

North South Inter-Parliamentary Association



Fifth meeting

Access for students to third-level education in the respective jurisdictions (i.e. Northern Ireland and Ireland)

8 October 2014

Background briefing prepared by the Research and Information Service (RaISE) of the Northern Ireland Assembly and of the Library & Research Service of the Houses of the Oireachtas (*Tithe an Oireachtais*)

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Key points

- While greater mobility of students between jurisdictions is an outcome aimed at by policymakers in Northern Ireland and Ireland, only a small proportion of those entering the third level student population actually take up studies in the other jurisdiction.
- In 2012/13 a total of 491 students domiciled in Northern Ireland were enrolled in Universities in the Republic, which represents 0.61% of all students in the Republic; 9 students were enrolled in Colleges (0.12% of all students); and 128 students were enrolled in Institutes of Technology (IoTs) (0.2% of all students).
- A greater proportion of students from the Republic attend higher education in the North (6.8%) than *vice versa* (0.9%).
- For those who do wish to study in the other jurisdiction there is some funding available under the North-South Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (under limited circumstances).
- According to the Centre for Cross-border Studies obstacles to mobility between jurisdictions include:
 - changes to equivalences between A level and LCE grades, which effectively devalued A-Levels in relation to the LCE;
 - lack of information about higher level education in the other jurisdiction;
 - unfamiliarity with the application process in the other jurisdiction;
 - concerns expressed by young people in the Republic in relation to their perception of sectarianism;¹ and
 - lack of financial support and the cost of living in the other jurisdiction.
- Two universities in the Republic are taking action to increase the attendance of students from Northern Ireland by accepting a limited number of students with only 3 A-Levels. These are Trinity College Dublin and Dublin City University.
- Recommendations to improve the mobility of undergraduate students include more co-operation between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on the island of Ireland and promoting awareness among school students of how the CAO and UCAS third-level application systems work.

¹ As described in the Centre for Cross-border Studies report *A study of obstacles to cross-border undergraduate education* (p.16 (c)) available online at http://www.borderpeople.info/study_of_obstacles_into_cross_border_undergraduate_mobility.pdf

Overview

Greater mobility of students across the border is considered important for the development of the all-island economy and the ongoing peace process.² Policymakers refer to the social and economic benefits of such mobility and the important role it plays in future job market fluidity across the border.³ In addition, it is argued that providing students the opportunity to study in the other jurisdiction is important for reconciliation throughout the Island.⁴

However, concern has been expressed in both Northern Ireland and the Republic about the low number of students taking up third-level education (also called higher education) in the other jurisdiction.⁵ A 2013 OECD report⁶ found that:

“Student mobility across the border, despite the proximity and absence of language barriers, remains low.”

To date there have been three pieces of research published by the Centre for Cross-border Studies examining this area. These are:

- *A Study of Obstacles to Cross-border Undergraduate Education (2011)* (For IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council and EURES)
- *Comprehensive Study on North-South Cooperation in the Education Sector (2011)* (For Department of Education and Skills & Department of Education)
- *Cross-border postgraduate student flows (2008)* (For Department of Education and Skills)

These reports have found various factors which deter students from studying across the border, such as concerns over perceived sectarianism (by students in the Republic)⁷ and the higher cost of living in the Republic (which is a concern for students from Northern Ireland). On this point, Expatistan calculates that the cost of living in Dublin is 27% more expensive than in Belfast.⁸ Another cost of living survey by Mercer ranks Dublin as the 51st most

² Ibid.

³ Soares, A. (2014). (Higher) Education Crossing the Border. Centre for Cross Border Studies. See <http://www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/EducationFinal.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ http://www.borderpeople.info/study_of_obstacles_into_cross_border_undergraduate_mobility.pdf

⁶ “The Case of Ireland-Northern Ireland (United Kingdom) – Regions and Innovation: Collaborating Across Borders”, *OECD Regional Development Working Papers*, 2013/20, OECD Publishing. See http://www.oecd.org/gov/regional-policy/The_case_of_Ireland-Northern-Ireland.pdf

⁷ *A study of obstacles to cross-border undergraduate education* (p.16 (c)) available online at http://www.borderpeople.info/study_of_obstacles_into_cross_border_undergraduate_mobility.pdf

expensive city in 2014 (out of 211), while Belfast comes in as the 120th most expensive city. A detailed infographic is provided by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) on the annual costs for students living in Dublin and can be accessed [here](#).⁹

Reports also find that qualifications such as Higher National Diploma (HND), Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) are not recognised for entry to third level study in the other jurisdiction. This acts as a further obstacle to mobility.¹⁰

It is worth noting that incentives for cross-border mobility also exist. For instance the Irish Times reports that prospective teaching students may qualify over a shorter time period in the UK than is the case in the Republic.¹¹

The following section contains statistics on the number of students from Northern Ireland attending higher level education in the Republic.

⁸ Expatistan is a free database of prices from around the world. Price are entered from over a quarter of a million people. Expatistan has been referenced by major financial institutions.

<http://www.expatisitan.com/cost-of-living/comparison/belfast/dublin>

⁹ <https://magic.piktochart.com/output/2381625-student-cost-of-living-guide-201>

¹⁰ Soares, A. (2014). (Higher) Education Crossing the Border. Centre for Cross Border Studies. See

<http://www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/EducationFinal.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/generationemigration/2013/06/14/hard-times-for-young-teachers/>

1. Students from Northern Ireland attending Higher Education Authority-funded Institutions in 2012/13

Table 1 shows the breakdown of students from Northern Ireland who were enrolled in Universities, Colleges¹² and Institutes of Technology (IoTs) in 2012/13. Figures are taken from the Higher Education Authority (HEA).¹³ The table shows that a total of 491 students domiciled in Northern Ireland were enrolled in Universities in Ireland, which represents 0.6% of all University students in the Republic; 9 students were enrolled in Colleges (0.1% of all College students); and 128 students were enrolled in IoTs (0.2% of all IoT students).

Table 1: County of permanent residence of Irish-domiciled Full-time Students in All HEA-Funded Institutions in Ireland 2012/13

Irish-domiciled Full-time Enrolments by County	Universities	Colleges	IoTs	Total
Antrim (including Belfast)	157		9	166
Armagh	38	2	15	55
Derry	47	1	18	66
Down	142	3	63	208
Fermanagh	31	3	9	43
Tyrone	76		14	90
Total	491	9	128	628
Grand Total = N students in the State	80,799	7,679	62,858	151,336

Figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency in the UK show that in the year 2011/12, 6.8% of all students studying at third level in Northern Ireland were domiciled in the

¹² These Colleges are: Mary Immaculate College, Mater Dei Institute, National College of Art and Design, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, St. Angela's, and St. Patrick's Drumcondra. Several colleges of education in Ireland provide training for primary school teachers, while a number of fee-paying third-level educational institutions offer courses, mainly in professional vocational training and business. Some of these colleges are linked to universities or professional associations and their qualifications may be accredited accordingly.

¹³ <http://www.heai.ie/en/statistics/2012-13>

Republic.¹⁴ This compares to 0.9% of students in the Republic attending higher education institutions who were domiciled in Northern Ireland.¹⁵

Pollak noted that the trend for falling numbers of students from the Republic studying in Northern Ireland began in 1997:¹⁶

“With the abolition of undergraduate fees in the Republic in 1997, the numbers of full-time undergraduate entrants going from the Republic to Northern Ireland higher education institutions fell sharply so that by 1998/99 they were at less than half (555) the highest point (1,205) they had reached three years earlier.”

This trend has continued, with Pollak stating that in 2010 NI had only 310 new entrants from the Republic.

¹⁴ Soares, A. (2014). (Higher) Education Crossing the Border. Centre for Cross Border Studies. See <http://www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/EducationFinal.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland, Spring 2012, Pollak, A, Cross-border undergraduate mobility: An obstacle race that the students are losing? http://www.crossborder.ie/?page_id=4721

2. CAO Admissions Policy for NI Students

Northern Ireland students applying to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Republic use the Central Applications Office (CAO) system. The CAO system is owned and controlled by the seven Universities in the Republic. The main difference is that the majority of Northern Ireland resident students apply with A-level qualifications¹⁷ rather than Leaving Certificate Examination (LCE) results.¹⁸

There are two criteria for entry to a HEI in Ireland:

- **Eligibility:** This is based on the number of points received in one sitting of the Leaving Certificate or A-Levels for UK applicants. Different courses have different points, with the most popular courses attracting the highest point requirements (for example Dental Science at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) needs 590 points). In addition, some courses, such as Medicine at TCD, require students to sit an additional admissions test, HPAT¹⁹ – Ireland, with a total points requirement of 731²⁰ (with A-level applicants having to *satisfy matriculation and specific course requirements within three consecutive years, e.g. GCSE (2010), AS (2011), A-levels (2012)*²¹; and
- **Subject:** For a number of courses, certain subjects (with qualifications gained in them) are needed in order to gain access. These subjects may have been studied at any time (except in certain specific cases such as Medicine).²²

Table 3 details the points applied by the CAO to A-level and AS-level results.²³

¹⁷ An A-level is a General Certificate of Education (GCE) qualification which shows a student has studied a specific subject to an Advanced Level. A-levels consist of two parts – the AS (year one) and A2 (year two) – normally a full A-level takes two years to complete. An AS Level can be the first half of an A-level or it can be a qualification on its own. Some subjects are assessed on course work and exams, while other subjects are assessed by exams only. <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/choosing-a-levels-and-as-levels>

¹⁸ The Leaving Certificate is assessed through a written examination at the end of a 2-year programme. There are practical examinations and project work in certain subjects, such as Art, Construction Studies and Engineering. There are oral examinations in Irish and continental languages. The practical and oral tests take place during the final year of the programme. The written examination is held in June each year.

¹⁹ Health Professionals Admissions Test

²⁰ Applicants must have a minimum of 480 points and meet the matriculation and course requirements of the College. The HPAT provides additional points in order to access the course. Please note, additional information is available regarding medicine applications at: http://hpat-ireland.acer.edu.au/files/2012_Admission_Guide_to_Undergraduate_medicine.pdf

²¹ Trinity College Dublin, Medicine, <http://www.tcd.ie/courses/undergraduate/az/course.php?id=187>

²² Further information on Subject requirements can be found here: <http://www.nui.ie/college/entry-requirements.asp>

²³ CAO, Applicant Scoring for GCE/GCSE, <http://www.cao.ie/index.php?page=scoring&s=gce>

Table 3: Applicant Scoring for GCE

From 2010	
	All HEIs
A Level	
A*	150
A	135
B	120
C	100
D	75
E	40
AS Level	
A	65
B	60
C	50
D	35
E	20

In addition:

“The four best A Level scores (or 3 x A Level + 1 AS Level), in recognised subjects, will be counted for points computation.”²⁴

For LCE students, the best six results they receive are considered, with the maximum number of points also 600.

It should be noted that the CAO Applications Handbook stresses that:

“It is very important to remember that this Handbook does not in any way remove the fundamental need for you to consult the appropriate HEI literature or HEI website. Only the official HEI material will give you the essential information about the content of courses, minimum entry requirements, course duration, career prospects, etc.”²⁵

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ CAO, The CAO Handbook, <http://www2.cao.ie/handbook/handbook/hb.pdf>

3. Obstacles to cross-border mobility of students

3.1 Findings from the Centre for Cross-border Studies 2011 report

In 2011 the Centre for Cross-Border Studies published a report based on a study commissioned by the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council and the EURES Cross-Border Partnership. The report, *A study of obstacles to cross-border undergraduate education*, examines levels of undergraduate mobility between Northern Ireland and the Republic, past and present, and outlines the obstacles to that mobility.²⁶

The main obstacles to the mobility of students across jurisdictions are identified as:

From North to South

- Lack of information about universities in the Republic.
- Lack of information about Institutes of Technology.
- High cost of living (particularly in Dublin).
- The change in equivalences between A level and Leaving Certificate grades in 2005 (e.g. some high demand courses such as Medicine and Law require 4 A levels while many comparable courses in the UK only require 3).
- Lack of familiarity with the CAO application process.
- An historical paucity of graduates from universities in the Republic who might recommend these universities to their friends and family in the North.

From South to North

- Introduction of free fees in the Republic in 1997.
- Lack of familiarity with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in Northern Ireland.
- Concerns about perceived sectarianism.
- Lack of information about universities in Northern Ireland.
- No financial assistance available in Northern Ireland.

²⁶ http://www.borderpeople.info/study_of_obstacles_into_cross_border_undergraduate_mobility.pdf

An OECD study agreed with a number of these findings, stating that cross-border mobility of students is:²⁷

“...impeded by several factors. There is a different organisation of studies in the two jurisdictions, including a different number of years of study. Technological institutes are poorly valorised in the UK context and thus students are not encouraged to attend, even if an institute lies just a few kilometres across the border. Differences in funding schemes for studies also drive student choices that work against cross-border enrolment. Those hurdles could progressively be overcome by targeted mutual recognition agreements between institutions on both parts of the island, but differences in national university regulations are likely to remain an important constraint to cross-border student enrolment.”

3.2 Changes to equivalences

One of the main findings of the study was that the issues for Northern Irish students with regard to accessing higher education institutions²⁸ in the Republic stemmed back to 2005. UCAS (the University and Colleges Admissions Service - the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK) altered the A-Level/LCE equivalences. Whereas previously each LCE subject was previously considered to have half the points value of an A-level, following a review this was moved to having two-thirds the value.

This effectively devalued A-levels against LCE results. Following this change, Trinity College Dublin required that Northern Ireland students should have four A-Levels (with A, and later A*, grades) for high-demand and high-point courses such as Medicine, Dentistry and Law. As stated by the study:²⁹

“They felt that to do otherwise would give Northern students with top grade A-Level results an unfair advantage over their Southern counterparts with top grade Leaving Certificate results. This practice was eventually adopted by all the Southern universities’ Admissions Offices.”

A student getting top grades at the LCE will receive 600 points. However, an A-level student who gets top grades in three subjects will only get 450 points, an insufficient amount to enter the most popular courses in some universities in the Republic.

²⁷ http://www.oecd.org/gov/regional-policy/The_case_of_Ireland-Northern-Ireland.pdf

²⁸ Higher Education in Ireland is provided mainly by 7 Universities, 14 Institutes of Technology, including the Dublin Institute of Technology and 7 Colleges of Education. In addition, a number of other third level institutions provide specialist education in such fields as art and design, medicine, business studies, rural development, theology, music and law. See <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education/>

²⁹ Ibid

As a result, for Northern Ireland students to be competitive in the Republic's system it is necessary to study four A-levels. However, as found by the BBC:³⁰

“In the 2011/12 academic year...only 925 out of almost 7,500 pupils in Northern Ireland took four A-level exams.”

As such, there is a limited pool of Northern Ireland students who can potentially reach the points thresholds in respect of some courses.

It should also be noted that a student's best four A-level results will only be considered from one academic year (for a possible maximum of 600 points) or a student's best three A-level subjects from one academic year plus one AS level subject in a different subject from the same or preceding year (for a possible maximum of 515 points).³¹

The Centre for Cross Border Studies also identified:³²

“...a general lack of adequate recognition of alternative qualifications, such as HND, BTEC and FETAC, for entry to third level study in the other jurisdiction.”

3.3 Fees

An important aspect to note is the difference in fees between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

In Northern Ireland, students must pay tuition fees of up to £3,685 (€4,606)³³ per annum to attend a third level course. In the Republic, there are no tuition fees for students domiciled there, although students are expected to pay a “Student Services Charge” of €2,500 (£1,999) in 2013/14 – please note, this charge will increase to €2,750 in 2014/15 and €3,000 in 2015/16.³⁴

Under EU law, students studying in another legal jurisdiction must be charged the same fees as domestic students. As such students from the Republic studying in Northern Ireland will be charged tuition fees of £3,685 and *vice versa*. It should be noted however that the

³⁰ BBC News, 6 February 2014, Dublin universities may change NI exam admissions criteria, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-26056346>

³¹ Trinity College Dublin, Admission of students from Northern Ireland, <https://www.tcd.ie/Admissions/undergraduate/apply/eu/northern-ireland/>

³² Centre for Cross Border Studies, 5 February 2014, Soares, A. Higher Education: Crossing the Border, www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/EducationFinal.pdf

³³ Based on an exchange rate of £1 to €1.25 (Exchange rate as at 09 September 2014)

³⁴ Citizens Information, Third-level student fees and charges, http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/third_level_education/fees_and_supports_for_third_level_education/fees.html

Student Services charge is paid for by a student's local Education and Library Board via a repayable Student Contribution Loan to cover the cost.³⁵

As such, students wishing to study in Northern Ireland must pay tuition fees higher than the charge they would be expected to pay in the Republic. This could act as a disincentive, with a much lower cost for studying in the Republic than Northern Ireland (€2,106 at current costs).

Pollak found that:³⁶

"If the Republic of Ireland continues to have such a low fees system alongside a much higher fees system in Britain, the consequences will be significant. Not only will a growing proportion of the nearly 9,000 undergraduates who currently go to universities in Britain and Northern Ireland probably decide to stay at home, but also a rising number of British undergraduates will choose to study in the low-fees regime in the Republic of Ireland."

3.4 Social and cultural attitudes

Social and cultural attitudes may also play a role in choosing to study across the border. A study by Aoibhín de Búrca and Dr Katy Hayward used three focus groups (consisting of an average of four participants in each from University College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast) as a means of investigating the attitudes of university students from each jurisdiction towards the other. The study found that students from the Republic were more apprehensive about travelling to the North than *vice versa*.³⁷

"The young generation in the South still perceive the North with some degree of apprehension – something that is based on a simple association of the North, and Northerners, with conflict... Even our young Dublin-based respondents have internalised a wariness of 'huge cultural difference' (expressed in their concerns about wearing the wrong colour shirt or having a noticeable accent) that reinforces in their own minds the 'otherness' of Northern Ireland and the implications of crossing the border. It is notable, however, that such fears are not reciprocated with nearly as much broad intensity of feeling by Northern respondents towards the South..."

In the Centre for Cross-border Studies research into obstacles to cross border student mobility focus groups were carried out with students from the Republic who were studying in Northern Ireland.

³⁵ Student Finance NI, Financial support for new students in 2014/15, http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=54,1266217&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

³⁶ The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland, Spring 2012, Pollak, A, Cross-border undergraduate mobility: An obstacle race that the students are losing? http://www.crossborder.ie/?page_id=4721

³⁷ The Journal of cross-border studies in Ireland, Spring 2012, The Agreement Generation: Young people's views on the cross-border relationship, <http://www.crossborder.ie/pubs/journal7.pdf>

These consisted of a focus group of five students who were studying at the University of Ulster's Coleraine Campus.³⁸

As stated by the CCBS, the main topic of discussion was around the continuing sectarianism of Northern Irish society and its effects on students from the Republic attending the Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster. The CCBS states that:

“These effects continue to be significant, probably because the Coleraine area is majority Protestant and strongly Unionist (unlike, for example, the university's Magee campus in Derry and its planned new Belfast campus in the north inner-city area of Belfast). However – and somewhat ironically, given some of the stories told by these Southern students – the majority of Northern Ireland students on the Coleraine campus are now from a nationalist background.”

³⁸ Centre for Cross-border Studies, Study of Obstacles into cross-border undergraduate mobility, http://www.borderpeople.info/study_of_obstacles_into_cross_border_undergraduate_mobility.pdf

4. How to encourage cross-border mobility of students

Universities Ireland was established in 2003 to promote co-operation and collaboration between the nine universities in Northern Ireland and the Republic.³⁹ It receives funding of £25,000 from both jurisdictions for the Centre for Cross-Border Studies, which provides secretariat support.⁴⁰ Part of its work involves hosting conferences on matters of common-interest to universities on the island of Ireland and the development of university-industry links, technology and research transfer on an all-island basis.

There is limited funding available for those who wish to study across the border. The *North-South Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme* offers funding to those participating in a recognised Master's degree programme or first year of a PhD programme, which would require them to relocate to the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland.⁴¹ These scholarships are offered by Universities Ireland in conjunction with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB).

The Centre for Cross-border studies is a participant on the *Cross-Border Co-operation and Student Mobility Project Team* (Department of Employment and Learning). Part of this work involves looking at ways to enable students to move freely between the two jurisdictions.⁴²

The 2011 Centre for Cross-border Studies report recommends a number of steps to encourage higher cross-border mobility between students from each jurisdiction, such as:

- Improving the flow of information about university courses between the two jurisdictions.
- Dedicated inter-government funding for a coordinated campaign to recruit undergraduates on a cross-border basis, possibly overseen by an all-island network of University Presidents.

³⁹ Soares, A. (2014). (Higher) Education Crossing the Border. Centre for Cross Border Studies. See <http://www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/EducationFinal.pdf>

⁴⁰ [http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring//WebAttachments.nsf/\(\\$vLookupByConstruct edKey\)/committees~20130711~GFJ/\\$File/Daily%20Book%20Unrevised.pdf?openelement](http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring//WebAttachments.nsf/($vLookupByConstruct edKey)/committees~20130711~GFJ/$File/Daily%20Book%20Unrevised.pdf?openelement)

⁴¹ <http://www3.ul.ie/careers/careers/downloads/files/Postgradireland%20-%20Costs%20and%20Funding%20Irl%20and%20Northern%20Irl.pdf>

⁴² Centre for Cross Border Studies, 5 February 2014, Soares, A. Higher Education: Crossing the Border, www.crossborder.ie/wp-content/uploads/EducationFinal.pdf

- A joint awareness-raising and recruitment campaign by Institutes of Technology in Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo in border region schools in Northern Ireland.
- End the practice of awarding Northern Ireland students, studying in the Republic, lower bursaries than the maintenance grants given to their counterparts studying in the UK.
- Northern Ireland universities should initiate an induction scheme for students from the Republic to prepare them for living in an area in which sectarianism still exists, possibilities include a 'buddy system' linking existing and new undergraduates.
- Look at equivalences between A level and Leaving Certificate examination grades for Northern Ireland school-leavers applying to third level in the Republic to ensure that the most equitable system of equivalences become part of any reformed CAO system.
- A Higher Education Authority/Department of Education and Skills task force should be established to examine the impact that large University tuition fees will have in English and Welsh universities, when they come into effect in the academic year 2012-2013 [The maximum tuition fee charged to Northern Ireland-domiciled students studying in Northern Ireland is £3,575 a year].
- Research should be carried out by the Departments of Education in both jurisdictions which would seek to examine the effect that demographic changes will have on demand for higher education. This should also examine the recommendations of the Williams Report 1985.

This report was discussed in the Northern Assembly in October 2012 and the Assembly agreed to take forward the recommendations in that report.⁴³ Speaking at the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement on the 11 July 2013, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr. Stephen Farry, discussed progress around these issues, including:⁴⁴

- The Higher Education Strategy addresses the quality of information available to students;
- Student support for students domiciled in Northern Ireland who may be studying in the Republic: From 2013-14 on there will be a new form of student support which

⁴³ Northern Ireland Assembly, 23 October 2012, Official Report, Cross-border education, <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Official-Reports/Plenary/2012-13/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20@@aims-hansard-20121023220936802.pdf>

⁴⁴ Dáil Éireann, 11 July 2013, Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, [http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring//WebAttachments.nsf/\(\\$vLookupByConstructe dKey\)/committees~20130711~GFJ/\\$File/Daily%20Book%20Unrevised.pdf?openelement](http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring//WebAttachments.nsf/($vLookupByConstructe dKey)/committees~20130711~GFJ/$File/Daily%20Book%20Unrevised.pdf?openelement)

hopefully will address some of the anomalies highlighted in the report and better facilitate students from Northern Ireland studying in the Republic; and

- Recognition of A-level qualifications and equivalency for university entry into institutions in the Republic: A report was commissioned by the Minister for Education, John O'Dowd, into the issue (please note, review of the Department of Education website did not find a copy of the report).

At a meeting of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement on Thursday 30th May 2013, Mr. Denis Cummins, President of the Dundalk Institute of Technology said:⁴⁵

“The institutes of technology at Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo are closest to the Border and have the greatest interest in improving student mobility, particularly from North to South.”

The recommendation of these IoTs, as set out by Mr. Cummins, is that the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement should support the establishment of a North-South Higher Education Joint Working Group to promote student mobility between Ireland and Northern Ireland and work towards:

- providing improved co-ordination in respect of admission and progression opportunities for students on an all-island basis;
- increased student recruitment on a cross-border basis;
- the establishment of a programme to facilitate cross-border staff mobility programmes between higher education institutions;
- the monitoring of cross-border student mobility programmes;
- ensuring the CAO system provides equitable treatment to students from Northern Ireland;
- facilitating better co-operation between careers services in the higher education institutions, particularly to promote job opportunities for graduates on a cross-border basis;
- an annual conference targeted at second level guidance services on a cross-Border basis to promote greater awareness of the portfolio of courses available at higher education institutions on either side of the Border; and
- the establishment of a scholarship fund targeted at promoting cross-Border student mobility for students from low-income backgrounds.

⁴⁵<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/committeetakes/GFJ2013053000013>

However, at the time of writing such a working group has not been established.

In response to a Parliamentary Question⁴⁶ on 8th October 2013 the then Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairí Quinn, T.D. said:

“The three border-region Institutes of Technology are cooperating to create greater awareness in the North of the programmes on offer. My Department is also encouraging them to collaborate with nearby Northern Ireland colleges and universities to explore how provision might be combined or rationalised to the benefit of the student population in their catchment areas.”

Speaking in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 29 September 2014, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr. Stephen Farry said:

“My officials are working with officials in the Department of Education and Skills to research and analyse cross-border student flows. A joint report that will inform policy development is scheduled for completion in the autumn.”

4.1 Actions by Universities

Trinity College Dublin recently announced a new initiative designed to increase the attendance of students from Northern Ireland to 8% of the student body. The university recognises that its requirement of 4 A-Levels has led to a reduction in the number of students attending from the North. A press release issued by the College on 3rd July 2014 said:⁴⁷

“In response to a recent decline in numbers from Northern Ireland – in part caused by the fact that only 1 in 8 students in Northern Ireland take 4 A-Levels – Trinity has announced a feasibility study to find a new way of admitting A-Level applicants from across the EU, which will be tested in the first instance for applicants from Northern Ireland.”

The Provost of the university went on to say that it was important to take action to increase the number of students attending from the North because Trinity College Dublin has always been an all-island university.

To address the decline in numbers, the University has decided to admit a limited number of students from Northern Ireland, based only on their best 3 A-Levels (so long as they meet a minimum grade requirement of A,B,B). This will apply to all courses with the exception of

⁴⁶ Reference number: 42205/13

⁴⁷ https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/major-new-trinity-initiative-to-increase-number-of-northern-ireland-students/4785#.U7wFILdOXcs

Medicine (due to the HPAT requirement).⁴⁸ However, the number of students availing of this will be limited to a maximum of 3 students per course.

Speaking about Trinity College Dublin's recently announced initiative to increase the intake of students from the North at their college, the University's Provost said that he is working, in his capacity as President of the Irish Universities Association (IUA), with his counterpart in the Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI), President Paul Hannigan, and colleagues in Northern Ireland to improve student mobility on the island.⁴⁹

Responding to this announcement, the Minister for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland, Dr. Stephen Farry said:⁵⁰

“Cross-border co-operation and undergraduate mobility between institutions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are important from an economic, social and cultural perspective. I welcome this announcement by Trinity College Dublin which supports greater cross-border student mobility.”

In addition Dublin City University launched the McAleese Scholarship in April 2014.⁵¹ It provides access to DCU for Northern Irish students with three A-levels (with a minimum requirement of two A's and one B in their final grade). In addition to lower entry grades, students will receive an award of €1,000. DCU will provide up to forty scholarships.

⁴⁸ The admissions test selected by the Irish Medical Schools is called HPAT – Ireland (Health Professions Admission Test-Ireland). The test measures a candidate's logical reasoning and problem solving skills as well as non-verbal reasoning and the ability to understand the thoughts, behaviour and/or intentions of people.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/major-new-trinity-initiative-to-increase-number-of-northern-ireland-students/4785#.U70ILbdOXcs

⁵¹ Dublin City University, 16 April 2014, McAleese Scholarships for NI students, <http://www.dcu.ie/news/2014/apr/s0414l.shtml>

5. Conclusion

Despite a desire by both jurisdictions to improve the flow of students across the border there is very little take-up of higher education by students in the opposite jurisdiction, with only 6.8% of all students studying at third level in Northern Ireland domiciled in the Republic. This compares to 0.9% of students attending higher education institutions in the Republic domiciled in Northern Ireland.

Studies have identified several reasons for low mobility between the jurisdictions, among them a change in equivalences between A-Levels and the Leaving Certificate Examination, effectively diminishing the value of the former, within the Republic's application system. The higher cost of living in the Republic in comparison to Northern Ireland was identified as a factor in the 2011 Centre for Cross-Border Studies, especially in Dublin.

Some Universities in the Republic have looked at ways of encouraging students from NI to study there. Trinity College Dublin and Dublin City University are both examining ways in which to do this, primarily concentrating on entry grades.

Recent reports recommend better co-operation between the Higher Education Institutions on the Island and the establishment of a programme to facilitate cross-border staff mobility programmes between higher education institutions.

Another recommendation is that HEIs and schools do more to promote awareness among students of the possibilities of studying across the border, particularly in terms of how the CAO and UCAS systems work.