures of third-level institutions. These elements are statutory requirements in the Universities Act 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

HETAC has ensured that there is a student perspective in the membership of its review teams, such as in the delegation of authority to make awards evaluation and committee representation for the Programme Accreditation Committee.

Those with a student perspective were also included in the teams appointed by the Qualifications Authority to review HETAC and the DIT and in the High level Reference Panel which had an over-seeing role in the context of the HEA/IUQB commissioned review of QA processes in the university sector, which was carried out by the EUA.

12. Level of international participation

In which of the following is there international participation in quality assurance

a) the governance of national agencies for quality assurance **Yes**

b) the external evaluation of national quality assurance agencies **Yes**

c) teams for ext. review of institutions or programmes, as members or observers **Yes**

d) membership of ENQA **Yes**

e) membership of any other international network **Yes**

There is a legislative requirement for international experts to be a member of all the external quality assurance reviews undertaken by higher education institutions themselves and this requirement has been implemented. This is also underpinned in the common Underpinning Principles of Good Practice established by the Irish Higher Education Quality Network and referred to above.

International expert peers are included in all quality assurance and other accreditation activities of HETAC. The Qualifications Authority has involved international experts in the teams appointed to review HETAC and the DIT. The Authority is also a member of the Joint Quality Initiative. The HEA/IUQB joint review of the effectiveness of QA procedures in the universities was undertaken by the European University Association, and all the teams consisted of teams of international experts from Europe and North America.

NQAI, HETAC and the HEA are all members of ENQA. The IUQB has applied for membership.

HETAC hosted the secretariat of INQAAHE from 2003-08. It is also a member of the Eurashe Quality Assurance working group since 2003.

RECOGNITION OF DEGREES AND STUDY PERIODS

13. Stage of implementation of Diploma Supplement

Describe the stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement in your country. Please include the percentage of all students graduating in 2009 who will receive a Diploma Supplement (if less than 100%, please explain)

The Diploma Supplement is at an advanced stage of implementation in Ireland. Approximately 75% of higher education institutions (HEIs) are issuing the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. The aim is that all students graduating from 2009 will receive the Diploma Supplement. Most HEIs are either issuing the Diploma Supplement electronically or are in the process of implementing such a system. An electronic system will enable production and issue of Diploma Supplements in a timely and efficient manner. Compatibility of student information systems and technology issues has delayed implementation in some institutions.

The National Diploma Supplement Steering Group helps support HEIs implement the Diploma Supplement and to promote widespread use of the document and will work in conjunction with the National Europass Centre in this regard.

a) Is the Diploma Supplement issued to students graduating from:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • 1st cycle programmes | Yes |
| • 2nd cycle programmes | Yes |
| • 3rd cycle programmes | Yes |
| • remaining “old type” programmes | Not applicable |
| • short higher education programmes | YES* |

* The Diploma Supplement is issued to those graduating with a Higher Certificate, the short cycle award within the Bologna first cycle. The National Framework of Qualifications also makes provision for smaller awards i.e. certificates at generally less than 60 credits and diplomas at generally less than 120 credits. Many of these programmes have only recently been introduced and are not yet catered for by the Diploma Supplement.

b) which of the following apply to Diploma Supplements issued in your country:

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| • issued in a widely spoken European language | Yes – English |
|---|----------------------|

- issued free of charge **Yes**
- issued automatically **Yes**
- corresponds to the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format **Yes**
- a national Diploma Supplement is used that is different from the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format **No**

13.1. Use of Diploma Supplement for recognition of qualifications

Please describe the way in which the Diploma Supplement is used for the recognition of foreign qualifications (or studies). Please comment in particular on the following aspects, giving references to any relevant websites and documents:

a) The Diploma Supplement is used as the reference document when admitting holders of foreign qualifications to the second and third cycles.

The Diploma Supplement being presented to HEIs for admission purposes is a growing concept.

b) Holders of foreign qualifications who present a Diploma Supplement in a widely spoken language do not have to provide official translations of their qualifications.

No

The Diploma Supplement being presented to HEIs for admission purposes is growing.

c) Holders of foreign qualifications who present a Diploma Supplement in a widely spoken language do not need to prove through other documents the validity of the qualifications in the awarding country (for further studies or employment in the non-regulated part of the labour market).

No

This depends on context – in reality, not too many Diploma Supplements are being presented to institutions or employers. While HEIs have a greater level of familiarity and understanding of the Diploma Supplement, that familiarity must still develop amongst employers. Until that time, other documents to ensure validity may still be sought.

d) Specific action has been taken at a National and Institutional level to enhance the use of the Diploma Supplement as a communication tool towards the labour market

Yes

The National Diploma Supplement Steering Group is in place and aims to support implementation of the document by HEIs, thus, promoting use of the document by graduates.

14. National implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

Describe the stage of implementation of the main principles and later supplementary documents¹⁴ of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

a) Does appropriate legislation comply with the Lisbon Convention? Yes

Ireland ratified the Lisbon Convention on the 8th March 2004. The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 established the NQAI as the body responsible for promoting recognition outside the State of awards made by bodies in the State and recognition in the State of awards made by bodies outside the State. An integrated national policy approach to the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland has been established by the Authority, in consultation with stakeholders. As the current recognition practice at a national level conforms to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, no amendments to national legislation are envisaged as a result of the ratification of the Convention.

The policy approach is available at –
www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/Publications

b) Does appropriate legislation comply with the later Supplementary Documents:

i) Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for Recognition Yes

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved - The recognition procedures put in place by the NQAI, as described in the national policy approach to the recognition of foreign qualifications, conform to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and supplementary documents, including the Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for Recognition

ii) Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees Yes

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved - The recognition of joint degrees is subject to the same integrated national policy approach as the recognition of single institution foreign qualifications. To date in Ireland, few joint degrees have been presented for recognition. However, provided the competent authority or the Irish institution was satisfied with the delivery of the programme and the status of the institutions which awarded the joint degree, problems recognising such qualifications are not envisaged.

iii) Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education Yes

If Yes, please demonstrate how it is achieved - There are very few examples of applicants holding these types of awards applying for entry to Irish higher education institutions. The institutions have indicated that the general approach would be that, provided that adequate quality assurance arrangements were in place for borderless and transnational education and provided that the institutions involved were

¹⁴ Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for Recognition (2001); Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (2004); Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001)

recognised institutions, a transnational or borderless qualification would be recognised.

c) which of the following principles are applied in practice

i) applicants' right to fair assessment

Yes

If Yes, please describe how it is ensured at national and institutional level -

All qualifications which are submitted to the NQAI are given a fair assessment. Foreign qualifications are recognised as being comparable to Irish qualifications which are placed at a particular level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. Statements are issued, stating this comparison and accompanied with explanatory notes on the learning outcomes associated with the Irish qualification identified. Foreign qualification holders are given adequate access to an assessment of their qualifications and applications are processed within a reasonable timeframe. A right to have the outcome of an application reviewed is also provided for. Where no comparison can be reached, the reason for such a decision is provided and advice is provided where possible. The recognition service provided by NQAI is widely publicised to the target audience via newspaper advertisements, labour and study fairs and liaison with groups and bodies which represent the non-Irish national communities in Ireland.

ii) recognition if no substantial differences can be proven

Yes

If Yes, please describe how it is ensured at national and institutional level -

The criteria applied by the NQAI in recognising qualifications is to treat the award presented, as similar to the corresponding qualification in the Irish education system unless it can be shown that there are substantial differences between the Irish qualification and the qualifications for which recognition is sought. For instance, where qualifications are proven to give entry to the next cycle in the country of origin, this entitlement is used as a basis for making a comparison with an Irish award that would accord the same entitlement.

iii) demonstration of substantial differences, where recognition is not granted

Yes

If yes, please describe how it is ensured at national and institutional level

The criteria applied by the NQAI in recognising qualifications is to treat the award presented, as similar to the corresponding qualification in the Irish education system unless it can be shown that there are substantial differences between the Irish qualification and the qualifications for which recognition is sought. For instance, where qualifications are proven to give entry to the next cycle in the country of origin, this entitlement is used as a basis for making a comparison with an Irish award that would accord the same entitlement.

The NQAI is also in the process of developing "country profiles" on the education and training systems in other countries and the qualifications attainable within those systems. This data is verified with sources within the countries in question. Through this research, distinctions and evidence for substantial differences sometimes arise,

particularly in relation to non-Bologna signatory countries or those not linked to the ENIC NARIC network. In such cases, every effort is made to establish at what level on the NFQ the award is comparable, or in the event that this can not be done, as much information as is possible is provided on the award in question.

iv) provision of information about your country's HE programmes and institutions

Yes

If Yes, please describe how it is done in practice

A key principle of the work of the NQAI is that learners considering taking a course should have available information about the qualification to which it will lead. The Framework provides the structure through which such information can be assembled. The Qualifications Authority took responsibility for QualifaX, the National Learners' Database, in early 2008 and is continually working with national stakeholders, to further develop the services available to learners. QualifaX is a key mechanism through which learners can access information regarding education programmes and institutions.

For more information see www.qualifax.ie

Additionally, the NQAI website (www.nqai.ie) provides links to a number of relevant resources for those seeking information on HE programmes and institutions, including links to university websites, those of awarding bodies and professional bodies.

v) do you have a fully operational ENIC

Yes

If Yes, please describe the role of your ENIC in recognition and information provision a) nationally and b) internationally

The NQAI on its establishment was given the role of acting as the ENIC/NARIC and National Reference Point (NRP) centres for Ireland. The NQAI is a fully active member of the ENIC/NARIC network and liaises on a frequent basis with ENIC/NARIC centres abroad.

d) As additional information, please describe any actions to implement fully the Convention and the later Supplementary Documents.

Ireland has ratified the Lisbon Convention in March 2004. All appropriate legislation complies with the legal Framework.

An integrated national policy approach to the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland has been established by the NQAI in consultation with stakeholders. The Authority is the Irish centre for the recognition of international awards, and represents Ireland in a European Network of centres known as ENIC/NARIC (European National Information Centre/National Academic Recognition Information Centre) and NRP (National Reference Point) which promote the recognition of international awards throughout Europe.

The Authority co-operates with stakeholders in implementing the national approach through its implementation advisory group. A national conference was held in April 2006 and documentation has been circulated to all higher education institutions in relation to the implementation of the Convention.

The work being undertaken to develop a national action plan on recognition has involved meeting with each higher education institution to be updated on implementation arrangements and to seek to further encourage implementation.

15. Stage of implementation of ECTS¹⁵

Describe the implementation of ECTS in your country.

a) *Please include the percentage of the total number of higher education programmes¹⁶ in which all programme components are linked with ECTS credits*

100%

All HEIs use the ECTS system.

b) *Are ECTS credits linked with learning outcomes¹⁷ in your country?* Please tick one:

In all programmes

c) *If you use credit system other than ECTS, please give details of your national credit system :*

i) *is it compatible with ECTS?*

N/A

ii) *what is the ratio between national and ECTS credits? -*

d) *Are you taking any action to improve understanding of learning outcomes? Yes*

In 2007 the university sector Framework Implementation Network was established by the NQAI and the IUA, with the aim of acting as a forum for discussion and sharing of experiences relating to Framework implementation, its use and related issues, including learning outcomes. The design of discipline specific learning outcomes emerged as a major area of interest for network members; not only for the individual / department endeavouring to write discipline-specific outcomes, but also for the teaching and learning units wishing to provide support for the process. A working group was established to examine this area; the proposed outputs of the group may include:

- the production of guidelines for the development of discipline learning outcomes and,
- the elaboration of guidelines through case studies.

The ongoing deliberations of the group and outputs will be posted on the network website: http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/Discipline_Specific_Learning_Outcomes/Default.79.html

¹⁵ Please refer to definitions in the ECTS User's guide, http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/guide_en.html

¹⁶ Except doctoral studies

¹⁷ Clarification: Learning outcomes in the form of knowledge, skills and competences are formulated for all programme components and credits are awarded only when the stipulated learning outcomes are actually acquired

Additionally, a working group has been established to address the issue of designing assessment methods that enable the demonstration of learning outcome attainment.

e) Are you taking any actions to improve measurement and checking of student workload?

Yes

The University Framework Implementation Network discussed above has also convened a working group which is looking at the issue of designing assessment methods that enable the demonstration of learning outcomes attainment. The objectives of the group include contributing to the drafting and publication of national policies and operational guidelines on the assessment of learning outcomes that will incorporate the following elements:

- Academic coherence; diversity; excellence; and good practice;
- Administrative facilitation; and
- Aspects of grading or classification appropriate to national practice and trends.

The aim of the group is to develop a 'handbook on assessment' incorporating the following components:

- Identification of the range of alternative assessment methods and the benefits and drawbacks associated with each;
- Sample module descriptors and verification / validation models;
- Worked examples / case studies ;
- Rubrics for assessment and the links with quality assurance and student feedback; and
- Constructive alignment models.

Information on the group is available on the network website: <http://www.nfqnetwork.ie>

f) Are you taking any actions to assist HE staff or other stakeholders in applying ECTS.

Yes

Ireland has appointed a National Team of Bologna Experts, whose role is to provide a pool of expertise in certain areas, including credit and ECTS to the wider higher education community in responding to the challenges of implementing the Bologna action lines. As part of Bologna Expert activity for 2008/09, the ECTS labels are being re-launched. Two members of the National Team of Bologna Experts have been appointed as ECTS Counselors to higher education institutions; they will provide counseling on the promotion of the ECTS label and information on the conditions and criteria of the re-launch of the ECTS label, as well as assist institutions in preparing their applications.

Following this, there will need to be greater promotion of ECTS amongst students who are aware of them in terms of accumulation necessary for progression, but not of their links with learning outcomes though we remain confident that this will be completed in a short time frame.

LIFELONG LEARNING

16. Recognition of prior learning

Describe the measures in place to recognise prior learning (RPL), including non-formal and informal learning (for example learning gained in the workplace or in the community).

a) Do you have nationally established procedures in place to assess RPL as a basis for access to HE programmes?

Yes

Following consultation with stakeholders, the NQAI established principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training. These principles were first printed on the NQAI website in 2005. The principles are addressed to education and training providers, awarding bodies, and those in the workplace. All providers are required to develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning including access routes and entitlements. Where the recognition of prior learning is used to enable entry to a programme, the statement of arrangements available should indicate to learners the competences needed to succeed on the programme. These statements should define the purposes for which recognition of prior learning processes can be used, i.e., to grant access to a programme of study.

See the Principles and Operational Principles in full here: <http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:iqAHg03D03gJ:www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/documents/NFQ-principles06brown.pdf+RPL+national+principles&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ie>

b) Do you have nationally established RPL procedures in place to allocate credits towards a qualification?

c) Do you have nationally established RPL procedures in place to allocate credits for exemption from some programme requirements?

Yes

All providers are required to develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, including the allocation of credits for exemption from some programme requirements. These statements should define the purposes for which recognition of prior learning processes can be used, i.e., to provide exemption from programme requirements or credit towards an award.

d) To what extent are any such procedures applied in practice?

Some

Verwijderd: —Pagina-einde—

Please describe the current situation:

A country background report was undertaken by the NQAI in 2007, as part of OECD activity in this area, to map the main developments in the recognition of prior learning (RPL) since the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications. A selection of the findings, which are set out below, are instructive in describing the extent to which RPL procedures are applied in practice:

- There is a wide range of practice, policy and procedures for RPL at all levels;
- RPL is used to access programmes, gain credit or exemptions, and, in very limited cases, to gain full qualifications;
- Much practice is localised, specific to particular groups of learners, programmes or sectors and tends not to be known outside of them;
- Awareness and understanding of RPL is limited;
- RPL is used by workers/professionals to access qualifications required for practice, in particular in newly regulated areas;
- A number of actions recommended in the White Paper on Adult Education (2000) for RPL have been or are being implemented e.g. credit systems, modularisation, flexible delivery and new forms of assessment, and the use of learning outcomes; and

In June 2005, the Qualifications Authority with the assistance of its Advisory Group on the Recognition of Prior Learning, adopted Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training. The purposes of the recognition of prior learning are defined as to provide:

- entry to a programme leading to an award
- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award

The principles for the recognition of prior learning are addressed to education and training providers, awarding bodies, and those in the workplace. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of recognition of prior learning and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or awarding bodies. The intention is that the guidelines will give an exemplar of the nature of the arrangements that further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers (the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology) should consider putting in place. For more details see here: <http://www.nqai.ie/en/LatestNews/File,823,en.doc>

Implementation is being encouraged and facilitated by the Qualifications Authority. This work is also linking into the implementation of the OECD work on the recognition of non-formal and in-formal learning and credit transfer. A national review is to be undertaken as part of the OECD process.

An example of developments that have taken place is that HETAC is putting in place processes for the making of awards on the basis of the accreditation of learning outcomes already attained. A Doctoral degree and a Masters degree have been awarded by HETAC following such a process.

17. Flexible learning paths

Describe legislative and other measures taken by your country to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, to encourage participation by under-represented groups.

a) Are there specific measures in place to promote flexible learning paths within the national qualifications framework?

Yes

The functions set out in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 define a key, pivotal role for the NQAI in the process of the promotion of lifelong learning, and particularly in the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression. The development and establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications is set in the context of a vision for the recognition of learning and is in line with the broad national and European policy of promoting a lifelong learning society.

The Authority has defined specific policies, actions and procedures through which it will meet its objectives in relation to access, transfer and progression. They are set out under four themes:

- credit
- transfer and progression routes
- entry arrangements
- information provision

Higher education institutions are implementing these. An example of developments is the enhanced opportunity for holder of FETAC awards to enter under-graduate programmes, particularly in the institutes of technology.

Supported by SIF, the Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) have been awarded funding to develop flexible learning mechanisms - aiming to develop, pilot and expand programmes and modules which assist in supporting life-long learning, increase opportunities for life-long learning in the workforce, and increase the overall participation rates of the life-long learning cohort.

b) Are there any measures to support HE staff in establishing flexible learning paths?

Yes

Strategic Innovation Funding, which is awarded for innovative, collaborative projects between institutions has provided support for numerous staff training and development initiatives. This also includes funding in support of restructuring initiatives, modularisation and the credit award system, in order to develop the key support framework for greater flexibility in learning paths.

c) Is there flexibility in entry requirements aimed at widening participation? **Yes**

d) Are there any flexible delivery methods to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners

Yes

e) Are there modular structures of programmes to facilitate greater participation? **Yes**

The National Access Plan 2008 – 2013 sets out a series of targets and objectives with regards to widening participation. In addition, several institutions have established Access Programmes that allow students from under-represented groups to enter programmes in the first cycle despite falling short of the results required.

Widening participation' projects, funded by the Strategic Innovation Fund, are intended to widen access and develop alternative pathways to higher education for a diverse cohort,

including Recognition of Prior Learning, work-based learning, progression to higher education pathways from the Level 5 and Level 6 sector, in addition to student support and information services to effectively underpin developments and ensure success.

The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education was established within the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in August 2003. The National Office facilitates educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education - those who are disadvantaged socially, economically and/or culturally, those with a disability and mature learners. It also encourages flexible delivery opportunities.

Modular structures are supported by the implementation of arrangements for credit accumulation and transfer set out above.

f) If possible, please provide any statistics on the results of measures taken to create opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, to encourage participation by under-represented groups,

Under SIF funding, safeguarding and enhancing the social dimension of the third level sector is specifically supported in order to enhance equality of access, participation and progression through the third cycle.

Ireland has achieved an unprecedented expansion in educational opportunities over the last four decades and has now reached entry rates to higher education in excess of 55 per cent. Assessments of future skills needs in the National Skills Strategy predict that entry rates to higher education should reach 72 per cent by 2020. The over-arching single goal of the Widening Access strand is to develop initiatives to underpin the concept of lifelong learning and to improve access rates to third level from designated under represented groups, in order to achieve the envisaged rates of participation in higher education.

JOINT DEGREES

18. Establishment and recognition of joint degrees¹⁸

a) Describe the legislative position on joint degrees in your country.

Are joint degrees specifically mentioned in legislation? **No**

Does the legislation fully allow:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| i) establishing joint programmes? | Yes |
| ii) awarding joint degrees? | Yes |

b) Please give an estimate of the percentage of institutions in your country which are involved in

i) joint degrees	1-25%
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¹⁸ A *joint degree* is a single degree certificate awarded by two or more institutions, where the single degree certificate is valid without being supplemented by any additional national degree certificate.

ii) joint programmes

50-75%

c) What is the level of joint degree/ programme cooperation in your country

In the first cycle?	None <input type="checkbox"/>	Little <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Widespread
In the second cycle?	None <input type="checkbox"/>	Little <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Widespread <input type="checkbox"/>
In the third cycle?	None <input type="checkbox"/>	Little <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Widespread <input type="checkbox"/>

The level of programmes/awards that are offered jointly by two of more institutions is growing.

Under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) may establish agreements with other awarding bodies for the purposes of making joint awards. In 2005, HETAC published its policy and criteria for making joint awards, joint accreditation and accreditation of jointly provided programmes.

In a number of cases the DIT has agreed joint awards for programmes, including one agreement with Harbin Institute of Technology, China.

The National University of Ireland has agreed (November 2006) that it can make joint awards with other institutions and has processed a change of statute to this effect.

There are however many examples of joint programmes, with other Irish, European and international partner institutions. Some of the joint programmes lead to dual awards, or to a single award with an additional certificate outlining the joint nature of the programme. A number of Irish universities are members of Erasmus Mundus and other joint programme consortia and have been making such awarding arrangements for several years.

d) In which subject areas/disciplines is joint degree/programme co-operation most widespread (please list if possible)?

Computing and business studies would be most common, however, joint programmes are offered in a wide range of subject areas.

e) Estimate the number of joint programmes in your country

There would be in excess of 70 joint programmes

f) Describe any actions being taken to encourage or allow joint programmes.

The introduction of joint degree regulations by HETAC and the National University of Ireland have facilitated these programmes. Policies on the accreditation and ongoing quality assurance of international provision within the EHEA and outside are also relevant.

g) Are there any specific support systems for students to encourage joint degree cooperation?

Mobility grants to address accommodation costs for short-term mobility and consular arrangements to prevent visa problems for non-EU students studying across EU national boundaries.

MOBILITY

19. Removing obstacles to student and staff mobility

a) What measures have been taken by your country both at governmental and institutional level to enhance student and staff mobility and overcome main obstacles?

The Student Support Schemes offer financial assistance to eligible students attending approved further and higher education courses. Students entering approved courses for the first time are, generally speaking, eligible for grants where they satisfy the relevant conditions as to age, residence, means, nationality and previous academic attainment.

An approved undergraduate course for the purposes of the third-level grants schemes includes a full-time undergraduate course of not less than two years duration pursued in a university or third-level institution which is maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from public funds in another EU member state.

Under the means-tested third-level schemes, grant-holders who are required, as part of their approved course, to attend foreign university courses for a period of up to one year may continue to receive grant assistance provided the period abroad does not affect the normal duration of the approved course.

On condition that they meet the residency and other requirements of the scheme and are pursuing an approved undergraduate course for the purposes of the schemes, EU-employees and their children may be eligible for grant assistance in respect of study in another EU country subject, in the same way as all other candidates.

The third-level maintenance grant schemes do not extend to postgraduate courses outside of Ireland. However, tax relief at the standard rate is available in respect of approved full/part-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses in both private and publicly funded third-level colleges in EU member states and in non-EU states for postgraduate courses.

In addition to the above, the Department of Education and Science make a number of awards each year under merit based scholarships schemes. These are based on results received in the Leaving Certificate Examination and are redeemable by students pursuing both full-time courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level in approved institutions in other EU Member States as well as in Ireland. In addition, the Department of Education and Science offers a number of scholarships for Irish students to the European University Institute, Florence. Candidates are required to have a good honours primary degree and good knowledge of at least two of the Institute's working languages.

The universities and institutes of technology have been active in encouraging inward mobility at both undergraduate and postgraduate level to Irish higher education, and inward mobility continues to grow rapidly. It has traditionally however been more difficult to increase outward mobility, and a number of institutions have taken a pro-active approach to encouraging greater participation in European exchange programmes such as Erasmus.

b) Have arrangements for visas, residence and work permits been amended to enhance student and staff mobility?

Yes No

Ireland has been working very hard to make it easier and quicker for students to apply for visas. In particular, we are also moving to an online application system, which should make the application procedures even easier.

EU/EEA students have the same employment entitlements as Irish nationals. From 2005, all non-EEA students who are attending a full-time course of at least one year's duration are allowed to work part-time while they study in Ireland - up to 20 hours per week during term and full-time during vacation.

c) Is there financial support for national and foreign mobile students and staff? YES

Support for study visits, placements and teacher/staff periods is provided under the Lifelong Learning Programme: Erasmus for Irish and other eligible candidates. Funding is not provided for incoming students or staff under any EU programme. Eligible students may also retain any student assistance that they are in receipt of. Institutions may have in place special provisions on a bilateral basis for other countries

d) Are study periods taken abroad recognised? YES

This is a formal requirement of the LLP: Erasmus Programme

e) Is there accommodation for mobile students and staff? YES

Higher Education Institutions as far as possible will try to make available on-campus accommodation subject to availability

f) Have any measures been taken to increase outward student and staff mobility? Yes

The Irish NA for the LLP: Erasmus (HEA) has been extremely active since the commencement of the programme in assisting the HEIs to raise awareness of the benefits of mobility. A range of activities have been initiated including -

- Seminars on motivation; media; placements have been held
- A range of publicity materials – posters; bookmarks have been published
- In addition, this material has been distributed to all second level schools in Ireland.
- A European Programmes Newsletter is planned
- The HEA (the parent body of the NA) is setting up a special Task Force to stimulate ideas and actions and to engage with the stakeholders in this area.

20. Portability of loans and grants

a) *Are portable grants available in your country?* **Yes**

b) *Are portable loans available in your country?* **Not applicable**

Ireland does not operate a loans system for students.

THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE EHEA AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

21. Implementation of strategy

a) *Describe any measures being taken by your country to implement the strategy "European Higher Education in a Global Setting"*

b) *What has your country done to:*

i) *improve information on the EHEA outside Europe?*

ii) *promote European higher education, enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness?*

iii) *strengthen cooperation based on partnership in higher education?*

iv) *intensify policy dialogue with partners from other world regions?*

v) *improve recognition of qualifications with other world regions?*

Ireland has engaged with non-EHEA countries regarding the alignment of qualifications with the Irish NFQ:

In February 2006 the Minister for Education and Science formally signed an international agreement between the Irish and Chinese governments for the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications. The agreement was signed between the Minister and her Chinese counterpart, Mr Zhou Ji in Beijing. The agreement provides for the recognition of higher education awards from sub-degree (higher certificate) to doctorate levels. It will ensure that students and graduates traveling between both countries for the pursuit of further study or employment will have their existing qualifications recognised.

In March 2008, the NQAI and New Zealand Qualifications Authority initiated a joint project to reach verification of the compatibility of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications. A project brief has been agreed upon; criteria and procedures used for this project will mirror those used for verifying the compatibility of the Irish NFQ and the Bologna Framework.

In addition, the NQAI regularly hosts study visits, as a means of forming links with education authorities from abroad and offering guidance on Ireland's experiences in implementing a National Framework of Qualifications and education reform.

To date, delegations have been hosted from Croatia (December 2007), Estonia (December 2007), Saudi Arabia (November 2007), Hungary (November 2007), Malaysia (November 2007), Australia (October 2007), China (October 2007), Sweden (October 2007), Romania (September 2007), New Zealand (September 2007), Botswana (July 2007), Romania (July 2007), Denmark (June 2007), Romania (May 2007), India (April 2007), Lithuania (March 2007) and the United Arab Emirates (February 2007).

West Balkans (January 2008), the Netherlands (January 2008), Serbia (February 2008), Germany (February 2008), Canada (February 2008), India (February 2008), Malaysia (April 2008), Australia (April 2008), Armenia (April 2008), America (May 2008), Chile (May 2008), the Czech Republic (May 2008), Australia (August 2008) New Zealand (September 2008).

The IHEQN guidelines on the pastoral care of international students have been agreed by the stakeholders in the network - including higher education institutions, students, quality agencies and funding bodies – details can be obtained at www.iheqn.ie.

Under the Strategic Innovation Fund, the higher education institutions in the Dublin Region have come together to form the Dublin Regional Higher Education Alliance (DRHEA), which will see the institutions working closely together to enhance the higher education system in Dublin and in marketing Dublin as an international centre for learning and research.

c) What measures have been taken in your country to implement the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education? Please describe.

The IHEQN guidelines on the pastoral care of international students, *Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions*” explicitly draws on the OECD/UNESCO guidelines in its approach to incoming students.

d) Are the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education applied to

i) cross-border provision of your education programmes?

ii) incoming higher education provision?

Section II of the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education sets out guidelines for academic recognition bodies. The relevant guidelines are implemented in full by the recognition service of the NQAI as follows:

- a) The NQAI is an active member of the ENIC – NARIC network, and actively exchanges information and advice with member agencies. Additionally, the NQAI has undertaken initiatives and qualification comparison agreements with the United Kingdom, China and New Zealand and regularly hosts study visits from a wide range of countries and experts.
- b) In assessing applications for recognition, the NQAI ascertains, through engagement with the ENIC–NARIC network and other education bodies, whether respective

- awards are made by recognised awarding bodies within the education system of the country of origin.
- c) The NQAI maintains, and often leads, contact between major recognition stakeholders in the Irish education and training system and liaises with professional bodies in assessing academic qualifications. In accordance with legislation, the NQAI refers applicants seeking to operate in a regulated profession to the relevant competent authority in Ireland.
 - d) The NQAI does not have a role in the recognition of professional qualifications; however, it does provide information on professional recognition of awards and refers both employers and those seeking to work in regulated professions to the relevant professional body or competent authority in Ireland.
 - e) The NQAI has recently reviewed its processes for assessing applications for recognition in line with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, thus ensuring the its processes are open and transparent; in line with international best practice; administered within a reasonable time frame and are compliant with data protection legislation. The NQAI seeks to issue instructive information in all recognition application cases in a consistent and fair manner.
 - f) The NQAI sets out clear information on the criteria for recognising qualifications in its information to applicants: <http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/> The NQAI is also undertaking research on the education and training systems and associated qualifications within countries from which it receives applications for recognition. This information, compiled in country profiles, is made available on the NQAI website. Similarly, cross border recognition agreements i.e. between the UK and Ireland, are published online. A right to review the outcome of an application is available in all cases.

The accreditation of any intended course of study may be consulted on the list of NQAI recognised qualifications (via www.nqai.ie or www.nqf.ie), HETAC (www.hetac.ie) or the course listings available at Qualifax, Ireland's national learners' database (www.qualifax.ie). This enables international and Irish students to obtain comprehensive access to reliable information on higher education in Ireland.

HETAC is currently adopting a New Policy for Collaborative and Transnational Programmes and Joint awards that explicitly incorporates the provisions of the OECD/UNESCO guidelines.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

22. Main challenges for higher education

Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for higher education and the Bologna Process in your country in the short and long term.

Ireland has a strong track record in terms of the development of coherent policies at national level in line with the Bologna agenda and this is reflected in this national report. The main continuing challenge for Ireland to ensure full implementation of all of the elements of the Bologna process is to encourage and deepen implementation of change at the institutional level.

PART II

TEMPLATE for NATIONAL STRATEGIES on THE SOCIAL DIMENSION of THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Practical instruction

The answers to this questionnaire will be included in the general national report on the implementation of the Bologna Process and reach the Bologna Secretariat (e-mail: secr@bologna2009benelux.org) by November 1, 2008. **Please do not exceed the length of 10 pages for the national strategy on social dimension.**

The questions in Annex C are not included in the questionnaire itself but are to be considered as reference material which could facilitate the drafting of the information on the national strategy.

I. Definition of the Social Dimension in the London Communiqué

“ We strive for the societal goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our populations. We therefore pledge to take action to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.”

II. AS IS SITUATION (Current state of affairs)

1. Which groups in society are still underrepresented in your national higher education system? What are the main obstacles to participative equity in terms of access and successful completion of studies?

Achieving an equitable higher education system has been a policy priority for the Irish state for over a decade. Three government white papers on education (1995, 1999, 2000), as well as a range of other national policy documents, legislation and funding programmes (including the current and previous National Development Plans and European Structural Funding) have underpinned the commitment of the state to the objective of tackling social inclusion through education as well as the wider goal of supporting lifelong learning for all.

In recent decades Ireland has made substantial progress in increasing the numbers of students participating in higher education. For example, the entry rate of 17-18 year olds to higher education has grown from 20% in 1980 to approximately 55% currently. However there remain challenges ahead in relation to the participation of some groups, in particular:

- students from lower socio-economic backgrounds
- mature students
- students with a disability
- students from within the Traveller community and ethnic minorities

There are various obstacles experienced by these groups of students in relation to access to and successful completion of higher education. These include the following;

- Additional costs faced by particular groups of students such as those with children, those on specialised courses and people with disabilities.
- Access is still not fully part of the mainstream activities and strategies of higher education institutions: Access personnel are not always involved in the strategic planning and decision making in their institution.
- The educational needs of those already in the workforce: Greater supported opportunities need to be made available to the workforce in accessing higher education to raise their skills profile.

2. Please describe what measures your Government is taking to increase the representation of the groups identified in the question above. Please refer to the possible actions listed in the Bologna Working Group report on the Social Dimension and Mobility (see Annexes A and B to this document).

The Higher Education – Equity of Access Unit of the Department of Education and Science has responsibility for leading the development of national policy on equity of access to higher education for all students, but particularly among those groups which are currently underrepresented in the sector.

The unit is responsible for a range of dedicated measures which facilitate greater levels of participation by disadvantaged students, mature students and students with disabilities. The principal support, in financial terms, is provided for under the student grant schemes, which make available means-tested financial assistance to students in further and higher education. The four maintenance grant schemes are administered by local authorities and Vocational Education Committees on behalf of the Department.

In addition to the maintenance grant schemes and a number of Third Level Scholarships aimed at disadvantaged students, there are further targeted supports made available by the Department details as follows:-

Student Assistance Fund

The Student Assistance Fund provides financial assistance for higher education students who are experiencing financial difficulties whilst participating in college. Students can be assisted towards their rent, childcare costs, transport costs and additional tuition. The operation of the Fund is devolved to the recurrently funded third-level institutions and allocations are based on total enrolments.

Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage

The Millennium Partnership Fund provides community-based funding to support the retention and participation of students from under-represented groups in further or higher education. Pobal administers the fund through local area partnerships (local community groups which administer social inclusion measures). It is anticipated that from 2009/10 academic year that the emphasis of the fund will be towards local access initiatives.

Special Fund for Students with Disabilities

The Fund for Students with Disabilities provides funding for students with a disability attending recurrently funded and non-recurrently funded institutions who require additional

supports and services while studying at further or higher education. Grants are provided for students who have serious sensory, physical, learning and/or communicative disabilities.

National Access Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

The Department of Education and Science established a National Access Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education within the Higher Education Authority in August 2003. The Department works with the National Access Office to facilitate educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education - those who are disadvantaged socially, economically and/or culturally, those with a disability and mature learners.

The National Access Office assists the Department by carrying out four principal functions in this regard: to develop and implement a national action plan to achieve equity of access to higher education; to provide advice to the Department on national policy; to manage a range of funding programmes on behalf of the Department; and to monitor and report on progress in implementing the plan and achieving set targets and outcomes. The office works with all higher education institutions and is supported in its work by an advisory group representing students, parents, the education sector and social partners.

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 was launched in 2008 by the Higher Education Authority. The plan sets out the rationale, policy and context for widening participation in Irish higher education and includes an evaluation of progress. It includes a number of objectives and relating action points to achieve equity of access to higher education. The relevant objectives include:

- Institution-wide approaches to access
- Enhancing access through lifelong learning
- Investment in widening participation in higher education
- Modernisation of student supports
- Widening participation in higher education for people with disabilities

This Programme for the 2008-2013 period aims to build on the progress that has been achieved under the 2005-2007 Access Plan. Measures taken since the establishment of the National Access Office to increase participation in under-represented groups include:

In January 2008 the Minister for Education and Science launched a website, www.studentfinance.ie, which provides comprehensive information on the range of funding schemes that are available to (full-time) students attending further and higher education. www.studentfinance.ie has been designed to help users to quickly and conveniently identify the various sources of financial support that they may be eligible for and how they might apply. It is anticipated that www.studentfinance.ie will be a valuable information resource for students, prospective students, their families and those who provide advice and guidance. As of October 2008 the website had been visited over 150,000 times by interested users.

The first national evaluation of **higher education access programmes** was published by the National Access Office in 2006. From this evaluation has emerged a practical framework of policies and initiatives that are required for a successful access programme. The framework will assist higher education institutions in their work to attract and support students from under-represented groups. Eight steps for future action are recommended; these include

development of an access plan in each institution, development of stronger links between higher education institutions and the rest of the education system and improved systems of funding to support progress and achievement.

The development of **institution-wide strategies** to address the complex challenges at the centre of inequality in education is of central importance. The action plan requests institution wide access plans to promote greater equity of access and participation in higher education.

The National Office began gathering **Equal Access data** from 2007 through higher education institutions as part of registration process on students' social, economic and cultural background. See data collection information below.

In Ireland, national policy supports the development of existing and new routes of access to higher education through the national qualifications framework. In particular, it has encouraged the development of the interface between the further and higher education sectors. This is an important access route for mature students who form over half the participants in the further education sector.

At the request of the Department of Education and Science, the office reviewed the current provision of higher education access courses. A consultative process is now underway with a view to the development of a nationally agreed approach for the future delivery and funding of this area of provision.

3. Describe what measures are being taken by the Government to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social or economic background. Again, please refer to the possible actions listed in the Bologna Working Group report on the Social Dimension and Mobility (see Annexes A and B to this document). Please indicate whether the measures apply to all students or only to certain levels or types of higher education institutions.

Exchequer Investment in Higher Education

Exchequer investment in higher education has increased substantially over the last decade rising from just over €50million in 1997 and to under €1,800million in 2006. This steadily increasing investment has underpinned the significant growth in third-level enrolments that has been achieved over the period.

Expenditure on Third-Level Student Supports

Of the €1,800m million spent by the Exchequer on the provision of higher education in 2006, some €080 million related to recurrent grants to institutions and a further €25 million related to capital expenditure.

The balance of €59 million was spent on student supports (tuition fees/charges and maintenance grants), representing 31% of the total public expenditure on third-level education.

The expenditure on third-level student supports provided by the Department of Education and Science is detailed in the table below:

Student Supports	Expenditure in 2006	%
Non means-tested ('free') tuition fees	€312m	56%
Means-tested Maintenance Grants	€232m	42%
Targeted supports under the Third-Level Access Fund	€15m	2%
Overall Expenditure	€59	100%

'Free' Fees

Under the free fees initiative, the exchequer meets the cost of the tuition fees of eligible undergraduate students who are attending third level for the first time. By far the greatest level of expenditure on student supports is devoted to the provision of free tuition fees. Entitlement to this support is not means-tested.

Student Maintenance Grants

The Department of Education and Science operates three means-tested grant schemes for students in higher education and one scheme for students attending further education.

Less well-off students can apply for means-tested assistance in the form of a maintenance grant - €232m was allocated in 2006. This included provision for means-tested maintenance grant, student registration charge and tuition fees, where these were payable.

Standard Maintenance Grant Rates 2008/2009

Grant	Non Adjacent Rate*	Adjacent Rate*
Full Maintenance	€3,420	€1,370
Part Maintenance (75%)	€2,565	€1,030
Part Maintenance (50%)	€1,710	€ 685
Part Maintenance (25%)	€ 855	€ 345

* If the student's normal residence is more than 24kms from college ("non-adjacent" – the majority of qualifying students) they will qualify for one of four grant levels currently ranging from €855 to €3,420. If the normal residence is within 24 kms of college ("adjacent") students qualify for one of four maintenance grant levels currently ranging from €345 to €1,370.

Special Rates of Maintenance Grants for Disadvantaged Students

In 2000-01, the Department of Education and Science introduced a special rate of maintenance grant, following the recommendation of an Action Group on Access. The purpose of this measure is to encourage and support the participation of the most economically disadvantaged students in third level education. To qualify for the special rate, the grant-holder must be entitled to a full standard grant and the grant-holder's total reckonable income must not exceed €20,147 in the tax year 2007 and must include a specified social assistance payment.

Special Rate of Maintenance Grant 2008/2009

Grant	Standard Rate	Special Rate Amount	Total Grant
Adjacent Rate	€1,370	€1,310	€2,680
Non-Adjacent Rate	€3,420	€3,270	€6,690

The latest data indicates that almost 13,300 students were in receipt of this additional funding in 2006-07. This is a significant achievement and is well ahead of the target of the Action Group on Access which proposed that at least 9,000 students should qualify by 2006/7.

Student Support Bill 2008

The existence of multiple maintenance grant schemes is believed to contribute to the difficulties faced by students and prospective students in understanding the grants system and which grant-awarding agency they should apply to. The difficulties in navigating the system can be particularly acute where there is little tradition of post-secondary educational attainment at family or community level. A commitment to introduce a single unified scheme of maintenance grants was made in the 2002-2007 Agreed Programme for Government.

Therefore, new legislation, titled the Student Support Bill 2008, was developed by the Department of Education and Science and initiated in February 2008. It is currently being considered in the Dáil (Irish Parliament) as part of the second stage of legislative debate.

The principal objective of the Bill is to create a more coherent system for the administration of student grants, which will facilitate consistency of application and improved client accessibility. The Bill will replace the four existing grant schemes with a new unified grant payment scheme. The key areas which will be addressed by the new legislation include the following:

- Rationalisation of grant-awarding agencies
- Efficient processing of applications
- Ensuring robustness in the system
- Review of performance and transfer of functions of grant-awarding bodies
- Change in residency requirement
- Criteria to be considered in determining grant eligibility
- Approved institutions and approved courses
- Appeals process
- Access plans/policies

The current system of maintenance grants remains in place for the 2008-9 academic year. It is currently envisaged that the proposed timescale for enactment of the Bill may allow for the new scheme to come into operation for the 2009-10 academic year. The timing of the commencement of the legislation will depend on satisfactory conclusion of discussions between the Department of Education and Science and the Vocational Education Committees on the revised administrative arrangements for the new scheme.

Third Level Access Measure Funds (see at Q2 above) – Expenditure 2005-07

Student Assistance Fund:

2005 €5.806m 2006 €6.038m 2007 €6.219m

Fund for Students with Disabilities:

2005 €8.126m 2006 €9.987m 2007 €13.53m

Millennium Partnership Fund:

2005 €2.050m 2006 €2.111m 2007 €2.175m

Other Supports

The Revenue Commissioners provide for tax relief at the standard rate on “fees chargeable in respect of tuition” for approved undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The relief does not apply to the student registration charge. Tax relief can be claimed on tuition fees up to a maximum fee limit of €5,000, in respect of the 2006/2007 academic year.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs operates the Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA). The BTEA is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to encourage and facilitate people on certain social welfare payments to improve their skills and qualifications and, therefore, their prospects of returning to the work force.

Community Initiative

Two new pilot community projects have begun which will run for three years from 2006-2009. The aim of these projects is to provide insights into the initiatives and relationships that are needed to make equality of access a reality using a whole-community approach. One project is in County Offaly and the other in Clondalkin, West Dublin.

Funding of Higher Education Access Initiatives

From 1996-2005 the Higher Education Authority supported the development of access programmes by higher education institutions through its targeted initiative funding programme. Since 1996, Higher Education Authority funded institutions have drawn on this funding to develop the necessary infrastructure and programmes of action which support wider access for people with a disability, mature students, young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and members of the traveller and refugee communities.

In 2006 this funding was mainstreamed through the core, annual recurrent grant to higher education institutions. A new funding model is currently being phased in for all Higher Education Authority funded higher education institutions. When fully implemented, the new Higher Education Authority funding model will include an allocation of additional funding to institutions for each under-represented student registered. This is reliant on improved systems of student data collection being introduced by higher education institutions from 2007 onwards.

As part of this model it is planned that the core funding for access initiatives will be linked to the number of students from under-represented groups enrolled in each institution. This is subject to the successful introduction of new access data collection systems by institutions from 2007 onwards.

In 2006 a new Strategic Innovation Fund was introduced, through which €10m will be allocated between 2006 and 2013 to higher education institutions for projects to enhance

collaboration in the sector; improve teaching and learning; support institutional reform; promote access and lifelong learning; and support the development of fourth level education. Access has been an important element of the strategic innovation fund. Under the first and second cycle of this fund in 2006 and 2007, over €23.5 million has been allocated for projects to promote access and lifelong learning.

Dormant Accounts Funding for Access Initiatives in Institutes of Technology

Activities and actions designed to enhance access to and participation in the Institute of Technology sector by educationally disadvantaged groups will get underway in 2008, funded by Dormant Accounts (this is a special fund initiated by the government using available funds from dormant accounts). Approximately €3m has been approved for the initiative by government. Funding will be allocated by the Department of Education and Science to the National Access Office to work with Institutes of Technology Ireland over the coming two years.

The National Access Office has been supporting the Institute of Technology sector in the development of the project proposal. The proposal aims to develop and embed a series of new access and retention initiatives throughout the sector. A primary objective for the project is to ensure continuity through the mainstreaming of programmes and other activities.

4. Does your country have statistical and/or other research evidence at disposal to underpin the identification of underrepresented groups and the main obstacles to participative equity (see Q 1) ? If yes, please specify. Or are regular student survey organised with the aim to provide data concerning the social dimension?

Equal Access Data Initiative

From 2007, higher education institutions began gathering additional information on students' social, economic and cultural background as part of the registration process.

Institutions have recently returned the final data from the 2007 registration process to the HEA and the data is currently being analysed. The HEA will publish a report on this data next year.

This information will provide a more consistent evidence base for national policy, in particular by supporting an assessment of progress to date.

III. PROCESS TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM (strategy for the future)

5. How do you plan to tackle the challenges identified under Q 1 in the near future (2008-2010)?

In close consultation with the Department of Education and Science, the National Access Office published a National Access Plan, 2008-2013. The aim of the plan is to further the pursuit of equality in higher education and to create an inclusive and democratic society.

(a) Which concrete goals do you want to achieve?

The following targets are set:

- The evidence base and relevant data collection systems will be enhanced.
- Institutions will develop and implement access plans and processes for evaluation.
- A national participation rate of 72 per cent of the relevant age cohort will be achieved by 2020 (55 per cent in 2004).
- All socio-economic groups will have entry rates of at least 54 per cent by 2020 ('Non-manual' group at 27 per cent and 'Semi-skilled and unskilled manual' group at 33 per cent in 2004).
- Mature students will comprise at least 20 per cent of total full-time entrants by 2013 (13 per cent in 2006).
- Mature students will comprise 27 per cent of all (full-time and part-time) entrants by 2013 (18 per cent in 2006).
- Flexible/part-time provision will increase to 17 per cent by 2013 (7 per cent in 2006).
- Non-standard entry routes to higher education will be developed so that they account for 30 per cent of all entrants by 2013 (estimated at 24 per cent in 2006).
- Ireland will reach EU average levels for lifelong learning by 2010 and will move towards the top quartile of EU countries by 2013.
- The number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education will be doubled by 2013.

(b) What actions are planned for the different target group identified above to overcome the obstacles in access, participation and completion of studies by students? Please refer to Annex B and to the suggested approach outlined in the 2007 report from the Bologna Process Working Group on the Social Dimension and Mobility (Annex C to this document).

The plan outlines policy objectives to achieve equity of access to higher education.

- Institution-wide approaches to access
- Enhancing access through lifelong learning
- Investment in widening participation in higher-education
- Modernisation of student supports
- Widening participation in higher education for people with disabilities

Each objective is accompanied by associated actions to achieve the objectives including:

- Institution wide action plans
- Expansion of part-time/flexible learning opportunities
- Enhancing progression from further to higher education.
- Diversifying entry routes to higher education.
- Supporting Institutional funding for access
- Developing awareness of the available supports
- Funding to support students with disabilities
- Ensuring greater equality of opportunity to higher education.

The plan highlights ongoing and new areas of action, including work on widening participation in higher education for people with disabilities who are severely under-represented in higher education. The continued development and implementation of funding strategies for institutions remains a priority and access to higher education features strongly

in funding opportunities. Student financial support remains a key priority and the National Access Office will work in close consultation with the Department of Education and Science to modernise student supports.

The plan highlights the social and economic benefits in increasing the numbers who hold a higher education qualification. Expanding the routes of entry to higher education is therefore key to increasing participation and will allow many to avail of higher education who previously have not benefited from it. Non-traditional routes such as mature entry, supplementary admissions schemes, transfer and progression between further and higher education will provide opportunities for those who wish to avail of higher education.

Equally, the lifelong learning agenda presents many challenges for higher education and for the education system as a whole. The plan suggests that there is very significant potential demand for further and higher education among the adult population and particularly from those who went directly into employment when they left school. Meeting the needs of those who wish to return to education will require integrated, joined-up approaches to the multi-dimensional needs of individuals and communities.

(c) is there a specific budget for these measures for underrepresented groups ? If yes, please provide details

Under the National Development Plan some €2 billion will be provided under the heading of “student support/third level access” to support greater equity of access to Higher Education. The high level objective is that, by 2013, students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including members of the Travelling Community and refugees should have adequate opportunities to progress to higher education. Higher education institutions will pro-actively welcome and cater for a fully diverse student population. Student grants are a major factor in encouraging the current record levels of participation in higher education. The key priorities in the area of student grants over the period of the Plan are to continue to give priority to addressing inequities in participation of students from the lower socio-economic groups, including those with family responsibilities and to ensure that a quality user-friendly application and payment service is provided to students. This funding will also provide support for the special rate of maintenance grant. The grant will assist applicants from households who are in receipt of certain long-term social welfare payments.

d) is there a timeline for action? If yes, please provide details.

The National Action Plan will cover 2008-2013, however some of the targets have interim targets of 2010 or have deadlines such as 2020.

6. What arrangements are planned for monitoring progress towards more equitable access, participation and success?

The recently initiated Equal Access Data Initiative will allow for the collection of the social, economic and cultural background of students. This information will provide a more consistent evidence base for national policy, in particular by supporting an assessment of progress to date.

IV. INFORMATION ON THE NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PREPARATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Please indicate which authority or other actor is responsible for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the national strategy and describe the way in which the various stakeholders are involved. Did your country designate (a) contact point(s) for the national strategy? If so, please add the coordinates of the national contact point(s).

The Department of Education and Science and the National Access Office – see above for details.

Appendix – National Organisation

The **Department of Education and Science** (www.education.ie) has overall responsibility for the higher education system in Ireland. It is assisted in its task by a number of agencies vis:

1. The **Higher Education Authority** (HEA) (www.hea.ie) which was established in 1972 is responsible for furthering the development and assisting in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education. With the passing of the Institute of Technology Act 2006 the HEA now has responsibility for these institutions. The HEA provides the operational funds to the institutions.
2. The **National Qualifications Authority of Ireland** (NQAI) (www.nqai.ie) was established by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, and is responsible for establishing and maintaining the National Framework of Qualifications.
3. The **Higher Education and Training Awards Council** (HETAC) (www.hetac.ie) which was also established as part of the 1999 Act, is the qualifications awarding body for the Institutes of Technology and other non-university higher education colleges and institutions. HETAC may also delegate the authority to make awards to the Institutes of Technology.
4. The **Irish Universities Quality Board** (IUQB) (www.iuqb.ie) was established in 2002 by decision of the governing authorities of the Irish Universities and became a separate legal entity in February 2006.
 - a. to increase the level of inter-university co-operation in developing their quality assurance procedures and processes, in line with best international systems
 - b. in representing their approach nationally and internationally as a unique quality model appropriate to the needs of the Irish Universities
 - c. to facilitate the conduct of reviews of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and their outcomes

Autonomous and self governing

Universities

The **Universities Act 1997** provides for the academic freedom of the universities. The university, in performing its functions has the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs. It is entitled to regulate its affairs in accordance with its independent ethos and traditions, and the traditional principles of academic freedom. In doing so it shall have regard to

- the promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access
- the effective and efficient use of resources, and its obligations as to public accountability.

The **Governing Authorities** are required to see that strategic development plans are prepared for periods of not less than three years. Externally, the HEA is involved and has an overseeing role with regard to strategic plans and quality assurance procedures. It is also responsible for the management and disbursement of all recurrent and capital funds to the universities and designated institutions, including the Programme for Research in Third Level

Institutions and other targeted initiatives promoted by the HEA, including the Strategic Innovation Fund.

DIT.

The DIT Act, 1992 gave DIT authority to regulate its own affairs though its actions require the consent of the Minister of Education in some areas .As DIT is an awarding body, its statutory Academic Council and Governing Body can make all the necessary decisions in the academic domain. Up to the end of 2006 the DIT was financed by an annual grant from the Department of Education and Science and has substantial autonomy in its use of the grant. Staffing levels must be agreed with the Department of Education and Science. The passing of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 will give greater autonomy to the DIT with the HEA taking on the former roles of the Department in areas such as budgets, finances, borrowings and research.

The Institutes of Technology.

The government established the Institutes of Technology as self-governing autonomous legal entities with a governing body, Director and Academic Council through the RTC Act 1992 and Amendment Act 1994. The institutes may provide such programmes as the governing body considers appropriate. All programmes of higher education and training are validated by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 extended this autonomy to allow Institutes of Technology to apply to HEATC for delegation of authority to make their own awards. Delegation of authority also allows institutes to validate their own programmes subject to the policies and criteria determined by HETAC and within the parameters of the National Framework of Qualifications. To date a number of institutes have achieved delegated authority status up to postgraduate degree level. The passing of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 will give greater autonomy to the Institutes with the HEA taking on the former roles of the Department in areas such as - budgets, finances, borrowings and research.

ANNEX A

Actions mentioned by the Bologna countries in the 2007 national reports

Financial

- scholarships - means tested
- scholarships - merit based
- research grants
- grants for studying abroad
- grants or loans for (nearly) every student
- unspecified social support system
- free education (at least 1st cycle)
- reimbursement of tuition fees for certain groups
- financial assistance for certain groups/areas
- improved funding systems

Structural

- new /expanded routes of access
- broader teaching or learning strategies
- information and preparation at secondary schools
- increase student places
- indirect aid schemes (tax relief, family allowance)
- subsidised residences/meals/transport/books
- provision of student welfare services (health care, day care centres)
- counselling/guidance services

Certain groups

- measures for ethnic minorities (not financial)
- measures for disabled (not financial)
- measures for disadvantaged groups (not financial)
- allocation of study places to certain groups
- promote access from all national areas

Policy and practice

- explicit widening access policy (devoted funds/units/laws)
- carry out surveys (study & work, disabled students,...)
- evaluations/research of policies and practices
- monitoring access (and retention) by students

ANNEX B

Possible actions and tools identified by the 2007 Bologna Working Group on the Social Dimension and Mobility

Measures to promote equal opportunities for access, participation and completion

- Anti-discrimination legislation covering higher education
- Admission rules that are simple, fair and transparent

Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education

- Outreach programs for underrepresented groups as defined nationally
- Flexible delivery of higher education
- Flexible learning paths into and within higher education
- Transparency of qualifications and recognition of prior learning
- Incentives for higher education institutions to take action to widen access and participation

Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience

A, Provision of academic services

- Guidance (academic and careers) and tutoring
- Retention measures (modification of curricula, flexibility of delivery, tracking academic success etc.)
- Working tools and environment (well functioning libraries, lecture halls and seminar rooms, internet access, access to scientific data bases etc.)

B, Provision of social services

- Counselling
- Targeted support for students with special needs and students with children
- Appropriate housing conditions for all students
- Provision of healthcare
- Provision of transportation, student canteens etc.

Student participation in the governance and organisation of higher education

- Legislation or other measures to ensure student participation in higher education governance
- Provisions for the existence of and exercise of influence by student organisations
- Student evaluations of courses, programmes and institutions, including action plans and follow-up of actions taken

Finances in order to start and complete studies

- Financial and legal advice for students
- Appropriate and coordinated national financial support systems that are transparent
- Targeted support for disadvantaged groups as defined nationally
- Support measures for students with children

ANNEX C

Suggested approach of the work on national strategies on the social dimension

In time for the next ministerial meeting in 2009 the Working Group suggests that the countries should report to the BFUG on their national strategies for the social dimension, including action plans and measures to show their impact. All stakeholders concerned should actively participate in and support this work at the national level.

The development of a strategy should be followed by a national action plan that includes monitoring mechanisms. Ideally, the strategy and action plan will be based on a national debate on the social dimension and the future priorities of that country depending on the current situation. In order to facilitate a national debate on the social dimension the Working Group proposes the following structure and topics for such a debate:

- Measures to promote equal opportunities

What obstacles are there to equal opportunities within higher education? What protection is there if a student is discriminated when applying for, being admitted to or carrying out studies? Is there a framework for appeal? What action would be the most effective to achieve equal opportunities in higher education?

- Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education for underrepresented groups (gender, ethnic origin, immigration, socio-economic status and background, disability, geography etc.)

What groups are under represented in your national higher education system today? Is there data to show access to higher education by gender, socio-economic background, disabilities, prior immigration, region etc? What obstacles to widened access and participation are there within your higher education system? At other education levels? What actions would be appropriate for the different groups to achieve widened access? Are targeted outreach activities needed?

- Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience

A, Provision of academic services

B, Provision of social services

What kind of academic or career guidance is provided for the students in your country? What is the student – staff ratio? Are there retention measures adapted to different groups or individuals with different needs? Is the academic success of student tracked? What would be/has proven to be the most efficient retention measures? What kind of study environment is there at the higher education institutions? Do student have access to information, electronically or by other means? What is the condition of libraries, lecture halls and seminar rooms? How do students in your country live? Is housing available, of acceptable standard and affordable? Is targeted support provided or needed for specific student groups? Is counselling available if students run in to personal difficulties?

- Measures to increase formal and actual student influence on and participation in higher education governance and other higher education issues

Are there formal provisions for student influence and participation at all governance levels, in consultative as well as decision-making bodies? Are there formal provisions for student evaluation of the education? Are the formal regulations followed-up with actual practices? Are there informal ways of student influence and participation as well? Do students have an influence on all issues related to higher education? Are students aware of their rights? Do students have organisations that

can organise elections to fill elective posts? Is it possible to find enough candidates to fill the posts available? If not – how could this be improved?

- Finances in order to start and complete studies

What kind of information and guidance is provided for students regarding financial issues? How does the average student make his or her living during studies? What kind of state support is provided? Is it appropriate for all groups and individuals? Do certain groups run the risk of being excluded from, or not able to finish their studies, due to financial reasons? Which are these groups or individuals? What could be done to help them? Are students informed about possible employment possibilities after finishing their studies? How is the labour-market relevance of the studies secured? Are former graduates tracked to follow-up their employment rates?

- Monitoring: The participating countries should establish national measures to monitor and evaluate the impact of the national strategy and action plan.

What monitoring mechanisms would be the most appropriate? How could success in strengthening the social dimension be measured short-term and long-term? What quantitative and qualitative data are needed? How is the responsibility for monitoring and evaluation allocated and divided? Are there student surveys carried out to measure the impact of a social dimension strategy? How can student surveys be used in this work?

- Stakeholder involvement

Which stakeholders should be involved in the development of a strategy and an action plan? What should be the responsibility of the different stakeholders when carrying out the agreed strategy and plan?