QAA

COUNTRY REPORT:

The Republic of Ireland

Contents

Preface

This report is part of a series of country reports that QAA, as part of its contractual arrangement with the four national funding bodies, regularly produces to offer higher education providers an insight into the higher education and regulatory landscape of key countries for UK transnational education (TNE). The reports offer high-level information and intelligence about regulations, challenges and opportunities, signposting sources of further information.

Some of our country reports are associated with TNE review activity, in which case they also include the main lessons learned from reviewing TNE in the subject country, for the benefit of the whole sector. This country report on the Republic of Ireland is associated with the review of UK TNE in Ireland carried out in 2017.

In producing these reports, and in reviewing UK TNE, QAA seeks to liaise with local regulators and quality assurance agencies, and other UK sector bodies with relevant expertise. QAA has a number of strategic partnerships with counterpart agencies in key countries for UK TNE. These are a source of intelligence and direct access to up-to-date information about local regulatory developments.

We would like to thank our partner agency in Ireland, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, for its valuable support in developing this report, and throughout the TNE review process.

Introduction

1   QAA has always reviewed UK transnational education (TNE) as part of its mission to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered. TNE is considered through both UK institutional reviews and a dedicated review process, TNE Review. TNE Review[1] aims specifically at:

- testing the implementation of UK degree-awarding bodies' policies and procedures for safeguarding the standards and improving the quality of their TNE provision

- gaining a better understanding of the experience of UK TNE students

- learning lessons that could benefit the whole UK higher education sector, thus driving the improvement of UK providers' capacity to delivery high quality TNE

- reassuring international stakeholders about the quality of UK TNE delivered in their countries, thus safeguarding the international reputation of UK higher education.

2   TNE Review is a country-based process. On the basis of a three-year programme of TNE Review activity,[2] each year a country of strategic importance for UK higher education is selected and a sample of UK TNE provision in that country is reviewed. A country-based approach is more cost efficient than reviewing overseas delivery sites on an institutional basis, given the geographical scale and growing quantity of UK TNE – over 80 per cent of all UK degree-awarding bodies are engaged in TNE provision. A country-based approach also facilitates a better understanding of the local operating environment of different countries, allowing TNE Review teams to make an informed assessment of UK TNE arrangements, taking into account the local context in which they operate, and to share knowledge with the sector. Finally, a country-based approach helps build stronger relationships with local quality assurance bodies, facilitating inter-agency cooperation in the quality assurance of TNE.

3   The Republic of Ireland (hereafter referred to as Ireland) was selected as the destination country for TNE Review for 2017. Ireland is the second-largest host country for UK TNE in Europe, and has been tipped by some as a potential destination for UK universities to open an EU outpost in the aftermath of Brexit.[3] At the same time, national policy developments in Ireland have seen the recent development of an international education strategy and reforms to prevent the abuse of student immigration, which impose limits on the extent to which UK providers can grow their TNE provision in Ireland. Through this TNE Review exercise QAA aimed to respond to possible concerns raised by local stakeholders about the quality and nature of UK TNE arrangements, while supporting the growth of quality TNE provision in the context of Brexit and national policy developments in Ireland.

4   This TNE Review exercise also embodied the commitment made by both QAA and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) to strengthen inter-agency cooperation in the quality assurance of TNE, through regular sharing of data, information, intelligence and good practice.

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1   *Transnational Education Review Handbook*, available at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=3146.

2   'In-country reviews of UK transnational education (TNE) provision in Ireland, Hong Kong and Malaysia', QAA, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/newsroom/in-country-reviews-of-uk-transnational-education-(tne)-provision-in-ireland-hong kong-and-malaysia.

3   'UK universities draw up plans for EU campuses ahead of Brexit', *The Guardian*, available at:
www.theguardian.com/education/2016/sep/22/uk-universities-mull-eu-campuses-in-new-era-of-uncertainty.

The Republic of Ireland

5   Ireland is a unitary parliamentary republic in Europe, created as the Irish Free State in 1922. It was declared a republic in 1949, following the Republic of Ireland Act 1948. The national language of Ireland is Irish (Gaeilge) and the official languages of Ireland are Irish and English.

6   Ireland became a member of the United Nations in December 1955. It joined the European Economic Community, the predecessor of the EU, in 1973 and adopted the Euro currency in 2002. Ireland is not a member of the Schengen Area.

7   The population of the Ireland is 4,761,865, with the highest concentration in the Greater Dublin Area, which accounts for 1,904,806 inhabitants. There was a significant fall in the number of births over the past few years, down to 67,000 in 2015 from 77,000 in 2010. The 2015 census also showed an ageing country, with a 19 per cent increase in the number of people over the age of 65 since 2011. A net migration of 22,500 people between 2011 and 2016 has further reduced population growth.

8   Ireland is ranked eighth in the Human Development Index,[4] and its economy is one of the wealthiest in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and EU, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 294.1 million USD in 2016. This represents a 5.8 per cent growth from the previous year.[5] However, the country's GDP is significantly greater than Gross National Product (signifying the national income rather than output) due to the repatriation of profits of the large number of multinational corporations based in Ireland. Since the 1980s, the Irish economy has transformed from being predominantly focused on agriculture to a modern knowledge economy, focused on high technology industries and services. There is a heavy reliance on foreign direct investment and Ireland has attracted several multinational corporations, thanks to a low corporation tax rate and a highly educated workforce. The most important sectors of Ireland's economy are industry (contributing to 39.1 per cent of GDP); wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities (12.8 per cent); and public administration, defence, education, human health and social work activities (12.3 per cent). Ireland's main export partners are the US, the UK and Belgium, while its main import partners are the UK, the US and France.

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4   Human Development Reports, United Nations Development Programme, available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI.

5   Ireland GDP Annual Growth Rate, Trading Economics, available at: https://tradingeconomics.com/ireland/gdp-growth-annual.

British–Irish relations

9   The United Kingdom is Ireland's closest neighbour and most important economic partner in trade, investment and tourism. Over a billion pounds sterling in trade in goods and services flows across the Irish Sea every week.

10   The 2012 Joint Statement issued following a summit meeting in Downing Street in March 2012 sets out the key areas for British–Irish cooperation over the next decade. The Statement includes references to the 'uniquely close political relationship' between Britain and Ireland and a call for deeper economic cooperation, with a particular emphasis on energy (including the All-Ireland energy market, the East-West interconnector and renewable energies), research and development, the agri-food sector, professional and financial services, and the creative sectors.

11   The British–Irish Council was created under the Good Friday Agreement to promote positive and mutually beneficial relationships among the people of these islands and to provide a forum for consultation and cooperation. The Council is made up of representatives of the Irish and British Governments, of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and of the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey.

12   The British–Irish Parliamentary Assembly was set up in February 1990 to act as a link between the Oireachtas, the Irish parliament, and the Houses of Parliament at Westminster. Originally called the British–Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, it was made up of 25 Irish and 25 British parliamentarians from the Upper and Lower Houses of the Oireachtas and Westminster. In 2001, it was enlarged to include five members from the Scottish Parliament, five members from the National Assembly for Wales, five members from the Northern Ireland Assembly and one member each from the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey Parliaments, and renamed as the British–Irish Parliamentary Assembly in October 2008.[6]

13   The decision of the UK to leave the EU, taken in the referendum on 23 June 2016, presents profound economic and political challenges for Ireland. As the only European member state to share a physical border with the UK, Ireland occupies a unique position in the Brexit debate. To protect the prosperity and peace of the country, the Irish government has developed a comprehensive preparatory programme, involving consultation, analysis, prioritisation and engagement.

14   Arising from this extensive analysis, Ireland's key priorities have been identified as:

▪ minimising the impact on trade and the economy

▪ protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process

▪ maintaining the Common Travel Area

▪ influencing the future of the EU.

15   Ireland remains fully committed to EU membership and the Eurozone. The Irish people have consistently endorsed the membership of the EU, and membership of the EU is considered to be central to the success of Ireland as an open, competitive economy and the foundation for much of the social progress that has been made over the last four decades.

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6   The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, available at: www.dfa.ie/.

Key policy drivers

16   The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (the National Strategy),[7] launched in 2011 by the Department for Education and Skills, outlines the blueprint for the transformation of the Irish higher education sector over the next two decades. It sets out changes for the sector that are aimed specifically at providing for:

- a more flexible system, with a greater choice of provision and modes of learning for an increasingly diverse cohort of students

- improvements in the quality of the student experience, the quality of teaching and learning, and the relevance of learning outcomes

- ensuring that higher education connects more effectively with wider social, economic and enterprise needs through its staff, the quality of its graduates, the relevance of its programmes, the quality of its research, and its ability to translate that into high value jobs and real benefits for society.

17   The National Strategy places particular emphasis on increasing 'flexible learning opportunities, part-time provision, work-based learning and short, intensive skills programmes' to facilitate the accessibility, relevance and responsiveness of higher education for mature and traditional school leavers who may need or prefer to combine work and part-time study. It is expected that, over the coming years, the demand for higher education opportunities from the adult population in Ireland will increase in association with the increasing vulnerability of employment and the demands of the knowledge economy for continuous upskilling.

18   This emphasis on the need for higher education to innovate and develop in order to provide flexible opportunities for larger and more diverse student cohorts, and enhance the quality and relevance of its education offer, is closely aligned with another key national strategy, the National Skills Strategy 2025. The National Skills Strategy sets out the strategic vision and specific objectives for the country's future skills requirement, and includes as its main objectives:

- for education and training providers to place a stronger focus on providing skills development opportunities that are relevant to the needs of learners, society and the economy

- for employers to participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness

- to continually enhance and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning at all stages of education

- to increase engagement in lifelong learning for people across the country

- for the government to support an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market.

19   These and other national strategies underpin the Action Plan for Education 2016–19, which outlines hundreds of specific actions to be implemented to support the Government vision of 'making Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026'.[8]

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7   National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, available at:
www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf (PDF, 845KB).

8   For more information, see: www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2016-Press-Releases/PR2016-09-15 html. An updated Action Plan is published at the start of each year, reporting on progress and setting out specific objectives for the year. The latest one for 2017 is available here:
www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR2017-06-02.html.

20   Another key national strategy driving changes in the Irish higher education sector is Irish Educated, Globally Connected: an International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020, published by the Department for Education and Skills in October 2016.[9] The driving goals of the International Education Strategy, which sets out the plan to increase the value of the international education sector by 33 per cent to €2.1 billion by 2020, are to:[10]

- increase the number of international students studying in Ireland
- attract outstanding researchers and build research capacity and commercialisation of research
- build world-class networks of learning and innovation that can attract funding from outside the Irish education system
- equip Irish learners with the skills and experience to compete internationally
- have more Irish students integrate overseas experience into their study through maximising mobility opportunities for all
- connect the benefits gained from internationalisation in education with enterprises to support the achievement of national economic ambitions
- enhance international alumni networks to build global connections for greater social and economic outcomes for Ireland at home and abroad.

21   The International Education Strategy is based on the commitment to retain and strengthen the reputation for quality of the Irish higher education and English language sector, and to prioritise the Irish accredited higher education and Irish quality-assured English language provision. This is reflected in the developing immigration and quality assurance framework for international education, aimed at reassuring international stakeholders about the quality of Irish international education, addressing immigration abuse in part of Ireland's private college sector, and regulating and limiting the operation of foreign provision in the country.

22   In the wake of a number of high profile private colleges' closure, which left over 3,000 non-EEA (European Economic Area) students without the education programmes they had paid for, the Ministers for Education and Skills and Justice and Equality announced a series of reforms to prevent student immigration permission from being used to facilitate the economic migration of non-EEA nationals.[11] As a result of the changes, overseas-accredited courses have ceased to be a basis for granting student immigration permission. These courses are seen as having little strategic value for Irish higher education and its internationalisation. Additionally, they have at times been seen as possibly playing a key role in the business model of some private colleges that abused the immigration system by centring their activity on the recruitment of international students attracted by the opportunity to earn internationally recognised degrees.

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9   International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-20, available at: www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/International-Education-Strategy-For-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf (PDF, 8.6MB).

10 For more information, see: www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2016-Press-Releases/PR16-07-10.html.

11 Regulatory Reform of the International Education Sector and the Student Immigration Regime, available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Regulatory-Reform-of-the-International-Education-Sector-and-the-Student-Immigration-Regime.pdf (PDF, 706KB).

The Irish regulatory landscape

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

23   The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (2012 Act)[12] is the principal legislation underpinning quality assurance in Irish higher education, combined with the Universities Act 1997.[13] The 2012 Act established QQI as the independent state agency responsible for promoting quality and accountability in education and training services in Ireland. It was created from the amalgamation of the agencies previously responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in further and higher education: the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), and the Irish Universities Quality Board.

24   QQI is responsible for promoting, maintaining and developing the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ),[14] a 10-level framework that includes many different qualifications offered by Irish education providers, including:

▪ the Junior and Leaving Certificates

▪ the certificates, diplomas and degrees offered by universities, institutes of technology, private higher education colleges, and other independent providers

▪ the further education and training qualifications offered by colleges run by the Education and Training Boards,[15] Fáilte Ireland,[16] Teagasc,[17] and other independent providers.

25   QQI is responsible for the external quality assurance of public colleges, institutes and universities, as well as independent private colleges that offer programmes leading to QQI awards. QQI also acts as an awarding body. Providers can apply to QQI to have their programmes of education and training approved so that the programmes can lead to a national qualification (QQI award) at all levels of the NFQ. The QQI award is the quality-assured qualification awarded for further and higher education and training in Ireland, and replaces the certification previously made by the FETAC and HETAC. QQI also manages a national scheme for the quality assurance of English language schools, and hosts NARIC Ireland, providing free advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland, as well as on the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad.

26   A prospective provider wishing to access QQI certification must establish quality assurance procedures, in accordance with QQI statutory quality assurance guidelines, and submit them to QQI for approval. The provider then may submit a programme or programmes for validation according to the QQI validation policy and criteria.[18] If successful, the provider may offer the programme for a period of five years, after which it must be re-validated, this time by the provider. The 2012 Act includes a provision for learner protection, where, prior to validating a programme, the provider must provide evidence that they have in place adequate learner protection arrangements, in the form of either two alternate equivalent academic programmes elsewhere that students can be transferred to, or a financial bond to recompense students in the event that the provider can no longer offer the programme.

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12 The 2012 Act, available at: http://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/2012/act/28/revised/en/html.

13 The Universities Act 1997, available at: www.ihegn.ie/_fileupload/Publications/UniversitiesAct1997_79918537.pdf (PDF, 418KB).

14 The National Framework of Qualifications, available at: www.nfq-qqi.com.

15 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are statutory authorities with responsibility for education, training and youth work, in addition to other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools, and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes. For more information, see: www.etbi.ie.

16 Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority of Ireland, available at: www.failteireland.ie.

17 Teagasc, the Agriculture and Food Development Authority of Ireland, available at: www.teagasc.ie.

18 QQI Programme Validation, available at: www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Programme-Validation07.aspx.

27   QQI monitors the programmes on a desk basis. This may occur by requesting enrolment data and progression rates and through monitoring requests for certification. If QQI has concerns (whether through its own monitoring or, for instance, learner complaints), it can institute a review of the validated programme or programmes, and, based on a recommendation from an expert panel, withdraw validation of the programme. QQI can also review the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of a provider at any time under what is termed a 'for cause' review. If the quality assurance procedures are found to be defective and approval is withdrawn, the validation of all QQI programmes is also withdrawn.

The International Education Mark

28   The 2012 Act further introduced the power for QQI to award the International Education Mark (IEM) to approved providers offering English language and higher education and training courses to international students. To access the IEM, providers will have to prove that they have established robust quality assurance procedures ensuring the quality of education for all learners, and that they are compliant with the Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners. The Code of Practice has been developed by QQI, as per the 2012 Act requirement, and any providers running programmes for international students will have to comply with the Code if they want to have those programmes approved by QQI. In order to fully implement the IEM, a number of legislative amendments to the 2012 Act are required. The Minister for Education and Skills has announced his intention to introduce these legislative amendments and it is anticipated that the relevant bill will be enacted in 2018.

29   In addition to functioning as a mechanism to distinguish between providers who are offering a genuine high quality Irish higher education to international students and those who are not, the IEM will also function as a requirement used by the Department of Justice and Equality for immigration purposes. Providers wishing to recruit non-EEA students will have to obtain the IEM from QQI, in a similar way to which UK providers wishing to recruit non-EEA students must undergo educational oversight by QAA.

30   Until the IEM is fully operational the Government has decided to manage the recruitment of non-EEA students through the implementation of an Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP), jointly administered by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Justice and Equality. The ILEP is used for immigration purposes only, with decisions on the eligibility of providers and their programmes to appear on the list being made jointly by the two Departments. Where relevant, advice may be sought from QQI where education-related queries arise.

31   Higher education programmes with features as set out in the ILEP criteria, for example offered on a full-time basis with minimum attendance requirements, at levels 6-10 in the NFQ, and with a minimum of 60 ECTS associated with the programme, are eligible to be listed. When it was introduced in 2015, programmes leading to awards of Irish and EU institutions (but not other foreign institutions) were considered eligible for inclusion in the ILEP, provided they complied with the criteria. The criteria were further refined in December 2016 and now only allow for programmes provided by Irish-accredited higher education bodies to be listed. Programmes leading to EU awards (i.e. non-Irish awarding bodies), which were added to the ILEP under the previous criteria, are in the process of being phased out. This is underlined by the policy that graduates holding an Irish-accredited award may only avail of the recently revised Third Level Graduate Programme, which allows legally resident Irish educated non-EEA graduates holding an award of a recognised Irish awarding body to remain in Ireland after their studies for the purpose of seeking graduate-level employment.[19]

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19 Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, available at: www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Student%20Pathway.

The Higher Education Authority

32 In delivering its functions, QQI works closely with the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which was established by the 1971 Higher Education Authority Act, and which holds the statutory responsibility for 'the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the higher education system.'

33 Accountable to the Department for Education and Skills, the HEA 'leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system', with a view to creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions, responsive to national objectives for the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland.[20] The HEA has responsibility for funding and policy development, leading in developing the evidence base that underpins strategic planning and strategy implementation at institutional and national level.

34 HEA's activities span the enhancement of teaching and learning, the promotion of equity of access to higher education, the enhancement of institutions' responsiveness to the needs of wider society, research capacity-building, and the internationalisation of Irish higher education. HEA also collects data about Irish higher education.

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20 Higher Education Authority, available at: http://hea.ie/about-us/overview/.

Higher education in Ireland

35   In 2016-17 there were 228,941 students enrolled in public higher education institutions, with a tertiary attainment rate of 41 per cent, exceeding the OECD average of 33 per cent. The Department for Education and Skills' projections for the next 20 years show that the number of new entrants is expected to grow steadily from 49,500 in 2015 to approximately 65,000 in 2025. It is estimated that this increase in higher education enrolments will be driven in particular by mature students seeking part-time study, as well as international students and greater demand for postgraduate study.[21]

36   There are 24 publicly funded higher education institutions in Ireland: seven universities, 14 Institutes of Technology (IoTs), and five higher education specialist colleges. Other smaller colleges also access some public funding for specific courses from either the Department for Education and Skills or HEA.[22] Publicly funded higher education bodies are subdivided into three categories: designated awarding bodies; bodies with delegated authority for self-awarding; and linked providers.

37   Designated awarding bodies have self-awarding powers, up to doctoral level, and include the seven universities, as well as Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

38   The 14 IoTs make awards up to level 9 of the NFQ – equivalent to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) level 5[23] – under delegated authority from QQI. Many of the IoTs also have delegated authority at doctoral level in specified fields.

39   Linked providers are bodies that do not have awarding powers, but have their programmes validated by a designated awarding body such as a university. Their students receive the validating university's awards, which are included in the NFQ.[24]

21 National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, available at
    www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf (PDF, 845KB).

22 Although over the past 10 years the reliance on state funding has decreased, following a series of increases in student contributions, and corresponding reductions in state grants, around half of full-time students still have their student contribution paid by the state through the grant system.

23 *Qualifications can Cross Boundaries – A Guide to Comparing Qualifications in the UK and Ireland*, available at:
    www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=165.

24 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, available at:
    www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/html.

Figure 1: Higher education institutions in Ireland[25]

UNIVERSITIES AND
COLLEGES IN IRELAND

1. Dublin City University
2. Maynooth University
3. National University of Ireland, Galway
4. Trinity College Dublin
5. University College Cork
6. University College Dublin
7. University of Limerick

8. Mary Immaculate College
9. National College of Art and Design
10. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
11. Shannon College of Hotel Management
12. Uversity

13. Athlone Institute of Technology
14. Cork Institute of Technology
15. Dublin Institute of Technology
16. Dundalk Institute of Technology
17. Galway Mayo Institute of Technology
18. Institute of Art, Design and Technology
19. Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
20. Institute of Technology Carlow
21. Institute of Technology Sligo
22. Institute of Technology Tralee
23. Institute of Technology Tallaght
24. Letterkenny Institute of Technology
25. Limerick Institute of Technology
26. Waterford Institute of Technology

27. College of Computer Technology
28. Dublin Business School
29. Griffith College
30. IBAT College Dublin
31. ICD Business School Dublin
32. Independent College Dublin
33. National College of Ireland
34. Hibernia College

40   Looking at the distribution of students across publicly funded higher education institutions, 54 per cent (119,798) are studying at universities; 40 per cent (90,150) at IoTs; and the remaining six per cent (12,670) at colleges that are linked providers or QQI providers. Full-time students represent 81 per cent of the total student population, while 17 per cent study part-time and three per cent study remotely. Of all part-time students, more study at IoTs (52 per cent) than at universities (42 per cent) – the remaining six per cent studying remotely. Of the full-time enrolments, 87 per cent are at undergraduate level and 13 per cent are postgraduates, while the proportion of postgraduates is much higher for part-time studies, at just over 40 per cent (see figure 2). There are just over 43,000 international students, the vast majority (96 per cent) coming from the EU.

41   Looking at subject areas, the top three undergraduate-level subject areas studied at universities are Arts and Humanities (22 per cent), Business Administration and Law (18 per cent), and Health and Welfare (18 per cent), the latter being the most common subject studied part-time (27 per cent). At IoTs the most popular subjects are Business, Administration and Law (22 per cent); Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (17 per cent); and Health and Welfare (14 per cent). Undergraduate students at publicly funded colleges nearly exclusively study Education (45 per cent), Arts and Humanities and Health and Welfare (27 per cent each). At postgraduate level, the most popular subjects at universities are Business Administration and Law (22 per cent); Health and Welfare (19 per cent); and Social Science, Journalism and Information (11 per cent); followed by Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics (9.5 per cent). At IoTs the most studied subjects are Business Administration and Law (29 per cent); Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction (15 per cent); and Information and Communication Technologies (15 per cent). Fuller sets of data are available on the HEA website.[26]

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25 Why Study in Ireland, Education in Ireland, available at:
    www.educationinireland.com/en/Publications/Education-in-Ireland-brochure-2017.pdf (PDF, 7.2MB).
26 Why Study in Ireland, Education in Ireland, available at
    http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/HEA-Key-Facts-and-Figures-201516.pdf (PDF, 7.2MB).

Figure 2: Enrolment data in publicly funded higher education institutions (source: HEA)
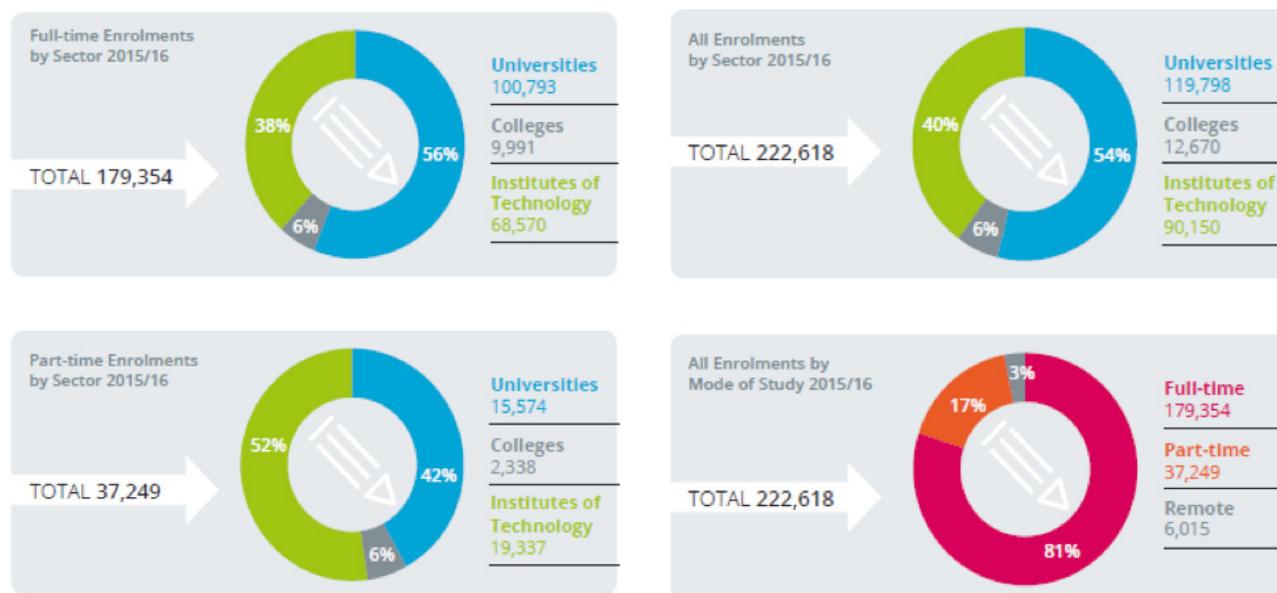
42   In addition to public higher education institutions, there are also a range of regulated private and independent colleges with awards included in the NFQ. There is no comprehensive data on the number of students studying in private colleges in Ireland and the range of programmes involved, but information is available on the profile of private institutions that offer QQI awards. In 2015 there were 17,140 students enrolled on programmes leading to QQI awards at level 8 (honours bachelor or higher diploma); QQI made approximately 3,000 major awards at level 8 in 18 independent colleges, compared with 30,600 level 8 major awards made by universities, IoTs, and colleges combined. Many of these private colleges also offer QQI awards at lower levels in the NFQ and awards of other bodies, including foreign degree–awarding bodies.

43   Currently, only students attending public institutions are in receipt of public financial support (being currently required to pay a contribution of €3,000). Students attending private colleges, including those offering QQI awards, are required to pay the full fee, although the top–up portion is eligible for tax relief. Also, eligibility for student grants is restricted to students at public institutions. The adequacy and mechanisms of higher education funding have been the subject of particular consideration in recent years, in the context of significant contraction of state investment and an increasing number of enrolments. From 2008 to 2016, overall funding per student has declined by approximately 20 per cent, taking into account the €3,000 contribution now required from students.[27] A major review was undertaken by an expert group on future funding for higher education, which resulted in the publication of a Strategy for Funding Higher Education[28] currently being considered by the Irish parliament. The HEA reports that the decline in public funding is having a significant impact on the financial sustainability of publicly funded higher education institutions, in particular IoTs.

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27 According to latest international available data, expenditure on tertiary education in Ireland (including both public and private spending) was 1.2 per cent of GDP in 2013, which is below the OECD average of 1.6 per cent.

28 Investing in National Ambition, A Strategy for Funding Higher Education, available at: www.education.ie/en/ Publications/Policy-Reports/Investing-in-National-Ambition-A-Strategy-for-Funding-Higher-Education.pdf (PDF, 1.1MB).

44   In Ireland, 'university title', as well as the term 'institute of technology', are protected by law. No organisation established after the Universities Act 1997 can use the term 'university' without ministerial permission. There is a mechanism for a higher education institution to be evaluated for university title under section 9 of the Universities Act 1997 but it has never been successfully pursued.[29] All IoTs have now received delegated authority from QQI to make their own awards, but despite the appetite of some to gain university title, the National Strategy seems to discourage establishing any new universities alongside the current ones, although it recommends permitting IoTs to pursue the status of Technological University. This would, however, require further legislation, which is currently being finalised.

45   This limit to the right to use 'university title' also applies to foreign universities seeking to establish a physical presence in Ireland, which would not automatically be entitled to use the title of 'university'. This might affect the attractiveness for UK universities to establish operations in Ireland post–Brexit. Foreign universities can still deliver their degrees in Ireland, although the tightening student visa regime, including restrictions on part–time study and post–study work visas, limits the type of eligible and viable TNE provision. Brexit, depending on the shape and form that it will take, might represent a further challenge for UK universities, as non–EU providers are currently not permitted to recruit non–EEA students in Ireland.

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29 The Universities Act 1997, available at: www.iheqn.ie/_fileupload/Publications/UniversitiesAct1997_79918537.pdf (PDF, 418KB).

The UK transnational education landscape in Ireland

46   According to the latest Aggregate Offshore Record published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the academic year 2015–16, Ireland is the second largest host country for UK TNE in Europe after Greece, with 11,621 students studying for a UK award in Ireland (see figure 4). This represents a decrease of approximately one per cent from the previous year, and of about 26 per cent over the past five years, which reflects the tightening up of overseas provision in Ireland associated with reforms in student visa regulations.

Figure 3: UK TNE in Ireland 2011–16
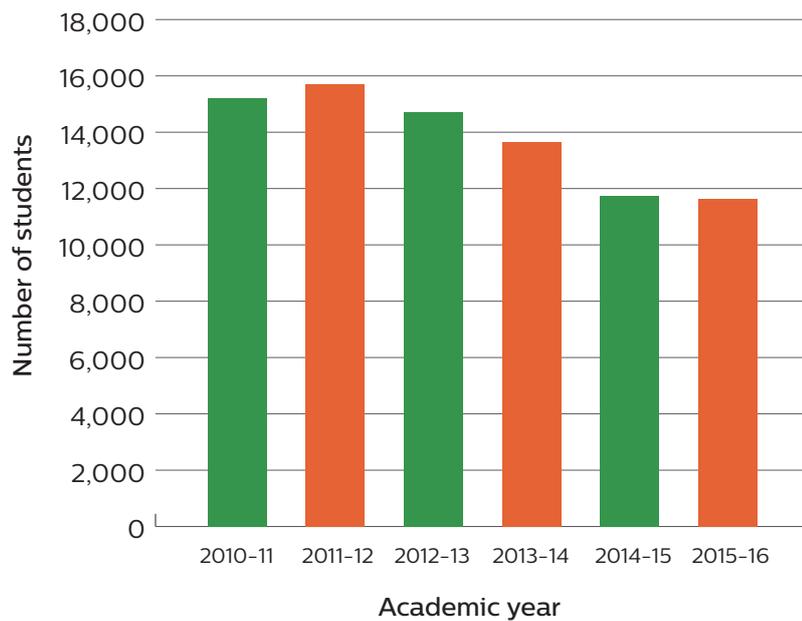
Figure 4: top 10 UK TNE host countries in Europe
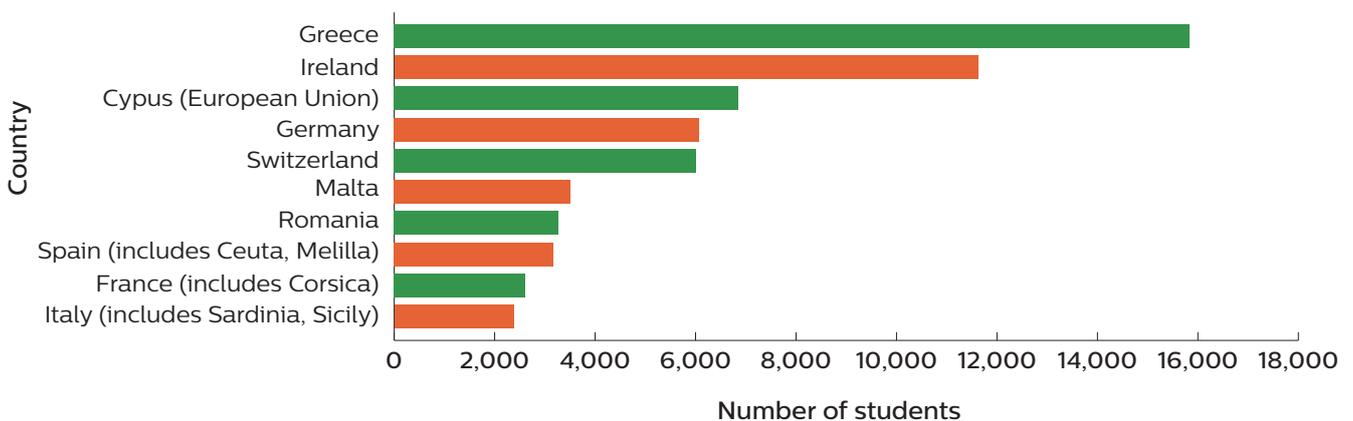
47   The majority of TNE students in Ireland – 6,542 students (56 per cent of total) – are registered with Oxford Brookes on the BSc in Applied Accountancy, offered in collaboration with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants as a top–up degree delivered through supported distance learning. Another 3,993 students (34 per cent of total) are studying via distance learning in country. If we look at TNE provision delivered in country, the total number of TNE students reported to HESA as studying in Ireland is just above 1,100.

48   As part of QAA's 2017 review of UK TNE in Ireland, UK degree-awarding bodies were surveyed, to complement HESA data with information at partner and programme level for the academic year 2016-17. The survey focused on provision delivered in Ireland, excluding distance learning. According to QAA's survey a total of 21 degree-awarding bodies are offering provision in the country in different forms of collaborative partnership with local education and training providers, to which it is possible to add five degree-awarding bodies offering distance learning provision in partnership with local centres supporting delivery. Table 1 lists these 26 UK degree-awarding bodies, indicating the number of reported students, partners and programmes.

Table 1: UK degree-awarding bodies with on-the-ground provision and locally supported distance learning (QAA survey)

UK degree-awarding body	Students	Partners	Programmes
Middlesex University	694	1	3
University of Ulster	276	6	9
University of East London*	256	2	2
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	170	1	1
London Metropolitan University	153	1	3
York St John University	85	1	6
Heriot-Watt University	74	1	1
University of Wolverhampton	61	1	4
University of Wales	58	3	3
University of Dundee	47	1	2
University of West London	39	1	2
University of Chester	38	1	5
University of Reading*	37	1	1
University of Northumbria*	26	1	1
University of the West of Scotland	25	1	1
The University of Hull	21	1	2
Edinburgh Napier University*	21	1	1
Nottingham Trent University	16	1	2
Leeds Beckett*	11	1	2
University College Birmingham	11	1	1
University of Worcester	11	1	1
Teesside University	9	1	1
Coventry University	8	1	1
University of the West of England	6	1	1
Queen's University Belfast	5	1	1
Glyndŵr University	2	1	1
Total	2161	34	58

* Degree-awarding bodies delivering supported distance learning programmes only

49   In total, there are 34 partnerships delivering 58 programmes for a total of 2,161 students (see table 1). The majority of UK TNE provision is located in the capital city, Dublin, accounting for 65 per cent of all partnerships and approximately 90 per cent of all UK TNE students in Ireland. The most popular subject areas are subjects allied to medicine[30] (35 per cent of all TNE students and 10 TNE programmes); Business and Administration (25 per cent of all TNE students and 12 programmes); Education (19 per cent of all TNE students and 10 programmes); and Creative Arts and Design (6.5 per cent of all TNE students and nine programmes) (see figure 5 for a list of most popular subject areas in terms of TNE student numbers). Most provision is at undergraduate level, accounting for 64 per cent of all UK TNE students, while 31.5 per cent are studying at postgraduate level (see figure 6).

**Table 2: Top 20 UK–Irish TNE partnerships in terms of student numbers**

UK degree-awarding body	Ireland partner	Students
Middlesex University	PCI College, Dublin (and others)	694
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	IBAT College, Dublin	170
London Metropolitan University	Portobello Institute, Dublin	153
University of East London	Institute of Child Education Psychology Europe, Dublin	132
University of East London	Chevron Training and Recruitment, Dublin	124
University of Ulster	Marino Institute, Dublin	117
York St John University	Irish Bible Institute, Dublin	85
Heriot-Watt University	Griffith College, Limerick	74
University of Ulster	Irish Times Training, Dublin	62
University of Wolverhampton	Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education, Dublin	61
University of Dundee	Ballyfermot College of Further Education, Dublin	47
University of West London	British/Irish Modern Music Institute, Dublin	39
University of Chester	National Training Centre, Dublin	38
University of Reading	Irish Management Institute, Dublin	37
University of Wales	IBAT College, Dublin	36
University of Ulster	University College Dublin	31
University of Northumbria	Law Society of Ireland, Dublin	26
University of the West of Scotland	Filmbase, Dublin	25
The University of Hull	Christian Leadership in Education Office, Cork	22
Edinburgh Napier University	St John's Central College, Cork	21

30 Subjects allied to medicine, as per the categorisation adopted by HESA, refer to a broad range of disciplines beyond traditional medical studies including, for example, pharmacology, complementary medicines, nursing, and medical technology. For more information, see: www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs/jacs3-principal.

Figure 5: Subject areas of UK TNE by student numbers
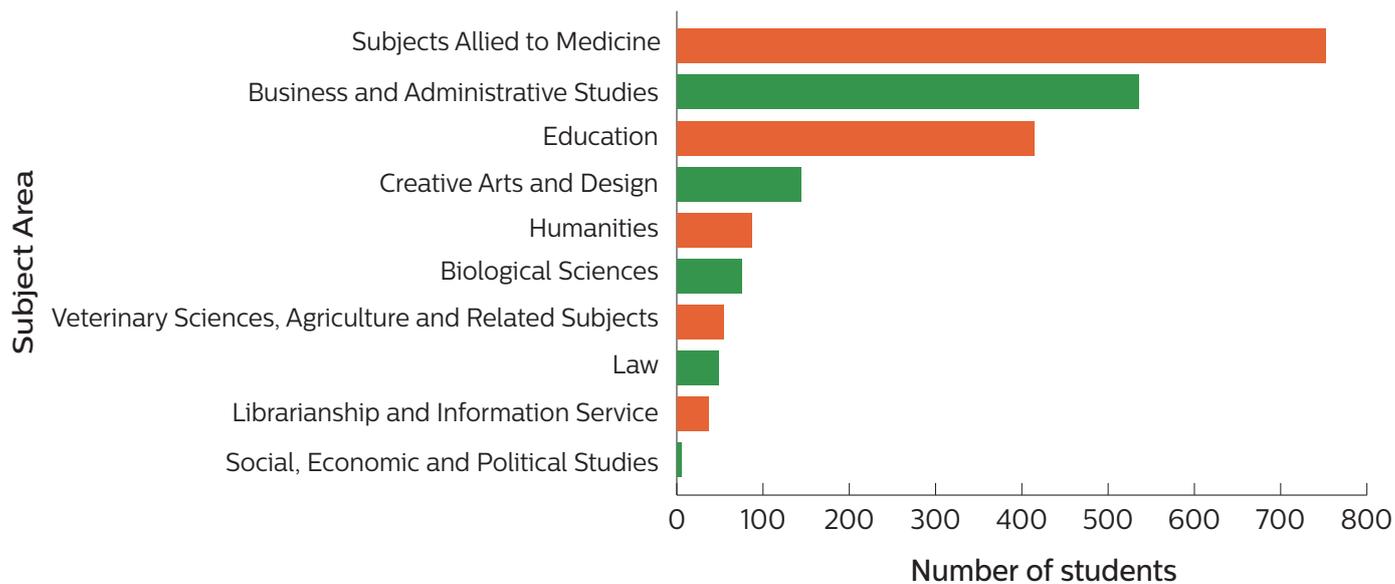
Figure 6: FHEQ level of UK TNE by student numbers
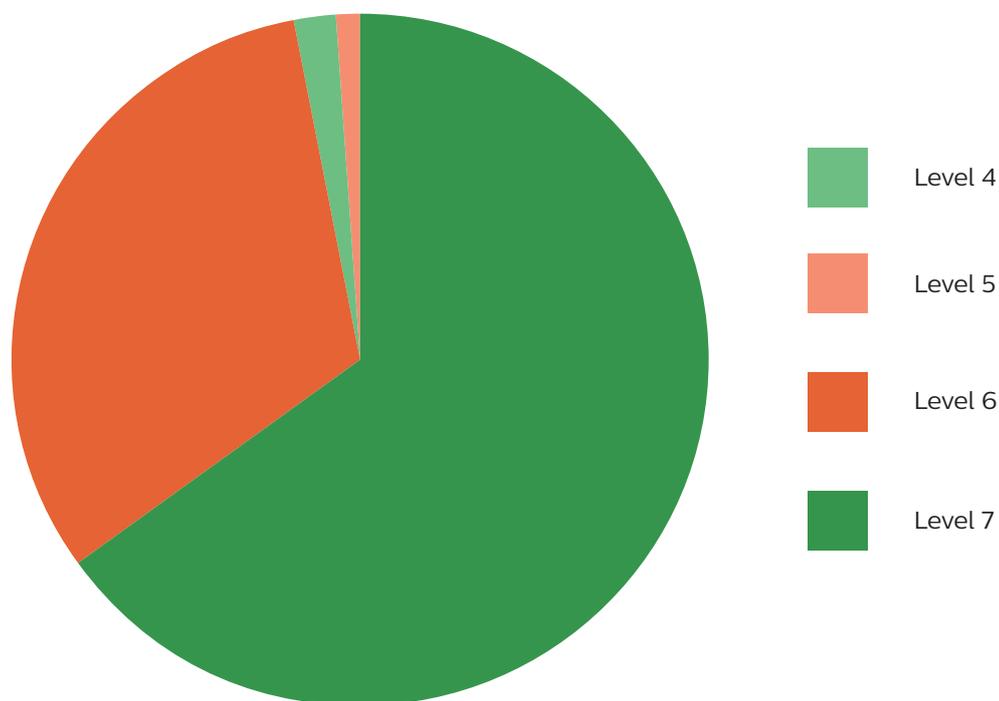
QAA 2017 review of UK transnational education in Ireland

50   On the basis of the survey returns, QAA selected 10 TNE arrangements to be considered in detail, either through a review or a case study. The selection took into account a range of factors including the number of students, programmes and partners, and the type of TNE arrangements and disciplinary areas of provision, with a view to selecting as representative a sample as possible across the four UK nations. Consideration was also given as to whether a specific TNE arrangement had already been reviewed in the past, and to intelligence from the host country quality assurance agency, QQI, highlighting any potential or perceived risks. On the basis of these considerations the following TNE partnerships were selected for review or case study.

Table 3: List of UK TNE arrangements in Ireland reviewed by QAA

UK degree–awarding body	Ireland partner	Type of engagement	Programmes	Students (2016–17)	Type of arrangement
University of Chester	National Training Centre (private), Dublin	Review in the UK, July 17	MSc Exercise and Nutrition Science	28	'Fly in/Fly out' part–time
			PG Cert Exercise and Nutrition Science	5	
			PG Dip Exercise and Nutrition Science	1	
University of Dundee	Ballyfermot College of Further Education (public), Dublin	Review in Ireland, October 17	BA (Honours) Visual Media	24	Validated top–up
			BA Visual Media	23	
London Metropolitan University	Portobello Institute (private), Dublin	Review in Ireland, October 17	BSc Sports Therapy	45	Franchised
			BSc Sports Science and Physical Education	22	
			BA Early Childhood Studies	86	
Middlesex University	PCI College (private), Dublin	Review in Ireland, October 17	BSc (Hons) in Counselling and Psychotherapy	660	Validated part–time
			MSc in Child and Adolescent Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills	28	
			Advanced Diploma in Supervision	6	

UK degree-awarding body	Ireland partner	Type of engagement	Programmes	Students (2016-17)	Type of arrangement
University of Ulster	Irish Times Training (private), Dublin	Review in Ireland, October 17	BSc Hons Management Practice	27	'Fly in/Fly out' part-time
			MSc Executive Leadership	32	
			Advanced Diploma Management Practice	1	
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	IBAT College (private), Dublin	Review in Ireland, October 17	MBA	170	Franchised full/ part-time
Edinburgh Napier University	St John's Central College (public), Dublin	Case study in the UK, July 17	BSc (Hons) Veterinary Nursing	21	Distance-learning top-up with local support
University of East London	Chevron Training and Recruitment (private), Dublin	Case study in the UK, July 17	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies	124	Distance-learning top-up with local support
University of Northumbria	Law Society of Ireland (professional body), Dublin	Case study in Ireland, October 17	LLM Advanced Legal Practice	26	Distance learning with local support
University of Wolverhampton	Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education (public), Dublin	Case study in the UK, June 17	BA (Hons) Video and Film Production	18	Validated top-up

51   Selected UK providers were requested to submit an information set focusing on how quality and standards are maintained for the TNE arrangement under consideration. The review team, comprising three peer reviewers with extensive experience of TNE, conducted a desk-based analysis of this documentation, which informed the review or case study visits to the provider. As indicated in the above table, four visits (three case studies and one review) were carried out in the UK between June and July 2017, and the other six visits (five reviews and one case study) took place in Ireland (Dublin) in October 2017.

52   Each review visit was conducted by two peer reviewers and managed by a QAA quality assurance manager. Each visit lasted one day, involving meetings with senior management, teaching and administrative staff, and students, following up on issues identified in the desk-based analysis, to better understand how the TNE arrangement works in practice and also to look more directly at the student experience. The review team sometimes made use of video-conferencing technology to meet staff and students based at the Irish delivery site during visits in the UK, or vice versa with staff in the UK when undertaking visits in Ireland.

53   Case-study visits were undertaken by one of the reviewers from the TNE Review team. Case studies visits are more focused in scope, taking place over half a day and involving a single meeting with selected members of staff involved in the specific aspect being considered by the case study. QQI representatives joined QAA for some review and case study visits, in the capacity of observers.

54   Both case studies and review visits were undertaken in an enhancement spirit, with a specific view to learning lessons that could benefit the partnership under consideration and more generally improve the capacity of the UK higher education sector to engage in high quality TNE. In particular, review visits do not issue a formal judgement of confidence about a degree-awarding body's capacity to safeguard standards and improve the quality of its TNE provision overall. It would not be possible to generalise in such a way from looking at a single TNE arrangement among many. However, review visit reports include recommendations for improvement, as well as highlighting positive features. Individual reports are published for both case studies and reviews[31]. Abstracts for the reviews and case studies are reported in the Annex; full reports are accessible on QAA's website.[32]

55   The following section outlines key overarching considerations from the 2017 TNE Review in Ireland.

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31 *Transnational Education Review Handbook*, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=3146.

32 Reviews and reports, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports.

Key findings of the transnational education review in Ireland

Diversity of partnership models

56   A notable feature of the review of TNE provision in Ireland was the diversity of partnership models used by UK providers, involving different type of partners. The 10 TNE arrangements examined included validated and franchised provision; 'Fly in/Fly out' and distance-learning delivery; part-time and full-time study; and whole and top-up programmes. The partners included six private providers, one professional body, and three publicly funded institutions, none with the power to award their own higher education degrees.

57   Three partnerships involved validated arrangements, where programmes developed by a partner institution are validated by the UK degree-awarding body as leading to its own awards. Two such validated arrangements, those of the University of Dundee and the University of Wolverhampton, consisted of the validation of top-up programmes. These programmes provide students (primarily from the partner college), with Higher National Diploma (or equivalent) qualifications at NFQ levels 6 and 7 in the creative arts, the opportunity to progress and gain an honours degree from the UK degree-awarding body. Both partnerships involved local publicly funded further education colleges.

58   The other validation arrangement, involving Middlesex University, consists of the local partner offering part-time delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes related to counselling, across multiple locations. Completion of some of the programmes also enables students to gain professional accreditation in Ireland.

59   The franchise partnership model, where the degree-awarding body authorises the delivery of all or part of one or more of its programmes of study leading to its award by an approved partner, was another example of TNE arrangements in Ireland. Under one of two franchise arrangements looked at, an MBA from the UK degree-awarding body (the University of Wales Trinity Saint David) was delivered by the local partner with three intakes per year in either full or part-time mode. The part-time mode was aimed primarily at Irish and other EEA students in employment, while the former aimed specifically to recruit non-EEA students, who in Ireland cannot currently study part-time due to student visa restrictions. In the other franchise arrangement, the UK degree-awarding body (London Metropolitan University) enabled the local partner to offer a number of undergraduate programmes leading to FHEQ level 6 awards in different disciplines, providing programme design capability not available in-house.

60   Another common TNE partnership model encountered in Ireland is one where the UK provider enters into an agreement with a local organisation for the provision of physical, administrative and, at times, academic support for the delivery of its own programmes. Two such arrangements involved the delivery, through 'Fly in/Fly out' part-time block teaching means by the UK degree-awarding body, of programmes it already delivers at the home campus. The University of Chester refers to 'agency agreements' for this type of partnership, while the University of Ulster refers to 'outcentres' to stress that it is just about the delivery in a different location of the same programmes delivered at the home campus by university staff. In the case of the University of Ulster, the Fly in/Fly out model is facilitated by the geographical proximity of the delivery outcentre; for the MA in Executive Leadership, the cohort, composed of students from both the home campus and the outcentre in Dublin, take modules in both locations, as well as one module in Boston. The University of Chester 'agency agreement' also involves the delivery of one module of its MSc in Exercise and Nutrition Science at the home campus in the UK.

61   The remaining three arrangements looked at by the review team use a similar model, but are based on distance-learning delivery, with the local partner acting as a logistical and academic support centre. Edinburgh Napier University partners with a public further education college for the online delivery of a top-up undergraduate programme in veterinary nursing. The University of East London also delivers a top-up distance learning undergraduate programme, in early childhood studies, but in partnership with a private provider. The University of Northumbria partners with a professional body for the online delivery of an LLM in Advanced Legal Practice.

Value of the UK degree brand

62   Students who met the review team in Ireland generally indicated that their decision to study for a particular programme delivered by a local partner was partly informed by the fact that the award would be made by a UK university. The common reasons cited by students for why they were attracted to a UK award included the perceived quality and international standing of the UK higher education system and the programmes offered, and the portability of the UK degree, which students anticipated would enhance opportunities for employment mobility. This is aligned with the findings of QAA's TNE Reviews in other countries.

63   The students the review team met had generally done their research by sifting through various study options available to them, basing their decisions on a number of considerations including: the structure and relevance of the programme content for future employment opportunities; the flexible teaching model; the development of critical thinking as part of the curriculum; and the reputation of the awarding body.

Vocationally oriented and flexible learning

64   The availability of a flexible model for the delivery of teaching was a recurring theme across many of the institutions visited by the review team in Ireland. Many of the students whom the review team met highlighted this aspect of their studies. As seen above, a range of delivery models were used including: intensive long weekend teaching blocks; part-time study; distance learning; and blended learning combining, for example, classroom, online/digital tutors, group collaboration, and seminars. Collectively, as might be expected, these flexible delivery approaches facilitated part-time students with family and work commitments and full-time students who needed to work part-time to cover living costs.

65   Generally, the provision of UK TNE in Ireland was recognised by both the Irish and UK partners as providing a flexible and responsive approach to addressing the accelerating pace of change at all levels within the Irish economy, particularly in relation to skills. It was notable that all the TNE arrangements looked at offered vocationally oriented higher education programmes. Indeed, the review team found that the main rationale behind many of the partnerships was that of enabling local colleges to offer higher vocational degree programmes, often in niche areas where there is a lack of local supply, and generally to mature students already in employment seeking to upskill and progress in their careers. Universities in Ireland seem less likely to offer vocationally oriented higher education degrees than UK universities. In this context, UK degree-awarding bodies, with their experience of delivering these types of degrees, have been able to partner with further education colleges to fill this gap in demand in Irish higher education.

66   Connected with this, another common feature of the UK TNE provision in Ireland under review was its strong links with industry. This included extensive use of industry speakers such as in workshops, small class teaching on specific industry topics, project supervision or feedback, and briefings about career opportunities. The students who met the review team recognised the benefit of the contact that they had with these experts. This ongoing and regular contact that programme leaders across the TNE portfolio in Ireland had with their respective industry links also facilitated the continuous enhancement of programme content, ensuring that students were as well equipped for employment upon graduation as they can be.

67   The UK universities, in conjunction with their Irish partners, would appear to have created a portfolio of flexible programme delivery models that caters for gaps and skills needs not currently offered by local higher education providers in Ireland.

Managing partnerships

68   There is a clear emphasis across Irish TNE collaborations on the importance of robust processes for the oversight of the TNE arrangement and programme management. Nearly all the institutions considered had in place a Link Coordinator, or equivalent role, to manage the partnership arrangement at each institution and to provide a key communication conduit between the institutions involved. Typically, the Link Coordinator would work in conjunction with a designated programme leader at the partner provider. The Link Coordinator is expected to provide support, advice and guidance on matters relating to the delivery of the programme and the application of the University's quality assurance processes, such as ensuring that annual monitoring reports are completed.

69   There was clear evidence that the role undertaken by Link Coordinators was pivotal to the success of the partnerships. Regular formal and informal meetings between the partner institutions – on-site and virtual – were a means to elicit the student voice, and contributed significantly to resolving issues quickly and facilitating early intervention to avoid or minimise potential problems.

70   In common with the findings in other UK TNE reports, the review team noted the importance of appropriate and continued oversight, not only at the operational level of the programme, but also at the level of the institution, to capture changes in the local environment and circumstances that might affect the partnership. Institutional-level issues that UK universities have responded to in recent years included: a change of ownership of one institution, requiring a renewed due diligence process to be undertaken; a QQI report on one partner that raised concerns; and changes to Irish legislation that would impact on non-EEA student recruitment. Some institutions had put in place an annual monitoring process with two separate reporting templates – one focusing on student and programme issues and the other focusing on institutional matters. In most cases, the UK institutions considered both the programme and institution-level aspects at periodic reviews; however, by capturing relevant information on an annual basis, institutions could respond more rapidly to changing organisational circumstances and consider timely intervention options if required.

71   Typically, UK institutions had established procedures to monitor and review TNE arrangements in a range of ways to reflect the needs of various stakeholders within their institutions. In annual reports, external examiners are typically invited to comment on the comparability of standards, the quality of the student learning experience (including the adequacy of related resources), and the effectiveness of assessment arrangements across locations (where this is applicable) for the programme(s) and/or modules that they have been assigned by the university. In particular, this usually includes comment on the quality of the work of the students who study in different locations, the level of achievement of the different cohorts of students, consistency of practice, and equity of treatment of students.

72   Overall, the UK institutions take a broadly similar approach to assuring standards and monitoring their TNE arrangements. Initial consideration of a TNE proposal typically involves a due diligence stage, involving a business case, a site visit report, a risk assessment and often a draft memorandum of understanding. Consideration of initial proposals includes the relevant university school, and staff from finance, quality and other related departments. A number of UK institutions have a dedicated committee to consider collaborative provision. If institutional approval is given, institutions put in place arrangements to consider and approve programmes, which are undertaken at the partner institution. If the institution and programme are approved, a memorandum of agreement is established, and monitoring and periodic review events are initiated, which include inputs from a range of sources such as external examiners, student feedback, teaching staff, senior staff of both partners, and industry experts.

73   All the UK institutions had documented quality assurance procedures for partnerships and overall maintained effective oversight of their TNE arrangements. This was facilitated by the geographical and cultural proximity of Ireland, which eases common challenges associated with TNE provision related to geographical and cultural distance. Closeness enables regular and effective communication, and reciprocal understanding and expectations. However, on a number of occasions, the review team noted issues with ensuring appropriate resources, such as library and special equipment are made available to TNE students.

74   Overall, it is possible to observe how similarities between UK and Irish higher education cultures facilitate the migration of UK institutional quality assurance procedures and expectations to Irish partners. This applied in particular to student engagement.

The student voice

75   Hearing and responding to the student voice is an important element of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education. While on-campus students use formal and informal faculty and staff interactions to give and receive feedback, engaging students studying offsite within transnational partnerships using formal feedback mechanisms can be challenging due to distance, language and cultural differences. In the context of TNE provision in Ireland (excluding distance learning) these particular challenges were less important, due to the geographical and cultural proximity of the two countries.

76   All the UK institutions with TNE provision in Ireland had documented arrangements in place to capture and respond to the student voice. Student module satisfaction surveys are in place in most institutions, which cover all modules, including online modules. Some universities use student-staff liaison meetings, in combination with other mechanisms, to discuss matters relating to programmes and modules. Link Coordinators or equivalent roles across the various TNE arrangements played a key role in facilitating and responding to issues raised by students. The students who met the TNE Review teams were generally aware of the range of mechanisms that were available to them within their own particular institution to feed back student views, and were positive about accessibility of local or university staff (depending on the mode of delivery), via both informal and formal conduits. The relatively short travel time between the UK and Ireland allows UK staff to make regular trips to the partner institution, providing a further opportunity for students to raise any issues directly with university staff.

77   Most of the collaborative arrangements reviewed as part of the UK TNE provision in Ireland had good student representative opportunities for students on institutional committees, and students confirmed that they felt that they had a genuine voice at such meetings, although the training of student representatives was variable across the institutions. Link Coordinators often play an important role in training student representatives and in some cases the university's students' union has also been involved. Engaging with the student voice in distance learning delivery model remains, however, more challenging.

78   The review team noted that there appeared to be a need for some UK institutions to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the student feedback mechanisms, as students were not always clear about the actions that the institutions had taken to address the issues that had been raised by them.

79   In the majority of partnerships reviewed, information in relation to the external examining system is made available to students through programme handbooks and student induction, and the review team was informed that students (or their representatives) are able to access external examiner reports via the relevant student portal. While students who met the review team were aware of the external examining system (and some cohorts had meetings with external examiners), most students indicated that they had not seen external examiners' reports relating to their programmes of study. The reason for this appeared to be mostly due to a failure to communicate clearly to students the availability of external examiner reports. UK institutions may need to be more proactive in this regard.

80   The widespread culture of student engagement across Irish higher education providers contributed significantly to the effective implementation of UK providers' policies and procedures for collecting and responding to the student voice. In an interesting development, the National Student Engagement Programme was launched in 2016 as a collaborative initiative by the Union of Students in Ireland, the HEA, and QQI, drawing on the experience of Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland agency (sparqs). A national working group has been established to work with pilot institutions to develop materials, processes and support requirements to deliver a common student representative training programme that will inform the implementation of a comprehensive student training programme at a national level. This is further evidence of the similarity and alignment of cultures of student engagement in the two countries.

Conclusion

81   UK TNE in Ireland is significantly shaped by the local higher education and regulatory landscape. A number of aspects of the national policy environment have had a direct impact on UK TNE delivered in the country. On the one hand, the international education strategy, combined with the reform of the student visa regime, has posed limits to foreign providers wishing to operate in the country. On the other hand, the National Strategy, combined with the National Skills Strategy 2025, has outlined the priority areas of development for higher education in Ireland to which TNE provision has also been subordinated.

82   The International Education Strategy is clearly aimed at supporting the internationalisation and development of Irish higher education. In this context, overseas provision in the country is seen as of least strategic value for Ireland, as it is not Irish provision. In addition, in the context of recent tightening up of the immigration regime pertaining to non–EEA students, overseas–accredited programmes have at times been seen as possibly playing a role in supporting the business model of some private providers that abused the immigration system by centring their activity on the recruitment of international students attracted by the opportunity to earn internationally recognised degrees. Non–EEA students must attend higher education programmes on a full–time basis; such programmes must lead to an award of an Irish awarding body, and, while waiting for legislation to be passed to enable the implementation of the IEM, only programmes in the Interim List of Eligible Learning Providers administered by the Departments for Justice and Equality and Education and Skills can recruit non–EEA students. Programmes leading to non–Irish awards are not currently allowed in the ILEP, and only one foreign higher education programme is currently in the list: the IBAT MBA validated by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. As a consequence of these developments, currently only those TNE programmes that were listed on the basis of legacy criteria remain on the ILEP and are due to be phased out in line with the amended criteria.

83   QAA's TNE Review can be taken to confirm the effectiveness of this policy, as those TNE arrangements the review team looked at were primarily offering vocationally oriented degree programmes, mostly in niche subjects in short supply in the country, to Irish students (generally mature students already in employment seeking to upskill and progress their career).

84   The UK programmes offered, and the range of partnership models involved, appear to complement Ireland's National Strategy and the National Skills Strategy 2025, which outline a number of key objectives for the Irish education and training system to equip the Irish workforce into the future, including:

- developing a more flexible system, with a greater choice of provision and modes of learning for an increasingly diverse cohort of students

- ensuring that higher education connects more effectively with the needs of learners, society and the economy, with a stronger focus on increasing the supply of skills to the labour market

- a specific focus on active inclusion to support participation in education and training and the labour market.

85   The National Skills Strategy 2025 identifies a number of skill areas that have projected employment growth in Ireland, including creative industries, information and communication technologies, international trade and financial services, and healthcare services. These subject areas reflect those covered by existing UK TNE arrangements in Ireland. The flexible delivery models used across the TNE provision that was reviewed further support the strategic objectives of meeting the needs of different learners and facilitating wider access in education and training.

86   UK TNE activity in Ireland comes in different shapes and sizes, tailored to its local setting. In particular, it offers students who may not otherwise be able to access UK degrees high quality education through different modes of teaching and learning. The general view of the TNE partners the review team spoke to was that their particular collaboration with a UK institution filled a gap that could not be met by local institutions.

87   One motivation behind selecting Ireland as a destination for TNE Review was precisely to address concerns from local stakeholders about UK TNE provision in the country, in particular in the context of reforms of the student immigration system, the implementation of the Irish international education strategy, and other national education and skills strategies.

88   Another motivation was that of implementing commitments that QAA and QQI have made towards inter–agency cooperation in the quality assurance of cross–border education, both as part of their bilateral memorandum of understanding and multilateral initiatives. The latter includes the Quality Assurance of Cross–Border Higher Education (QACHE) project led by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which issued practical advice to quality assurance agencies on ways in which cross–border cooperation in quality assurance can be strengthened.

89   The cooperation between QAA and QQI can be seen as a practical example of implementation of some of the advice contained in the QACHE toolkit for quality assurance agencies, Cooperation in Cross–Border Higher Education.[33] QQI shared valuable information, data and intelligence about the local operating framework and UK TNE providers at critical stages of the review process. This contributed to selecting the sample of TNE arrangements to be looked at, identifying areas of inquiry, and briefing the review team about the Irish higher education and quality assurance system. At the same time, QQI's close involvement in the TNE Review process has been valued by QQI, as it is developing its approach to quality assuring the growing outbound Irish TNE. This close cooperation between the two agencies has contributed, not only in developing reciprocal understanding, but also in strengthening reciprocal trust in each other's higher education and quality assurance systems.

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33 A Toolkit for Quality Assurance Agencies, available at:
    www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers–and–reports/occasional–papers/QACHE%20Toolkit_web.pdf (PDF, 2MB).

Annex – Review and case study reports executive summaries

Reviews

London Metropolitan University and Portobello Institute

London Metropolitan University (the University) has some 10,000 students based on three campuses in the capital, and some 4,000 students enrolled with 25 collaborative partners, of whom 12 are overseas. The University has a history of providing educational opportunities to non-traditional students who might otherwise be unable to fulfil their potential, especially in commercial and technical subjects. Portobello Institute (the Institute) is a Dublin-based, private, commercial provider of further and higher education and training to some 2,300 students in Montessori and special needs, business, travel and tourism and sports therapy, among other subjects. The Institute franchises degree-level programmes in early childhood studies, and sports and sports therapy from the University. The partnership started in 2013, and now has some 165 students. It is the University's only partnership in Ireland.

Both organisations have considerable reputations in early childhood studies in their different jurisdictions. The sports courses have features that are unique to this provision in Ireland.

The partnership is well established and generally well sustained. An Institutional and Course (Periodic) Review of July 2017 was a particularly good example of effective University oversight. There have been some staffing difficulties in the sports courses, but both the Institute and the University appear to have solved these with new appointments and procedural changes. Some of the University's stated requirements in formal course management and student feedback have not been followed, although there is no sign that this has had a negative impact on the student experience in practice. Recently introduced procedural changes appear to offer an effective means of improvement in these matters.

Standards in the programmes are well maintained. Students of both early childhood and sports programmes are positive about their learning experiences. The close collaboration between the University and the Institute (involving other, UK-based partners that also franchise the programme) in annual Programme Enhancement Meetings in London is an effective guarantor of standards, a means of staff development, a way of consolidating the relationship between the partners, and a particularly positive feature of the partnership.

Middlesex University and PCI College

Middlesex University (the University) established a partnership with PCI College (the College) in 2001. The College, formerly Personal Counselling Institute, was founded in 1991 to provide a broad education in counselling and psychotherapy for mature students and now provides third-level and continuing professional development programmes in this field. The partnership, which is defined as a collaborative agreement offering validated provision, was initially set up for delivery by the College of an Advanced Diploma in Supervision, aimed at qualified practitioners working with individual supervisees in an organisational context, and a part-time (four year) BSc (Hons) in Counselling and Psychotherapy. In July 2016 an MSc in Child and Adolescent Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills was validated, with its first intake in September 2016; in May 2017, two postgraduate programmes, MSc Addiction Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills and MSc Family Therapeutic and Counselling Skills, were successfully validated and commenced delivery in September 2017. All courses are offered on a part-time basis through flexible patterns of study and the undergraduate programme is offered across seven sites.

The University has in place appropriate policies and procedures in relation to establishing collaborative partnerships, and comprehensive and effective procedures for the approval,

monitoring and review of its collaborative provision. The responsibilities of the University and the College in relation to the partnership are clearly set out in a Partnership Agreement and Memoranda of Cooperation. The University retains responsibility for the standards of its awards no matter where delivered – and in relation to delivery of the programmes offered through the College also retains responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and academic appeals. The College, operating within the University's academic framework, is responsible for recruitment and admissions, student induction, assessment, student support including resources, student engagement, complaints, producing annual monitoring reports and chairing assessment boards.

Effective oversight of the partnership is exercised through the University's committee structure and key role holders; the University Link Tutor role ensures regular and effective communication between the University and the College. Students spoke positively about their experience of the programmes and valued the flexibility of delivery and professional and vocational focus of the curricula.

University of Chester and the National Training Centre

The University of Chester (the University) established a partnership with the National Training Centre (NTC), based in Dublin, in 2004. The partnership, initially set up under an Agency Agreement, used NTC's physical resources in Dublin to deliver the MSc Exercise and Nutrition Science programme by University staff, which was followed by an additional programme, an MSc Obesity and Weight Management. The NTC was established in 1988, and is a private professional training organisation that offers part–time educational courses in the areas of Health Fitness and Bodywork Therapy. Following several years of successful operation of the Agency Agreement, the University approved NTC's application to become an academic partner of the University, and an Organisational Agreement was signed in 2011 between the two institutions. NTC's application was for the purpose of obtaining permission to deliver several University programmes directly: an MSc in Neuromuscular Therapy and a BSc (Hons) in Osteopathy. Other than the MSc Exercise and Nutrition Science, however, the other programmes failed to recruit sufficient students to remain viable, and following a periodic review, the respective programme agreements lapsed. During this period, the Agency Agreement for the delivery of the MSc Exercise and Nutrition Science continued and currently has 34 students registered on it.

The MSc Exercise and Nutrition Science programme has six taught modules delivered in block mode plus a Research Project. One of the taught modules is delivered at the University in Chester. The University is responsible for student recruitment and assessment, and assessment boards are convened under the remit of the University. Students spoke favourably about the mode of delivery of the taught component of each module, which occurs over a long weekend (Friday through to Sunday), which facilitates their work and family commitments.

Provision awarded by the University and delivered through a collaborative partner is subject to the same standard monitoring and review processes applied to all University programmes, in accordance with the University Principles and Regulations and the Quality and Standards Manual.

Overall, the programme is well managed and students are effectively supported in the achievement of their academic award. The University considers the arrangement with the NTC to be an effective partnership, with potential for further development.

University of Dundee and Ballyfermot College of Further Education

The University of Dundee (the University) established a partnership with Ballyfermot College of Further Education (BCFE) in 2004 to deliver a BA (Hons) Animation degree. In 2013, the University revalidated the programme and the award was renamed BA (Hons) Visual Media with two pathways: Animation and Game Design. The BA programme is a top–up degree for students on BCFE's two–year Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes in Classical and Computer Animation and Creative Media Production. The top–up programme

is currently the University's only validated programme with a partner institution. BCFE has strong links with the creative industry and uses guest speakers extensively to enrich the curriculum and the student experience. Student numbers are capped under the Validation Agreement and currently there are just under 50 students enrolled across both pathways.

A satisfactory revalidation of the programme and partnership arrangement took place in 2016. Overall, the programme is well managed and effective oversight is maintained in keeping with the University's quality assurance procedures, complemented by BCFE's own quality assurance framework. Both the University's and BCFE's Link Coordinators play a pivotal role in the successful management of the programme, acting as key points of contact for communication between the programme team and University School and for students, with whom they meet regularly.

Roles and responsibilities for the oversight of the partnership and the programme are set out in the Validation Agreement, and work is in progress to formalise the role and responsibilities of the Link Coordinators further. BCFE is responsible for recruitment, enrolment and registration of students; however, the entrance qualification attainment level must be approved by the University. BCFE is responsible for assessment, but the University retains responsibility for the appointment of external examiners. The external examiners appointed to the BCFE programme also examine cognate pathways at the University.

The University uses a number of mechanisms to ensure that it remains aware of the local Republic of Ireland higher education context. There is a student representative system in place and elected student representatives receive training for these roles. While students were generally positive about the opportunities presented by their study programme and the accessibility of staff, they did voice concerns about the variability of assessment feedback, insufficient technical support and outdated software. Students enrolled on the programme are BCFE students but have associate student status at the University.

Ulster University and Irish Times Training

Ulster University operates primarily from four campuses in Northern Ireland. Its mission is to 'deliver outstanding research and teaching that encourages the innovation, leadership and vision needed to help our community thrive'. The current student population is approximately 27,000, of whom around 2,000 are Ulster students studying at 'outcentres'. In addition, over 6,000 students are enrolled on Ulster validated courses at other partner institutions. As defined by the University, an outcentre is a type of partnership where the primary relationship is for the provision of accommodation and similar facilities.

Irish Times Training (ITT) is a wholly owned subsidiary of *The Irish Times* and is well known nationally and internationally as a provider of a wide range of short courses and other programmes in various areas of management education and training. Its client base includes multinational companies, government departments, and small and medium-sized enterprises. ITT has training suites in the Irish Times Building on Tara Street, Dublin. The University classes ITT as an outcentre for the delivery of its programmes.

The University's Business Institute offers undergraduate programmes in Management Practice, and an MSc Executive Leadership at ITT. Twenty-eight students are currently enrolled on the BSc Hons Management Practice undergraduate programme, with 32 enrolled on the MSc. All students are studying part-time. Recruitment in Dublin is largely by ITT, which also provides the delivery venue and some student support. Admissions to these programmes is the responsibility of the University and the courses share common curricula and learning outcomes with programmes delivered at the University. The great majority of teaching and all assessment is by Ulster staff. Tuition for the MSc is in three-day blocks. All undergraduate teaching is delivered at ITT. In the case of the MSc, alternate blocks are delivered at ITT and the University's Belfast campus, and one block is delivered in Boston.

The link started with an undergraduate certificate programme in 2005 and has grown to include more awards on the basis of successful operation. The partnership is highly valued by both parties and by students. The University provides ITT with a flexible and innovative

approach to curriculum delivery, and ITT gives the University an established client base and client management system, and a recognised and respected brand name for business training in the Republic of Ireland. Students at all levels gain opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills, and networks of new contacts. The firms that employ students gain directly from practical and focused project work. While the reviewers recommend that the University considers some aspects of collaborative operations, particularly the quality assurance arrangements consequent on the categorisation of partnerships, no problems have actually arisen, due to the inherently strong nature of this particular partnership.

University of Wales Trinity Saint David and IBAT College Dublin

The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (the University) established a partnership with IBAT College Dublin (the College) in 2013. The College, a private provider formerly known as the Institute of Business and Technology, was established in 2004; it occupies two campus locations in Dublin. In 2016 the College became part of Global University Systems. The partnership, which is defined as a programme partnership, was initially set up for the delivery of the University's MBA under a franchise arrangement. Currently, there are 185 students studying on the programme in both full and part-time modes. The student body is comprised of local, EU and international students. Subsequently, in 2016, three undergraduate programmes were approved to run as validated provision; at the time of the transnational education review these programmes had yet to commence delivery, although the College was hoping to recruit sufficient students for a February 2018 start date. Students on the undergraduate programmes will study on a part-time basis.

The University's policies and procedures in relation to collaborative partnerships are comprehensive and accessible, with additional guidance being made available to the College. The responsibilities of the University and the College in relation to delivery of the MBA are clearly set out in a Memorandum of Agreement. The University retains responsibility for the standards of its awards no matter where delivered; in relation to delivery of the MBA programme and in accordance with its framework for partnerships, the University also retains responsibility for assessment and award boards, and the appointment of external examiners and academic appeals. The College, operating within the University's academic framework, is responsible for recruitment and admissions, student induction, student support including resources, student engagement, complaints and producing annual monitoring reports. The University is aware of the local context and has worked with the College to ensure it meets Republic of Ireland requirements for non-Irish providers.

Effective oversight of the partnership is exercised at a number of levels within the University, including through its committee structure and key role holders; the Partnership Team Leader role in particular ensures regular and effective communication between the University and the College. Students spoke positively about their experience of the programme.

Ongoing financial and contextual changes from 2016 onwards led to a full due diligence review of the College and partnership; at the time of the transnational education review, the University indicated that the situation was being monitored.

Case studies

Edinburgh Napier University and St John's College

This case study is concerned with the collaborative partnership between Edinburgh Napier University (the University) and St John's College, Cork (the College). The partnership involves delivery of a two-year top-up BSc (Hons) Veterinary Nursing programme for students already registered to practise as a veterinary nurse, delivered through distance learning; all modules and associated materials have been developed by the University. Through this arrangement, the University is offering the opportunity for students in the Republic of Ireland to study up to honours degree level in veterinary nursing, building on NFQ level 6 and 7 qualifications obtained locally. The programme aims to capitalise on the professional mobility of veterinary nurses between the Republic of Ireland and the

UK, enabling Veterinary Council of Ireland registered veterinary nurses and Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons registered veterinary nurses to work within the veterinary nursing profession of both countries.

The University has well-established processes for the establishment, approval and review of programmes offered in partnership with both UK and international partners set out in its Quality Framework. The partnership is effectively managed; a University programme leader oversees the arrangement and is instrumental in ensuring that the programme operates effectively. Staff at the College are not involved in the delivery of the programme.
The University, aware of the challenges of delivering a distance-learning programme, has put in place a number of measures to engage students, such as face-to-face induction events and assigning them a personal development tutor. While there is no system of student representation in place due to the dispersed nature of the student body, student feedback is gathered in several ways.

At the time of writing, in light of the relatively small number of students on the programme and a change in strategic approach within the University, the programme was being closed.

University of East London and Chevron Training and Recruitment Ltd

This case study is concerned with the collaborative partnership between the University of East London (the University) and Chevron Training and Recruitment Ltd (Chevron).
The partnership involves a franchise arrangement whereby students progress from a QQI level 6 Early Childhood Care and Education Diploma onto the University's BSc (Hons) Early Childhood Studies programme part way through FHEQ level 5, and complete 180 credits on the University's award – 60 credits at FHEQ level 5, and 120 credits at FHEQ level 6. Students with a related Republic of Ireland qualification obtained pre-2012 complete two additional modules.

The University has clear quality assurance and enhancement processes, including those specific to collaborative partnerships. Regular and open communication between the University and Chevron ensures the effective operation of the partnership. The University's academic Link Tutor, in conjunction with the University's Academic Partnerships Office, oversees the academic management of the partnership.

The programme is delivered through Chevron's virtual learning environment; modules, while developed by the University, are supported by a local tutor employed by Chevron. Students have access to the University's student portal and e-library, as well as local library facilities and specialist materials provided by Chevron. Student feedback is sought in a number of ways and student representatives are in place.

There are clear benefits for both Chevron and the University resulting from this partnership. The partnership draws on the expertise of both partners in delivering online provision in Early Childhood Studies and extends the University's reach in relation to students studying online in this subject area. While the delivery model provides students with a flexible model of study it also presents some challenges, which both the University and Chevron are aware of and address in variety of ways.

Northumbria University and the Law Society of Ireland

This case study is based on a collaboration between the Northumbria University Law School (the University; the Law School) and the Law Society of Ireland (LSI), under which the Law School offers its LLM Advanced Legal Practice programme to qualified solicitors in Ireland, largely using the resources of LSI's Diploma Centre. The University has a large Law School and offers an equivalent programme in the UK. LSI is the professional body for solicitors in the Republic of Ireland, and exercises statutory functions in respect of the legal profession. It also has a substantial education function, providing tuition for the Professional Practice Course required to practise as a solicitor.

The partnership is at an early stage, and as yet only two students have graduated. However, recruitment has been more buoyant than expected, the student body is high

calibre, and further collaborative work is planned. The practical focus of the University's law courses is a particularly attractive feature for LSI. Collaboration between the University and a professional body with an education and regulatory function has avoided some of the pitfalls identified in research published by QQI about professional body links. The University remains aware of the need to consider the changing nature of the LSI partnership when planning continuing oversight, rather than relying on the arrangements standard for its initial classification as a 'Distance Learning Academic Support Centre'.

University of Wolverhampton and Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education

This case study is concerned with the collaborative partnership between the University of Wolverhampton (the University) and Coláiste Dhúlaigh College of Further Education (CDCFE). Through this arrangement, the University is offering opportunities for students to study locally to degree level in a range of subject areas, building largely on previously gained Higher National Diplomas or equivalent qualifications. Under this arrangement the University franchises a number of its courses; students enter these courses at FHEQ level 6.

All courses operate under the University's academic regulations and assessment polices. The multicourse partnership allows for a high level and standard of support to be provided to the partner, including through the link tutors and the dedicated partnerships coordinator. The partnership is enhanced by regular communication between the University and CDCFE. Programmes are delivered by CDCFE staff, many of whom are University graduates. Student feedback is achieved through the appointment of class representatives and through module evaluations.

There are clear benefits for both CDCFE and the University resulting from this partnership. The widening participation remit of CDCFE fits well with the ethos and values of the University, as does the shared vocational focus of the institutions and courses. There are also some challenges, with distance and the different academic year structure at CDCFE being factors.