NATIONAL REPORT 2004 – 2005

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1. Main achievements since Berlin

1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms

Legislative reforms, consistent with the Bologna Process, were made during the late 1990s. However, since Berlin, a number of significant developments have taken place, including the formal launch of the National Framework of Qualifications (October 2003) and the OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland (August 2004).

2. National organisation

2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies
(For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

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.
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.

2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure
(For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

Traditionally the system of third level education in Ireland has comprised the university sector, the Institutes of Technology, the Colleges of Education and other State aided Institutions. All are in receipt of State aid, either via the HEA (in the case of Universities and Colleges of Education) or directly by the Department of Education and Science

(www.education.ie) in the case of all others.

In recent years, a number of independent private colleges and other institutions have been established. These colleges offer a range of courses complementing the existing provision in the higher education and training sector, some of which have submitted programmes for validation to HETAC.

Ireland has a binary system of higher education, designed to ensure maximum flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of students and to the wide variety of social and economic requirements. However, within each sector, a diversity of institutions offer differing types and levels of programmes. The Universities are essentially concerned with undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, together with basic and applied research. The main work of the Institutes of Technology is in undergraduate programmes, with a smaller number of post-graduate programmes and a growing involvement in regionally orientated applied research.

There are seven universities recognised under the Universities Act, 1997 - University College Cork, University College Dublin, National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Limerick and Dublin City University. The Universities validate and award their own qualifications as well as institutions such as the Colleges of Education, which are have management agreement with the universities.

There are thirteen Institutes of Technology (IoTs), which are designated under the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992. The institutions are Athlone IT, IT Blanchardstown, Cork IT, IT Carlow, Dundalk IT, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Letterkenny IT, Galway-Mayo IT, Limerick IT, IT Sligo, IT Tallaght, IT Tralee and Waterford IT. These conduct programmes leading to awards made by HETAC. In some cases, following a review process, the institutions have been or may be delegated authority by the Council to make higher education and training awards themselves.

Other higher education colleges and institutions include National institutions, private colleges and other higher education and training institutions. However, under recent legislation any provider of education and training regardless of the source of that provision, whether it is in an educational institution, the workplace or the community, can apply to HETAC for validation of a programme.

Finally, the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) (www.dit.ie) which made its own awards for many years, was awarded degree awarding powers in 1997.

2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country
(National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

A national steering group has been established to oversee the implementation of the Bologna Process. It is chaired by the Department of Education and Science and has nominees of the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities (CHIU), the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology (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) and the Union of Students of Ireland

(USI).

Ireland now has a number of Bologna Promoters who will provide a resource to the wider higher education community in responding to the challenges of the Process.

3. Quality assurance
The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.
Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

Ireland is not operating under a single national quality assurance system. Quality assurance and the respective responsibilities are set out in different legislation. The specific responsibilities of the bodies and institutions in this area are set out below.

Universities.
The **Universities Act 1997** requires the universities to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university. It includes the conduct of evaluation at regular intervals and in any case not less than once in every 10 years or such longer period as may be determined by the university in agreement with the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Such reviews are undertaken by persons, other than employees, who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. In addition, a review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures is also carried out by the Universities (at least every 15 years) in consultation with the HEA. In recent years, the seven Irish Universities have co-operated in developing their quality assurance systems and in representing their approach nationally and internationally as a unique quality model appropriate to the needs of the Irish Universities. Further collaboration is now being achieved by the decision of the governing authorities to establish the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB).

The **HEA** has a statutory role to assist the universities in achieving their objectives. Furthermore it may review and report on quality procedures in the universities.

While **DIT** has primary responsibility for the implementation of quality assurance procedures, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has a quality assurance review role in relation to these procedures. The DIT is at present undergoing an external quality assurance evaluation by the European Universities Association (EUA) on behalf of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

HETAC is required under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 to agree and review the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures with its providers of higher education and training programmes. All higher education institutions are primarily responsible for establishing quality assurance procedures in accordance with HETAC guidelines and criteria.

In 2002 HETAC published Guidelines and Criteria for Quality Assurance Procedures in Higher Education and Training. These require all providers of higher education and training programmes associated with HETAC to establish quality assurance procedures and agree those procedures with HETAC. Twenty-two providers have agreed quality assurance

procedures with the Council to date. A review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures will commence in 2005.

National Quality Assurance Network - Irish Higher Education Quality Network.

The Irish Higher Education Quality Network was established in October 2003 as a formal network. The network comprises the main organisations with a role or significant interest in quality assurance in higher and education and training in Ireland. Membership includes the Universities, the Institutes of Technology, the Higher Education Colleges Association, the HEA, HETAC, IUQB, DIT, NQAI and student representatives. The network is working towards the development of a common national position on key quality assurance issues, in order to inform the debate on those same issues at the European level. The network provides a forum for discussion of quality assurance issues amongst the principal national stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education and training in Ireland and allow for the dissemination of best practice in quality assurance amongst practitioners and policy makers involved in the Irish higher education and training sector.

3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.

The **Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999** has been enacted. The Act established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The Act contains quality assurance procedures for any provider with programmes validated by either of the two awarding councils or with the delegated authority from an awarding council to make awards itself.

The Act provides that the quality assurance procedures must be agreed between the appropriate Council and the provider. The procedures must include regular evaluation by national and international experts and evaluation by learners. The provider must implement any of the findings arising from the application of the procedures that the awarding council determines. The effectiveness of the procedures must be reviewed on a regular basis by the council. In addition, the Act also requires the Dublin Institute of Technology to agree quality assurance procedures with the NQAI, which will include the regular evaluation of its programmes of education and training and ancillary services by national and international experts and learners. The NQAI will consider the findings arising out of such evaluations and may make recommendations to the Dublin Institute of Technology, which it will implement. The NQAI also reviews the effectiveness of these procedures.

Under the HETAC system of certification for quality assurance procedures, providers submit quality assurance (QA) procedures (in accordance with national criteria and guidelines) to the Council. The QA procedures are sent to an external expert review panel (membership includes international expertise). Each panel member reviews the QA procedures and submits a report to HETAC, where a single report is compiled. The expert panel meet to consider the converged views and make a recommendation to HETAC. The recommendation will indicate agreement (or otherwise) of the QA procedures. The review of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures may be described as the accreditation of quality assurance procedures following the agreement process. The review of QA procedures will involve a self-evaluation by the provider, an external expert panel with international

expertise and a site visit to the provider.

The **Universities Act, 1997,** which came into force in June 1997, specifically requires each university "to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university". This model, which recognises institutional autonomy, is one of self-assessment. It must include the evaluation, at least once in every 10 years of each department and, where appropriate, school of the university and any service provided by the university, by employees of the university in the first instance and by persons, other than employees, who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. Furthermore, the procedures must include assessment by those, including students, availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university, and the procedures must provide for the publication in such form and manner as the governing authority thinks fit. A governing authority must implement any findings arising out of an evaluation carried out in accordance with procedures established under this section unless, having regard to the resources available to the university or for any other reason, it would, in the opinion of the governing authority, be impractical or unreasonable to do so. In addition, each governing authority must, at least every 15 years, having regard to the resources available to the university and having consulted with the Higher Education Authority, arrange for a review of the effectiveness of the procedures provided for by this section and the implementation of the findings arising out of the application of those procedures and publish the outcome of such a review.

On a wider level, the Higher Education Authority has a statutory role under the Act to assist the universities in the achievement of their objectives generally. Furthermore, it may review the quality assurance procedures established and may publish a report on the outcome of any such review – a process which is conducted in consultation with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The first such review of quality assurance procedures is being undertaken by the Higher Education Authority in conjunction with the IUQB and this will be concluded in early 2005.

3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.
Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?

HETAC
International expert peers are included in all quality assurance and other accreditation activities of the Council. HETAC has engaged over twenty five international peers to participate in programme accreditation, delegated authority (Institutional accreditation), research accreditation and quality assurance activities, in the past eighteen months. HETAC currently holds the secretariat for INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. The CEO of HETAC is currently Vice President of ENQA-European Network for Quality Assurance Agencies. The Council is a member of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and the Joint Quality Initiative and as host of the 2003 biennial conference of the International network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education organised the European Regional Meeting of that body. HETAC draws on the expertise in over 12 other accreditation and QA agencies (ECA).   The governance of HETAC includes expert members with overseas international experience in higher education and quality assurance systems from Europe and North America.

Universities.
The external members of the IUQB (see 3.1) board includes at least two persons from outside Ireland with experience of accreditation and quality assurance of academic programmes in universities in Europe and North America. External members also include a person with experience of professional accreditation and a person with a background in quality improvement and assurance as it relates to management and services. One of the external members acts as Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive of the IUQB acts as Secretary.

The HEA/IUQB joint review of the effectiveness of QA procedures in the universities is being undertaken by teams of international experts from Europe and North America.

Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)
The Dublin Institute of Technology has made its own awards at Certificate and Diploma level for more than 50 years. The quality assurance system of DIT was assessed by an International Review Team in 1996; this team recommended that DIT be granted the power to award its own degrees. The recommendation was accepted and implemented by the Minister for Education and Science. Internationally, DIT is an active member of EUA.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

4. The two-cycle degree system

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report

As indicated in Section 3.2, the Qualififcations (Education and Training) Act 1999 has been enacted, with one of its key tasks being 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 make the awards from level 7 to 10.

BOLOGNA CYCLES	NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS		PROVIDERS	
	Awards	**Levels**		
3	Doctoral Degree	10	**Institutes of Technology**	**Universities**
2	Masters Degree	9		**Recognised Colleges of the National Uiversity of Ireland**
	Post-Graduate Diploma		**DIT**	
1	Higher Bachelor Degree	8	**Private Colleges and other HEIs**	
	Higher Diploma			
	Ordinary Bachelor Degree	7		
	Higher Certificate	6		
	Fruther Education/ Schools Awards	1 - 5	Entry from Second Level and Further Education and Training	

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.

5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

An integrated national policy approach to the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland has been established by the NQAI in consultation with stakeholders. This integrated approach is through the Qualifications Recognition – Ireland service within the Authority. 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. A Recognition Implementation Group has also been formed comprising representatives of the Authority, the Department of Education and Science, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the universities. This group is responsible for assisting in the management of the implementation of the national policy approach to the recognition of international awards.

With regard to the Diploma Supplement, the Department of Education and Science chaired a Working Group, charged with responsibility of developing a National Template for this document. This was formally launched by the Minister for Education and Science in February 2004, at a conference of ECTS Counsellors in Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

The template has since been revised to take account of the first milestone of the National Framework for Qualifications, and this is currently being rolled out to all providers in higher education.

6. Doctoral studies and research

6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies
(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)

Third cycle study in Ireland is not limited to university provision. All higher education institutions may provide postgraduate research degrees programmes, in accordance with the principles of the National Framework of Qualifications. Level 10 refers to third cycle studies. Progression from one award to the next is set out, for example, in the policies and procedures that describe the operation of the National Framework. Progression from the Honours Bachelor Degree (level 8) cycle 1 to the research award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) cycle 3, is possible as is progression to PhD is from the Masters Degree award at level 9, cycle 2.

Typically doctoral awards (PhD) are obtained by a process of supervised research resulting in the production of a thesis. There are a small number of programmes (professional areas) where there is a substantial taught part in addition to the thesis.

The IUQB has recently completed a review of the organisation of PhD programmes in the university sector. Arising from this it is intended that good practice guidelines will be recommended for the sector.

6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?
(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)

The National Development Plan (2000 – 2006) provided for an investment of some €2.5 billion for the development of institutional research capacity and strategically orientated basic research. Part of the provision included some €650million for a dedicated Programme of Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI). The objectives of the Programme are

(i)   facilitation of the strategic development of institutional research capabilities (infrastructural and programmatic),

(ii)   enhancement of the numbers, quality and relevance of graduate output and

(iii)   support of high quality inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional research.

Funding is also provided under the NDP for programmes operated by the two Research Councils - Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences and Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology.

In addition to this, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) was established in July 2003, having previously been in place to administer Ireland's Technology Foresight Fund. SFI plans an investment of €646 million between 2000-2006 (of which, €113m in 2004) in academic researchers and research teams to generate new knowledge, leading edge technologies, and competitive enterprises in the fields underpinning the two key strategic areas of biotechnology and information and communications technology.

There are a number of other research agencies with specific remits in areas such as the health sciences, environment, marine and agriculture. While these may have their own research facilities, it should be noted that some 80% of all publically funded research is conducted in higher education institutions.

7. Mobility of students and staff

7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country (For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)

Studies at international and national level have confirmed that the key issues affecting mobility of Irish students are, in common to those in other countries, funding, linguistic ability, academic/institutional barriers (credit transfer, recognition, course structures) as well as inadequate information systems in regard to the options available. Evidence suggests that, not surprisingly, there is a high correlation between parental income and opportunity to study abroad (Euro Student Survey 2000 – Irish Report). This study also showed that while the desire to improve language skills is often the main reason for students going abroad, over half the students surveyed declared that they had little or no competence in a foreign language. All third-level students in receipt of means-tested maintenance grants have the option of utilising those grants while pursuing approved **full-time undergraduate** courses of not less than two years duration in a university or third level institution which is maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from public funds in Ireland and in any other EU Member State. Eligible students for 3rd level maintenance grants schemes in Ireland include, inter alia, students from other EU Member States who satisfy the conditions of the schemes.

For incoming students the availability of courses through English is a major attraction. Incoming students under the Erasmus programme are nearly double the number of out-going students.

7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country

The Student Support Schemes, administered by the Local Authorities and the Vocational Education Committees (Awarding Bodies) under the aegis of the Department, 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. In such cases any grantholder in receipt of the adjacent rate of grant will be paid the non-adjacent rate or higher rate of grant for the duration of his/her study abroad.

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.

Rate of Grant
Grants are paid at either of two rates:-
- The non-adjacent rate, where the grant-holder's normal residence is more than 15 miles from the college attended. With effect from the 1999/00 academic year all eligible mature students have received the non-adjacent rate of grant.
- The adjacent rate, where the grant-holder's normal residence is 15 miles or less from the college attended.

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, namely Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Italian and Spanish.

Tax Relief
Section 473A, Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 provides for tax relief on third level tuition fees, at the standard rates in respect of approved courses at approved colleges of higher

education including certain approved undergraduate courses in any EU Member State, and postgraduate courses in any EU and non-EU Member States. The maximum level of qualifying fee for tax relief purposes in the current academic year (2004/05) is €3,175. The maximum level of qualifying fee for 2005/06 will be €5,000. The tax relief is allowed in respect of tuition fees paid by an individual in respect of her/his courseband also in respect of fees paid for a dependant.

Finally, an Inter-departmental committee has recently reported on the Internationalisation of Irish Education Services. It recommends, inter alia, the establishment of a new body "Education Ireland" with functions in a range of areas including responsibility for the award of a Quality Mark and the operation of a code of conduct for the pastoral care of international students.

Notwithstanding this Government initiative, many Higher Education Institutions have taken specific steps to improve mobility. For example, DIT has recently established an International Students Office with three staff to co-ordinate the mobility of students from outside Ireland into DIT and the movement of DIT students to higher education institutions in Europe*.*

7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country *(For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)*

The main factors influencing teacher mobility under the Erasmus programme are:
- Duration of visit and the need to provide substitution teaching while away.
- Lack of recognition of teaching period for recruitment and promotion purposes.
- Funding available.

7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country

The HEA as the National Agency for Socrates/Erasmus recently published an external review of Erasmus Teacher Mobility. It is hoped that the issues identified in this report will help to improve teacher mobility.

8. Higher education institutions and students

8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions
Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?

Universities
The Universities Act 1997 provides for 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 not less than periods of three years. Externally, the HEA is involved , which has an overseeing role with regard to strategic plans and quality assurance procedures. It also is responsible for the Management and disbursement of all recurrent and capital funds to the universities and designated institutions, including Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions and other targeted initiatives promoted by the HEA.

DIT.
The DIT Act, 1992 gives DIT authority to regulate its own affairs though its actions require the consent of the Minister of Education in some key areas e.g. purchase or sale of property and the introduction of new programmes of study. As DIT is an awarding body, its statutory Academic Council and Governing Body can make all the necessary decisions in the academic domain. DIT is 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 Institutes of Technology.
The government established the Institutes of Technology [then Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs)] 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. While the Institutes have the academic freedom to decide on curriculum and programmes the Department has the final say as regards the funding of these programmes and any additional resources, such as staffing, required to run them.

8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process

As indicated in Section 2.3, the Department of Education and Science has convened a National Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the Bologna Process in Ireland. In addition to this, it is normal for the Department or one of the stakeholders to organise a national conference in advance of each Ministerial conference.

8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?
(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)

Students are represented on, *inter alia*, the Governing Bodies of Higher Education institutions established in statute, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

Student representation has been further advanced through the policy initiatives on quality assurance, where the proposed system recognises the importance of students in the process, particularly in reviews of academic Departments and of units that directly provide services to

students. This approach is underpinned by legislation, including the Universities Act, 1997 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

HETAC has extended student representation to include activities such as the delegation of authority to make awards evaluation and committee representation for the Programme Accreditation Committee.

9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process

9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland was established on a statutory basis, under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 on 26th February, 2001. The two principal tasks of the Authority are to establish and maintain a national framework of qualifications to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression. The national framework is now established with a view to evolving to:

"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."

Each award on the framework is described as multipurpose and states: ' *this is a multi-purpose award-type. The knowledge, skill and competence acquired are relevant to personal development, participation in society and community, employment, and access to additional education and training'* Detailed policies actions and procedures on the facilitation of access transfer and progression has been published and higher education institutions are realigning their policies and procedures to facilitate these new requirements.

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. The National Office, in consultation with the education community, learners and social partners recently completed a national, multi-annual plan to achieve equity of access to higher education. This plan was launched by the Minister for Education and Science in December 2004. During 2005 the National Office plans to progress its work significantly.

10. Developments in lifelong learning

10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?

An audit of AP(E)L practices in higher education in Ireland, undertaken primarily as the first activity of a Socrates-Grundtvig 2003-2005 project, VaLEx; Valuing Learning from Experience.

In October 2002, a detailed report on Life-Long Learning was produced by a taskforce composed of representatives from the Further and Higher Education Sectors, industry, community groups and key Government Departments. In determining the most appropriate strategies, it defined Life-Long Learning as:
 "The State and citizens working in partnership, should achieve the skills, motivation, supports/ tools, resources and time to engage in learning on a lifelong basis, and thus

enrich lives and develop a more prosperous, more inclusive society."

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

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

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

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

10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths

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 NQAI has established an advisory group to assist in encouraging the continuation, expansion and further development of processes for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training, and to promote co-ordination and harmonisation of these at a National level.

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. It is a policy of the NQAI to encourage the continuation, expansion and further development of processes for the recognition of prior learning, and to promote co-ordination and harmonisation of these by providers.

11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education

11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint

study programmes

11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees
HETAC has a number of integrated and collaborative programmes recently accredited that will lead to joint awards in the near future. The Council is at present considering a policy on Joint Awards and Collaborative programmes with a view to establishing a policy on Joint Awards with one award/qualification as the output. There are a number of integrated study programmes in place in the university sector. For the most part these programmes have been developed under the Erasmus programme and more recently the Erasmus Mundus programme. e.g. European Masters Degree in International Humanitarian Aid, (UCD in collaboration with 6 other European countries).
11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)
The programmes under the remit of HETAC have been jointly accredited. The programme Accreditation process considers issues on admission, nobility of students and assessment. The HETAC policy on joint awards and collaborative programmes includes a detailed provision on the agreement or contract between the institutions providing joint programmes and the awarding bodies. The making of a joint award is subject to ratification of the agreement.

11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education
The requirements for participation under the Erasmus programme e.g. European Policy Statement and the initiatives funded under the Erasmus programme are specifically aimed at developing the European dimension in higher education.

11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension *(For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)*
Curriculum development projects under the Erasmus programme promote the European dimension. Also, the use of European peers in Quality assurance reviews can facilitate the development of a European dimension in curricula.

12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA
Ireland is playing an active role in the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area, as illustrated by the following: HETAC and HEA are members of ENQA, with the NQAI as an associate member. Séamus Puirséil, Chief Executive, HETAC, is now Vice- President of ENQA. Ian McKenna (Department of Education and Science) is involved in the working group charged with the task of designing the European Framework of Qualifications. Séan Ó Foghlú (NQAI) and Séamus Púirséil (HETAC) assist in providing technical support to this

group.

The working group on stock-taking within the Bologna Process is chaired by Ian McKenna, Department of Education and Science, Ireland.

HETAC is a member of the European Consortium of Accreditation (ECA), a consortium of accreditation agencies working actively on the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions between the various member countries. The consortium will soon agree a code of good practice which will support and strengthen the ENQA brief and other Bologna objectives.

All of the meetings of the Joint Quality Initiative where the Dublin Descriptors have been agreed, have been hosted in Dublin by HETAC and the NQAI.

HETAC on behalf of the Department of Education and Science has organised a number of Bologna seminars on the Diploma Supplement and label, ECTS, ECTS label.
The Department of Education and Science has co-ordinated the implementation of the Diploma Supplement through the development of a National Template. This document is now being cited as an example of good practice in Ireland.

The National Higher Education Quality Network was established in 2003 and is well advanced in setting out principles of good practice for quality assurance and quality improvement in Irish higher education.

With the assistance of its Technical Advisory Group on Credit (Higher Education Track), the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has developed a set of 'Principles and operational guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish higher education and training' in a manner consistent with ECTS.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland participates in the ENIC/NARIC networks and is hosting the 2004 General assembly in June 2004. In addition, Carmel Kelly of the NQAI is the Vice President of the ENIC Bureau.

In March 2004, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, with the assistance of the Further and Higher Education and Training Awards Councils and the HEA, on behalf of the Departments of Education and Science and Enterprise, Trade and Employment, hosted an EU Presidency Conference in Dublin Castle entitled Towards 2010 - Common Themes and Approaches in higher education and vocational education and training in Europe.
Finally, representatives of many Irish Higher Education Institutions have participated in European projects, including Tuning etc.

13. Concluding comments

13.1. *Give a description of your national Bologna strategies*

These have already been identified throughout the text

13.2. *Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country*

- Deepening the engagement of institutions in the process.
- Ireland faces the challenge of encouraging further exchanges of staff and students within Europe (as promoted by the Bologna process) in view of the cost of such exchanges for an off-shore island