

Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education



The Centre for Cross Border Studies

**Main Office: 39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB
Tel. (028) 3751 1550 Fax. (028) 3751 1721
(048 from the Republic of Ireland)
Email: a.pollak@qub.ac.uk**

**Dublin Office: Room QG11, Business School,
Dublin City University, Dublin 9
Tel. (01) 7008477 Fax. (01) 7008478
(00 353-1 from Northern Ireland)
Email: andy.pollak@dcu.ie**

Website: www.crossborder.ie or www.qub.ac.uk/ccbs

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction by Olivia O’Leary	5
Ms Carmel Hanna MLA, Minister for Employment and Learning	7
Mr Noel Dempsey TD, Minister for Education and Science	11
Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England <i>Higher Education in the 21st Century: An English Perspective</i>	15
Professor Malcolm Skilbeck, Keynote Speaker <i>Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education: Challenges for the Universities</i>	25
Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, NUI Galway <i>Response to Malcolm Skilbeck’s paper</i>	31
Questions and Discussion: First Day Chaired by Olivia O’Leary	39
Mr Richard Riley, Former US Secretary of Education and Former Governor of South Carolina <i>American Higher Education in a Diverse World</i>	53
Mr Nikolaus van der Pas, Director-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission <i>Higher Education: The European Dimension and Beyond</i>	61
Closing Discussion: Second Day Chaired by Dr Art Cosgrove, President, NUI Dublin	67
Closing Remarks, Professor Gerry McCormac, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Queen’s University Belfast	81
Appendix 1: A Briefing Paper on the Irish Third Level Education Systems, North and South	83
Appendix 2: Conference Programme: Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education	99
Appendix 3: Biographies of Speakers and Chairpersons	101
Appendix 4: Conference Participants	105

INTRODUCTION

If cross-border co-operation were going to develop anywhere, one would have expected it in the enlightened sphere of third level education. It hasn't really happened, however, so a conference to find out how Ireland, North and South, could co-operate to become a centre of excellence at third level was bound to produce some challenging ideas. This was even more so when it brought together so many of the leading names in third level education throughout the island and internationally.

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck, a world authority on education and the conference's keynote speaker, probably spoke for everybody when he said that third level institutions had a moral responsibility to give a lead in North South co-operation – they had operational freedom to take initiatives and a fundamental responsibility to the well-being and interests of the state and citizens who support them. So why has so little been done? Three main reasons emerged in discussion: firstly, the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', which created practical difficulties; secondly, little political funding and support by governments until recently; thirdly, the fact that universities compete fiercely with one another and find it difficult to collaborate in the same city, let alone across the border.

So how could both parts of Ireland co-operate to develop as a centre of third level excellence? Among the suggestions were: collaboration on research; joint degrees; a collective North-South effort to maximise our advantage as an English-speaking area to attract students from overseas. Along the way, however, was some fascinating debate on what the primary function of third level institutions is; what their relationship should be with the societies and economies in which they are based; and whether co-operation and competition can exist comfortably side by side.

Finally, a hopeful note. Many conference participants regretted the fact that a body specifically set up to encourage third level collaboration on the island – the Conference of University Rectors in Ireland – had become dormant. We now hear, some six months after the Armagh conference, that the CRI is to become active again. It's good to talk.

Olivia O'Leary, conference chairperson

April 2003

Thursday 10 October

OFFICIAL CONFERENCE OPENING

Chairperson: Professor Gerry McKenna
Vice-Chancellor, University of Ulster

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA, Minister for Employment and Learning

Good afternoon, I would like to welcome you all, especially my Irish counterpart and friend, Noel Dempsey TD. I am very pleased to see among the guest list we have practically all the main players in Irish higher education attending this conference. I want to commend Andy Pollak, Chris Gibson and the Centre for Cross Border Studies for their initiative in organising this conference. This is first time that the nine universities as well as other institutions on this island have come together to discuss ways in which we can improve our profile as a centre of excellence in higher education.

I want to especially welcome our overseas visitors and, in particular, former US Education Secretary Richard Riley, who personally, and as part of the Clinton administration, has demonstrated so much practical goodwill to this country. This small island of Ireland, 32,000 square miles, just over five million people, is similar in area to the American state of West Virginia. It surely makes sense that there be ever-closer co-operation between the nine universities on the island, to the mutual benefit of all involved.

I have to acknowledge that it is with very mixed feelings that I speak to you today. It is likely that if this conference had been held next week I would not be talking to you as Minister. Like many, I feel a great sense of frustration at the events of recent days and previously. A shadow is hanging over the future of devolved institutions in the North, and the democratic will of the majority of Irish people is being continually thwarted by events which we are helpless to influence.

Whatever the recriminations between various parties in recent days, it is clear that the will of the people is being continuously thwarted. I am clear on what the people of Ireland voted for in 1998. More people on this island voted for parties which are part of the democratic nationalist tradition which wishes to live in peace, friendship, equality and harmony with the people of the unionist tradition and indeed those who are not part of either of those traditions.

I am part of that democratic nationalist tradition. I am also a social democrat. It has been said over the last few days that unionism is in crisis, that loyalist paramilitaries are on the streets, and that is true. But physical force nationalism is also in crisis, and until physical force nationalism gets its house in order political processes on this island will continue to be frozen.

The people of Ireland, especially in the North, have never suffered from an excess of good governance. The undermining of the integrity of the processes and institutions which have been endorsed by the people of Ireland with the kind of stop-go governance to which we have been subjected cannot be allowed to continue.

I do not know what effect this crisis is going to have on young men and women leaving education and looking for their first job. Or what effect it will have on adults who have problems reading and writing and who need support to overcome those difficulties. What effect is it going to have on students entering universities and further education colleges for the first time? And, most importantly, what effect is it going to have on our children and those future generations on whose behalf we have been charged with bringing good governance closer to the people?

I know not everybody thinks about politics, or indeed about the Good Friday Agreement, on a daily basis. But I have been eating, drinking and dreaming the Good Friday Agreement for so many years that I know that certainly in the next few days when this does suddenly collapse, or go into suspension, whatever we want to call it, I think it is going to be the equivalent of watching a friend die – when what has happened really doesn't hit you until that person has died, and I think that is how I am going to feel in the next couple of days.

I had to get that off my chest, but I suppose I had better say something about education!

I don't know if Ireland in early Christian times ever really should have been called the 'island of saints and scholars', but we certainly persuaded ourselves of the fact. I note that in the United States, though not in Ireland, a recent book by Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilisation*, featured in the bestseller list for many months.

The Irish proverb – 'education is easy carried' – testifies to the extent to which the people of Ireland esteem the intrinsic value of education. My Department's strategy for education – and I had better make sure I have got the priorities in order here – is social inclusion and widening access to third level education; a higher education system which is of the highest quality and promotes the highest standard of teaching and learning; and enhancing the contribution of higher education to the needs of the economy. These key themes match very well with the themes of today's conference.

Higher and further education is now one of the largest and growing industries in the world. UNESCO estimates that there are 88 million university students worldwide and almost all those students are to be found in huge state-funded public systems created by government, and funded for the most part out of general tax revenue.

It is now almost axiomatic that more and more education is the indispensable determinant for economic growth. However – and I am saying this today now because I probably won't be Minister next week and I am not sure that the Department really agrees with all this – I believe that the linkages between education and economic growth are many and subtle, and I think it is highly questionable if there is a simple direct relationship between the amount of education in society and future economic growth: the idea that governments can fine-tune education expenditure to maximise that self-same rate of growth.

Universities and institutions of higher education make two vital contributions to the economy: firstly as educators and trainers, and secondly as generators of intellectual, scientific and technological ideas which are often of direct commercial relevance.

We also live, and I say this with some regret, in a 'winner takes all' society, in a world of global communications. Pressures on students and institutions are greater today, not just because of mass higher education, but also because they are increasingly international in context. More people are chasing the best graduates, researchers and academics of the best universities and colleges, not within but across countries.

How can Ireland position itself in this increasingly stratified international market? Can this be done without a system for higher education that is, in effect, a centralised government-controlled nationalised industry, and at a time when the real funding for students appears to be on an ever downward path? Are we facing progressive decline in the amounts of teaching and learning offered in each degree? Does mass higher and further education inevitably have to mean downward pressure on the funding of the institutions, and what are the implications for scholarship and intellectual creativity?

Those are just some of the issues with which you will have to grapple. They are difficult questions to which I certainly don't have the answers but, as Samuel Beckett once said, I try and fail, I try again and I fail better.

I just want to finish by quoting the remarks of Cardinal John Henry Newman given in a series of lectures 150 years ago at the time of the founding of what is now University College Dublin. Newman, as I am sure everyone in this audience knows, was one of the greatest prose stylists in the English language and his words resonate to the present day. "Knowledge is not merely a means to something beyond it, or the preliminary of certain arts into which it naturally resolves, but an end sufficient to rest in and to pursue for its own sake. Knowledge is an indispensable condition of expansion of mind, and the instrument of attaining it."

Mr Noel Dempsey TD, Minister for Education and Science

I am pleased to have this opportunity along with Carmel Hanna, Minister for Employment and Learning, to open this conference, an initiative of our two Departments, with the theme 'Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education'. I wish to record my appreciation to all those who participated in its preparation, including representatives of our third level institutions, North and South. This conference, the first in a series, is to explore the scope for enhancing standards in our systems through increased collaboration in the areas of further and higher education. In this way we will increase the attractiveness of the island of Ireland as a centre of excellence for education services. Collaboration and co-operation between both education systems in this island should not merely rely on student mobility; it has to move to a higher level where we share knowledge and experiences.

The success of the Irish economy over the past decade has been based on, among other things, the availability of an efficient, young and well-educated workforce, which is the product of our education system. We now need to focus on the next phase of economic development in Ireland, which is based on the premise that, as we have become wealthier, our cost advantages could erode relative to direct competitors for foreign investment in Eastern Europe and South East Asia. The challenge facing the Irish economy, and indeed that of the island of Ireland, is to achieve higher value investments, based on sourcing an increasing proportion of the intellectual and knowledge content of goods and services on the island.

This concept of knowledge as the basic economic resource underpinning the knowledge-based innovation society brings the development of and support for a strong research capacity to the forefront of national policy. I suggest that this is a goal which must be shared by all of us on this island.

Of all the areas of potential co-operation in these increasingly knowledge-based economies, including those identified in the North/South Ministerial Council's commissioned report, *Obstacles to Cross-Border Mobility*, research in our third level institutions has to rank among the highest. The central importance of building up our research capacity has been recognised in our National Development Plan, in which the Government has made a commitment to an unprecedented level of funding of almost €700 million over the duration of the Plan. Improved networking between researchers within higher education has to be achieved and this will be further facilitated by the availability of funding for collaborative activities under the National Development Plan. Knowledge generation requires inter-institutional co-operation, and this approach will allow the island of Ireland to secure a position in the global research arena.

I am glad to note the evidence from Cycle Three of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions that some of the projects approved involved collaboration between institutions North and South. The Common Chapter in our National Development Plan and its Northern equivalent, the Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity, provides an agreed context within which a number of co-operation measures may be progressed. It recognizes that the valuable linkages which have been developed provide the basis to establish more closely integrated, coherent approaches in the future with clearer policy objectives and outcomes.

In the Institute of Technology sector, co-operation between the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology and the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC) over the past number of years led to the signing of a protocol on 20 September 2000. The joint protocol has many valuable and important elements, including co-operation in respect of quality assurance issues, which is critical to the promotion of these institutions. I strongly welcome the initiative of the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges and the Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology in agreeing this protocol, and I have no doubt that the outcomes will be of mutual benefit to the institutions, their staff and students North and South.

I am glad to say that specific funding for North-South collaborative research activities is earmarked and set aside under the NDP. The total funding allocated to North-South activities over the duration of the Plan is some €15 million, including support from the EU Structural Funds. The aim of this measure is to facilitate and encourage cross-border co-operation and research between third level institutions. Discussions are ongoing with a view to developing a strategic approach to effecting this provision and making it complementary to any other funding sources that may become available. I know that these are nearing a conclusion, and I hope to be in a position to announce details of a scheme in the near future.

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck, in his excellent report, *The Universities Challenged*, said that universities must recreate themselves in order to broaden their horizons. These horizons are not just North-South, but also on the wider international stage. I quote:

“Recreating the Irish universities means that in broadening horizons to see themselves as global players, they should enhance their power and capability ... there are other benefits to countries where universities play prominent international roles: diplomatic and economic benefits from networking; students educated abroad returning to positions of influence in their own country; research collaboration; enriched staff and student experience”

In his briefing paper for this conference Andy Pollak has raised similar issues, which are both opportune and central to the promotion of Ireland, North and South, as a centre of excellence for higher education. In particular, he poses the questions as to whether higher education institutions can exploit to a greater degree the advantages they have with a language that is a medium of instruction of universal currency, and how they will cope with the challenges of the changing international environment.

The challenges and opportunities emerging from the increasing globalisation of higher education is an issue which is currently being considered by Ministers for Education within the OECD context, and more particularly at the EU level. The European Commission has recently launched a proposal – Erasmus World – the underlying objective of which is the promotion of Europe as a centre of excellence in learning and the need to ensure that European higher education remains at the leading edge of developments through, for example, the establishment of co-operation with third country institutions of a comparable level of development.

The numbers of free moving students pursuing an international education is constantly increasing. It is estimated that almost 2 million students study overseas at present as against 1.3 million in the mid to late 1990s. It is forecast that these numbers will continue to expand considerably into the foreseeable future. We estimate that there are around 20,000 foreign students, including English language students, in the South.

European higher education institutions have so far failed to combine individual strengths, educational diversity and wide experience in networking to offer courses unique to Europe and of world class standard, which would enable the benefits of international mobility simultaneously to be maximized and shared more widely within the EU and partner countries. The EU Commission's proposal for a series of initiatives in support of the objective to promote Europe in this way is one which we broadly welcome. Its timing is opportune in the context of the objectives for this conference, and should help to focus our minds, as Andy Pollak has done in his conference paper as to how, on this island, we can best collaborate to ensure that Ireland can be established as a centre of excellence for education services.

In referring to EU initiatives, I should, of course, acknowledge the immense benefits which our membership of the EU have brought to the development of higher education, in particular through the availability of Regional and Social Funds to build up our infrastructure and programme capacity, especially in our institutes of technology. There is no doubt that Ireland's prosperity and social progress are vitally dependent on us having a peaceful and secure external environment, consistent and appropriate policies, and a well regulated and open trading system. The European Union, within which we have participated fully, has provided the framework on which our prosperity has been built.

I am sure that this conference and those to follow will provide Minister Hanna and myself with many worthwhile suggestions to promote the objectives of co-operation – suggestions which, for my part, I look forward to receiving.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: FIRST DAY

Chairperson: Olivia O’Leary

Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England

Higher Education in the 21st Century: An English Perspective

I am delighted to join you this afternoon at what is clearly going to be a very stimulating and important conference. It gives me considerable pleasure to return to Ireland. I have cultivated a long and warm relationship with your country. In the time of the UK Universities Funding Council I was Chairman of the Northern Ireland Committee. And I have spent many a pleasurable evening in Dublin in my role as external examiner at Trinity College. Like so many of my colleagues, I always return from Ireland enriched by your culture, full of hope for your future, and inevitably enchanted by the beauty of your island and its spirit of friendship.

It is fitting that we are gathered together in Armagh on the 150th anniversary of the series of lectures on higher education by John Henry Newman in Dublin in 1852. As many in this audience will know, it was Archbishop Paul Cullen of Armagh who persuaded Cardinal Newman to be the first Rector of a new Catholic University of Ireland. And as the new Rector, Newman accepted Archbishop Cullen’s invitation to deliver a series of nine lectures on the ‘Scope and Nature of University Education’. These nine discourses, supplemented by a series of occasional lectures and essays, were brought together for publication in 1873 in one volume with the now well-known title, *The Idea of a University*.

For anyone who wants an insight into the difficulties faced by both Cardinal Newman and Archbishop Cullen in establishing a new university then I commend to you a fireside read of Newman’s published letters, which offer a superb vignette on the range of major and minor issues that can trouble a university vice-chancellor. I recognise many of the practical as well as philosophical issues that troubled Newman from my own experience as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton. I think the only area that passed Newman by was the never-ending debate about the need for more parking spaces on campus.

I do admire the energy and creativity of Newman. Whether or not I could have managed a series of nine public lectures to celebrate my inauguration as vice-chancellor is open to doubt – as least in my mind. The breadth of his lectures is staggering by any measure and it is remarkable that we have not seen anything in the past century and a half to match Newman’s bold and controversial attempt to define the essence of a university education. Surely there is someone from within this island nation, or indeed my own, who will rise to the challenge to map out the idea of higher education in the 21st century. There is a challenge for you. I should enter my own disclaimer at this point. This is not the first of a

series of nine lectures on higher education to be delivered by me in Armagh over the remaining months of 2002.

We are, I believe, at a defining moment for higher education in England. Although it is a particularly exciting time for higher education we should be in little doubt that it is also a very challenging time for the academy. We are for the first time in our history really entering the realm of mass higher education with the prospect of 50 per cent of young men and women experiencing higher education by 2010. We need to build on the considerable strengths of our higher education system as we fully embrace the challenges and opportunities of the knowledge economy and knowledge society.

We need to focus on options that will deliver the future rather than simply tinkering with structures that have delivered the past. The world of reflection and ideas needs to move in parallel with the world of action and decisions. Over the next 30 minutes I would like to reflect on what I see as the main drivers behind change in higher education, the challenges we face, and the opportunities that lie before us.

It has been argued by many commentators that we have slipped into the age of mass higher education in England while maintaining the traditions and structures of an elite system. We need to reflect on how best to cope with the management of change. And in many respects the mood of change will need to be attitudinal as well as structural. The way we have structured, managed, organised and delivered higher education in the past may need to be realigned as we make a step-change adjustment to the needs of the knowledge society.

The knowledge society offers higher education huge opportunities. But we are no longer the only players in the delivery of knowledge. We need to ensure that in a world where comparative advantage will determine the allocation of resources and future survival of institutions, we continue to define our contribution by the high quality of our teaching and research.

I believe that we are truly living and working at a hinge point in history, when the decisions we make over the next few years will be critical for the future direction and structure of our system of higher education. It is not too dramatic to describe this period of change as an epochal period of transition, in which the forces of change that we are facing have the potential to have immense consequences for the role of higher education institutions.

I think it is important that in planning for the future we do not give way to naïve futurology. We do need to understand how the present has emerged from the past, and how it might be extrapolated. This approach is described beautifully by Walter Lippman writing in the second decade of the twentieth century in his book *Drift and Mastery*. He wrote:

“All we can do is search the world as we find it, extricate the forces that seem to move it, and surround them with criticism and suggestion. Such a vision will inevitably reveal the bias of the author; that is to say it will be a human hypothesis not an oracular revelation. But if the hypothesis is honest and alive it should cast a little light upon our chaos. It should help us to cease revolving in the mere routine of the present or floating in a private utopia. For a vision of latent hope would be woven of vigorous strands; it would be concentrated on the crucial points of contemporary life, on that living zone where the present is passing into the future. It is the region where thought and action count. Too far

ahead there is nothing but your dream; just behind there is nothing but your memory. But in the unfolding present, man can be creative if his vision is gathered from the promise of actual things”.

So we need to try to understand what is really going on in the contemporary world of our higher education system, to discover what it means, and then to move forward in that spirit of understanding to create a new model that will build on the past and our heritage but meet optimistically and realistically the new challenges of the future.

Over a century ago, Benjamin Disraeli told the House of Commons at Westminster that ‘a university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning’. This is still a noble aspiration for higher education, but it is unlikely that this definition would adequately encompass the missions and activities of our universities and colleges today as they grapple with the many challenges of the 21st century.

Our higher education institutions are part of a big, complex and demanding business requiring large-scale ongoing investment. In 1998 the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education estimated that some 82 million people were enrolled in higher education institutions, a sixfold increase in the period 1960 to 1995.

Although we are facing considerable challenges in the 21st century, the histories of our universities and colleges give good cause for optimism. Our institutions of higher education stretch back over many centuries. They have demonstrated their viability and durability as well as the ability to change and nurture progress in society at large.

The demands and expectations that are being placed on higher education institutions by government, industry, parents, students, professional bodies, and a whole range of other interested parties, are formidable. It is essential, therefore, that we assess, review and explore performance and chart strategies so that our higher education system is equipped to deal with the new challenges of this century.

Nobody would deny that education at all levels is central to economic, social and cultural well-being and a central part of self-development and personal empowerment. Worldwide there is a growing demand for access to higher education, bringing forth new providers, new modes of delivery, and innovative methods of learning and teaching. The concept of lifelong learning is universally recognised, encouraging as it does a more diverse student population.

We have a collective responsibility within the academy to bring our skills and energy to bear on the myriad of themes, issues, challenges, threats, options, perspectives, patterns, policies and approaches that are surfacing and challenging higher education systems across the globe.

The higher education system in England is already a considerable success. Our research is among the best in the world and we have one of the highest completion rates in the world. There is strong demand for graduates in the UK economy and graduates are generally very satisfied with their courses.

With only one per cent of the world’s population, the UK is responsible for 4.5 per cent of the world’s spend on science, produces eight per cent of the world’s scientific papers, receives 9 per cent of citations and claims around 10 per cent of internationally recognised science prizes.

UK universities have major advantages in the global market for higher education. Their reputation for high quality teaching and research combined with the emergence of English as a universal language puts the sector in a strong position to attract students worldwide. International students comprise 12 per cent of the total student population and 39 per cent of full-time postgraduates. Fee income from students outside the European Union contributes 10 per cent of all teaching income.

Our universities make a substantial contribution to the development of their own regional economies. On a practical level this contribution includes: hosting science parks and innovation centres; encouraging the creation of, and providing support to, newly created firms; providing bespoke training solutions to businesses; arranging student placements in local businesses; and linking student projects directly to the needs of businesses and local community groups.

In recent years there has been a steady increase in inter-institutional collaboration, ranging from informal co-operation and joint course provision through formal partner or federal arrangements to full institutional merger. Within England we have seen increasing numbers of higher education institutions requesting support from our restructuring and collaboration fund to enable appropriate partnerships and changes in academic provision better to reflect changing student demand or regional need.

Our universities are among the finest in the world. And they are essential for the continued success of the UK today in regional, national and international terms. The UK university system is a huge success story and a significant sector of the economy in its own right. Collectively, our system in the UK spends some £13 billion a year, employs 300,000 people and educates over 1.8 million students. The higher education sector generates £35 billion worth of output across the UK economy, over 60 per cent of which is generated outside the institutions themselves.

I would now like to turn to the key forces that are transforming societies, not only in OECD countries but globally, and which are indeed having an impact on the way we deliver higher education in England. And then I want to tell you about the way my organisation is moving forward strategically to work in partnership with our universities and colleges to meet these challenges.

The first issue is globalisation. We do need to consider everything that we do as a sector in a global and not just a local or national context. The standards that we apply in all our activities need to be ones of global and not just local or national excellence. There is now widespread recognition that higher education lies at the heart of the knowledge-based economy. Indeed in many respects we are now seen as being in the engine room of the knowledge-based economy.

But there are some other themes which are perhaps less commonly commented upon. One of the most important in my view is the increasing contribution that higher education makes to civic society. We need to remind ourselves that higher education is not simply a means to an end, but is an end in itself. We need to continue to celebrate the purposes of higher education in terms of the enlightenment it brings in spreading civilised values and promoting social progress. Universities are important institutions which lie between the state and the individual. We shouldn't forget that we have a key role in our communities and regions in promoting civic welfare, and in inculcating civic values in our students.

Of course the future of higher education was reviewed a little more than five years ago by Lord Dearing and his committee. I would like to reflect briefly on the major roles of

higher education institutions in the twenty-first century that were set out in the Dearing report. The key areas are:

- lifelong learning
- creation of a learning society
- regional economic development
- pure research and scholarship
- technological innovation
- social cohesion
- public accountability.

These are my terms, and not those of the Dearing Committee itself, but I think they are activities with which few of us would quarrel.

The dilemma I think we all face is not that we would wish to deny the importance of any of these, but rather that no institution is funded sufficiently to pursue all these activities simultaneously at global levels of excellence. If one accepts that view, then one proceeds logically to the notion that institutions must seek out their comparative advantage rather than trying to do everything. Institutions need to focus on what they are best at.

We might ask: 'Why doesn't this happen now?'. One answer certainly is that the HEFCE funding model does not really encourage it. A key issue for the Council is how far we can re-engineer our funding model to encourage, rather than discourage, a greater diversity of mission within the sector.

Let me emphasise here that we have no top-down plan. We have to strike a balance between offering some steering and guidance to the sector on the one hand, and respecting institutional autonomy on the other. So what we envisage is not some sort of 'big bang', but rather an evolutionary approach in migrating towards an increasing diversity of mission. I sometimes describe this as a form of back-seat driving, using the policy levers that we have.

In other words, what we want to do is to develop a range of rewards for excellence for institutions, covering areas other than just research, and then leave it substantially to the institutions themselves to determine where their best interests lie. They would be acting in the knowledge that if they do choose to focus on certain activities rather than others, the funding model will reward them for excelling in those activities. I think that is the key social compact we have to develop, so that institutions know that if they do excel then there will be rewards based on that performance.

The core themes of our strategic plan for the period 2003 – 2008 plan are:

- widening and increasing participation (which is of course a government election manifesto commitment)
- enhancing excellence in teaching and learning
- enhancing excellence in research
- enhancing the contribution of higher education to the economy and society.

We also have three cross-cutting supporting themes:

- Building on institutions' strengths
- Developing leadership, governance and management and people

- Organisational development within HEFCE to deliver the strategy.

We have already started the process of consulting our universities and colleges about the shape of the new strategic plan and key areas for development. We expect to publish our strategic plan for consultation in January 2003.

I know some parts of the sector give a groan when funding bodies, or indeed government departments, start to talk about strategic reviews. We have the prospect of strategic reviews from both the Department for Education and Skills, and HEFCE, to look forward to over the next few months. Review is such an ambiguous word. One commentator has already suggested that if these are reviews of higher education then the French Revolution might correctly be described as a review of the French aristocracy. I do not think we need to be quite so cynical or nervous on this occasion. And the point I would emphasise is that we can only make progress if we work in partnership with the higher education sector.

Let me go back and look at each of these strategic themes in turn.

First of all **increasing and widening participation**. The 50 per cent target of 18-30 year-olds benefiting from higher education by 2010 is an election manifesto commitment. Therefore as a sector we do have to regard it as politically non-negotiable. But there must be no return to the growth at marginal rates of funding that characterised the 1980s, with all the threats to quality that that produced.

The 50 per cent target is a tough challenge, although we do believe it is achievable. The current initial entry rate is 41.5 per cent, so we need an improvement of about 1 per cent each year between now and 2010.

All this must be set within a lifelong learning context. We must not forget about the needs of adult learners and those over 30. We must not regard those who are 31 years old as being of less interest to us than those who are 29. We do recognise in the Council that all of this will incur substantial additional costs, both in recruiting the students we need from lower socio-economic groups but also in retaining them within the sector.

We need to stimulate demand through our Partnerships for Progression initiative which we are pursuing jointly with the Learning and Skills Council.

We know that a large number of the students we need to attract into higher education will come from the lower socio-economic groups, with all that implies in terms of changing culture and of changing the basis for student financial support. We are therefore looking at new types of students across all subjects. We are also looking at offering new products to these students – more of the same will probably not be sufficient.

Over the last few months much effort has been focused on thinking through the issues of demand for higher education. But increasingly at the Council we are now thinking also about the supply side. We estimate that the Government's target of 50 per cent participation would mean about 360,000 additional full-time equivalent students enrolled by 2010.

That gives you some idea of the scale of expansion we are talking about. In percentage terms it would be the largest expansion of higher education in this country since that following the Robbins report in the 1960s and 1970s – and it would be greater than that in absolute numbers. This would have enormous implications for how and where the students study. How many of them would be honours degree students and how many

would be taking other higher education qualifications? And, crucially, how would they be distributed geographically?

This expansion alone is likely to increase diversity of mission. Even if the expansion were to be fully funded, I think it is highly unlikely that there would be an inflation of research funding commensurate with the increase in resources for teaching and learning. It is also unlikely that this scale of expansion can be achieved in a laissez-faire manner, for example through the existing annual competition for additional student numbers. We will have to take a rather more planned approach. This is going to require a lot of work on our behalf, and a great deal of consultation with the sector.

The second major theme is **excellence in teaching and learning**. Now that we are embarking upon a new quality assurance regime, I think we can look forward to a period in which the emphasis will be placed more upon quality enhancement in teaching and learning than on regulation. We therefore need to think about how we can develop rewards for excellence in teaching and learning, both for institutions and for individuals, and how we can measure excellence. This will not be easy. It is something in which government ministers in particular have an increasing interest.

Then we have the issue of **research excellence**, which of course is uppermost in our minds following the recent Research Assessment Exercise. We are presently undertaking a review of the RAE.

It is almost inevitable that quality-related (QR) research funding will continue to be allocated on a highly selective basis. We have an open mind at the Council on how this will be reflected in a newly reformed RAE. Let me emphasise that there is no question here of trying to stop institutions undertaking research. We could not do that even if we tried, and we have no intention of doing so. Higher education institutions have received, and will continue to receive, a great deal of research income from sources other than the Council.

The fourth theme concerns higher education's **links with business and the wider community**. We recognise that these currently encompass a wide range of activities. We need to define these activities more clearly and then refine them into a more coherent set. It is possible that we could proceed by offering institutions the option to choose, from within a portfolio, which activities they wanted to focus and be evaluated on.

Having defined that portfolio rather more clearly, we would then be in a position to develop measures which would provide some basis for performance-related rewards. In this area in particular we also need to develop stronger links with other partners within the regions, such as the Regional Development Agencies, and the Learning and Skills Councils.

How all of this can be reflected in a robust funding model is one of the things we will need to do a great deal of work on. I must emphasise that we are talking in terms of soft not hard boundaries. It is no part of our intention to categorise institutions and then fund them differently according to which category they are in. Rather, we want to identify the core areas in which we believe all institutions will be active – learning and teaching, research, closer links with business and communities, and widening participation – and then to develop for each of these an element of funding which might be related to performance.

So it is a kind of core-plus model. Where institutions choose to focus their efforts to obtain the 'plus' funding would largely be a matter for them. In this way we hope our funding method would encourage diversity. We also hope it would enable us to consolidate our

funding into fewer streams, in order to increase focus. And we believe that out of greater mission diversity might come a more solid basis for strategic partnerships and alliances. These would be based on complementarity of mission, rather than on competition, which is often the case at present.

We recognise that all of this carries considerable implications for **leadership, governance and management** in institutions. As a Council we wish to invest much more in professional development right across the sector at all levels. I believe that we under-invest at the moment. We need to do a lot more, from head of department upwards, to ensure that colleagues have the professional skills they need, when they need them.

This is a strategic plan which is not intended to predict the future, nor is it intended to be directive. It is a means by which we can as a sector discuss our priorities for the years ahead. It is also a way in which we can provide our higher education sector with the framework needed to plan future activities.

Although the mood of this speech is one of embracing change and indeed managing change, we should not forget the essence of our universities and colleges of higher education. They still represent, and are clearly recognised as, a community of scholars with a considerable sense of history and longevity. We have survived as an academy because of the centrality of providing creative solutions to society's needs and problems. Alfred Lord Whitehead remarked that the secret of progress is to preserve order in the midst of change and change in the midst of order. That is the challenge that both our nation and our universities and colleges face today.

Predictions are very hard to make. The philosopher F M Cornford commented that 'nothing should ever be done for the first time'. I have heard it speculated that the future is much like the past – only longer. I think that particular observation no longer applies – well certainly not in respect of higher education. The future has always been different, and increasingly it is becoming less and less like the past.

In his recently published book on the future role of the American University, Frank Rhodes, from his vantage point as a former President of Cornell University, and as an academic for many years in England, argues that our generation has every justification to believe that it is living in a period of unprecedented change, in which the pace of transformation dwarfs anything experienced before. Every age has seen, to some degree, technological development as a major influence in its social transformation. But previous changes in past centuries were heavily dependent on natural resources, and were limited both in their scope and in the range of their impact by national boundaries, wealth and communications.

This is no longer the case. A nation's present well-being and future destiny are no longer constrained by its 'given' – its geography, its population, its natural resources. Knowledge has become the prime mover; science and technology represent the new driving force. Economic prosperity, energy supplies, manufacturing capacity, personal health, public safety, and environmental quality – all these and more will depend on knowledge creation and knowledge transfer.

We may well have a comparative advantage in terms of the quality of our higher education but increasingly we need to align this traditional strength with new modes of delivery to a more diverse and critical group of consumers. I believe that with the e-university we have made a good start, but we need to ensure that the paradigms of new modes of delivery to a diverse range of prospective students – wherever they are located – pervades our thinking

as we move into the new learning environment for higher education. Higher education institutions across the globe are making the transition from 'just in case' to 'just in time' to 'just for you' learning as students have shifted into a new role as consumers of higher education.

I have spent my whole adult life within the academy and am fiercely proud of our traditions and achievements. Our higher education institutions are variously the conservators of human experience; the custodians and transmitters of the best that has been thought or written, said and done; the embodiment of openness, rational discourse and experiment. They are also critics of the very knowledge they conserve, and of the society that supports them. Not least, they are the creators of new knowledge, fresh insight, novel techniques and creative approaches.

New discoveries in one field often provide a wholly new approach to problems in another field. It is here that the community of scholars in higher education is so important: testing, sifting, contesting, refining and applying all manner of knowledge; analysing and addressing all kinds of issues; and doing all this in a spirit of rationality, integrity, openness and civility.

The unique function of our higher education institutions is not only to provide technical skills of the highest quality, but also to bring each new generation together with a community of more senior scholars to reflect on the great issues of life and to confront the overarching challenges of society.

In the future a great institution of higher education may be defined by what it chooses not to do, as well as by what it chooses to do. We will either define ourselves or we shall be defined.

Great teaching still has the power to inspire, to encourage a critical but open outlook, a breadth of interest and a generosity of spirit. Teaching has always been and still is a vocation. We joined the profession to spread enlightenment and to promote the cause of social justice. We should not lose sight of that aspiration.

Our collective task is to deliver the future for higher education. We should always start with a vision. This is a task as daunting as it is inspiring. We should settle for nothing less.

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck

Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education: Challenges for the Universities

1. Achievements and Challenges

The title of this conference may be read as a declaration of what is, or as an aspiration for the future. I would like to support both readings. There is ample evidence of the quality and strength of third level education in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. We can all pay tribute to it. Equally evident is that there are challenges to be met and opportunities to seize. It is to address these, more than to debate achievements, that the conference has been planned and organised. However in neither evaluative judgements nor future planning should we overlook what has already been achieved.

Over many years I have had the privilege and pleasure of working in Ireland on a variety of projects. This experience has given me great confidence in the ability of Irish people and the quality of education throughout the island. My engagement has been with the education system, both schooling and tertiary education, alike in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The five years I spent at the University of Ulster (then the New University of Ulster) from 1971 to 1975 was an intensive learning experience. Life in the province was my first direct introduction to armed political conflict. More important, it brought me face to face with the history and culture of a great people.

I came to believe during my life in Ulster, as I still do, that in face of physical violence of all kinds we must mobilise to the fullest possible extent the peaceful and constructive forces of education and the virtues of what Bertrand Russell thought of as a civilised life. However, as Russell also knew, there are occasions when direct action – which in his case included civil disobedience – seems to be the only option.

Whatever views may be on that point, I would like now to express my warmest appreciation to the organisers of this conference, indeed to those responsible for the wide and deep peace process of which it is a part. So long as physical conflict continues and apparently irreconcilable differences persist, it is essential that we meet in settings such as this: to declare our positive educational values; to learn from one another; and to share our determination that education of all kinds will play a prominent, indeed a decisive role in the continuing development of our societies.

Universities have become more not less important as knowledge and its uses is seen to underpin social and economic life. They have increasingly opened themselves to the world and claimed for themselves a fundamentally important role in sustaining human well-being. As a result of this expansion and their readiness to address contemporary issues and needs, they have lost much of their traditional mystique. Paradoxically, the harder they work, the more they contribute to economic and social development, the less they seem to command respect and the more difficult becomes the quest for the financial resources necessary for their activities. They have an image problem, but it is not insoluble and this conference and what it stands for could be of material benefit in addressing that problem.

2. Steps Toward North-South Collaboration in Higher Education

In the excellent background paper that Andy Pollak and his colleagues have prepared for this conference, we learn that there are close similarities between higher or tertiary education in the Republic and the North. Also, we are reminded of the review undertaken by Professor Gareth Williams not only of the complementarity of third level education in the two jurisdictions, but also of the scope for mutually beneficial cooperation. His review was in 1985, and it appears that it did not have the impact at the time that was sought. Now we have another opportunity which should be warmly embraced. Of course, there have been many cross-border initiatives since then and it is worth recalling that there were earlier initiatives, for example during the very difficult years of the 1970s. One of these, in which Professor Norman Gibson of the New University of Ulster played a most active role, aimed to establish a framework for graduate studies in economics whereby students could, from a number of universities both North and South, draw on a common pool of units of study. I do not know whether that idea took root, or how much North-South collaboration exists at present. It certainly exists at the grass-roots level, and there is mention in our papers of the North-South collaboration in teacher education. I am happy to note that the respective Departments of Education, North and South, have provided funding for the range of fine projects which we discussed in Belfast in the year 2000.

3. Benefits of Co-operation and Partnerships

Over and above the peace process, it is reasonable to ask what benefits are likely to accrue from more extensive collaboration among the universities on this island. Is this not a specific instance of the more general issue concerning partnerships and co-operation that universities everywhere are now addressing? Partnerships and other forms of co-operation have become a necessity in research. I believe we could achieve a great deal by extending the principle to teaching. One of the consequences of the electronic revolution is the recognition by universities that in various kinds of partnership they can operate globally. As yet, we have not proceeded far down this track, but can expect to do so in the course of the present decade. There are some highly ambitious projects in the pipeline which promise to link universities in several countries, extending opportunities for students but equally for staff, in both teaching and research.

It is not only the technological revolution that is fostering global outreach. The increased interest the universities are taking in the sale internationally of a wide variety of services – in teaching, research and consultancy as well as other fruits of their scholarship – means that they have become significant economic actors in some countries. Sale of services extends to more intensive use of the massive capital facilities universities possess and their organisational skills. What is notable about these developments is that, like globalisation generally, many of them cut across national boundaries and are based on a mutuality of interest, not on the specific structures, policies and funding arrangements of individual nation states. However, the drive for students both nationally and internationally has led to intense competition to the neglect of the possible benefits of co-operation.

In considering cross-border cooperation between the North and the South, we must keep in mind that from the point of view of universities this is a subset of wider relationships. For both Northern Ireland and the Republic, membership of the European Union is of course a major source of cross-national linkages, including the sharing of students. In addition, each university will have its own networks and linkages extending beyond Europe. So a necessary question to address is the extent to which the further expansion of existing linkages and networks specifically in the North-South context will be of mutual benefit to the universities. This is to see the matter from the standpoint of the university

and each university will have to find its own answer. If I can put it slightly differently, what role do the universities see for themselves as contributors to and major players in the evolving social, cultural, economic and political movement that goes under the shorthand name of ‘the peace process’?

No doubt there are different perspectives on this question. My brief answer is that among the wholly reasonable expectations of the university is a direct and substantial contribution to the well-being of the society which sustains it. Although, as I have indicated, the contemporary university is increasingly part of global society, it is primarily still an institution of and within the nation state. It has a fundamental responsibility to that state, to the advancement of its interests and to the well-being of its citizens. The exercise of that responsibility is one of the main reasons for state support of universities.

4. The Responsive University: Expectations and Values

In the report I was invited to prepare on university education in the Republic of Ireland, I took the view that there is a fundamental challenge to the contemporary university to reposition itself and to show greater responsiveness to the declared requirements of the society of which it is a part. At the same time, I underlined fundamental intellectual values and principles which provide the *raison d'être* of higher education, and whose continued vitality is a charge upon the university community and the society which supports it. To strike a balance between these at times conflicting requirements is of course difficult. Nevertheless, it is a responsibility of the university community as a whole to take the initiative and to show that it is capable of addressing social and economic imperatives while maintaining its integrity and advancing fundamental values.

Let us remind ourselves what these values are. In essence they are those of free and independent enquiry, the pursuit of truth, and the advancement of knowledge. These are generalities which have to be translated into specific purposes, procedures and contexts. They lend themselves to a variety of interpretations and it cannot be said that academic life consists of a pure-minded devotion to them. In my report I argued that the university is supported from both public and private sources to create, disseminate and teach useful knowledge. Its role is not only to prepare students for professional life and to help them advance their professional careers, and to undertake research and scholarship which, *inter alia*, have socially and economically useful outcomes. However, these are among its primary purposes.

Are these utilitarian expectations, requirements and sought-for outcomes inconsistent with the fundamental values? Is a professionally useful education illiberal or lacking in creativity, critical thinking and detached enquiry? The answer in principle is, of course, ‘no’. It is a matter of how the utilitarian purposes are pursued, and whether the university community is able to structure itself and organise its affairs in such a way that there is a constant and productive interplay between the expectations, the requirements, the outcomes and the fundamental intellectual and educational values and principles. The heart of the challenge lies in the processes, the procedures, the structures that are adopted and this is very much in the hands of the universities themselves. If you like, it’s a test of their creativity and capability.

5. Toward the Entrepreneurial University: Managerial or Collegial?

Universities have to make a living, to pay their way, and it is perfectly obvious that the old model of public funding is in decline. In the United Kingdom the rate of decline has been rapid during the past twenty years. For many universities, this means rather less than 50

per cent of the operating budget and capital funding comes through the old mechanism of grants from government. For the Republic of Ireland, this process has started, but has yet to reach the scale of the United Kingdom. However there is no question but that the universities there will have to become more entrepreneurial and more accustomed to the world of contract-based funding. This has already happened in respect of research. The Republic's universities will be increasingly subjected to the rigours of appraisal and public accountability that the UK universities have faced in recent years. Perhaps there is something to be learnt from the UK experience – and I don't mean just the negatives that are so often voiced. The establishment in the Republic of a quality assurance agency brings it into line with the increasing number of countries which require of their universities a mix of self-evaluation and public scrutiny.

In my country, Australia, in a very short space of time universities have become accustomed to seeing themselves as businesses, and this is nowhere more evident than in the highly successful campaign over the past two decades to draw upon the international pool of fee-paying students. It is no less evident, however, in the area of capital works where private-public partnerships and borrowing in the capital market are becoming the norm. The term 'business' is anathema to some academics, so perhaps I should qualify it and say 'more businesslike', which means more focused on costs, a variety of income streams, and the efficient use of resources. Is this such a bad thing?

A major consequence of the changes in the funding regime and one to which I draw attention in the report I prepared, *The University Challenged*, is the absolute necessity for universities to become more effective managers of their very substantial resources and more capable entrepreneurs. This is sometimes seen as giving rise to a conflict between so-called managerialism and collegiality, with the former regarded as an example of the capture of the university by commercial values, and the latter as the traditional essence of the true university. In my view it is foolish to present these as alternatives since the modern university is a very large, complex, costly and publicly visible entity which must be well governed and managed while remaining true to its fundamental values and purposes. The 'moral' role of the university and its ethical quality depend, in fact, on its survival and its capacity to create new structures and forms of organisation which are effective, economical and transparent, and which have the wide assent of the community of scholars and students on the one hand, and the public domain on the other.

6. Staff: The Key to Excellence

Two aspects of the work of the universities provide a focus for several of the challenges that I posed in my report. The first is the concept of staff development, which refers to a continuing process throughout the whole career of all staff members, whether academic, technical, administrative or managerial. If the universities are to meet the challenges, which I believe are not only of growth and development, but of survival, it will be through the quality of the staff. Quality entails readiness and willingness of staff to continue to grow and develop. This means not only such obvious items as maintaining their own academic expertise as teachers, scholars and researchers, but also seeing themselves as active members of changing, growing and expanding institutions. There is a distinction to be made between seeing oneself as a good teacher, scholar and researcher on the one hand, and being an active player in institutional development on the other. One of the dangers in the present situation, as I see it, is that institutional development has become very much the preserve of senior management, whereas traditional teaching and research roles are assigned to lecturers and professors in departments. The diminished role of academic boards and senates is a danger signal, not the mark of a good university.

Another danger as yet only on the horizon is of casualisation, whereby staff are hired and fired as if there is not a fundamental identity between their work and needs on one hand and institutional purposes and processes on the other. Close integration of institutional procedures and academic work is required. This is perhaps best achieved through such processes as, first, faculty-wide/institution-wide course and programme development in which all members of staff play an active role; and, second, interdisciplinary, co-operative and collaborative research projects. In other words we need to break the mould of the traditional department as the essential unit and look for more fluid, flexible cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional programmes and ways of working.

7. The Changing Student

The second area where I believe there is considerable scope for creative initiative is that occupied by the mature age student. Of course, in one sense all students entering university are of mature age, but what I have in mind is the older student who returns to study or learning after considerable experience in the workforce and/or in adult, family or interpersonal life.

One of the features of the transformation of higher education which I and colleagues noted in a twelve country OECD study of tertiary education that we carried out in the mid 1990s was the rapid expansion of numbers of mature age students entering or re-entering tertiary education. This, together with the preponderance of females, is the most striking change in the student population in many countries. It is a result in part of changing demography, but more immediately of the acknowledgement that education is a continuing process. For economic, social and personal reasons, very large numbers of adults in our society seek and need to continue their professional development or see continuing education as an essential part of their self image and well-being as people. Some systems – and I include the United Kingdom and Australia together with the United States, Canada and New Zealand – have for a very long time made provision for mature age students, but others – and the Republic of Ireland is one – have not. I believe there is an overwhelming case for the Republic to move rapidly in this direction, and for those countries already in the vanguard to continue to expand provision and opportunity.

There is considerably more to be done, however, than simply developing new courses and rearranging timetables. Much of the growth can and should take place through distance education with increasing use of electronic technology. Moreover, we have to do much more than we are doing at present to establish linkages between the various elements, which in the United Kingdom include further education, and in the Republic of Ireland the Institutes of Technology, private providers and the large and amorphous field of adult education. At present we have too many snakes and not enough ladders, too many dead ends and inadequate means whereby people can find out about learning opportunities and practical ways of continuing their studies or returning to learning. Furthermore, funding arrangements for mature age students are riddled with inconsistencies, which have received too little attention in the overall preoccupation with financial constraints on institutions.

The mature age student is or should be of considerable interest to the arts and social science faculties as well as to the professional schools. In the great emphasis of recent years on socially and economically useful knowledge, the humanities have often felt left behind. However, in considering mature age students, the humanities are a rich and important territory. The expansion of part-time study for mature age students is a great opportunity for humanities departments, where student numbers have declined and governments have shown little interest. But this means a readiness to change course

content perhaps quite dramatically, and to accept the great diversity of backgrounds of mature age students. Since many of the departments in question are small and specialist, there is great scope for cross-institutional collaboration in programme planning, development and delivery. Programmes are not confined to regular teaching, but may include workshops, exhibitions, archives, summer schools and thematic projects. More collaboration should also mean less duplication and the opportunity to concentrate on areas of strength. I see the mature age student as a focus for considerable expansion and development of cross-border collaboration.

8. Cross-Border Co-operation: Opportunity and Responsibility

In thus returning to the question of future cross-border collaboration which I touched on earlier in my remarks, I will conclude with the thought that universities have the advantage of a high degree of independence and freedom to operate. Their charters and legislation generally provide scope for initiative unrestrained by political and other considerations. A wide acceptance in the community of the international nature of scholarship and learning, and of the need for students to cross boundaries of various kinds and to explore new ideas, is a great asset in this respect.

For these reasons, and given the already well established linkages across boundaries, the universities are very well placed to become leaders in the cross-border dialogue that is so badly needed as a counter-balance to the tensions and violence in other spheres. I believe the universities also have a moral responsibility to show leadership in this regard and to see North-South co-operation not as incidental, but as one of their primary responsibilities. They need to report and communicate to a wider public what they are doing in this regard, to undertake and to publicise new initiatives, and to establish as part of their internal organisation mechanisms and procedures to facilitate and extend cross-border cooperation. This is a challenge which should draw in university governing bodies, presidents and vice-chancellors and their deputies, deans, senior administrators, and heads of department. It is pre-eminently a leadership issue with rich opportunities for the taking. I congratulate everybody here and the organisers and supporters of this event for an initiative which should lead to a new and very important phase in the peace process.

References

- OECD (1996) *Redefining Tertiary Education*. Paris. OECD.
Skilbeck, M. (2001) *The University Challenged*. Dublin. HEA/CHIU.

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, National University of Ireland, Galway

Response to Malcolm Skilbeck's paper

It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity of responding to Professor Skilbeck's opening paper at this timely conference on the challenges facing Irish universities, North and South.

Malcolm Skilbeck has been a distinguished and influential commentator on Irish education, including the university sector, for more than three decades: from the time of his appointment at the (then) New University of Ulster in the early 1970s to his recent major report, *The University Challenged*, completed for the HEA/CHIU in the Republic in 2001. His contributions to the debate on developments in Irish education have always been framed in a wide comparative context, have invariably been challenging, and have consistently offered perceptive insights into the particularity of the Irish educational experience and systems. These virtues are richly represented in his opening address.

In the time available to me, I intend to comment briefly on a number of the principal propositions (and assumptions) of Professor Skilbeck's paper which are explicitly concerned with cross-border challenges and opportunities for the universities and with which I find myself in general, in some cases wholehearted, agreement. I will follow these comments with a response to one or two more fundamental questions which he has raised regarding the role of the university as an institution, in an 'open' western society of global liberal capitalism, and the particular contribution towards redefining 'excellence' in this context which the Irish universities might find a worthy challenge.

Professor Skilbeck addresses the issue of why there ought to be closer co-operation and joint projects between universities North and South, given the different jurisdictions and the differences in regulatory structures and funding systems in which they operate, and given the fact that Irish universities (in common with others in the technologically advanced world) can increasingly seek and find partners for collaborative research projects and, less commonly, course development and delivery projects, across state boundaries. But Skilbeck is surely right to insist that, apart altogether from those cross-border university projects which are based upon a recognition of demonstrable mutuality of interest (and there are many such projects), in the particularly fraught circumstances of division and conflict in Ireland, and at a critical time for the hopes and prospects of movement away from community conflict in Northern Ireland, there is an obligation on all the universities in Ireland to show some collective purpose and make a distinctive contribution to the cause of peace, tolerance and progress.

It is not difficult to imagine the distinctive contribution which the universities might and should make in this context. Given the deep wells of fear, ignorance, prejudice and unreason which have sustained suspicion, division and violence in Northern Ireland over many decades, if there is any prospect of constructive dialogue and peaceful cohabitation between the communities, then surely it is proper that a significant and distinctive contribution to the movement towards peace and tolerance should be expected of institutions whose core values, practices and culture of open enquiry, reason and respect for different views, represent the very antithesis of the fears and dark forces in which

conflict and violence have for too long thrived. Whatever its content or focus, the university's contribution should be exemplary of its culture of 'open' enquiry and tolerance: by being exemplary it will become inspirational.

Again, in its commitment to extending the reach of its values, its knowledge and wisdom, and its spirit of open enquiry to the widest possible audience, the university sector, North and South, should indeed, as Skilbeck suggests, take full advantage of all the advances in technology and communications systems (for distance education), and of the declared commitment of political leaders in both jurisdictions to general strategies of social inclusion and to the idea of a spatial strategy which aims at achieving some balance in the geographical distribution of economic and social (including educational) opportunity and advantage. The acknowledgement of the need for continuous professional education, for lifelong learning, for second-chance and career-change options, likewise reinforces Skilbeck's emphasis on the challenges and opportunities which the universities on this island (in common with universities throughout the developed world) face in engaging the mature or adult student. **Improving the provision of appropriate 'ladders' for adult learners (through flexible transfer mechanisms, credit systems, course design etc.) could usefully be a priority task for a cross-border university project aimed at increasing participation rates among this category of student. But for these ladders to be used effectively, there will have to be a radical reappraisal of the funding arrangements for mature students (rightly criticised by Skilbeck as being 'riddled with inconsistencies').**

It may be worth noting, in passing, that in Professor Skilbeck's comments on the potential for increased access to university education for mature or adult students, there lurk, however unintentionally, some curious normative assumptions which merit closer scrutiny. Take, for example, the following:

"However, in considering mature age students, the humanities are a rich and important territory. The expansion of part-time study for mature-age students is a great opportunity for humanities departments where student numbers have declined and governments have shown little interest. But this means a readiness to change course content perhaps quite dramatically, and to accept the great diversity of backgrounds of mature age students. Since many of the departments in question are small and specialist, there is great scope for cross-institutional collaboration in program planning, development and delivery. More collaboration should also mean less duplication and the opportunity to concentrate on areas of strength. I see the mature student as a focus for considerable expansion and development of cross-border collaboration."

Undoubtedly mature students present opportunities and challenges of the kind and in the particular areas identified by Skilbeck – and these opportunities should be grasped. But, so far as the Republic is concerned, the humanities (and social sciences) in general have shown no sign of decline in recent years: indeed, in terms of the numbers and quality of students seeking admission, the arts and social science faculties in the universities in the South have been doing rather better in recent years than some other faculties and courses which the exhortatory rhetoric of the State and development agencies (echoed by journalists) suggest as having 'more socially and economically useful knowledge' to disseminate. Moreover, is there any reason why latecomers to university education should not, based on their life experience and the mature identification of real aptitude, aspire to courses and qualifications in medicine or science or architecture, as well as in philosophy, medieval studies and Latin?

In proposing a holistic concept of staff development – where, in addition to continuing development in their particular fields of expertise and responsibility, all staff will see and develop “themselves as active members of changing, growing and expanding institutions” – Skilbeck aims to address (to correct) the trend whereby “institutional development has become very much the preserve of senior management”, feelings of impotence or indifference pervading other staff who perceive themselves to have no meaningful ‘ownership’ of the key decisions and processes involved in institutional change. Skilbeck’s remedy – “close integration of institutional procedures and academic work” – is already the declared objective of structural reviews (course planning teams, flexible cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional programmes, devolved resource management) in every Irish university with which I am familiar, and a variety of initiatives and models have been devised to attempt implementation. **It would seem to me that a thorough review of these various models of holistic staff development and integrated institutional development might constitute an early candidate for a cross-border university review of a kind that might reasonably be expected to enhance ‘excellence’ in the performance of our universities, North and South.**

However, in considering this particular challenge of staff development as the key to excellence, Skilbeck reaches the more fundamental issue of the changing role of the university as a special kind of institution in the ‘open’ society in our time. His own direct experience of university systems in several jurisdictions, together with his comparative approach, give particular weight to his views. It would not be unfair, I believe, to summarise his position as one of qualified endorsement of an emerging, more entrepreneurial university, showing “greater responsiveness to the declared requirements of the society of which it is a part”, while at the same time remaining true to its fundamental intellectual values and principles. It is, as he sees it, "a responsibility of the university community as a whole to take the initiative and to show that it is capable of addressing social and economic imperatives while maintaining its integrity and advancing fundamental values". In achieving this balance, Skilbeck sees the universities in Ireland (as he noted in particular in his major report last year on the universities in the Republic) as needing to become ‘more businesslike’ (as he approvingly notes of the recent direction of university developments in Australia) in conducting their affairs, “which means more focused on costs, a variety of income streams, and the effective use of resources”.

Specifically, Skilbeck accepts as a given that the portion of university resources (current and capital needs) provided from public funding will continue to decline (with the Irish universities following the trend in the UK over the past twenty years). In the Republic this ‘catching up’ with the UK experience will, he observes, also involve a sharp learning curve in dealing with the world of competitive, contract-based funding, and increasingly with “the rigours of appraisal and public accountability that the UK universities have faced in recent years”.

These features of the contemporary university, sketched by Skilbeck, are already well-imprinted on the universities in Ireland, North and South. [And it may be that Professor Skilbeck underestimates the extent to which these general features are already present in the universities in the South]. Contract-based funding in certain key domains (large-scale capital intensive collective projects, with a strict, predictable time-frame for ‘deliverables’) has been a feature, for example, of competitive, EU-assisted research projects for many years and increasingly also in other endowed research projects. And the management of these contracts has inculcated habits and refined practices which have benefited the research culture in general across the university sector.

Of course, contract-based research is only one form of research, and the university needs to ensure that it remains (in its rhetoric as well as in its management ethos and practices) hospitable to the variety of forms of research intrinsic to the university's mission. Likewise, in course development and teaching, it is already the case that contract-based funding has become an established feature in a number of areas in all of the universities. **The potential of this kind of contractual funding, as well as its limitations, should be part of the ongoing strategic reviews of general policy within Irish universities and in dialogue between them.**

The quality assurance systems operating in recent years and being fine-tuned in the universities in the Republic in a legal climate of liberal Freedom of Information provision, represent significant and distinctive models of quality assurance, which combine self-evaluation (including external reviewers) with a public scrutiny dimension. In any dialogue between the universities North and South on models of quality assurance, it is likely that both sides would have something to learn, with each side bringing valuable if different experiences to the discussion. Certainly the common purpose of seeking excellence through regular and rigorous evaluation of performance would be well-served by formal cross-border review of current practices in this area.

And yet, for all its flexibility and adaptability to the changing context of funding and the changing expectations (of governments, funding agencies and the general public), Professor Skilbeck has shrewdly noted a striking paradox in the regard in which the modern university is now held:

"Paradoxically, the harder they work, the more they contribute to economic and social development, the less they seem to command respect and the more difficult becomes the quest for the financial resources necessary for their activities. They have an image problem, but it is not insoluble ..."

The university may indeed have work to do in attending to its image. But I would like to suggest another possible explanation for the paradox which Skilbeck identifies in the university's predicament. It may be that the universities (and this does not by any means apply exclusively to the vice-chancellors or presidents) have not been effective or successful (have, in fact, been rather feeble) in proclaiming the essential or characteristic features which make the university a distinctive, not to say unique, institution of service to society; the universities have not been good at finding the terms – the language – in which the claims of the university as a special kind of institution (with a special value) need to be articulated in an 'open' society, so as to secure public understanding, endorsement and support.

The emergence of the 'virtual' university and the continuing implications of developing information and communications technology for the 'learning society' presents a challenge to the traditional campus-centred university. The question that arises with particular insistence in the debate on the future of the university (its future role, shape and form) in the technological age, is the following: can technology (with its growing interactive capacity and a population becoming fully acculturated to its presence in their lives) mimic, emulate, replace, or interchange easily with the more immediately intimate social space or environment which has hosted the learning process up to now? There is a growing body of literature emanating from educational analysts and educational leaders, notably in the USA, which seems to accept that technological interaction (through distance learning, remote or off-site delivery systems etc.) will indeed become the dominant form of 'learning' in the new age of massification in lifelong learning.

Estimates as to the size of the learning public at any given time vary, but one recent estimate from the USA conjectures that “demands in the USA alone can translate into the full-time equivalent enrolment of one-seventh of the workforce at any point in time”. Not surprisingly, it is not anticipated that demand from a learning population of this magnitude can or will be met in traditional style campus environment; accordingly, it is envisaged that “there will not be more college campuses, but a variety of providers and new types of facilitators, learning agents, and intermediaries – with far greater competition and choice”.

Faced with this scenario, the primary concern of many university leaders is with the issue of whether and how the universities can or should reposition themselves within this grid of continuous learning, so as to guarantee their continued relevance, if not dominance, of this ‘market place’. They seek to ensure that they will continue to licence the facilitators and, perhaps most crucially, certify the performance or the standards reached. It is acknowledged that in terms of financial resources, technological know-how, management systems and, perhaps, ambition, there are likely to be formidable alternative or competitor ‘providers/facilitators’ in the market.

However, there are a number of other issues which deserve closer examination, before we accept the definition of the challenge in terms of the logic of the market place and the capabilities of technology in creating an environment (and a massively-accessible medium) for learning. One particular issue of relevance here is the extent and the precise sense in which learning (as distinct from accessing information) is a social process. A major study by Brown and Duguid in California in the late 1990s offered some important insights and made a number of telling points (*see footnote*).

As one might expect, this study presents a fascinating prospect for the uses of technology in the ‘learning society’. However, the most challenging assertions in the study relate not to the technological but to the socio-cultural aspects of the learning society of the future and the changing role of the university therein. Rejecting the ‘knowledge delivery’ view of the university, the findings properly insist that “the core competency of universities is not transferring knowledge, but developing it, and that is done within intricate and robust networks and communities. Communities are at the heart of what universities do and the experience their degrees represent.” The authors conclude: “The central point we want to make ... is that learning does not occur independent of communities.”

The primary function of the university does indeed lie in generating and developing knowledge. This has its own rhythms and procedures which are embedded over time in the peer-sanctioned practices which inscribe the concept of excellence in research and scholarship. Universities must proclaim and explain this unique function (one of its ‘fundamental values’, in Skilbeck’s words) more confidently and more persuasively to government and to the general public than they have been doing in recent times. And they must then practice what they preach. Some branches of research may indeed be capable of ‘delivering’ results with a demonstrable social utility within specified time limits. But the painstaking editing of a difficult document or the grappling over many years with an intractable problem in number theory or some other area of pure mathematics is also, luminously, a contribution to generating and developing knowledge which lies at the heart of the university’s mission. Its internal procedures, no less than its public rhetoric, must proclaim clearly the university’s esteem for all forms of excellence in research and scholarship.

For all that it must be businesslike in managing its estate, a university is not a business, any more than it is a monastery dedicated to pure contemplation. An audit of a university

is not the same as an audit of a manufacturing plant. The appropriateness of the imperatives and vocabulary of the 'market place' as a frame of reference (a discourse, if you like) for understanding or defining the role of the university in society – now or in the future – needs to be challenged. If the experience of university education is to be described as delivering a 'service' or delivering 'products' efficiently and effectively to 'customers' (who, in the time-honoured phrase of the market place, are 'always right'), then it will inevitably be the case that the university will be judged like any other service industry. If the university chooses to articulate its mission in terms which have their origin in (and inhabit most comfortably) the world of business, commerce and industry, then there can hardly be reasonable complaint if the rules, the performance indicators and the culture of this world of business are applied, by government and by the public at large, to the universities and to their performance.

The critical issue is, what makes the university a *special* place of learning? Here let us remind ourselves again of the two great impulses of education – the conservative (the consensus on the curriculum, what ought to be studied and transmitted as being of value) and the subversive (the interrogation of and challenge to these assumptions and values encoded in the curriculum). These must be present in all forms and at all levels of education. But they are especially important in a university.

May I say at once that so far as the structure of the university in the future is concerned, I am not sure that we should take up fundamentalist positions on what the ideal structure should be. Of far greater consequence, it seems to me, is the issue of what are the essential, inviolable characteristics of education, and what are the general and specific characteristics which we can (and must) claim for the university as a particular site of learning and an unique asset to an 'open society'?

In what sense then can the university of the future continue to be a special place of learning? It is likely that the university in the medium-term future will be characterised by a high degree of flexibility and hybridity . It will combine elements of the real (campus-based) and the virtual, the local and the distant, technologically-assisted and mentor-led learning. The precise combination of elements will vary, but the effects of technology, virtual massification of access, lifelong learning and cost-consciousness will dictate that flexibility and hybridity will be characteristic features of the university of the next generation. But if the university remains firm in its commitment to its fundamental mission, then it seems to me that there are a variety of structures which may be compatible with and capable of serving that essential mission.

The question of what constitutes the optimal or the acceptable mix (on campus/off-site, individual/contact experience) in terms of the social grounding of knowledge, is a matter for ongoing debate (and we are only at the early stage of observing the social impact, as it were, of the new environment of information and communication). I have no doubt that the university – as a distinctive, special institution of learning and enquiry in our society – is and will continue to be capable of sustaining considerable variations in organisational models and structures, without sacrificing the integrity of its mission. But if it ceases to be informed, animated, and inspired by the independent spirit of enquiry and the imperative of searching after truth; if it fails to articulate effectively its special mission and role in terms that are distinct from other (worthy) institutions in society; if it ceases, in short, to believe in itself as a unique institution of service, then the public will cease to believe in it also, and it will deserve whatever may turn out to be its fate.

As Malcolm Skilbeck rightly concludes in his discussion of the search for a balance between meeting changing expectations and maintaining fundamental intellectual and

educational values and principles: "The heart of the challenge lies in the processes, the procedures, the structures that are adopted and this is very much in the hands of the universities themselves."

Finally, a word on structures. If we accept, as I do, Skilbeck's assertion that the universities have a moral responsibility to show leadership and to 'see North-South co-operation not as an incidental but as one of their primary responsibilities', then there is urgent need for structural initiatives. The networks of project-centred bilateral or multilateral links between universities North and South are deserving of the highest praise, and, at the risk of embarrassing our hosts, this Centre for Cross Border Studies is wholly admirable. **But whatever may have been the reasons for the early promise of the Conference of Rectors in Ireland not being realised, and for its lapse into its current anaemic state, some more solid version of the CRI should be reconstructed, not merely as a vehicle for occasional summits to give benediction to useful work in progress or to mark ceremonial events (important though these rituals can be), but to give coherence and leadership to the search for excellence in the cross-border dimension of university performance in both parts of Ireland.**

This dimension will, of course, be a sub-set of wider networks, and will have due regard for the particular visions and ambitions of individual universities. But if properly structured and resourced it could make an important contribution to our shared objective of making Ireland a centre of excellence in third level education.

Footnote

The work was conducted by John Seely Brown (vice-president of Xerox Corporation and director of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Centre) and Paul Duguid of the University of California at Berkeley, working on a project/book, *Situating Cyberspace* (a summary of the project can be found in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 10 May 1996).

Questions and Discussion: First Day

Chairperson: Olivia O' Leary

Panel of discussants

Professor Gerry McKenna, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ulster

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, NUI Galway

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck

Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, President, Dublin City University

Olivia O'Leary: Professor Gerry McKenna, we are talking about the need for more co-operation across the border between the higher education institutions. Why has there not been more co-operation up to now?

Professor Gerry McKenna: There are a variety of reasons why there has been less cross-border co-operation between the higher education institutions than would perhaps be desirable. One of the reasons is that you have two different funding methodologies, and while everyone has frequently said it would be a very good thing to have more cross-border co-operation, we have never managed at any one time to have two pots of money available at the same time. So sometimes there has possibly been money available in the North but not in the South, and sometimes vice versa. Universities do respond to funds, and certainly there is no lack of willingness on the part of the university presidents or indeed university staff to get involved in cross-border activities.

I think another factor has been that we are obviously part of different systems. We in Northern Ireland have been part of the UK system in terms of quality assurance teaching and quality assurance research through the RAE exercise, which has been important to us in terms of benchmarking nationally and locally. Certainly we have substantial benefits as a result of that and clearly that has focused our attention on the national scene in the UK. But I think there is a tremendous goodwill on the part of the universities to be more involved in co-operation and collaboration across the border, particularly at postgraduate level. I think also there are real opportunities for research, recognising that Ireland is a very small country, however you define it, and that we can't be good at everything but co-operatively there are real opportunities. But the short answer is funding.

O'Leary: You mentioned something else – the fact that you are involved in a UK-wide quality assurance system. Is that a barricade to co-operation with the South?

McKenna: I think it is less of a barricade because our system for the evaluation of teaching has changed very substantially, and therefore I hope there will be a lighter touch in the future, which will be helpful. We may well want to discuss ways in which we could actually have some sort of an all-Ireland system with a relatively light touch to assure quality. I think also that with the massively increased research funding in the Republic there are real opportunities now if Northern Ireland can find the matching funds to do joint work. In the past the Irish universities did not get a lot of research funding from the

government so it was difficult to match them up with Northern universities. At the moment the balance has gone the other way, so that we are getting rather less money for research in Northern Ireland than we ought to be getting and the Irish universities are doing very well, which I'm glad to see.

O'Leary: One more thing before I move on. You mentioned that sometimes you had the money that would have allowed for a co-operative scheme and the Republic of Ireland didn't, and sometimes vice versa. I was talking to a very eminent academic during the coffee break who pointed out to me that it has really only been in the last two-three years that both sets of political authorities, North and South, actually made funding available for the sort of co-operation you might envisage. So to a certain extent was there a lack of political will?

McKenna: I'm sure there was a lack of political will, and certainly since the Good Friday Agreement there has been relatively more political support for this type of initiative, and not withstanding what is happening politically at the moment that support will continue.

O'Leary: Relatively more doesn't sound much...

McKenna: Someone mentioned earlier that we had the Conference of Irish Rectors (CRI) established in the early nineties and for a variety of reasons that has been somewhat dormant, but we have been discussing ways in which we can resurrect that initiative. I know there is strong support for this from the North/South Ministerial Council. I know the Irish university presidents want to resurrect the CRI, and I think we will probably approach North-South university co-operation in a much more focused way when we get that particular initiative back on the road.

O'Leary: Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski, can I throw all those points at you. Let's talk in a minute about what sort of co-operation we could have, but in a way it is astonishing that there hasn't been more co-operation in the past, or is it?

Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski: Probably not. One of the things I suppose that one can say about our system is that we don't have a great record on inter-institutional collaboration at all, and therefore until quite recently you could have easily asked the same question about why there has not been more collaboration within the Republic, never mind cross-border. When I was asked a similar question recently I said that, in some respects, it would be easier for my university (Dublin City University) to collaborate north of the border than it would be to collaborate south of the Liffey. There are certain competitive instincts that people have which aren't triggered by cross-border collaboration but which may however be triggered by internal collaboration. I guess the big change in the Republic which has triggered inter-institutional collaboration internally has been the new research funding and the conditions attached to that – some of which are now being changed by some of the funding bodies in such a way that North-South collaboration, and indeed any collaboration outside the state, becomes a possibility as part of the funding stream.

Actually, I think that we could realistically say that there has been an element, and quite a successful element – even if it is slow – of North-South collaboration. The Centre for Cross Border Studies itself is an illustration of this, being an inter-institutional, cross-border collaboration initiative. A week ago exactly I was in Armagh launching two other teaching programmes in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast. There are initiatives. There are not enough of them, and clearly funding is a key ingredient to make such initiatives happen, but the conditions under which the funding is provided has changed to such an extent that they are much more possible now. The conditions under which we operate in

terms of external scrutiny and similar factors are also now becoming much more comparable. My guess is that there will be a growing trend in North-South university co-operation, and in so far as there wasn't much in the past, it was just that we weren't used to inter-institutional collaboration.

O'Leary: Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, why do you think there has not been more collaboration in the past between bodies who would have had more freedom perhaps than other institutions to take risks and co-operate across the border?

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh: I think the main reasons have been given. The only one I would add is that projects which tend to involve mobility of people, student or staff mobility, were inhibited by the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. It didn't prevent the collaboration of researchers who worked in their own realms, nor did it prevent the traffic in terms of external examiners in both directions. But if I could add one extra word above that which has already been said by the university presidents, it would be that some of the earlier EU-based university networks facilitated the process of developing North-South networks. These all necessitated an element of staff or student mobility, and I rather suspect that the critical time of the 1970s and 1980s when some of these EU collaborative networks were beginning to be set up, the North-South element was inhibited by the 'Troubles' to some degree.

O'Leary: So you would hope that we are heading into a new era of collaboration to that extent?

Ó Tuathaigh: Yes, certainly.

O'Leary: Professor Malcolm Skilbeck – to look forward and not to look back – can you give us examples of three or four of the sort of projects you would see as worthwhile initiatives for North-South co-operation in higher education?

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck: The first thing is the most obvious one: collaboration on R&D projects. This is not difficult to handle and there is a great deal being done already. It is partly a developing concept anyway that research should be partnership-based – that there should be a partnership between active institutions on the one hand, and between institutions and the wider world on the other. That seems to be a natural, obvious development and there is nothing that stands in the way of the strengthening of linkages through R&D projects.

It is more difficult in relation to teaching and learning collaboration. But there are two examples which I think lend themselves to this co-operation (I have mentioned one in my talk already). In relation to higher degrees, it would be a good thing, within jurisdictions as well as between jurisdictions, to have more pooling of programmes, so that a student anywhere can take parts of a higher degree from any one of a number of contributing universities, which could be in the North or the South. So if you are doing a masters degree which is made up of a modular programme, you have six modules spread over two years. Those six modules could be on the basis of three from the parent institution and three from other institutions. I don't see any difficulty in principle about doing that – it is an organisational problem, a partnership between like-minded institutions which have a sufficiently common structure to provide degrees.

The other example is perhaps more challenging and more in the future – the emergence of on-line learning. On-line learning is an area where the potential for extravagance, waste and inefficiency is enormous. If you think of each university trying to set up its own

structure and system and to put its own material on-line, on an individual institutional basis, I would have thought that any government should step in straight away and say we are not going to do this on such a basis – it ought to be a collaborative project involving all the institutions. I do emphasise the challenge this that represents – particularly on a North-South basis on the island of Ireland – but it seems to me to be a very important step forward. There would be so many benefits from it – resource benefits and others – that it would seem to me, looking well into the future, an avenue that should be explored.

O’Leary: When you talk about pooling programmes and allowing students to take modules at different universities, do you see that as a possibility for undergraduates as well as postgraduates?

Skilbeck: I would like to think so and in fact it is beginning to happen. I think someone made a reference to an international scheme which will use on-line technologies to allow students to take parts of undergraduate degrees from a pool provided by a group of around 20-25 universities in a number of countries. The reason I mentioned higher degrees is that the capacity to develop higher degree collaboration is available now. The capacity to develop on-line degrees of the kind I am talking about does not yet exist but it is on its way.

O’Leary: Can I put those suggestions to some of our university representatives in the audience? For example to Dr Art Cosgrove, President of University College Dublin.

Dr Art Cosgrove, President, University College Dublin: I think a good deal more could happen, but collaboration generally within CRI, as it was, usually depended on the idealism of the few, which quickly dissipated in the light of the failure of some schemes such as the student and staff exchanges of the mid-nineties. What is needed is something that would appeal to enlightened self-interest all around. In other words, there must be some incentive for the people concerned. The other issue I would raise is this – and I think I am the longest serving head of all the nine universities on the island, so as far as the criticism of CRI is concerned I should take the brunt of it – insofar as we did appoint a full-time administrator in CRI, we found that there was very little for him to do. Then, paradoxically, once he disappeared, the two governments (North and South) suddenly found us to be far more interesting than we had ever been before. It was at that stage that we got some more mature promises of funding to support this initiative, which I suppose is the way of the world.

On the research side there has been a plan around for some time for a joint fund between North and South which would be competed for by universities in partnership across the border. I don’t know whether it is going to be finalised or not – the Irish government was going to put in a sum of money which started out being big but I now gather it is going to be very small in comparison to what is available under other schemes.

Sometimes academics will say: “Why should I co-operate with a university in the North or the South when I can go to France or Germany and get a partner there which can put me into bigger money than is available on a cross-border scheme?” I’m back again to the argument about self-interest. I agree with Gerry McKenna that there is a great deal of goodwill there. However I would add that rather than agreeing that CRI should exist as a general principle, if we had specific projects on which CRI would then work, we would really move along. One obvious area is postgraduate co-operation, and I think programmes at postgraduate level, where we would increasingly be going for the American model of thesis plus coursework, would be something that would be well worth exploring.

A second area for co-operation would be whether we could do more collectively to attract students from overseas. A number of us will be going out to Australia at the end of this month to see how the Australian vice-chancellors do this. I think 35 per cent of students in Australian universities come from outside Australia. Is there an opportunity for the universities on the island of Ireland to market themselves in the same kind of areas, using the attraction that we have the advantage of being the English-speaking country inside the EU which is not England, if you know what I mean.

O'Leary: Gerry McKenna, what do you think are the sort of projects on which we could co-operate?

McKenna: I think the obvious ones have been mentioned, but I think one of things we ought to be doing if we were really serious about North-South co-operation is to look at our regulations and our statutes to make sure that we could actually offer joint degrees. That ought to be a project that we commit ourselves to doing. I think the other thing we should do is to have a common credit accumulation and transfer system which would be available throughout all of Ireland to allow students to transfer from one institution to another. I also agree with the point that there is a real opportunity in branding Ireland and Irish universities overseas.

I should also say that there are things going on in the area of e-learning. For example, the University of Ulster, Trinity College Dublin and University College Cork are about to launch a new masters programme, including regulatory systems, entirely on-line. This is a clear example of bringing the three institutions together. I think there are real opportunities to pool our resources in the whole area of e-learning and hope that will happen.

O'Leary: Just before I go to the audience again, Ferdinand von Prondzynski, what do you believe are the possibilities for collaboration?

Von Prondzynski: I would agree pretty much with what everyone has said. I agree with Art Cosgrove about the taught American-style PhD, and that there is a considerable advantage to looking at such innovations together.

On the on-line/e-learning issue, I am perhaps more sceptical than some. Gerry McKenna just gave an example of an e-learning project that the University of Ulster is involved in. We are involved in two, one of them with Queen's University Belfast. The problem is that as governments are asked to fund both research projects and the infrastructure for them, you are constantly fighting the official instinct that (and I am delighted if our own Department of Education and Science would contradict me on this) e-learning is a cheaper way of delivering learning than by classroom teaching.

In fact it is the opposite. It is much more expensive than classroom delivery, and you have a much more demanding set of students who expect attention at times of day and night when you wouldn't be giving it in the classroom context. So I think that while e-learning is very significant and important as a pedagogical tool, it is not a cost saver. Indeed, because it is so expensive, not only does there need to be widespread inter-institutional collaboration, it probably needs to involve significant private sector collaboration as well because keeping the technical infrastructure up to date is quite possibly beyond the capacity of a university to deliver. To that extent a very imaginative set of collaborations would probably need to be developed for this approach to e-learning.

O'Leary: Let us now take some questions from the audience.

Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, Director, Institute of Technology, Athlone: We are delighted to hear universities talking so eloquently about their numbers. Just to remind the audience that over 50 per cent of the student intake in the Republic into higher education is into the institute of technology sector. I think this is a point that has been lost here at the beginning of this conference and it is one that is worth making. I would also emphasise that, in terms of the further and higher education sector in Northern Ireland, there is also a significant element of higher education being taught in those colleges and the conference should not lose focus on that.

The second point I would like to make is the role of institutes of technology in North-South collaboration. Athlone IT, for example, has had for a number of years a joint masters with the University of Ulster and is in the process of developing a second programme in that regard. The institutes of technology in the Republic also have significant partnerships with the universities in the Republic.

I would also like to refer to Gearóid O Tuathaigh's earlier point about student mobility, because as a former director of a further and higher education college in Northern Ireland during the nineties, I saw a very significant influx of students from the Republic into the North. At one point in my institution we had about 43 per cent of our students coming from the Republic. It was the introduction of fees in Northern Ireland that stopped the flow into the North almost immediately and kept Southern students at home. But during the nineties we were getting students (and also their parents) in from all over Ireland, and the economic and social impact of that was very significant. I think this was all lost.

O'Leary: Does that mean you regret the ending of fees in the Republic and the introduction of fees in the North?

Ó Catháin: The impact of student flows from the Republic of Ireland into Northern Ireland was significant in the context of the peace process in the 1990s. From that perspective I would certainly regret it.

Billy Tate, Principal, Aghnacloy Primary School, Co Tyrone: I come from the heart of the Unionist community here. One of the things I would say is that there are an awful lot of people within that community who do want to reach out to work with people in the South, and maybe that didn't come across strongly enough at the beginning of the conference. I think possibly that is because the emphasis has been on Ireland and not on Northern Ireland. However we do want to reach out and we do want to work with the community throughout the island.

It is important that you go to Australia and America to try to attract students, but what about my sons and daughters at home here in Northern Ireland who are Ulster Protestants and have been unable for many reasons to go across into the South of Ireland to study? I agree with the earlier speaker that there has been a large degree of movement northwards by students from areas like Monaghan – although they have gone back South again because of the fees – but there has been very little movement of students from the North into the South. What are you doing at university level to improve this? We are losing our excellent young people. Young people are coming in from the South to study and at the same time we are losing young Northern Ireland people who go to Scotland to study.

O'Leary: And why is that?

Tate: Because of the border situation, because of the Troubles, there is not the same confidence within the unionist community. If you really want to do something, bring the

university to the big estates in Portadown and Belfast. If you want Ireland as a centre of excellence in education, then go into those big estates and reach out into those communities. They wouldn't come to a conference like this because it is not the sort of community that they are used to dealing with. They are working class people. Most people here are not from a working class background today – although many of them may have originated from it. You have got to get into the communities; you have got to reach out. Within my own teaching profession there should be accredited professional courses for principals in such areas (and I know our teacher training colleges in the region are reaching out to do this kind of thing).

O'Leary: You are talking about working class communities, particularly Protestant working class communities, in Northern Ireland. What, Ferdinand von Prondzynski, can be done in order to reach out to those kids?

Von Prondzynski: A big factor is young people in those big estates being switched off education at 13 and 14 years of age. To get into those communities you have to have people who are in there working with the communities and who get to know them. That is why we have groups like the Workers Educational Association – they are the type of people who get into the community and work with them.

But you have to build confidence. Even today I felt there was quite a negative tone at the beginning of this conference towards the unionist community. That has to stop and we have to reach out to that community. Those people within those big estates feel alienated. We have to get people into them. How many people here have been to those estates and have been working with those communities? We have a project where we are working with primary school children across the border, but we can't get funding, we can't get a director, we can't get people to help us with it. We are burnt out. We need to start at those levels right at the very bottom.

O'Leary: Can I just take that point and put it to you, Gerry McKenna. Maybe there is in fact a problem with relations between higher education and all working class areas, both North and South?

McKenna: I should say that the University of Ulster has 40 per cent of its students coming from working class backgrounds, and Queen's University Belfast also has a very high percentage of working class students attending the university. That said, increasingly the working class Protestant areas are doing rather less well in terms of participation in higher education than working class Catholic areas. That is something we are working on within our university. For example, one of the programmes which we initiated in Derry/Londonderry is the Step-Up programme, where we took five Catholic schools and five Protestant schools which had a tradition of not sending kids to university and we brought university staff into those schools. We brought the business community into those schools. We brought the kids onto the university campuses.

When we started the programme, 98 per cent of those kids said they had no aspiration to go to university. The result of it is that 100 per cent of that pilot group are going to university. That is an example of an intervention programme which is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning. We would very much like to roll that out throughout Northern Ireland.

There is another factor we have to be cognisant of, and that is that the unionist community does feel something of a chill factor in relation to higher education in Northern Ireland which is resulting in a disproportionate number of Protestant kids leaving Northern

Ireland to go to university outside Northern Ireland. We have all got to work together because we can't afford that brain drain from Northern Ireland. I don't think it is a North-South issue. I think it is an internal Northern Ireland issue which we need to address, and there are various imaginative ways of doing it which don't all involve bricks and mortar but which do involve real involvement between universities, the further education sector and working class areas in order to develop role models whom young people can aspire to follow.

Tadhg O hÉalaithe, Director of Corporate Services, Higher Education Training and Awards Council: I would like to change the topic and put a question to Malcolm Skilbeck. If he is correct, and a lot of us think he might be, he is saying that it is absolutely necessary for universities (and I take it he is talking about institutes of technology as well) to become more effective managers of their very substantial resources and more plausible entrepreneurs. Is he saying in simple terms that presidents of universities and directors of institutes of technology in the future should not come perhaps from the teaching profession? Should we be looking for hard-skinned entrepreneurs to take these jobs, and if more forceful people had been members of CRI then we would have had more North-South co-operation up to this point?

Skilbeck: I don't think so. You can either say that business people should become academics, which I don't happen on the whole to agree with, or you can say that academics can become a little bit more businesslike, which I do agree with. There was reference from Howard Newby to the importance of the development process of staff extending all the way from the top to the bottom or from the bottom to the top, depending on your point of view. That the governing bodies and the heads of institutions are in as much need of continuing professional development as any member of the technical, academic or administrative staff is self-evident, and that leads me to the question of what is the nature of that developmental process.

All I am suggesting is that one very important aspect of that development is the management of a very massive and complex resource system. It is a resource, of course, for all kinds of things, but I was focusing at that particular point in my remarks on the most productive use of a massive public resource to maximise the returns from that resource, bearing in mind all this potential. For that purpose, and I say this as a former head of an institution, I am very conscious of my own limitations in that regard and I would have been a much better head if I had more experience of professional development and training. I got some subsequently after leaving that job. It would have been better if I had had more of it before. So I'm not saying let us just employ a whole lot of financial experts as heads of institutions and deans of faculties (although why not some?). No, what I'm really talking about is a challenge to the academics.

O'Leary: Ferdinand von Prondzynski, can I take that as a kick off question on the whole question of an entrepreneurial spirit in higher education institutions, and pick up the point that was made by Art Cosgrove about going off to Australia to attract students. If we are to sell Ireland as a whole as an education opportunity in the same way as we are trying to sell tourism as an all-Ireland opportunity, how would that be done and does there have to be a reform of university thinking in order for that to happen? Do universities have to find the sort of enlightened self-interest that entrepreneurs have got in order to make a move in this direction?

Von Prondzynski: That is very interesting question and I don't want to deviate from it, but I would like to say that university presidents and vice-chancellors should be appointed

from whatever circles are best. The best candidate should get the job and background shouldn't matter.

In terms of the question you ask, I think universities are in a bit of a fix due to their reliance on public funding. It is the only type of funding which we have known and generally speaking every expenditure that we have had is funded out of taxpayers' money, which has been given in the form of grants or similar sources of revenue. In that setting we have experienced a situation where the real value of that funding has gone down very substantially. In the lifetime of DCU, for example, we can calculate the value of the funding we get from the state for an individual student has gone down in real terms by about 40 per cent. That has been hidden by a volume increase so that it looks as if our funding has gone up, but in actual fact what we can devote to each individual student has gone down by something like that amount. In the UK that kind of movement has been described as an 'efficiency gain'. You can follow that to its logical conclusion and you will end up saying that the most efficient thing you can do is to take in a student, take their fees and give them a degree certificate.

The problem is that the capacity of the taxpayer to provide us with the funding that we regard as appropriate for our ambitions and what we want to do is limited. We have to accept that the expansion and diversification of our sources of income must be one of our absolute priorities. One of the answers to that is to do what Art Cosgrove is referring to: to market our programmes to those from overseas who are capable of paying for them. That is only one thing. For example, we are appallingly bad at our technology transfer programmes. There is a lot to be said for North-South collaboration in that field because there is some expertise being developed on both sides of the border and thus some capacity for collaboration. We are also bad at commercialising the things that come out of our research, and we are bad at looking at possible new ways of using our expertise and staff in the interest of developing other revenue streams. I think that a debate of the kind that Malcolm Skilbeck is looking to generate is entirely healthy.

O'Leary: Can I throw the notion of the universities on the island setting out to sell Ireland as a centre of excellence for students at some other university heads present? Can you see it happening and what needs to be done in terms of the mindsets within universities and higher education institutions, North and South, before that can happen?

Professor Gerry McCormac, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast: I think it is already happening and it should happen increasingly. This session so far is properly focused on Ireland, but we have got to remember that there is a big wide world out there that we can gain and benefit from throughout the whole of Ireland, and attracting students is just one aspect of it. Funding is the bottom line and to be quite honest there are very few initiatives which can be discussed across the whole of Ireland without funding. I think one of the things that saddens me about devolved government in Northern Ireland (if it is going to be suspended) is that the two governments in Belfast and Dublin have not actually got together and said: "Come forward with an initiative and we will put a pot of funding there so that you can take it forward for the benefit of Ireland". I hope that if we do get back a devolved government that that will happen.

There is another initiative where I think we can have influence and that is e-science. We know we have Grid Ireland and we know that we have the UK Grid. Belfast is one of the nine nodes in terms of the UK grid. There ought to be university influence in how a connection between the two grids is made because, as was said earlier on, within a decade the Grid right across the world will transform research and teaching. This is not a funding

issue. The funding is already there but we can influence developments from a political point of view.

Professor John Hegarty, Provost, Trinity College Dublin: On the question of being entrepreneurial, I would hate for people to come to the conclusion that this is new and that the system hasn't been doing this. I am thinking of three areas, for example. During the bad old days in the 1980s, Irish research survived on EU funding. Researchers went out to Europe far ahead of any other country's researchers to look for EU funding. To me that was extremely entrepreneurial. I would disagree with Ferdinand on the issue of commercialisation of research. Irish universities do not have a bad story to tell in that regard. Spin-off of companies and licensing of intellectual property over the past 15 years has been a really good story for Ireland. I did a comparison between one university in Ireland and MIT and looked at the revenue from commercialisation of research in relation to investment in research, and the ratio was the same.

O'Leary: Can I just bring you back to the question of how North-South co-operation would figure in Ireland being able to sell itself as a centre of excellence abroad? Someone might ask why can't Trinity do it by itself; why can't the University of Ulster do it by itself? Why does it matter that it is done on an all-Ireland basis? Do you see reasons why it should be done on an all-Ireland basis?

Hegarty: I think that is the natural next step. The heads of the seven universities in the South are already working on a strategy to advance the sector. It seems to me that the natural next step would be to include the other two universities and for the nine universities (and all the other institutions) on the island to work together.

O'Leary: Would you be proposing that this happens?

Hegarty: Yes, I would think so. One issue in my mind is on using technology to deliver education. Ireland does have an international reputation in high tech knowledge – in electronics, pharmaceuticals, high technology. It seems to me to be a natural next step to use that technology in education. We don't have to prove ourselves. We just have to do it. The brand itself is already there.

The biggest thing that has happened in Irish education over the past 20 years is the increase in student numbers because of the demographics of the country. Now that has changed and we are all going to be competing over students.

Peter Gallagher, Director, North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Derry: Malcolm Skilbeck referred to the Williams report and how the expectations generated by Prof. Williams in the mid-eighties didn't materialise. I had the unique experience of making a submission as head of Letterkenny Institute of Technology to that report and responding to it when I went to the North West Institute in Derry. In both positions I recommended greater cross-border co-operation.

Tomorrow in the University of Ulster people will be commemorating Sir Derek Birrell, who took up some of those cross-border recommendations and moved them forward greatly. Then there came a period where they fell down. Professor McKenna was very modest when he said it was down to money. I think it is down to people because we had a barren period between Sir Derek Birrell and Professor McKenna when those co-operative structures fell. We are now moving again.

I also want to endorse everything that Ciarán Ó Catháin said about the fact that this tends to be monopolised by the university sector. The growing influence of the further education sector, North and South, must be recognised more. I shared Ciarán Ó Catháin's experience because I was chairman of the Association of Technical Institutes, North and South, for a period of time. I have got to say that what Gerry McKenna has done by articulation arrangements, North and South, with institutes of technology and colleges of further education is enabling further education colleges to get into the big estates described by our unionist friend in a very significant way. It is easier for the further education sector to do it. But if it is part of an articulation arrangement with a university, it means we bring them the first few steps and make it easier for them eventually to access university. A word of congratulations to Tadhg Ó hÉalaithe of HETAC because it would help us greatly if our colleges in the non-university sector in the North could be benchmarked and validated by HETAC because we are not benefiting hugely from the experience and reputation of EDEXCEL at the moment.

Councillor Gearóid Ó hÉara ,Co-Chair, Further and Higher Education Partnership, Derry City Council: This is not an attempt to put Gerry McKenna on the spot, although it would be nice if I could. I just want to throw another dimension into this discussion in that I was at a meeting yesterday afternoon in Ballymena where Graham Gudgin, the well-known economist, was describing economic growth patterns. In all his graphs and charts the north-west region came across as the most deprived in terms of economic development. I come from a city and a region that is massively economically deprived. In the area covered by the partnership of all of the further and higher education institutions in the North West – including Magee, the University of Ulster's college in Derry – the take-up of further education is abysmal. It is below the average it would be for comparative areas, North and South, and we are out-stripped by areas such as Galway and Limerick as well as places with smaller populations.

What we have been attempting to do is to develop further and higher education as a means of addressing TSN (Targeting Social Need) in the north-west as part of our bid to engender some means of economic regeneration. One of the issues that we have discussed with the Minister, Carmel Hanna, was the idea of creating an economic corridor from Coleraine through to Letterkenny, and I would like to see it extended to Galway. What we are talking about is the need for some sort of special education status for regions which are economically and educationally deprived. The location of economically relevant further and higher education programmes could actually bring areas out of conflict and into economically productive regeneration. I would also like to make the point that the introduction of fees north of the border deprived Derry of many cross-border students.

What we have asked the Department to do is to put in place pilot programmes in the north-west aimed at economic and community regeneration using education as an instrument. If you are going to build Ireland as an educational centre of excellence, then you have to bring everyone up to the level of the playing pitch, and that includes those deprived areas that have suffered as a consequence of the conflict. I support all of what has been said about adopting an entrepreneurial approach, but if you look at the figures and the deprivation data for areas like Derry, there is also the basis for strong arguments for serious intervention by government.

Gill Roe, Director of Programmes, International Education Board – Ireland: I would like to inform the conference of our existence. We are talking as if the International Education Board Ireland did not exist. We were established to promote Ireland as a centre of excellence internationally. We are an all-Ireland body with a North-South element as part of our constitution, although we are funded by the Department of Education and

Science in the Republic. The University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast are members of our body and we promote both universities in our literature. I would also like to say that the diversification of funding sources is a very critical issue.

In terms of demographics, it is very important to know that studies have shown that our student numbers in the Republic are going to drop in the next three-five years by 25-37 per cent, and that has huge implications for the whole higher education sector. From our perspective, a very positive outcome of considering the island of Ireland as an educational centre of excellence would be a North-South initiative like Tourism Ireland. It would be an excellent thing to be able to brand education in Ireland for the whole island.

Professor Patrick Clancy, Dean, Philosophy and Sociology, University College Dublin: We have been talking about selling Ireland as a centre of excellence. I'm more concerned with *developing* Ireland as a Centre of Excellence. One of the actions in the future may be at fourth level (PhD level) rather than third level. We have been doing some work on this in UCD and are beginning to formalise the development of taught PhD programmes. This is an area where the issue of scale arises, and it is an area which is ripe for co-operation between all the universities and other third level institutions in Ireland. At this stage the students are highly mobile and highly motivated, and I think the amount of planning to fuel this type of activity would be tiny in one sense – basically to facilitate students to travel to different institutions to take up particular modules. You are talking here about relatively short periods of time. If we want a project to come out of this conference, this would seem to me to be one which it would take a relatively small amount of money to facilitate.

Professor John Coolahan, Professor of Education, National University of Ireland Maynooth: Two points. Firstly we were saying earlier on that there was much less co-operation North and South than we would wish, but I think there may be more than we know. To be honest I don't think we know how much is actually going on. My hunch is that there is a lot going on within institutions and across institutions that we are not aware of. As I speak some of my NUI Maynooth staff are in Belfast with 50 teachers, North and South, working out curriculum and ICT projects as part of the Dissolving Boundaries project. There are many other projects that I am aware of. It would be a very good exercise, emerging from this colloquium, to organise a mapping exercise to put on record the amount of stuff that is going on – as far as we can establish it – including some of the initiatives on selling Ireland abroad, because a lot of us don't know what is going on. I believe that a lot more is going on than we sometimes think. Such an exercise would give us the confidence to move forward if we could establish what was happening.

The second point is the real significance of funding at the right time. The instance I can give it is that which Malcolm Skilbeck has already mentioned: the conference held in Belfast in May 2000 on teacher education when representatives from 27 institutions involved in some form of teacher education on the island came together for the first time. It was a very successful conference with a list of practical, specific research proposals coming forward with a North-South aspect. However when we submitted a budget and plan for carrying it forward in December 2000, there was no enthusiasm from the civil servants in the North. In the South there was. We had to wait until July this year to get some funding which might allow us to carry forward this work. The money is very small: we are talking at this stage about £160,000 between the two governments. But if there was seed money available at the right time, when people were opening up dialogue, we would not waste and fritter away opportunities for the want of small amounts of money.

I was just wondering about the €15 million that Minister Dempsey said is going to be available for seed resourcing for this kind of thing. If we can we get more information on that, it might give encouragement to other agencies to carry forward their momentum.

O’Leary: I want to put one final point to everyone on our panel. The point was made that student numbers are falling and there will be greater competition for available students. How are we going to marry that competition with a spirit of co-operation, or will one cancel out the other? How do we solve that?

Ó Tuathaigh: I don’t see them as being incompatible at all. There will be a degree of specialisation, but students make choices for all sorts of reasons. There will continue to be a variety of attractions and a variety of specialisms in the various areas which will attract students. But I have no doubt at all that even in a more competitive environment, with a decline in the pool of school leavers, there will be an element of elasticity in the demographic situation. What we are looking at here is the total population of learners in the society, and each institution collaboratively as well as with its own mission will find a new configuration. I do not believe that there is any menace in it at all. I believe it is a straightforward matter of making decisions about how you configure your student population either on campus or through the extension that technology permits.

McKenna: I certainly don’t believe that competition rules out co-operation. The two Northern Ireland universities compete but they also co-operate quite well in many areas. I remember way back in the late 1970s/early 1980s we were told to prepare for a much smaller student population because the demographics said that the school leaving population would be falling. It did that, but at the same time participation rates grew enormously. Indeed every year there is more competition for university places in Northern Ireland despite the demographics. We feel that we have an opportunity to bring more people into the pool, North and South, people who could benefit from higher education.

Von Prondzynski: I would agree with all of that. There are clearly challenges ahead in the context of the demographic trends we are experiencing, some of which we don’t quite yet understand. Having said that, I think this is also a climate for much greater collaboration, which includes North and South. We all understand that some of the challenges that we now face can be met much better by joint initiatives rather than by cut-throat competition.

Skilbeck: I don’t think that falling student numbers is a major issue at all and it is not worthy of the significance it is being given. Participation rates will increase and can increase – that is the first point. Secondly there is a great deal of scope for increasing participation rates at the level of postgraduate studies where, as we have discussed this afternoon, the scope for collaboration is real.

The next area where I think that through co-operative work there can be greater participation is that of selling Ireland internationally as a place for students from all over the world. There is a great big pool of students out there that some countries are targeting effectively. Some of you are going out to visit one of those countries, Australia, and you will see what kinds of benefits and also what kinds of drawbacks are associated with that. The last area, which I keep coming back to, is need for the institutions to get together and focus their efforts on the mature-age student. There is a huge pool there and it is not just a matter of filling places in institutions – it also an equity issue and it is also a big efficiency issue for the economy and for society. So there is no need to be bothered at all about falling numbers of 19 year old school leavers. That is not the only target area for third level institutions.

Friday 11 October

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: SECOND DAY

Chairperson: Olivia O’Leary

**Mr Richard W. Riley, Former U.S. Secretary of Education
and Former Governor of South Carolina**

American Higher Education in a Diverse World

It’s wonderful, as always, to return to Ireland and to Armagh – a city that still seems to be glowing in the aftermath of the All-Ireland Gaelic Football championship. I was here in Armagh in 1998 with President Clinton. I remember that it was a lovely and sunny summer evening. Mary Black had just finished singing when we arrived. The President, as always, was in good form, and the very large crowd responded in kind.

Later that evening after the speech President Clinton, Prime Minister Blair and George Mitchell briefed the congressional delegation that was travelling with the President. It was an intense and very direct meeting and it was very clear that everyone in that room was committed to the ongoing peace process and the Good Friday Agreement. While the American people are naturally focused on the aftermath of 9/11, I want to assure you that Ireland still has many friends in the Congress, who remain committed to supporting the peace process here in Northern Ireland.

This process, as I have discovered over the years, has its ups and downs. I think every time I have arrived in Ireland in the last eight years I have arrived to a new headline about the latest crisis of the day. But the main thing is to stay with it, to keep moving in the right direction – toward peace and reconciliation. And that, I believe, is what the American people are eager to support. In 1999 I came back to Belfast to attend a North/South education conference on primary and secondary education. I came back again in 2000 with Bill Clinton on his last trip as President. I remember waiting for the President to arrive in Dundalk. It was a cold night so they made a decision to take all the Americans travelling with the President to a pub to await his arrival. We passed the time as best we could.

The next day, just before President Clinton spoke in Belfast, I signed a Memorandum of Understanding (or MOU) with Carmel Hanna’s predecessor Sean Farren. This MOU with Northern Ireland remains in effect as does the MOU with the Republic, and both of these documents provide a clear opportunity to develop new educational links with the United States.

Last year I returned to Ireland to be part of the selection process for the Clinton Center for American Studies. I am here today with Dr. Matt Quinn, the Executive Director of the new Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, which has about \$500 million in assets. Matt is a former college president and he has found the job that every college president in America dreams about. Instead of having to raise money all the time, Matt gives it away. In its first year his foundation has, under his leadership, broken new ground including the creation of the most generous graduate scholarship program in the United States – up to \$50,000 a year for six years of studies.

Dr. Quinn has deep Irish roots, as does his wife Maureen Molloy Quinn who is also here today. Matt's mother was born in County Derry and his father was from Sligo. My wife Tunky is also here with me today as well as my long time associate Kevin Sullivan. Kevin has well established Cork roots and his mother was born in Sixmilecross, in Tyrone, which is just up the road from here. I am a Cavan man. I am sure that all of you already know that with a name like Riley.

Today I would like to talk about higher education in a diverse world. As we all know, higher education is now a growing global enterprise. In my capacity as U.S. Secretary of Education I had the opportunity to meet with many of my foreign counterparts. At the 1998 Summit of the Americas, for example, education was the number one item on the agenda for discussion by the hemisphere's 34 heads of state and government. Two years later, in 2000, I participated in a pre-G8 conference in Okinawa that focused on education.

In my remarks today I want to speak to four broad themes: (1) the global dynamics impacting higher education; (2) the importance of helping disadvantaged students, who in America are often the most diverse, to obtain a third level education; (3) how we can increase educational links between the island of Ireland and the United States; (4) the importance of international education in the aftermath of 9/11.

RESPONDING TO GLOBAL DYNAMICS

To get a sense of the growing importance of higher education to our global community, let's take a look at some facts. According to UNESCO, in the last twenty years, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions worldwide has more than doubled – from about 50 million in 1980 to more than 100 million last year.

Here in Ireland, enrolment in institutions of higher learning has increased for many years and has now stabilized. But long-term demographic trends obviously present you with new challenges.

In the United States we face a different challenge. Colleges and universities are facing record enrolment pressures at a time when many states are cutting back support for higher education because of a weakening economy. We have 15 million students in college right now, a national enrolment record. As a result, the competition to get into college and the cost of getting a third level education are increasing.

Globally the demand for higher education is beginning to outpace supply in many countries and governments are hard pressed to keep up. E-learning is clearly one way that colleges and universities are seeking to meet demand. In the United States, for example, the percentage of college classes with their own websites increased from six per cent in 1996 to over 30 per cent in 1999.

We are also seeing more private and for-profit initiatives entering the higher education market in response to this growing demand. At the same time, American universities, like their counterparts around the world, are seeking new sources of revenue and entering into new alliances, some good and some bad.

College sport, for example, is big business and is now an integral part of the American entertainment industry. It is not unusual for a major university to spend millions of dollars on its annual athletic budget.

The globalization of higher education is also a new and increasing facet of higher education. According to an organization called NAFSA: The Association for International Educators, where I serve in a leadership role, the number of higher education students studying overseas reached an all-time high in 2001 of some 1.5 million worldwide.

In the United States alone a record 550,000 foreign university students are enrolled in every subject from engineering to information technology to the social sciences. Our great research institutions have a very large number of foreign graduate students. It is important to note that these foreign students come to America not because these centres are in America but because these centres are the best in the world. Simply put, standards and excellence matter.

9/11, of course, has reduced the number of foreign students coming to America. Ireland and other countries are the immediate beneficiaries of this fall off. The America visa process, which is now much tighter than before, has become a stumbling block for many foreign students.

In addition, many other nations are making a substantial effort to recruit foreign students. International trade in education services and content amounts to billions of U.S. dollars annually. This has not escaped the attention of educators and policymakers around the world, including here in Ireland.

In my opinion the United States has not responded to these new challenges in a comprehensive manner. In this new era of global education, we can no longer assume that past achievement automatically guarantees future success.

American students are studying overseas, but not enough of them. England remains the most popular destination for American students with about 30,000 students. Spain ranks as the second most popular destination with about 14,000 U.S. students. About 2,000 American students are studying here in Ireland, both North and South.

The globalization of higher education also can be seen in the tremendous growth in cooperative arrangements between universities, in distance-learning programmes offered overseas, and in faculty-exchange programs.

During my service as the U.S. Secretary of Education, I was so pleased that President Clinton issued an Executive Memorandum stating the American government's full support of international education. That policy statement, signed in April 2000, calls for even more student exchange programmes, supports the development of academic programmes that address internationally recognized subjects and criteria, and encourages more foreign language learning.

All these factors – the increasing demand for higher education, the search for new sources of revenue and new ways to deliver higher education, and the increase in student

exchange programmes – are part of this new global era of education. Another important element to consider is finding new ways to help more disadvantaged students gain access to a higher education, which is my second broad topic.

HELPING DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS REACH THIRD LEVEL: OVERCOMING THE GREAT DIVIDE

I know that this is an issue of great importance to the co-chairs of this conference and rightly so. The lack of access to third level education for students who have the potential to achieve is ultimately short sighted, and it is a policy that can lead to frustration, class division and a tearing of the social fabric.

In the United States our most disadvantaged students are also our most diverse. America's community colleges have become the first entry point for many African-Americans, Hispanics, women, and the many new immigrants who have come to America in the last 20 years. Several years ago a study was published in the United States entitled *Crossing the Great Divide*. This report noted that "our college campuses will be missing 250,000 African Americans and 550,000 Hispanic undergraduates" by the year 2015 because we did not prepare them to do college level work. These student have the potential to do college level work, but we simply are not giving them the tools to achieve.

To overcome this great divide I believe that colleges and universities must do much more to develop collaborative efforts with educators at the secondary level. The lack of access to third level education for disadvantaged students is often linked to the cost of tuition and other fees. In my opinion, however, the real roadblocks are a lack of standards, the lack of preparation for disadvantaged students, and the disconnections between the different levels of higher education.

This is why I support the development of public policies that invest in targeted programmes to give these young people both the encouragement and extra help they need to achieve a third level education. I believe that strengthening your own efforts in this regard may make sense given your long-term demographic trends.

For decades in the United States we tolerated and – to the great shame of our country – accepted the fact that poor children, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, other minorities and children with disabilities were denied a quality education. We used our secondary schools as "sorting machines," and frequently that sorting was done not by academic potential but by race and class. As a result, even today, many students have no expectations that they will ever go to a college or university. They come from poor and working classes families. Just getting these young people to raise their sights early enough so they can take the right courses is an important objective. This is one reason why there is such intense focus in the United States on raising standards at the primary and secondary education level.

Now, to my third broad theme – increasing new links between our systems of higher education, North and South.

CREATING NEW LINKS

I believe that the United States and Ireland have much to gain by developing new links and partnerships at the university level. Clearly there are well-established bonds of affection between our two peoples. The fact that so many American universities have Centers for Irish Studies is one indication of this continuing interest in Ireland.

So what can be done? The Irish university system clearly has much to offer American students. A common language, a deep cultural heritage, high standards, and an Irish student body that is on the cutting edge seem to be all the right ingredients to make Ireland attractive to young Americans. Then there is Guinness but – as they say – that is simply “good for your health.”

As I said earlier, there are about 2,000 Americans studying here in Ireland, North and South. But why not set a goal of 4,000 or 6,000 or even 10,000 over the next 10 years?

Developing a promising strategy to encourage Americans to come to Ireland could take many forms: individual scholarships; new co-operative educational agreements with individual colleges and universities; and a concerted public relations campaign that reaches beyond traditional Irish-American universities like Boston College and Notre Dame that have well established links to Ireland. The growing success of the George Mitchell Scholarship programme is just one indication that Ireland can attract the very best Americans to consider studying in Ireland. The new Ferris graduate scholarship programme for African-Americans students is another example.

I believe that it is very important to build on your well-established reputation as a centre of excellence for writing, music, literature and poetry – the arts in their broadest sense. In the last decade Irish musicians, playwrights, actors, poets and writers have given Ireland a tremendous amount of positive exposure in the United States. They have, in very real sense, paved the way for you already in recruiting new students.

Irish universities can also gain a new reputation for excellence by creating new partnerships that are linked to innovative efforts and the new commitment to become a world centre for biotechnology and information technology. Ireland, like the Southern part of America where I come from, has historically been an importer of ideas. Now, in this new era, the task is to become a centre for innovation and creativity in the sciences. Given the world-wide competition, it seems incumbent that Irish universities, North and South, do as much as possible to work together in fulfilling this common strategy.

There are other ways to enhance new partnerships through business, education and research activities. The growing ‘Atlantic Corridor’ initiative that links upstate New York universities and businesses with their counterparts here in Ireland seems to me to be a very promising model of what can be done. The effort by Dublin City University to create ‘Biopharma Ireland’ is the most recent example of how enterprise and scholarship can go together. These types of initiatives also have the opportunity to gain the political support of such important congressional leaders as Senator Hillary Clinton and Congressman Jim Walsh.

I believe that the Atlantic Corridor model could be ripe for development in other parts of the United States. Please remember that all 40 million Irish-Americans do not just live in Boston, New York or Chicago.

This also encourages me to put forward a suggestion that was sparked by Malcolm Skilbeck’s opening remarks about the need to reach out to the mature student. In the next two decades, the number of Americans who will be over 65 will grow from 35 million to 70 million. By and large this group of Americans – whom we call the ‘baby boom generation’ – is prosperous and determined to remain active and learning. As a group they will have much more leisure time and they want new challenges. Why not promote study tours here in Ireland targeted at this growing leisure class of American citizens?

EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11

And now to my last theme. I believe that the United States must do much, much more to respond to the increasing diversity of our global society and especially so in light of 9/11. For international education – and especially higher education – is an important part of any nation's diplomacy: international education encourages understanding, it leads to tolerance, and it produces wisdom and insight.

Today only about 9 per cent of America's undergraduates study abroad, less than a third of those spending a semester or more; and very few of them represent minorities that make up our growing student population. In fact, only nine colleges and universities in the entire United States send over 20 per cent of their students overseas.

The United States cannot hope to be an effective world leader if our young people do not understand the world in which they live. To my way of thinking, one essential aspect of a quality education is an appreciation and experience of another culture and language. The fact that most American students speak only one language is a reflection of our continuing insularity.

More than most people in our global society, we Americans have a responsibility to engage the world more fully. Recent events have shown us that America turns away from the world at our own peril. We must make meaningful connections with the world around us. Making these meaningful connections means thinking broadly, creatively, and strategically. It means reaching across boundaries and borders, across cultures and traditions, across organizations and sectors. It means forming educational partnerships that serve the needs of individual students, of our countries, and of our international community.

Creating new educational partnerships in our diverse global society can foster and sustain a set of principles that respond to the contemporary challenges of our time: principles that encourage intellectual freedom, democracy building, human rights, the peaceful resolution of disputes, cultural diversity and a willingness to see the advance of education for the good of all, including the millions of children in the developing world who have no schooling. These high principles suggest that all of us – both here in Ireland and in the United States – move beyond the parochial to the larger issues of our diverse and global society. They suggest that universities here on the island of Ireland should make a sustained effort to develop ongoing cross-border partnerships.

This is why I echo and endorse the recommendations of Malcolm Skilbeck that Irish university leaders should become “leaders in cross-border dialogue” and that Irish universities have a “moral responsibility to show leadership in this regard and to see North-South co-operation not as incidental, but as one of their primary responsibilities.”

Finally, these principles suggest that Irish universities and the Irish people have a proper role to play on the world stage as well. Surely if Irish monks saved Western civilization in the Dark Ages, you can do no less than to emulate their example.

Yes, a great nation like the United States will usually take centre stage in its efforts to shape a world where freedom, democracy and free enterprise flourish. But we cannot do it alone. Partnerships are vital. Small nations like Ireland, rich in learning and hopefully wisdom, can play a positive role in making sure that the great nations of the world stay focused on what really matters when it comes to expanding freedom and protecting democracy.

In a diverse and growing global society the challenge is not to dominate but just the opposite: to develop creative partnerships, to encourage equal opportunity for all when it comes to a quality education, and to sustain justice and freedom around the world.

As Marie Montessori has written: “Averting war is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of educators.”

Mr Nikolaus van der Pas, Director-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission

Higher Education: The European Dimension and Beyond

Thank you very much for your kind introduction and for having invited me here today. I have only been to Ireland once before but that visit left with me a great impression. I toured the whole of the island for a week and I have never had a better time, even though the weather was more awful than it is today. We spent the whole time in Wellington boots and under umbrellas, but I have never before or since had so many good laughs. The Irish people really have a capacity for human contact that is unsurpassed. I don't say that because it is politically correct but because I really feel it. When someone with a voice like mine and with an aversion to any public display found himself singing at the top of his voice in Irish bars, then it is clear that you really made an impression on me. That in itself was a good reason for coming back.

This leads me straight on to a quote from the German author, Goethe: "Where people sing you can sit down and relax because wicked people don't have any songs". I quote this as an illustration of what I have just said, but also as an indication of my hope that the splendid things that have been done over the last few years in order to bring forward the peace process will find their way back into the right direction, in spite of the difficulties that you are going through these days. We are very much with you in that process, and when I say 'we' I mean the whole of the European Union.

Secretary Riley, I was delighted to hear you say what you said about the attitude the United States should have in the present circumstances. I was delighted to hear you use expressions like 'cultural diversity' and 'reaching out to co-operate' in international understanding and in language learning. There is an immense amount of solidarity after what happened on the 11th of September, but there is a feeling in some quarters in Europe that there is a new sense of isolationism in the US. Having just heard what you said is a great relief and I hope that very many Americans share that feeling because there is no other way forward. We are living in an ever-smaller world, and reaching out and understanding each other is an absolutely essential condition to be able to live together, to get on together and to make life not only tolerable but better for each other. So thank you for those words.

I would like to see this conference as the contribution of the Department of Education and Science, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Centre for Cross Border Studies to exactly that sort of necessary development. If you are talking about co-operation between North and South to obtain the goal of Ireland as a centre of excellence, then that is in fact saying that together we can do it better than we can do it alone. That is very much the key to everything we are trying to do and indeed have been doing in the European Union over the last 50 years. So congratulations for taking this initiative because it is a tangible and a very welcome signal.

I also congratulate Malcolm Skilbeck on his paper, for it shows that a very concrete will is needed in order to make that co-operation work and to take up the challenges facing all our educational institutions. His paper also underlines the difficulties in meeting those challenges. If there are difficulties in the context of North-South relations in Ireland, just

imagine how difficult it must be within the European Union with its 15 member states – soon to be 25 – and with a prospect of going beyond 30 in the not too distant future. The question therefore can be asked: should the European Union be addressing such questions? Can it ever hope to make a contribution of any significance in areas that are already so difficult at a national and even at a regional level?

I recall that in some of our member states education is not even a national competence – it is a competence for the regional authorities. You who know the university world so much better than I will tell me that the universities have always lived with a claim of sovereignty and independence and they want it to keep it that way – and so it should be.

So what is the European Union doing in terms of higher education? I believe there are now very good reasons why the European Union should be looking at education. **First** of all, if the European Union is only an internal market or an economic entity with some social policy fringes and some external relations, it is not going to mobilise our citizens. As Jacques Delors said once when he was President of the European Commission: “People don’t fall in love with an internal market”. Indeed, it doesn’t give them an identity, it doesn’t give them a sense of what the European Union is really about.

I believe it is about avoiding war and about making European people live together in peace and prosperity. If it were only an economic affair, then it would not work in the end. We need elements which offer points of identity, and that means, in my view, *inter alia* education and culture. This will be even more important in a dramatically expanding European Union.

The **second** reason is that even if we start from the point of the EU as an internal market, logic pushes us very quickly towards education. If you claim to create one of the biggest economic powers and traders in the world, then very quickly the question of your competitiveness arises. In the context of globalisation the competitive power of the European Union has to be strengthened as much as possible. We don’t have a lot of raw materials. Our strengths are our people, our brains, our inventions and our innovations. Education is key factor in all of our strengths.

Then there is the **third** element which is related to that internal market. The internal market is supposed to free up the movement of people, of capital, of services and of goods. The logical consequence would be that skills and competences must also be able to travel freely throughout that big internal market. This raises questions of recognition and accreditation and leads us straight back to education.

So we see a number of good reasons why the European Union should deal with education. The question then is: how? According to the Treaty on the European Union, the available instruments are limited. From the very beginning (in the 1950s) it was already recognised that it was necessary to look after vocational training questions. Indeed, the phrase ‘vocational training policy’ is even contained in the initial treaty. But the moment the idea of the European Union’s involvement in education spread to other levels of education, hesitations appeared.

The feeling in the mid-1990s – in other words 40 years after the beginning of the EU – was that perhaps the European Union was dealing with too many questions which should be dealt with at the national level – the key word at the time being subsidiarity, meaning that decisions should be made as closely as possible to the people. I agree with that. As a consequence, the EU treaties hold back on competences in the field of education. In fact there is a ban on harmonisation and on European legislation in the educational field.

What is possible is support for mobility which can help people to travel within Europe, to get to know other people and to speak other languages. There is support for innovation, for bringing people together across borders in order to exchange ideas, to compare and develop best practices.

The Bologna process illustrates that this approach can work. The ambition is no less than creating by 2010 a European Area of Higher Education. Member states are moving voluntarily towards common structures for bachelors and masters degrees and doctorates. We also see a movement towards more transparency and comparability between diplomas. Examples are diploma and certificate supplements in the vocational training area, and a system for credit transfers between universities. These examples show that the limitation of competence does not hinder progress.

However the question is – Are we doing enough? My answer to this question is ‘no’. There are still too many obstacles to the free movement of people within the EU because of the limitations on recognition and accreditation. I find it extremely difficult to tell my sons that while they can travel, work and trade anywhere they like in the EU, they will run into difficulties when they cross the border and want to continue their studies or validate their diplomas and qualifications.

However the currency in their pocket is the same in most of the European member states. The colour of their passport is the same, and anyway in most of the European Union member states they don’t have to show their passport any more. Now how do these things relate to each other? I am free to travel and to work and to trade, but this piece of paper which shows what I am capable of doing or what I know is not automatically recognised. As a former spokesman for the European Commission, I find this very difficult to explain. We must do better, in the interest of our citizens and of the EU as a whole – these limitations hamper the development of skills and knowledge in the EU.

We can be proud of being the world’s biggest market. With enlargement we will definitely be in an even better position with close to 500 million citizens. But looking at our growth figures, we need to ask ourselves whether we are performing at our best. The United States, in spite of its own difficulties, is doing better in terms of growth than the European Union. Why? Simply because we still have too many rigidities within the EU labour market and we have not done enough to capitalise on the full potential of the Internal Market. We have not done enough to prepare for globalisation – and I can say that knowing that this is recognised at the highest level within the EU.

Our Heads of State and Government in the European Council in Lisbon 2001 agreed a statement which is still resounding through all the meetings I attend. This statement says: “By 2010 the European Union shall be the most competitive knowledge economy in the world.” Its context concentrates on economic, social and labour market policy, but it also contains, for the first time at a European level, a very important reference to the importance of education and training at all levels. This signal at the highest level was reinforced one year later at the Barcelona European Council, which formulated the ambition that our education systems should be a world reference by 2010.

The latter European Council also adopted a work programme for defining common objectives for our education systems. This is without precedent in the 50 year history of the European Union. For the first time we have identified common objectives in terms of quality, access and openness. But these three words summarise a complex world of challenging sub-objectives on which much work needs to be done in increasingly difficult circumstances.

In terms of EU demographics, more people will be leaving the labour market than moving into it. Many more elderly people will want to remain active and may have to in order to fill labour market needs. They will seek and need access to further education. That brings us straight to the important question of lifelong learning.

The Commission recently produced a memorandum and an action plan, and the Council of Ministers stressed the importance of the issue. But all this is more easily put into words than into practice. For lifelong learning to be successful it requires action at all levels of society – not only at the level of education but also at the levels of social partnership and individual initiative. It is a very complex issue. And that's true for each of the words quality, access and openness.

Quality is related to the pedagogical content but it also has to do with the status and the quality of teachers, basic skills for all, and the capacity of people to work with new information and communication technologies not only by surfing the internet but by using them in an interactive way for pedagogical purposes. And the list is longer than that.

Access – How can we talk about lifelong learning if someone who is 40 or 45 or 50 years old sees access to a particular level of education refused simply because he or she doesn't have the required diploma? A lot of knowledge is gained through informal and non-formal learning. This should be recognised if someone knocks at the door of an educational institution or seeks professional qualification.

Openness – What do we mean by that? We must stop looking inward, nationally, regionally, institutionally. We need to be open to new ideas. We need to be open to the world. Secretary Riley has said a number of memorable things about this. In a globalising world we can only be better if we are receptive to hear ideas and willing to exchange practices. The European Union is trying to reach out here. We have co-operation agreements with the United States and with Canada about university exchange. We have programmes helping the ex-Soviet Union countries to improve their educational systems – a programme which was recently extended to the Mediterranean countries as a direct response to the need for more intense intercultural contacts after the events of 11th September.

Universities are indeed a very important contribution to inter-cultural understanding. Hence a recent Commission proposal, 'Erasmus World', which will create educational partnerships throughout the world, as well as within the European Union.

These are a few illustrations of work in hand, on which we will report at the next European Council meeting in early 2004. But there are more: for example, an e-learning programme, and the so-called 'Bruges Initiative', which is a new endeavour to get to grips with the complex question of vocational training qualifications and their recognition throughout the European Union. And there is the need to introduce instruments in the educational field that allow better measurement of progress – but also of deficiencies. Indicators and benchmarks are such instruments.

I know that this is a very sensitive issue in the European Union. Two years ago we presented a list of 16 indicators for the EU member states and the candidate countries. Of course, those countries that did not come very well out of this exercise did not like it. But I am sure that we need such moments of truth: they will spur us on to become better.

The recent PISA study (Programme for International Student Assessment), published by the OECD, is another example. It showed that some EU member states, e.g. Germany,

were not doing very well compared to other OECD countries. The first reaction in Germany was one of shock and disbelief. But this triggered a national debate and increased awareness of the need to improve the country's educational systems.

I believe that this approach needs to be strengthened. We are working in the Commission on a number of new indicators and benchmarks. Because on the basis of the now available data, the answer to the question, 'Are member states doing enough to reach the objective of becoming the most competitive knowledge society or knowledge economy in the world by 2010?' must be 'no'. Some of them are doing quite well, but generally we are not doing enough. Composite indicators, measuring overall progress towards the knowledge society, show that although growth is strong, it starts from a low level and we have a lot to do to catch up with the United States.

Take, for instance, progress in participation in lifelong learning. The spread of performance within the European Union is uneven. The participation figures for lifelong learning are disappointing: perhaps 30-40 per cent in good countries like Ireland, but much less in other countries. If we are taking lifelong learning seriously then we need to improve.

In the area of basic skills for all, some member states are doing well but some are doing badly, as the PISA study showed. In terms of ICT use in education, we can boast of almost 100 per cent of schools being connected to the Internet, but how many teachers know how to optimise the pedagogical use of this instrument? There is room for improvement here. The same is true for language skills. European Union citizens should be proficient in two or three languages. Whenever improvements are necessary, indicators and benchmarking can help to make progress more rapidly and more efficiently.

But I know that we must be careful that such a statement is not interpreted as the European Commission wishing to enforce harmonisation and imposing top-down rules. My answer to this is that the EU cannot and should not impose harmonisation. Diversity in educational matters is a very good thing and should be protected. Just as in nature, diversity is something positive – it strengthens and enriches us. But if harmonisation is completely out of the question, comparing ourselves to each other and learning from each other is not such a bad idea. In the first place this is a task for the member states themselves, for regional and local authorities, for educational institutions.

Ultimately, I would like to see a situation in education comparable to the monetary field before the introduction of the Euro – a situation in which we did not have to harbour doubts about the currency of a member state, knowing that there was complete co-operation and confidence among central banks. Similarly, in the internal market, according to a ruling by the Court of Justice in Luxembourg, a product that is good enough for one of the markets in the European Union should be admitted to the markets of all other member states.

Similarly education accepted in one of our member states should be good enough for all others. I don't underestimate the difficulties. In solving them, trust is the key word, not harmonisation. And trust has to do with quality assurance, transparency and comparability. Behind each of these words lies an enormous challenge which is the more difficult because we can only succeed by mobilising everybody by not imposing from above.

I come back to my initial question: 'Why should Europe deal at all with these educational matters?' While I have indicated some reasons, such as the logical consequence of the

internal market, there is one thing which I haven't mentioned: the leverage Europe gives to national developments.

One example of this is the single currency. I was a spokesman for the European Commission when we were discussing the conditions under which member states could become a member of the single currency. There was a time when a journalist asked me: "Is it true that Luxembourg is the only country which fulfils the conditions for participation? Can you therefore confirm that the single currency will start in 2002 with one single country?" That was indeed the situation at that moment. However within two years governments which had never been seen as examples of budgetary and economic solidity knew that they had to pull up their socks – and they did. Countries like Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal qualified. They did what was necessary in order to be part of the inner circle of the European Union. European leverage created this miracle.

Another example is that of the EU candidate countries. When I started negotiations with these countries, I explained the two major conditions for entry into the EU. First, accept all of the rules of the European Union. Second, be able to implement the rules, and build an administration capable of dealing with them. I believed the second condition was going to be the real challenge, and I must admit that I was pessimistic that the candidate countries would be able to meet it soon.

However the prospect of enlargement in 2004 has had exactly the same effect as the challenge of the single currency. The candidate countries have done it. No doubt there is still a lot to be done, but they are virtually there. Without the prospect of EU membership the hardship of the necessary restructuring might have been politically too much. Governments would have been at risk and they might not have been able to pull through without the perspective of becoming a European Union member state.

Europe has a role to play in higher education. I think Europe offers a chance which should not be ignored. I am not saying this because I have been working for the European Commission for almost all of my professional life. I am saying it because only the European dimension can help us to achieve the challenging objective set by our heads of state and governments. But I also say it because I remember the reaction of young Europeans – for example, young students who tell me of their fantastic experience of participating in the Erasmus programme. They speak about it as an experience which changed their lives, one which showed them the best Europe can offer. It is the spark in their eyes which gives us all the reason we need to allow Europe to play its role.

Closing Discussion: Second Day

Chairperson: Dr Art Cosgrove, President, NUI Dublin

Panel of Discussants

Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President, University College Cork

Dr Mary Meaney, Director, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Professor Bob Osborne, Professor of Applied Social Studies, University of Ulster

Dr Matthew Quinn, Executive Director, Jack Kent Cooke Foundation and former President, Carroll College, Helena, Montana.

Dr Art Cosgrove: Between now and the end of this final session we hope that we will be able to devise at least three themes for future conferences because, as you know, this conference is to be the first in a series and I would hope that we will be able to reach some consensus about themes for future conferences.

Now to help us all to do that we have four speakers here on the panel: Professor Áine Hyland, Dr Mary Meaney, Professor Bob Osborne, and Dr Matthew Quinn. What I am going to do is to ask each of our four speakers to make a presentation based on the discussion in which they participated in the breakout groups. If they have not covered all of the issues already, I will say something about what was discussed in our group and then we will throw the meeting open. By the end of the afternoon I hope we will have reached a consensus on at least three themes for future conferences.

Professor Áine Hyland: I was in group number five and what I thought I would try to do here very briefly is to bring together the thoughts and ideas that came from that group and tie them in to some of the discussion we have had yesterday and today. First of all we unanimously as a group felt that we should pass a vote of thanks to the Centre for Cross Border Studies for having made this conference possible, and made it possible for all of us to meet together and to commit ourselves, insofar as we as individuals and institutions can, to continuing to support the Centre. One practical way in which we can do that is to identify themes for further work together and for further conferences together.

We noted the congruence of a number of points made by various speakers from various jurisdictions and institutions, and how much there was in common in all of our institutional commitments. There is a commitment to a culture of inclusivity within our third level institutions, and particularly a real move towards trying to ensure a greater level of social inclusion to redress the imbalance of socio-economic representation within the student body.

We are all committed to the excellence of the conference title: excellence in research and teaching in our various institutions, North and South. We have a lot to learn from the various inputs from the European Union and from the United States in that regard. And

we are committed to co-operation under a range of headings: research and development, teaching and learning initiatives, staff development and online learning.

We also have a strong commitment to working with each other in helping to manage the rapid change which our institutions are experiencing. We are all experiencing a period of very significant change, although many of us have seen significant change before – I quote the late Dr Patrick Lynch who said change is perennial and will not stop this year or next, and he wrote that in 1965 which we thought was a period of very rapid change as well. How to be proactive in that change and how we can, all of us, North and South, work together to have a collective perspective in an international environment – that also was something I think we were asked to address.

We did make the point that a good deal is happening. As Professor Coolahan said from the floor yesterday, there is a need for what is happening to be mapped and that might be a very appropriate first exercise arising out of this conference for the Centre to carry out. The extent of co-operation between individuals, between university departments, between universities and between other higher education institutions could be under-estimated. There is a lot going on in a quiet way and some of it has been quite effective.

We also saw that in an area which is very high on the agenda of both Ministers: the inclusivity of the institutions and the whole issue of social inclusion in particular. I think in that regard the question of how we can work together in encouraging and developing socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged young people, and indeed not so young people, to come onto our campuses has to be looked at. There is a lot of very good work going on in the various institutions in that regard, and there are also institutions which are working with their communities in terms of quite early intervention, at primary and pre-primary levels as well as second-level – so that is something that should be shared.

Obviously various institutions also have different approaches to integrating and encouraging students with disabilities to come on to campus and how they respond to their needs.

The whole issue of refugees and asylum-seekers is one which we are only beginning to address in a very, very preliminary way. It will become a very big issue I think for us, as it has been in countries like the US – the multi-cultural issue has not been really addressed to any significant extent at all yet and it is something we are all going to have to address in a much more focussed way.

Our group also talked about the whole question of managing change and, in particular, staff development initiatives in various institutions, North and South. We did feel that tribute should be paid – since the Higher Education Authority chairman Don Thornhill is here – to the HEA's Targeted Initiatives, which have been hugely significant in the South in transforming the culture of the universities and colleges of education in terms of the focus on teaching and learning, and support for teaching and learning. A relatively small amount of money, because it was targeted, has made, in many of our views, a very big difference.

Finally there seemed to be some concern that since there was such a heavy emphasis in the UK environment on measuring research and perhaps having a separateness between research and teaching – which isn't the case in the South – that this might be a barrier to co-operation. I for one had some concerns yesterday listening to Sir Howard Newby on the new British higher education strategy document, when he talked about rewarding separately centres of excellence in separate areas. A lot of us agreed this morning that we

would not be happy to see a very specific separation of teaching and research institutions happening.

I will just finish with a quotation of my own in that regard (stolen from somewhere else). I said this morning to Don Thornhill that I think there is a complementarity between research and teaching that we really mustn't break in any sense – it would be really quite a serious step if it happened either in this island or the other island. Research is to teaching as sin is to confession – if you don't engage in the former you have very little say in the latter, and I think that will keep us thinking.

Dr Mary Meaney: I was in group number four and much of the discussion that Áine has just commented on also took place within our group. I think one of the central themes that has come right through the conference, from the Ministers' introductions yesterday to today's speakers, has been the whole theme of social inclusion. It would be a theme which would be particularly dear to my heart and perhaps to many of the institutes of technology in the South.

In our group we talked about role of the education providers, that is ourselves, in being leaders, and looking at how we can bring Ireland forward as a centre of excellence for social inclusion. If we were to pick that as a theme and ask how we would go about it, I think one of the first challenges that we might have is that, as leaders, we must recognise and embrace diversity, and I say that both in terms of the students that we attract into our institutions but also in terms of those institutions themselves. We are a diverse group of providers; yet we are all supposed to have our own type of provision and we all need to have mutual respect for each other. I think that is something that is going to be very important if we are going to work together both North-South but also within our own jurisdictions.

We concentrated in our discussion on what types of tangible things we could do. We have had a great conference; there has been a great amount of energy associated with this conference, and there is certainly a lot of commitment associated with the conference. When we leave here today we will all be highly enthused, but what we don't want to do is in a year or two to look back and say 'that was a fantastic conference but did anything come out of it?' So in the context of addressing social inclusion, we had a discussion around looking at the accreditation of prior experiential learning on an island of Ireland basis. Is this something we could group together in order to look at: the whole area of the adult learner, the return to education learner?

We also looked at the research technology area. We heard yesterday from Minister Dempsey that there might be £15 million available for North-South co-operation, so maybe some of this could go towards three or four tangible North-South projects in the research technology area.

The other area that we touched on was the idea of promoting and selling Irish education as a commodity. Is this something that we wish to do, or perhaps do to a greater extent? We had an input into our conference from the International Education Board Ireland in terms of how can we sell Ireland as a centre of excellence to other, including developing, countries. I would have to say that in my own mind there is some potential conflict here in that we talk about social inclusion on the one hand and the fact that we really have to try to increase participation in our own institutions, and on the other hand we want to go out and sell those places to people overseas to get some income into those institutions. Do we have a conflict here? Have we thought it through? I am not 100 per cent convinced that we have thought it through totally.

The other theme we touched on was the theme of quality. Again, if the island is going to be an area of educational excellence, how are we going to measure that, and how can we learn from each other North and South? We know that in the North there is much more benchmarking taking place – perhaps they have learned some difficult lessons and perhaps we could learn in the South from what has gone on in the North in the whole area of quality assurance.

Professor Bob Osborne: We have all discussed much the same sort of thing and there is a degree of repetition starting to come in. So I might take advantage of that and not only report on my group but also say something for myself.

I think on the general issue of North-South co-operation there is perhaps a feeling, looking back over the 1990s, that the high profile, ‘going for the big ideas’ strategy didn’t work. There is a recognition that the experience of the Conference of Rectors in Ireland (CRI) this time around wasn’t particularly successful, and we went on to explore a slightly different approach that might come out of this experience. Given our political circumstances here in Northern Ireland, I think a lower profile approach, going for pragmatic areas of obvious advantage and added value, would be where it would make most sense for us to build over time. One of the suggestions which came up yesterday was reiterated: we have got an opportunity with graduate research students as we move towards the American model of taking two years plus one year of active research or one year plus two years of active research. This means that we can’t offer modules on all campuses at all levels for all subjects, so there is an opportunity for particularly mobile students to move around from course to course and campus to campus.

Obviously collaboration needs funding and we discussed some ways in which funding might be made available. It is quite clear at this time that the problem with the €15 million mentioned by Minister Dempsey is that the Northern Minister hasn’t got a reciprocal or a proportionate amount and was unable to get that from the Northern Executive. Until that door can be unlocked politically through the Executive, if there is an Executive, then that particular source is going to cause problems.

We did explore the issue of the different needs of different disciplines and that you can do quite a lot with the humanities and social sciences which doesn’t need big money; also that we have a number of learning societies that operate on an all-island basis anyway and we can make more use of them as catalysts by developing cross-disciplinary interactions with them. We duly noted, when it was brought to our attention, that just because we were talking about CRI doesn’t mean that higher education only means the universities.

On the widening access and participation issue, I am slightly advantaged in that I have been involved in looking at two surveys of UK-wide widening access activity published in 1998 and again earlier this year by Universities UK, and I also did some work for the Higher Education Authority some years ago looking at its Targeted Initiatives scheme. However I think that both in the UK and Ireland it is time for a step-change, if I can use Howard Newby’s term. We have gone through the phase of setting up a lot of access schemes which are actually not producing significant numbers of new students. While we are getting a political message about the need for social inclusion, I think we will also be held increasingly more accountable in terms of the numbers of students that we take in proportionate to the amount of money we are spending, and the extent to which we get them through the system without dropping out.

The Action Group Report on Access to Third Level which was published last year in the South is a very good template which potentially could be rolled out. It involves setting

targets, setting goals for institutions and that is certainly the way to go; similarly the proposed premium funding that institutions can get on top of their core student funding for bringing in students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However if you are thinking about retention and completion, there also should be a premium at the end of the process as well, thus rewarding institutions *both* for bringing in such students *and* for taking them through and graduating them.

We also noted that even if we did become more substantial and more effective in our widening access activities, there is now emerging evidence in the UK that students coming from less well-off social backgrounds, even after going through the same institutions and gaining the same qualifications, are effectively being socially discriminated against by employers in terms of lower wage levels – this is a new dimension to the widening access agenda. I was assured in a number of universities that accountancy is a prime example of this: accountancy firms don't just look at the degree that you have got, they look at which school you went to. So there is a degree of social selection, not just academic or merit selection, going on.

So I would argue there is a need for a step-change, and obviously this is not just a decision for the universities and the other HE institutions – it must be government and resources-led. However the other part of the agenda is what Malcolm Skilbeck talked about in terms of mature students, and now we have to add part-time students as well. The social needs of students from different social backgrounds, of mature students and part-time students, are going to be a lot more diverse than 'bog standard' 18 year olds coming in well-qualified, staying for three years, and moving on. This process is going to pose major questions about the culture of our institutions and major questions to individual academics about how they do their business, how they do their teaching, and how they relate to individual students. For example, once you get into the part-time and mature market you are talking about offering courses in the late afternoon or early evening – that will shift the culture of an institution substantially from the conventional.

Our group also looked at the marketing issue, about whether we should market ourselves as Ireland Inc when attracting overseas students. We certainly don't want to displace any of our own students in order to bring in 'cash cows', as it were, and we certainly wouldn't want to see this as a principal response to any demographic decline – if there is a demographic decline then surely the widening access agenda is the one that you go for in a big way to cover any gaps.

There was also a feeling about going out to get overseas students that you have got to be clever since everybody is doing it. We have got certain advantages but we have got to find some sort of niche areas, otherwise why would students be attracted to come here rather than anywhere else? Now there are obvious advantages, but we maybe need to think of some niche courses: Irish Studies was suggested as one particular area in the humanities and social sciences.

If I could add something of my own here. We had an intervention yesterday from a primary school principal who stood up and identified himself as coming from the unionist community. I just wanted to reflect with you on the pattern of student movements that I have been studying over a good few years now, and particularly what happened to the Northern Protestant perception as a result of the flow of students from the South into the North which started in the mid/late-1980s, continued into the mid-1990s, reached its peak about five or six years ago and now has started to ebb again. In 1996-97 and again in 1998 I happened to be doing focus group work over an extended period with Northern parents, teachers and pupils, and the pupils were 17-18 year olds so it was the year they were going

into higher education. What came across from the Protestant parents, pupils and teachers I was talking to was a perception that the proportion of Catholics was going up in the two Northern Ireland universities and now there was a large cohort of students coming in from the South. We were getting parents saying “Why would I want to send my child to a university that is now an Irish university – it is not a university for us”.

That voice which was articulated yesterday afternoon briefly is a voice that isn't often heard, and I think that is part of the picture and we can't run away from that. Almost half of all Protestants who enter higher education now leave Northern Ireland – they don't go down South, they go east and most of them don't come back. So any student mobility that we want to create purposively has got to be sensitive to the unintended consequences. If we think student movement is generally a civilising process, an opening up – well, in our wee schizophrenic world up here it doesn't always work like that.

Dr Matthew Quinn: My remarks will be divided into three parts. Let me first mention my bona fides as it were: my mother was born in Bellaghy and my father was born in Sligo, so this is something of a homecoming for me. I thank Andy Pollak for the opportunity to return to my roots – it is a grand opportunity to visit with the Irish people and learn two very important words – grand and lovely. Thank you all very much for your hospitality.

My second point is to briefly summarise what we talked about in our session, which is very much similar to what I have heard the other discussants describe. We talked a bit about the tension between the moral imperative and self-interest, and where the moral imperative might not drive cross-border co-operation, self-interest might.

There also seems to be a lot of co-operation going on, especially in the student area. The Erasmus project was mentioned as one which can serve as a model. One of the suggestions was that the next conference – and there is a strong consensus that there should be a next conference – might focus on what is actually taking place in co-operation North-South as well as East-West, and see if what is going on successfully might serve as a model. The person who made that suggestion is, I believe, in the registrar's office of a university, and said that when a project application comes into the university it is alarming and amazing that the person who is initiating the project has not talked with anyone else at the university to see whether they have done any similar work which has proved successful.

Thirdly, let me speak briefly about my own experience. In addition to having been a university president, I served as head of the state college system for the state of New Jersey. We had nine state colleges, about 80,000 students and 3-4,000 faculty, and we had to make allocations of state resources. All the colleges offered a similar curriculum, but when the time came to make the important decisions about special use of resources we had competition and the best institutions were then selected as centres of excellence. For example one institution in New York City was designated as a centre of excellence in the fine and performing arts and additional funding was provided to that institution. Another one in the south of the state near the wetlands was designated as a centre of excellence in environmental studies and as a result special allocations were made to that institution. After a while students wanting to concentrate on particular areas of study began to become aware that these centres existed, and they would choose to go to a particular institution as a result. If they didn't have a specific need or a specific desire, they would go to the institution that was nearest to them and would get the traditional courses like business or liberal arts, nursing or teaching.

Another experience I had was when I was provost of St Joseph's University in Philadelphia for a while. We came over here in the late 1980s to work with a number of Irish

universities on food marketing because we had a programme that had several years of very successful experience. My president had some experience with Ireland and was aware at the time that in a number of areas you were exporting raw materials and not getting value-added opportunities. Our faculty formed liaisons with a number of institutions here and over the past 15 – 20 years there has been a great commerce back and forth between Irish institutions and universities in Philadelphia. Our reflections are that co-operation works best where there are incentives on both sides – where it is one person trying to force another to co-operate it doesn't succeed, even if it is from the top of an institution or from institution to institution. There has to be some real as well as perceived benefit, as well as real and perceived needs, on both sides.

My most recent experience before coming to the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation was in Montana. Montana is very scarce on resources. The north-western states of the US made very wise decisions about medical education. Instead of building a medical school in each of the four north-western states, one of them, Washington, which has an excellent medical school, co-operates with Montana, Alaska and Idaho. The students in those other three states take the first two years of graduate study in the medical sciences – anatomy, physiology and so on – at the local state university and then for the final two years they go to Seattle and study the clinical subjects at the University of Washington there. The students pay in-state tuition which is exceptionally important – otherwise they would be paying \$25-35,000 a year – but they compete very aggressively for in-state tuition to be sent from Montana or Idaho or Alaska to the state of Washington for their final years. In the early years there was some resistance to this use of Montana state resources, but with time the success of the programme convinced people that this is the best way to go.

And then at my own institution in Montana we had a theatre programme that was very successful and we had the opportunity to send our students to New York City for off-Broadway opportunities. That gave me the conviction that initiatives are best started at the individual level, and where the individual level of initiative is successful, the administrator, in this case the president, can facilitate that by providing resources for it in acknowledgement and recognition. I don't think I could have gone to anyone and said why don't you do this – it just would not have happened – but where the individual has the vision and initiative, and the doors are opened to him, I have been able to provide institutional resources that allowed that programme to flourish.

Again, my thanks to the organisers of the conference and my appreciation for allowing my wife and me to come to be with you.

Cosgrove: I was in group number one and, as you might expect, most of the topics have already been covered. We too had much debate on social inclusion. We talked about the attraction of overseas students, and the issue that if they came at undergraduate level they should be additional students rather than substituting for home students. We thought that it would be easier to attract students at postgraduate level from overseas, at least in the initial stages.

Connected with that, as has already been mentioned, is the question of whether we could have co-operative postgraduate programmes: in other words, letting students, either from within Ireland or from abroad, utilise the resources of more than one institution in a postgraduate programme.

We also picked up a point from what Mr van der Pas said this morning about how in many instances European initiatives led to developments that might not otherwise have occurred or led to them happening a lot more quickly. We thought in the context of the Bologna

process, which would allow for transferability of credits throughout the EU, that if we have to do this on a European basis by 2010, it might be no harm to do it on an all-island basis a little bit before that. In other words, the fundamental difficulty of trying to reconcile different methods of measuring or marking or attesting to students' achievements needs to be addressed throughout the island and at all levels if we really believe in the issues of credit transfer and ladders of progression. I think it is one of the ironies that we find it easier sometimes to have our students exchange with students in France or Germany than to do it within Ireland, and that is a big issue which Bologna is going to force us to look at even if we don't wish to. We have got to consider what the barriers are to mobility within the island itself and one of those barriers, which is becoming clearer and clearer, is the lack of a common system of accreditation.

In our group there were a couple of other points raised which don't seem to have been raised elsewhere. The question of a particular zone – the border zone – on the periphery of both jurisdictions where there are common problems is something that might be looked at.

The question also was raised in our group of private sector support: that in both jurisdictions this will be an increasing element in the resources for third level education, and how can we co-operate to look at what we are doing to maximise the level of private support for institutions of higher education?

I think those were the main points that we made. Having said that, it is now time to throw the discussion open to the floor. But could I ask you to keep in mind the objective of trying to outline at least three themes that might be utilised in future conferences. It may well be that social inclusion has already leaped to the top of the list, since all the groups mentioned it, but let's see what comes out of the discussion.

Gill Roe, Director of Programmes, International Education Board – Ireland: If I could just make a few points about internationalisation. Just to say that I think as well as working with the challenges that are posed by living on this island, cross-border and in our separate jurisdictions, I think we have to deal with the reality of living in the wider world as well.

Our HE institutions can't operate any longer in isolation. I think that moving towards greater access for mature and part-time students, and recognition of prior learning on the one hand, and encouraging international students on the other, is not a mutually exclusive exercise. It is not simply about income, although income is very important – in the Republic this year we estimate that international students are bringing about €170 million into the economy, and that is very significant. However I would argue that they are not all 'cash cows': we also need to attract international quality students into our institutions to maintain international academic links and to maintain international academic standards. We do live in a global world and I think we need to recognise that, and I think Irish HE institutions do.

I would also like to mention the multi-cultural issue. Multi-culturalism is becoming very important, North and South, and particularly in the Republic. I think the educational institutions need to be seen to lead the field in that area and I think that that is another very important reason to embrace international students.

Peter O'Neill, Manager, National Union of Students/Union of Students in Ireland: I think there is a realisation by most commentators that the harmonisation of student support schemes in both jurisdictions would be an important driver in terms of promoting student mobility. The UK review of student support is ongoing in London and

the Southern government is looking again at the whole issue of student finance, so it could be opportune to look again at designing a student finance framework which could meet the needs of the island of Ireland. Whether that is the tuition fees model which the student movement has long campaigned against is another matter, but I think we all realise that the imposition of tuition fees in the North stymied the very strong inflow of Southern students into the North. Perhaps there is a better model that could fan the flames of genuine student mobility both jurisdictions, and that could be a theme we could address perhaps at a future conference.

Tadhg Ó hÉalaithe, Director of Corporate Services, Higher Education Training and Awards Council: The term social inclusion is somewhat intriguing. We would want to be sure what we mean by that. We are all in favour of this, as we are all in favour of apple pie and motherhood, but what do we actually mean – is it a question of students from low income families? I could speak from experience and say I know that if you look at the NUI's graduates between 1970 and 1976 you find quite a number of people from the poor areas of Cork city. It is very laudable that we should say we are all in favour of social inclusion once we know what we are doing, once we know it can be measured. Maybe we could have a response to that.

Hyland: I chair the Education and Disadvantage Committee which has been recently set up in the Republic under the 1998 Education Act, and we have had so much discussion about that term. The Department of Education has a social inclusion unit and much of the EU documentation talks about social inclusion, but the 1998 Education Act defines educational disadvantage and talks about educational disadvantage – the term social inclusion is not used. Educational disadvantage is defined in that Act as follows: the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefits from education in schools.

I mentioned that because you are quite right in saying that a postal address or a socio-economic indicator alone does not necessarily mean that somebody is not deriving a benefit from schooling. So social inclusion as a term, while it has very wide usage in the OECD and European Commission contexts, when it comes to the Irish legislation, it is more specifically defined.

Dr Don Thornhill, Chairman, Higher Education Authority: Clearly some burrowing has to go on behind the scenes in terms of seeing how productive a topic might be for a day's conference or a day and a half conference. Internationalisation certainly is one, in the sense that is there sufficient value-added to be gained by an all-island venture in that area. In that regard, the HEA will be publishing a report later this year or early next year on the internationalisation issue, which of course will only have a Southern focus, but it might be one element feeding into a conference.

There are three areas where policies and practices are different between the two jurisdictions and where there could be a useful sharing of experience. The first one is in the area of quality where there is, as far as I understand it in the North, a single approach through the Quality Assurance Agency. In the South there are two different approaches: the approach which applies to the universities under the provisions of the Universities Act and then the National Qualifications Authority structures which apply to the institute of technology sector. So there could be some useful sharing of different experiences and approaches there.

Another area where there is quite a difference in approach is in what one might call foundation funding for research. At the risk of simplifying the approaches in the two

jurisdictions or simplifying the description of them, the approach which applies in the North, the UK approach, is an *ex post* one through the Research Assessment Exercise. In the South it tends to be an *ex ante* one through the PRTLII Programme. So in a sense you have two different approaches, one looking at potential, the other looking at historic performance. What lessons can we learn from either or from both by comparing them?

Thirdly, there is the point about student support which has been raised by my colleague here. There is a fascinating unsymmetrical experiment going on in this island as fees have been introduced in the North as they were being withdrawn and phased down in the South. Now what happened before and what has happened since in both jurisdictions? Debate around those topics could be productive.

Fr Sean Nolan, Aughnacloy-Truagh European Studies Project: There is a theme that I am certainly hearing and it is coming through at a number of levels: the whole theme of cultural identity and difference. In the North there is the issue that was mentioned earlier of unionist identity, which both the panel and the workshop groups have highlighted in the form of the drift eastwards by the Unionist population seeking third level education.

In the South there is an issue that is going to be very critical in the immediate future which was highlighted by the debate over the Nice treaty. Are we heading for a new grouping in Dáil Éireann which instead of the rainbow coalition would be the 'green coalition'? What is the significance of that? I do think there is an issue here that is going to need guidance and leadership from the wisdom and learning of the universities.

Dr Peadar Cremin, Director, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick: If I could take as a focus something that has been in the pre-conference papers and that was the issue of globalisation. There are both challenges and opportunities for Ireland arising from globalisation. An example would be the inclusion of the immigrant population in Ireland on the one hand – and how we work with that population as the disadvantaged population of the future – and on the other Ireland's very strong track record in terms of working in developing countries, with so many people working as either missionaries or teachers abroad. I think we can reap the benefit from that heritage, and I would suggest that as one theme.

Another theme which I am surprised not to have heard emerging thus far is e-learning, which is something we have been clearly told that we are going to have to do but are not going to be able to do as individual institutions. It might be useful to suggest a conference focusing on the opportunities and implications for Ireland as a centre of excellence in third level e-learning. I would suggest that type of conference might engage in a partnership with the private sector. It would be very useful and enriching to have speakers from the private sector, both Irish companies and foreign companies located in Ireland.

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck: At the risk of being even more controversial, I would like to take up a couple of the points that have been raised and put them in a slightly different context, particularly the points about globalisation on the one hand and the Protestant unionist/Catholic nationalist issues on the other.

Northern Ireland comes from a somewhat different cultural context and tradition than the Republic of Ireland. At the same time it comes from a tradition that has some identical features, so it is both the same and different. I would have thought that there must be some interesting differences in the cultures of the educational institutions which would be of interest – not perhaps to policy makers and people interested in resources, but

certainly to those people concerned about cultures, symbolic systems, meanings, relationships and understandings, people who are interested in why what is taken for granted in one jurisdiction is not taken for granted in another.

It takes the debate away from the kind of traditional, religious divide which is getting, if I might say so, a bit tedious, and is certainly having some very dangerous consequences. It puts it into a new kind of framework or setting. There are people in all the institutions, both North and South, for whom this is a specialist field of study, people who teach cultural studies, philosophy, history, literature and language and so on.

These people are very concerned about globalisation as a kind of homogenisation of culture, and thus a great threat to distinctiveness, uniqueness, and values which are local and come out of some sort of tradition. Yet globalisation as we know is a reality and we have to come to terms with it. It might be worth putting together a small study group – it doesn't have to be a big conference – but a few people from institutions, North and South, who are particularly interested in this area and who would like to explore it further in the Irish context. This would certainly put some of the traditional arguments and debates into a new setting, put them in a new key, as it were, and introduce a somewhat different cultural conceptual framework. That would be of great value in the Irish context.

Such an initiative would also be a source of scholarship. It would also connect with the work of academic and professional associations to which people belong in both jurisdictions. Such a study group might be of interest to sponsors, foundations for example, even foundations from other countries that support this kind of work. I think it could be a valuable initiative, not necessarily a major study, but a valuable part of the process of cross-border analysis.

Cosgrove: In that context, Professor Skilbeck, it is worth pointing out that the Conference of Rectors in Ireland did sponsor a series of lectures at UCD on the different political views put forward on the island from all sides, and what I think you are saying is that maybe a cultural equivalent of that would be useful. We had some very useful discussions from all shades of opinion, North and South, and from Britain, on the issue of Northern Ireland during those lectures. I think what you are saying is that a cultural symposium exploring what are the differences and similarities other than the political and religious ones might be useful.

Any other contributors? Well if we have nobody rushing to get in, I think what I might do is to give each of our four speakers an opportunity to sum up and then I'll try at the end to see if I have got a list of themes that we can throw back to the organising committee or to Andy Pollak to see what might be the theme of a next conference. So maybe I'll start in reverse order this time and ask if Matt Quinn would like to say a few words.

Quinn: I recollect listening to one of the speakers saying that one of the issues that came up in our workshop was the issue of quality – how to assess it and how to recognise it – not only quality of instruction, but also of research and of programmes that are available to the students.

Osborne: I quite liked Don Thornhill's three points. However I want to come back to Malcolm Skilbeck's idea of the traditional religious divide being tedious. It is tedious, but it's lived every day in Northern Ireland, and those of us who go into the classroom on a regular basis have to deal with the tensions in wider Northern Ireland society that are manifested in the classroom. That has become more of an issue and a problem over the

last few years with the rise of political extremism. Young people are coming in with very extreme views and are quite confident about expressing them.

How that is dealt with in classrooms poses huge challenges to the creation of an academic environment in which normal debate and discussion can take place. I teach in the area of public social policy and politics, and find at times that this is a difficult issue to manage. So it might be tedious in one sense but it sure is important in another.

Meaney: Another point that we picked up in our group this morning was the whole area of mutual recognition of qualifications. We felt that there might be an opportunity with work going on in the South at the moment on a new qualifications framework to look at the implications for working more across the border.

Hyland: That was one of the points I had also thought of focusing on – not just because of its value for cross border co-operation, but also for cross institutional co-operation in the South. The Southern universities are not directly subject to the National Qualifications Act. At the same time we have to see university education in the context of access, progression and flexibility generally, and we will increasingly have to work within a lifelong learning framework of young and not so young people coming in and out of the education system. This also ties in with the Bologna situation, with the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education. Those of us who are looking at students coming from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds or mature students would be aware of the difficulty for each individual institution of working on its own without the value of a national qualifications framework. But it is also important that we, within the universities, understand the implications of that new framework for our own qualifications.

Finally, it is always worth being aware that if a young person has left school at the end of primary – and in the South we still have about a thousand young people per annum who get lost somewhere between primary and second level – the state will have spent about €20,000 on that young person's education.

In contrast, those young people who come through the third level system with a four year degree course, or a three plus one degree course, would have about €6065,000 spent on their education, so the state owes those early school leavers quite a lot of money. Sometimes it is important to remind people of this when additional resources are being made available through special initiatives either to retain young people in the system or to encourage them to come into third level through access programmes. Why is the state investing money in these young people? If any of those young people got into trouble, the Department of Justice would find itself paying out about €100,000 per annum to keep them either in jail or in some kind of a detention centre. So it does no harm to remind ourselves of the economics of investing in education.

Cosgrove: It is my unenviable duty to try to sum up and say what themes have emerged. It seems to me that the dominant theme of the discussion remains what we will call social inclusion or widening access or the attraction of disadvantaged students, whatever way you want to put it. It is clear that in both jurisdictions efforts that have been made in this direction, and, while achieving some success, there is still a very long way to go. Whether we want, as a follow-up North-South initiative, a fact-finding exercise as to what is actually being done on both sides of the border, or whether we think a conference based on that fact-finding might be useful, is open for discussion, but certainly there is a commonality here: neither jurisdiction has cracked this particular problem.

Osborne: Just as a point of information: next March the Society for Research in Higher Education and the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council are organising an 'in house' conference on widening access, where the explicit aim is to have a look how Northern Ireland policy might be reformulated and reshaped, with contributions hopefully from Scotland, England and Wales and the Republic of Ireland. I am just letting you know that this forthcoming event is there.

Cosgrove: We should await that one before we move on to any similar conference on widening access under the aegis of this North-South group.

The second issue is the one of internationalisation, which has a number of features, not just the attraction of students from overseas. There is going to be a HEA report soon that could certainly contribute to a conference on that issue. I think we might also look at the issue of what value there is in the higher institutions of Ireland generally selling themselves to prospective investors as an incentive to come to both parts of Ireland. There was also the issue about whether we as a group of institutions on the island could make any contribution to the resolution of some of the difficulties faced by Third World countries.

The third issue is the one raised by the HEA chairman, Dr Thornhill: the question of quality assurance. This should also include, possibly, the question of staff development, North and South: in other words, not only how do you assess the quality of what you are doing, but also how will staff adapt to changes in the composition of the student population, and the diversification of that population, within the universities and institutes of higher education.

Research funding is an issue which would be even more urgent if we thought there was a real prospect of a joint North-South fund to support research, but there are some difficulties in the way of that at the moment. However the different methods by which research is funded in the UK and in the Republic would be, if not worthy of a full day conference, certainly something that would be worthy of study.

Another issue that we mentioned was the question of student support: what would happen if the jurisdictions changed policy on this, and what would happen to the flow of students North-South or South-North if the Republic reintroduced student fees, if the UK went in the other direction (although the latter seems unlikely). It would be useful to have documented what has happened in the last seven-eight years.

The question of postgraduate co-operation was raised as a practical issue. Given that we have limited resources as an island, could we get some good postgraduate programmes going if the universities were to co-operate with one other in structured PhD programmes: for example, where you would take part of your course in one university in the North and part in another university in the South.

Andy Pollak, Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies: I am very conscious of what was said yesterday about the balance of the presentations at this conference, with the universities being favoured vis-à-vis other sectors of higher education. I know there is a mismatch between institutes of technology in the South and the further education sector in the North, but can we think of an idea for a study or a conference that would encourage those institutes and colleges, North and South, to come together around a common theme?

Cosgrove: That's a fair point and one worth considering, if the institutes of technology in the South and the further education institutes in the North are to find common ground.

Have I left anything else out that people think might make a useful theme? We haven't actually decided which three themes are most significant, but we have got a selection. We should be able to identify one out of which we could usefully organise another conference of this kind in the near future. Because, as somebody has already said, a year from now we don't want to look back and say that was a great conference but nothing has happened since.

Professor Elizabeth Meehan, Director, Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research, Queen's University Belfast: It is not exactly a conference theme, but there is something I think was not present in your summing up which came out certainly in our group and clearly from the reports from some of the other groups. We do need a mapping exercise and what I really want to stress is that it should not just be about major funded research projects; this has already been done and showed that such projects are rather sparse. However there are huge number of individual links, certainly more than has ever emerged in previous reports of links and networks. I am thinking, for example, of the Political Studies Association of Ireland and the Institute for British-Irish Studies based in UCD; there is the International Education Board – Ireland, which I am sorry to say some of us had not heard of before today. So there are a lot of networks of one sort or another that we all need to know about in order to help us know what to do in the future.

Cosgrove: I have it underlined here that the mapping of what is happening is essential as a preliminary to any kind of conference. My memory is that CRI did commission a study of the links that already existed and I think that probably still has some relevance even though it was compiled a year or two ago.

Meehan: It was mainly on research projects: there wasn't much scope in it for these more individualised or networked activities.

Professor John Coolahan, Professor of Education, NUI Maynooth: I just think that the mapping exercise would be an enriching one if it included some record of people's experience of the successes and problems of the various North-South initiatives. It should be a broad-ranging exercise which would include things like the academic associations that operate on an all-island basis. Also the reactions of people who have experienced the achievements and problems in selling Irish higher education internationally, for example in China. This could enrich the whole process and be a very good basis for further work as we move forward.

Cosgrove: Thanks very much. I think we have probably identified a wealth of themes that could be explored, but since it is Friday afternoon we might close slightly earlier than planned, and so I will ask Gerry McCormac, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Queen's, to close the proceedings.

CLOSING REMARKS

Professor Gerry McCormac, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Queen's University Belfast

Thank you very much. I think it was attributed to Winston Churchill – although perhaps misattributed to him – when he said you should never try to try to climb a wall that is leaning towards you, nor try to kiss someone who is leaning away from you. So at the last session of a conference on a Friday afternoon you should definitely not speak for too long, so I promise I will be very brief.

On behalf of the steering group I would like to begin by thanking all the speakers (I won't name them individually), and the chairs of the sessions who did a wonderful job in creating some discussion and then generating possible themes for future conferences. Thanks also go to Olivia O'Leary, the conference chair, for facilitating the lively discussions that we had, and Andy Pollak and his team for the hard work they have done in organising the event. We as a steering group would also very much like to thank the two Ministers for taking the time to come to the conference and speak, their Departments for funding the event, and the Centre for Cross Border Studies for initiating the idea. At the outset there were two main questions posed:

1. Where should North-South co-operation in higher education, which has been at a relatively low key until now, go from here?
2. How can universities and other higher education institutions work together on a North-South basis to make Ireland a centre of excellence for higher education?

I don't think any of us on the steering group expected that we would arrive at a comprehensive answer to either question at this first conference, but we did hope that the ideas that would be generated could be explored more fully in a planned series of further conferences for which we have been attempting to generate themes this afternoon.

I also created a list as the discussion went on and, if you permit me, I will just add one or two extra themes that I think perhaps were missed. One of these was barriers to mobility of students between universities in the Irish context and in the EU context. There was also a suggestion of an audit of successful North-South models of co-operation. An interesting one came from Matt Quinn on identifying institutional strengths with a view to creating centres of excellence in Ireland, which I think might be quite useful. And lastly the opportunities for Ireland in the e-learning environment.

When Sir Howard Newby spoke yesterday of the changing roles of universities, he used some nice phrases: he talked about moving into an age of mass higher education while maintaining the traditions and structures of an elite system – I think that is something each of us will recognise. He spoke of changing demands on higher education in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, and how we must not lose sight of the importance of university education in inculcating civilising values among our students.

Professor Skilbeck followed by suggesting that universities North and South are well placed to become leaders in cross-border dialogue. He stated that the universities have a

moral responsibility to show leadership and to see North-South co-operation not as incidental but as one of their primary responsibilities. I noticed that other speakers today took that particular phrase out of his paper and used it again.

Can I leave you with this? Let us hope that through the forthcoming series of conferences we can bring real meaning to the North-South dialogue and ensure that we realise the opportunity that genuine co-operation can deliver. Let us hope that we can find ways to build institutional collaboration and effectiveness so that Ireland's universities can be bigger than the sum of their parts and make Ireland a centre of higher education excellence; so that through the civilising values we inculcate and our academic excellence we may once again be worthy of the title Carmel Hanna used in her opening address, the 'Land of Saints and Scholars'. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX 1:

A BRIEFING PAPER ON THE IRISH THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION SYSTEMS, NORTH AND SOUTH

by Andy Pollak, Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies

Introduction

The two Irish higher education systems, although they spring from a common British root and are both ‘binary’ in nature (with university and technological streams), have evolved very differently over the past 80 years since the island was divided. One consequence of this is that there is little mutual knowledge of the higher and further education systems in the other jurisdiction. This short paper will therefore be divided into three sections: the Northern Ireland higher education system; the higher education system in the South; and co-operation between the two systems.

A fourth section will outline some themes and questions for the conference to address which are largely taken from the conclusions of Professor Malcolm Skilbeck’s 2001 report *The University Challenged: A review of international trends and issues with particular reference to Ireland*.

1. NORTHERN IRELAND

Higher Education Provision and Structures

Higher and further education in Northern Ireland is provided by two mainstream universities, Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) and the University of Ulster (UU), the Open University, two teacher training colleges (Stranmillis University College and St Mary’s University College) and 16 further education colleges.

The Department for Employment and Learning is responsible for higher and further education policy and funding. In contrast to the Department of Education and Science in Dublin and the Department of Education and Skills in London, there is no separate higher education funding authority in Northern Ireland: the institutions are directly funded by DEL. Such funding, which is primarily recurrent, accounts for around one half of the two universities' total income.

The Northern Ireland universities are treated as an integral part of the wider United Kingdom higher education system. Queen's University Belfast has five faculties (engineering; humanities; legal, social and educational sciences; medicine and health sciences; and science and agriculture) with, in 2001-2002, 19,931 undergraduate and postgraduate students (including 5,962 part-time students).

The University of Ulster is based at four separate campuses (Belfast, Coleraine, Jordanstown and Londonderry) and has six faculties (arts, design and humanities; business and management; engineering; informatics; life and health sciences and education; and science) with, in 2001-2002, 21,220 students (including 6,531 part-time students) and a further 4,180 studying for University of Ulster qualifications at other recognised institutions in Northern Ireland.

In 2001-2002 88% of the total number of students at Queen's University and the University of Ulster were from Northern Ireland; 7% were from the South of Ireland, and 5% were from Britain or overseas. There are just over 400 Erasmus students from European countries at Northern Ireland's universities.

The Open University has since 1992 been administered from Belfast as a single region with the South. It offers a wide range of undergraduate degree and diploma courses in subject areas ranging from the arts to technology and in 2001-2002 had around 3,500 part-time students from the North and nearly 4,000 part-time students from the South.

Funding and Quality Assurance

The two Northern Ireland universities are funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) using the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding methodologies, provided through an agreement between DEL and HEFCE. Total recurrent funding for the universities in 2002-2003 will be £146 million, with a block grant of £72 million going to Queen's University Belfast and a block grant of £74 million going to the University of Ulster. In 2000-2001 Queen's University's total recurrent income was just over £147 million while the University of Ulster's total recurrent income was just under £112 million.

In broad terms, around 80% of DEL's funding to the two universities goes on teaching and 20% on research.

The monitoring of quality assurance in the university sector is undertaken by the UK Quality Assurance Agency, which was set up in 1997 to provide a unified quality assurance service for higher education in the UK. The English, Scottish and Welsh Higher Education Funding Councils and the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning are represented on this agency's board.

A new quality assurance regime for higher education recently announced for England will be extended to Northern Ireland in the 2002-2003 academic year. This will involve a three year transitional period in which all higher education institutions will be audited,

followed by a six year cycle of institutional audits, starting in 2005-2006, with a mid-point 'health check'. There will be a focus on institutions' own internal quality assurance methods and on their published information on quality and standards. There will be increased opportunities for student involvement and full subject reviews where cause for serious concern is identified.

Both universities have performed well in the teaching assessment exercises undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency. In the recent league table of teaching performance of UK universities published by the *Daily Telegraph*, Queen's was ranked at 15 and the University of Ulster at 39.

Widening Access and Participation

DEL is addressing the issue of widening access to higher education through a range of actions: an expansion of higher education provision in the period 1999-2005; a £65 million package of student support measures (over three years) including higher education bursaries and a new childcare grant; and funding incentives for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and part-time and mature students.

As a condition of DEL funding, the universities have been required to produce new Widening Participation Strategies and Action Plans for the years 2002-2004 which detail activities, targets and performance indicators on the recruitment, retention and progression of students from under-represented groups.

Teacher Education

The Department for Employment and Learning assumed responsibility for the funding and administration of initial teacher training following devolution, although the determination of the level of intake to teacher education courses remains with the Department of Education.

For the most part, primary teacher training is provided by Stranmillis (mainly state schools) and St Mary's (mainly Catholic schools) University Colleges through a four year B.Ed. course, and secondary teacher training is provided by the education departments of the two universities through a one-year PGCE course. Both Stranmillis and St Mary's are colleges of Queen's University Belfast.

Research

The Northern Ireland economy is characterised by a high number of small to medium-sized enterprises which for various reasons do not have a well established tradition of undertaking research. It is therefore estimated that the research and development undertaken by the two universities accounts for over 30% of the total R&D in Northern Ireland. This represents a very high percentage of total regional research and development, the highest in any region of the UK.

To support the research infrastructure of Northern Ireland universities, the Department for Employment and Learning provides 'mainstream' recurrent funding not tied to specific initiatives. This is distributed according to a number of factors, most weight being given to quality as measured by the most recent Research Assessment Exercise (*see below*). In 2002-2003 this will amount to £15.99 million to QUB and £10.67 million to UU.

The universities are also supported by a number of government-funded research initiatives, the most significant being the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) and the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF). The first SPUR, launched in 2001, provided £43 million in investment over the period 2001-2005 in the form of a public-private partnership (the main private element of which was the US charitable foundation Atlantic Philanthropies). The second phase of the SPUR programme (2003-2007) will provide a further £50 million for university research in Northern Ireland, again funded equally by DEL and the private sector. This initiative is aimed at developing the regional universities' research capacity, in particular their ability to produce research which is of international standard.

The Department for Employment and Learning has been allocated £7 million from the UK Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) for the period 2002-2004. This partnership between the UK government and the Wellcome Trust is intended to boost capital investment in the science research infrastructure.

Both Northern Ireland universities also receive funding as part of the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a competitive review of individual universities' research performance carried out in 1992, 1996 and 2001 (the next assessment is due in 2006). University departments are rated from one (poor) to five (international excellence) and are funded for future research accordingly, with ratings of 3a and above attracting more resources.

According to the *Guardian's* Research Power Index of UK universities RAE performance, QUB was 19th out of more than 170 institutions in 2001. UU was in 38th position in 2001. In 2001 over 70% of departments in the two universities were rated as demonstrating levels of national excellence in research (a rating of four or above), compared to 37% in 1996. However improved performance does not automatically attract additional state funding. Queen's University, in particular, was disappointed in 2001 that its improved ratings led to less-than-expected extra funding. Following similar complaints from other UK universities, a review of the RAE process has now been initiated.

Further Education

Further education (together with some elements of higher education) is provided largely through the 16 further education colleges, catering for around 25,000 full-time and 67,000 part-time students enrolled on vocational courses (2000-2001 figures). In addition, there are approximately 60,000 students on non-vocational courses which include adult basic education and a wide range of leisure time/hobby courses.

The majority of full-time students are in the 16-19 age group while most part-time students are over 19. The FE sector in Northern Ireland makes an important contribution to economic development through vocational and skills training. Thus while the number of enrolments in the FE sector as a whole rose by 7% between 1997-1998 and 2000-2001, the numbers doing courses in the areas of skills needs – computing, construction, electronics, catering and tourism, manufacturing engineering and software engineering – rose by over 54%.

In 2000-2001 there were 3,600 full-time and 8,400 part-time students studying for degrees and higher national diplomas at the further education colleges. 11 of the 16 colleges offer full-time higher education (degree and higher national diploma) courses with all the

colleges offering part-time HE courses. There is a ceiling on the number of full-time places that can be offered.

Eight of the further education colleges, in partnership with the two universities, are also piloting two-year foundation degree courses as a route to a full degree course particularly aimed at mature and part-time students, disabled students and students who do not have traditional qualifications.

The largest college in this sector is the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education, which has six main campuses, and over 43,000 students (around 4,300 full-time, 19,500 part-time and 19,600 on evening courses).

The main campuses of the other further education colleges are at Armagh, Ballymena, Bangor, Castlereagh, Coleraine, Derry, Downpatrick, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Limavady, Lisburn, Newry, Newtownabbey, Omagh, and Portadown.

DEL also provides funding to a small number of non-statutory education providers: the Workers' Educational Association, the Educational Guidance Service for Adults and the Ulster People's College.

£146 million was set aside for the provision of further education in Northern Ireland in 2001-2002 (£122 million recurrent, £23 million capital).

2. REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Higher Education Provision and Structures

The Department of Education and Science (DES) is the government department with overall responsibility for the administration of higher education. The universities are funded by the Higher Education Authority, which acts as a planning and budgetary agency with specific responsibilities for the universities and other designated institutions. The 14 institutes of technology are funded directly by the DES.

There are seven universities in the Republic of Ireland. The National University of Ireland is a federal university operating through four constituent universities: University College Dublin/National University of Ireland Dublin; University College Cork/National University of Ireland Cork; National University of Ireland Galway; and National University of Ireland Maynooth. There are also three NUI-recognised colleges: the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), St Angela's College of Education (Sligo), and the National College of Art and Design.

The three other universities are the University of Dublin/Trinity College, Dublin City University and the University of Limerick. [There is also a small Catholic national seminary and pontifical university, St Patrick's College, Maynooth.]

All seven universities offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in arts, science, business studies/commerce, social studies and engineering. Medicine is offered in the three larger NUI universities, Trinity College Dublin, and the RCSI, and veterinary and architecture are offered in University College Dublin. Dublin City University and the

University of Limerick, having been set up to specialise in more technological and applied programmes, now offer the full range of courses.

There were 158,881 students enrolled in higher education institutions in 2000-2001, 126,300 full-time students and 32,581 part-time students. The largest university in the state is University College Dublin/NUID with 17,910 students in 2000-2001 (including 2,936 part-time students). In the same year, the University of Dublin/Trinity College had 13,797 students (including 2,758 part-time students); University College Cork/NUIC had 12,894 students (including 1,200 part-time students); National University of Ireland Galway had 10,450 students (including 1,183 part-time students); the University of Limerick had 9,334 students (including 1,314 part-time students); Dublin City University had 8,686 students (including 1,222 part-time students); and National University of Ireland Maynooth had 4,752 students (including 552 part-time students).

In 2000-2001 there were 8,555 full-time students from overseas out of a total student body of 126,300 (6.8%). In addition there were 3,075 Erasmus students from European countries studying at Irish universities on short-term exchange programmes. There were 1,087 full-time students from Northern Ireland (0.9%).

Higher education student numbers in the South saw a spectacular rise between the 1970s and 1990s, with 33,000 in full-time higher education in 1975 growing to 126,300 in 2000-2001 (over 65,000 of them at university) in 1997, although with the slowdown in the birth rate in recent years this increase has now levelled off (the Republic's growth in student numbers during the period 1955-1994 was around the European average, with the UK slightly higher).

Funding and Quality Assurance

In 1999-2000 total recurrent income for the seven universities was €525.9 million (IR£414.1 million). Total recurrent expenditure was €526.4 million (IR£414.5 million).

In 1999-2000 University College Dublin/NUID had a total recurrent income of €143,447,000 (IR£112.95 million), 57% of which came from the state grant and 38% from academic fees (including state subsidy of the free fees initiative). University of Dublin/TCD had a total recurrent income of €105,794,000 (IR£83.3 million), 53% from the state and 39% from academic fees. University College Cork had a total recurrent income of €89,245,000 (IR£70.3 million), 56% from the state and 38% from fees. National University of Ireland Galway had a total recurrent income of €62,286,000 (IR£49 million). The University of Limerick had a total recurrent income of €52.28 million (IR£41.2 million). Dublin City University had a total recurrent income of €42.82 million (IR£33.7 million). National University of Ireland Maynooth had a total recurrent income of €30 million (IR£23.7 million).

The 1997 Universities Act laid down a legislative framework for management of quality assurance in the universities in the South for the first time. Primary responsibility for such quality assurance remains with the individual universities. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has the responsibility for reviewing the universities' quality assurance procedures, and will produce its first report on those procedures in 2003. The HEA's role is an advisory one, to assist the universities in making improvements and to advise them on best international practice.

Internally, the universities must review the effectiveness of their procedures at least every 15 years under the 1997 legislation. In addition, a working group from the universities is

developing a guide to assist them to develop quality assurance procedures in all aspects of their operations.

An overall qualifications framework – for schools, further and higher education – is currently being developed by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI). Through this framework the NQAI will set the overall standard for awards in the non-university sector. The framework will also include all the higher education awards in the South when it is established by the end of 2002.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council makes awards for the non-university sector. It is in the process of delegating award-making authority to some institutes of technology.

Widening Access and Participation

Under the 1997 Universities Act, all Southern universities must prepare a policy statement on access for students from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and other under-represented groups including mature and part-time students, and set out ways they will implement that policy. The Higher Education Authority will periodically review these statements and their implementation, the first such review to be published in 2003.

In addition, the HEA provides funding under a Targeted Initiative Scheme for specific university projects, most of them in the area of widening access for disadvantaged students. In 2002-2003 the HEA will provide €6 million for a range of different projects, selected from proposals submitted by the universities, for widening access.

Teacher Education

There are five colleges of education which provide degree courses leading to qualification as a primary teacher: St Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra; the Marino, Froebel and Church of Ireland Colleges of Education (all in Dublin), and the Mary Immaculate College of Education in Limerick.

The education departments of the universities offer a one year Higher Diploma in Education postgraduate course which is recognised as a second-level teaching qualification. In addition, three small colleges – Mater Dei Institute, St Angela's College and St Catherine's College – offer degree courses leading to a qualification as teachers of specialised subjects at secondary level.

Research

For many years the Republic of Ireland was one of the lower spenders on university research among OECD countries. This began to change following the onset of rapid economic development in the late 1990s. In 1997 the Irish government launched a IR£250 million Education Technology Investment Fund, aimed at modernising the infrastructure of third level colleges, developing new courses to meet skills shortages, and promoting the innovation and research required to maintain and expand economic growth.

In recent years there has been a very large expansion of government research budgets in the South, signalled by the provision of IR£1.2 billion for research, technology, development and innovation under the 1999 National Development Plan. The two largest

research programmes which have emerged from the NDP are administered by the Higher Education Authority (IR£550m) and the new Science Foundation Ireland (IR£560m).

The HEA's Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) has allocated approximately €600 million since 1999 over three cycles. It is aimed at developing the research capacity (infrastructure and personnel) of universities and institutes of technology, enhancing the relevance of graduate output and skills, and enabling interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research programmes (so as to build up critical mass). Thus funding is provided for capital infrastructure, research personnel and research programmes. Third level institutions make bids for the funding, based on the development of a strategic research plan for their institution, rather than individual researchers or research teams applying. A large proportion of the funding to date has gone to the physical establishment of research centres in the third level institutions, with funding also being provided for research programmes and personnel.

Around €600 million in research funding will also be allocated in the next five years by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), an agency of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. This funding will be allocated for research in the two nationally identified strategic growth areas of biotechnology and information and communications technologies. The main mechanism for distribution will be through programmes targeted at research teams led by principal investigators. SFI also funds research centres/units in third level institutions with a prerequisite that the centres have a partnership with industry.

Over the period 2000-2006, €38 million is being allocated under the National Development Plan to support research capacity building projects in the institutes of technology.

Smaller amounts of research funding is also allocated to individual researchers by the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology and the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (both of which are funded by the Department of Education and Science). The Health Research Board, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the Marine Institute, Enterprise Ireland and the Environmental Protection Agency also allocate funding for research in their specialist areas of interest.

Institutes of Technology

There are 14 institutes of technology, most of which grew out of the regional technical colleges (RTCs) established in the 1970s. They emphasise technological and vocational education and provide a range of courses ranging from craft and apprenticeship programmes, through two and three year certificate and diploma courses to degree programmes in the applied areas of engineering, science, business studies and humanities, and some taught masters and postgraduate diplomas. They also play an important role in regional economic development by providing part-time day and evening programmes, and skills upgrading courses, for people at work. The role of the RTCs, which were upgraded to institutes of technology (ITs) in 1994, in providing qualified technicians for industry has been recognised as a key factor in attracting foreign companies to locate in Ireland during the economic boom period of the past decade.

The largest of the ITs is the multi-campus Dublin Institute of Technology (which has a separate legislative remit) with 20,000 full-time and part-time students. It offers a full range of courses including degree and postgraduate programmes.

The remaining 13 institutes of technology are at Athlone, Blanchardstown, Carlow, Cork, Dun Laoghaire, Dundalk, Galway/Castlebar, Letterkenny, Limerick, Sligo, Tallaght, Tralee and Waterford and between them cater for around 55,500 full-time and part-time students. Although their concentration is on certificate and diploma work, the majority of these courses can lead to 'add on' degrees. The institutes also offer a range of 'ab initio' degrees and, in most cases, postgraduate courses. Research has shown that students at ITs are drawn from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds, with a greater representation of students from non-professional and non-managerial backgrounds. However more IT students work part-time than university students, one factor in the ITs' higher 'drop out' rate.

The amount spent in capital and current funding on the institutes of technology by the Department of Education and Science has risen considerably from around €161 million (IR£127 million) in 1993 to around €540 million (IR£ 427 million) in 2001-2002. The recurrent income of individual institutes in 1999 ranged from over IR£79 million for Dublin Institute of Technology to IR£4.75 million for Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.

In 1994 Dublin IT was given full qualification awarding powers, while the other institutes of technology had their awards granted by the National Council for Education Awards. In 2001, under new legislation, this function was transferred to the Higher Education and Training Awards Council.

Further Education

Further and continuing education in the South has traditionally largely been organised by the county and city Vocational Education Committees (VECs), elected by local authorities under legislation in the 1930s to provide vocational and technical education.

Apart from certificate and diploma courses provided by the Institutes of Technology, the principal further education programmes for young people are Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. These are provided, mainly in VEC colleges and schools, to students who have finished senior cycle of secondary education. They are aimed at providing skills to meet the needs of the economy and to equip young people with the vocational and technological skills necessary for employment and progression to continuing education and training. Around 25,700 young people are currently taking PLC courses.

There are a wide range of other further education initiatives, mainly aimed at 16-25 year olds: apprenticeship courses; Youthreach programmes for early school leavers; Community Training workshops for young people with poor educational attainments; Travellers Training Centres and the Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme for unemployed people over 21.

Structural and funding comparisons with Northern Ireland are difficult because in the South further education provision shades into adult education provision, and a significant minority part of it is provided by informal (e.g. community-based) organisations. The Department of Education and Science allocated over €150 million for further and adult education in 2001, most of which went to financing the programmes listed above, and to grants for non-statutory adult education and adult literacy organisations. This sum does not include the salaries of teachers in VEC schools and colleges. Most adult and continuing education in the South is provided on a fee-paying basis.

3. NORTH-SOUTH CO-OPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

North-South co-operation in the third level sector is not a new idea. As long ago as 1959 the students were leading the way with the foundation of the Union of Students in Ireland with close links with the UK National Union of Students. These links were formalised in 1972, so that students in Northern Ireland are now members of both bodies. This unusual intersection of two national student bodies made NUS-USI the largest consortium of student organisations in Europe.

In the early 1980s the Northern Ireland Economic Council and the National Economic and Social Council commissioned Professor Gareth Williams of the University of Lancaster to “review the complementarity of third-level education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the scope for mutually beneficial co-operation.” The 1985 Williams Report noted that in international terms the two systems of higher education in Ireland were small and that small systems were under an obligation to encourage contact and co-operation and to avoid parochialism.

Williams proposed a North-South higher education liaison committee to advise the two governments on the potential for cross-border co-operation. He also suggested greater collaboration in distance learning and in taking advantage of opportunities for economies of scale in the purchase of expensive equipment. In the Derry-Downal region, in particular, he suggested that the range of co-operation could be extensive.

Professor Robert Osborne of the University of Ulster has noted in a recent book that it is “difficult to trace specific actions resulting from the Williams report” (*Higher Education in Ireland, North and South, 1996*). There were developments in other areas in the mid-1990s, however, with increased student flows to the North from the South caused by the ‘no fee’ regime in Northern universities at the time. This reached its peak in 1994-95, when 17% of the University of Ulster’s students were from the Republic. With the introduction of undergraduate fees in the UK, and the ending of these fees in the Republic, this flow has reduced in recent years.

North-South university research collaboration remains at a relatively low level: writing in the mid-1990s, Osborne estimated that it was not much greater than when Williams had examined it a decade earlier. Since the mid-1990s, several major research projects between Northern and Southern universities have been initiated: e.g. the Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (UU Coleraine, TCD and UCC) and the super computer project between TCD and Queen’s University Belfast.

Co-operation between the nine universities on the island in non-research areas – apart from a significant exchange of external examiners – is not a major element in their work. The Conference of University Rectors in Ireland (formed as an informal grouping of the island’s university heads in 1992) took on a full-time officer in 1999 to try to improve co-operation, but this post has now been discontinued.

Since the 1998 Belfast Agreement, there has been a revival of interest in cross-border co-operation in higher education (although the sector is not one of the areas designated for co-operation and implementation in that agreement). In a paper to the 1998 Standing Conference for North-South Co-operation in Further and Higher Education, Professor Osborne and Professor Patrick Clancy of UCD suggested that the nine university heads should develop a system of more structured North-South student exchanges. This might involve a common system of credit accumulation and transfer throughout the island, so

that students could spend a semester or year at an institution across the border as part of their degree. There could be postgraduate bursaries specifically aimed at cross-border projects, and pump-priming money from the two governments could be made available to develop research ideas through cross-border partnerships.

In September 1999, with support from the Departments of Education, North and South, the Centre for Cross Border Studies was set up in Armagh with funding from the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme. It is a partnership between Queen's University Belfast, Dublin City University and the Workers Educational Association (N. Ireland). It has completed cross-border research studies in the areas of disadvantage in education, distance education, school and youth exchanges, telecommunications, health services, EU funding programmes, local government links, mental health promotion, labour mobility, business research, local history societies and animal health. It has also organised 20 cross-border conferences and study days in subjects ranging from tourism to citizenship education, agriculture to ICT, the North-South Consultative Forum to the euro.

In May 2000 teacher educators from universities, colleges of education and other agencies throughout the island held a highly successful conference in Belfast out of which came a proposal for a Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South. In 2002 the Departments of Education, North and South, provided funding for this new body's first two years of operations.

4. A CONTEXT AND FOUR CONFERENCE THEMES

Taken largely from 'The University Challenged: A Review of International Trends and Issues with particular reference to Ireland' (2001) by Malcolm Skilbeck. This report dealt exclusively with universities in the Republic, but most of the questions it raised have a similar relevance to universities in Northern Ireland.

The international context

Globalisation and the ICT revolution are presenting universities in Ireland and elsewhere with challenges which could see them shaping and managing the future and thus maintaining their control of the higher education agenda, but could equally see them experiencing "a steady and inexorable decline and loss of authority, influence and resources."

"These challenges facing universities should be seen in a context where there are already – on the horizon – different ways of addressing higher education and research roles than by simply augmenting and concentrating resources in universities. Alternatives already exist, internationally, for carrying out each and every one of the main functions traditionally performed by universities:

Teaching is increasingly being delivered on-line and by correspondence, internationally by private providers and consortia of prominent universities; private, off- and on-campus universities are demonstrating a capacity to sectionalise the market and provide courses at lower costs than public providers.

Research, including basic research, is being and can be carried out by specialised research institutes, both independently and from government and industry bases.

Information from traditional repositories and sources, notably libraries, is becoming available on-line, and there will be as a result access by students and staff to a much larger array than any single institution can provide.

Private firms and consultancy groups, including teams of academics, are providing services on a contractual basis comparable to those available within universities (e.g. course units, programme evaluation, installing specialist systems) and on a competitive cost basis.” (p. 133)

A collaborative and outward-looking sector?

1. Is there still too little acknowledgement in Irish higher education of the challenges from the changing international environment?

Skilbeck says the 1995 report of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education (in the Republic) “made little acknowledgement of the challenges from the changing international environment: there is still the sense of a largely self-contained system of Irish higher education even though the reality is in fact different.” (p. 137)

2. In response to the competitive challenges posed by this international environment, should the Irish universities systematically put forward their capabilities and perspectives as a collective?

“It is not evident that Irish universities have as yet, and on the basis of carefully prepared strategies, sufficiently mobilised themselves either individually or collectively to achieve maximum impact.”

For example, great concern was expressed in the South at the prospect of large increases in research funding by-passing the universities through the establishment of dedicated ‘stand alone’ research centres. “If, as the universities believe, this could lead to a wasteful duplication of infrastructure and, with destructive competition for scarce human resources, be harmful not only to the universities but to the national research endeavour, has a system-wide, collaborative strategy for the future of research been initiated by the universities acting in unison?” (p. 135)

3. Does international practice recommend that on a small island like Ireland – with nine relatively small universities – there should be a higher level of inter-university co-operation and avoidance of duplication of provision?

“Ireland has a relatively small population, not so many universities and they are not large by international standards. Is this scale an advantage or a weakness? That depends on how their governing bodies and presidents seek to position their institutions, either as minor players in a big league, or as a well-coordinated system of both co-operating and competing institutions dedicated to achieving a frontier position, benchmarking themselves according to key, selected strengths, growth points, and weaknesses which they determine to eliminate. Such a successful demonstration would be of great interest internationally as universities everywhere struggle against

mounting challenges to determine their own futures”. (p. 146-7)

In his Armagh conference paper, Professor Skilbeck will state his belief that the universities in Ireland also have a “moral responsibility to show leadership” in cross-border dialogue and to see North-South co-operation “not as incidental, but as one of their primary responsibilities.”

“The universities are very well placed to become leaders in the cross-border dialogue that is so badly needed as a counter-balance to the tensions and violence in other spheres”, he will say. “They need to report and communicate to a wider public what they are doing in this regard, to undertake and publicise new initiatives, and to establish as part of their internal organisation mechanisms and procedures to facilitate and extend cross-border co-operation. This is a challenge which should draw in university governing bodies, presidents and vice-chancellors and their deputies, deans, senior administrators, and heads of department. It is pre-eminently a leadership issue with rich opportunities for the taking.”

An entrepreneurial sector?

1. Is it time for Irish universities to become more entrepreneurial and to seek a greater proportion of their funding from non-state sources?

For example, can Irish universities come together “to co-operate in selling such services as undergraduate and postgraduate places and consultancies on the global market, as Australia, Japan, Switzerland and the UK among others now do so successfully and other countries are actively planning to do? Is the pressure of diminishing levels of unit cost funding encouraging the universities to greatly increase the proportion of non-formula-funded resources – as happened in Australia, the UK and the USA? Are there opportunities for the universities, together with the institutes of technology, to provide large-scale professional upgrading programmes – for engineers, systems analysts, designers, accountants, lawyers, doctors, public servants, and the staff of large enterprises? And, if so, are there incentives, including incentives for university staff, to take up these opportunities?” (p. 147)

2. Can Irish universities exploit to a greater extent the advantages of having the language of universal currency, English, as their language?

This has proved to be a highly exploitable asset in the Irish economic boom of recent years. “It is a major selling point in the marketing strategy of countries which have greatly increased out-of-country enrolments. But, of itself, it is not sufficient. Universities seeking to greatly expand fee-paying enrolments from abroad need to ensure that there are very good programmes in language tuition, tutorial support, reasonably priced housing, a generally welcoming atmosphere, and the provision of high demand courses well-backed with state-of-the-art facilities. They need to develop expert knowledge of the market and of the communities from which the students might come. These require long-term planning, investment strategies, and an institution-wide commitment which can amount to a very substantial change of direction.” (p. 148)

3. Should the universities be doing more to strengthen their partnerships with industry and community organisations?

Building on existing industry partnerships, campus companies and other outreach work, “there is a need for universities to demonstrate a greater responsiveness to the rapidly changing economic environment through outreach schemes in all subjects and fields of study – and not only those with obvious business/employment links. These could include work and community experience as a normal component of all degree programmes; closer integration of university career guidance and community liaison programmes into academic work; business-university fora; sponsorship by industry of an even wider range of study programmes and studentships including those in humanities and social sciences; training in the establishment and operation of small businesses; and more prominence in reporting and public communication of those socio-economic dimensions of university activities.” (p. 143)

A sector committed to lifelong learning and widening access?

1. Have Irish universities sufficiently taken on the challenge posed by the future development of higher education as an integral part of lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning is at the core of contemporary education policies in most economically advanced countries. “Few universities, anywhere, have taken the measure of this challenge, which goes far beyond adult and continuing education programmes being a kind of add-on.” (p. 136)

2. Are Irish universities doing enough to bring about a greater measure of equity, openness and flexibility regarding routes and access into higher education for school leavers and others, particularly those from disadvantaged groups?

Equity (let alone equality) of access to higher education is still an ideal to be realised, despite significant improvements in recent decades. Third level education in Ireland, North and South, remains largely the preserve of the middle and upper classes, as recent surveys by the *Irish Times* have once again shown.

Given the diverse groups of students in the modern age, including those disadvantaged groups under-represented in higher education, there is a need for reforms in line with “the numerous initiatives internationally to broaden access, increase flexibility of study routes and establish more student-centred programmes to facilitate educational opportunity.” (p. 140) There is a need for close co-ordination between Irish universities to incorporate new forms of credit accumulation and transfer.

“For the universities the challenge now is to show a readiness to work collectively as a system...Targets should include the introduction of procedures for more systematic recognition of prior learning; credit transfer; joint (cross-sectoral) study programmes; part-time study including work and home-based study by distance education; further diversifying curricula, teaching and assessment procedures; and developing on-line learning on a national, co-operative basis.” (p. 143)

3. Are the challenges posed by a declining number of school-leavers (particularly in the South) being faced up to? Are enough mature students and part-timers entering higher education?

The South anticipates a drop of 36% in school leaver numbers from 1998-2012. This challenge “should not become a battle among institutions for a diminished supply but is instead a definite opportunity to increase the proportion of school leavers entering tertiary education end-on, but not necessarily as full-time students; diversify study routes into tertiary education; increase opportunities for open and flexible learning for adults; increase the recruitment of fee-paying overseas students; achieve a better internal balance of numbers and resources within institutions e.g. by increasing the numbers of postgraduate students and those on post-experience professional programmes.” (p. 142-143)

The South’s “low ranking among OECD countries in respect of mature age students’ participation in higher education has been identified as a significant weakness both on economic and equity grounds. This is now a more pressing concern with recent shortages in the labour market of highly trained personnel and the need for continuing upgrading of knowledge and expertise...There is a need for greater openness, flexibility and innovativeness if suitable conditions are to be established to attract mature and part-time students and suitable programmes of study provided for them.” (p. 139)

A sector offering high performance and high quality?

1. What is the value of a national and publicly transparent approach to evaluating universities’ performance?

The UK has such a system. In the South the 1997 Universities Act places the onus on the universities themselves to undertake self-evaluation. “A more comprehensive, systematic approach covering the whole sector and resulting in published and widely available overall evaluative reports would be of great value.” (p. 143-144)

2. Is one of the most significant issues facing Irish universities that of preparing academic staff for the challenges of growth, diversity, technology-based training, applied scholarship and international competition?

“There are very serious challenges to appoint new staff for a broad range of entrepreneurial as well as academic roles and to provide professional development opportunities for the present staffs of the institutions. Growth of student numbers, greater diversity – including equity groups and mature age students with whose educational needs many teachers may have little experience – and the spread of technology-based learning pose considerable challenges that will all have to be met in positive ways. Good teaching needs encouragement and appreciation including fuller recognition in recruitment and promotion procedures. The examination-bound conventions of the ‘right answer’ and the fostering thereby of rote learning have long been signalled as potential weaknesses. They become all the greater in a modern society where emphasis is given to problem-solving, team work, oral communication, the search for information from multiple sources and self- and group-directed initiative.” (p. 144-145)

3. Would joint studies into good practice in academic staff development on the island of Ireland be a good initial North-South higher education co-operation project?

Since there does not appear to be an established policy framework in Ireland to address these and related needs, a first step might be to initiate at the national (or islandwide) level some studies of good practice, which could lead to a policy debate. But should the universities wait for this or should they not rather themselves initiate a collective inquiry to pool experience, pinpoint gaps and indicate what they perceive to be needs? A process of this nature, a practical demonstration in cross-institutional co-operation, would be an immediate contribution to the more lengthy procedures required for national (or islandwide) level policies. Ireland could play a valuable role in this regard – setting a range of closely coupled improvement targets and treating staff development as the key strategy to achieve them. (p. 145)

September 2002

APPENDIX 2:

Conference Programme

Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education Armagh City Hotel – 10 & 11 October 2002

Thursday 10th October

Fisher Suite, Armagh City Hotel

Conference chairperson: **Olivia O’Leary**

1.45pm Registration and refreshments

2.30 Official opening by the **Minister for Employment and Learning, Ms Carmel Hanna MLA** and the **Minister for Education and Science, Mr Noel Dempsey TD** introduced by **Professor Gerry McKenna**, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ulster

3.00 **Sir Howard Newby**, Chief Executive, Higher Education Funding Council for England
Higher Education in the 21st century: An English Perspective

3.30 **Keynote speaker:**
Professor Malcolm Skilbeck
(author of ‘The University Challenged: A Review of International Trends with particular reference to Ireland’)
Ireland as a Centre of Excellence in Third Level Education: Challenges for the Universities

4.15 Responder: **Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh**, National University of Ireland, Galway

4.30 Refreshments

5.00 Questions and Discussion
- 6.00

7.30 Drinks reception
(sponsored by Armagh City Hotel)

8.00 Conference dinner
Speaker: **Ms Jackie Harrison**, Director of Social Policy, Irish Business and Employers Confederation.

Friday 11th October

- 9.30 **Mr Richard Riley**, former US Secretary of Education and former Governor of South Carolina
American Higher Education in a Diverse World
- 10.00 **Mr Nikolaus van der Pas**, Director General, Education and Culture, European Commission
Higher Education: the European Dimension – and Beyond
- 10.30 Refreshments
- 11.00 Four workshops, chaired by:
Dr Don Thornhill, Chairman, Higher Education Authority, Dublin
Professor John Coolahan, Professor of Education, National University of Ireland, Maynooth
Professor Fabian Monds, Chairman, Invest Northern Ireland
Ms Brenda McLaughlin, Pro-Chancellor, Queen’s University Belfast
- 12.30 Lunch
- 1.45 Panel Discussion, chaired by **Dr Art Cosgrove**, President, National University of Ireland, Dublin, with:
Professor Áine Hyland, Vice-President, National University of Ireland, Cork
Professor Robert Osborne, Professor of Applied Social Studies, University of Ulster, Jordanstown
Dr Mary Meaney, Director, Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
Dr Matthew Quinn, Executive Director, Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Lansdowne, Virginia, and former President, Carroll College, Helena, Montana, USA
- 3.15 Closing remarks by **Professor Gerry McCormac**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Queen’s University Belfast
- 3.30 CLOSE OF CONFERENCE

APPENDIX 3:

Biographies of Speakers

Professor Malcolm Skilbeck is a former Deputy Director for Education at the OECD and a world authority on education. He has published many articles, books and reports on curriculum theory and development, secondary and tertiary education, teacher education, educational policy and youth training. Among other posts he has held have been as Director of the Curriculum Development Centre in his native Australia, Director of Studies of the Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations in England and Wales, and Vice-Chancellor Deakin University. He is author of the influential report 'Industry-university partnerships in the curriculum: trends and developments in OECD countries' (1996).

Professor Sir Howard Newby is Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Before that he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southampton, Chairman and Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council, and Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex. In 2001 he completed a two-year term as President of Universities UK, the UK body which represents the university sector.

Mr Richard Riley was US Secretary of Education in President Clinton's two administrations, and before that Governor of South Carolina for an unprecedented two terms. The Christian Science Monitor has called him "one of the great statesmen of education in this century". He was particularly noted for his initiatives to help educationally disadvantaged young people. Since leaving office in 2001, he has rejoined his law firm and has been appointed Distinguished Professor at Furman University and the University of South Carolina.

Mr Nikolaus van der Pas is currently Director-General for Education and Culture in the European Commission. He has been working in the Commission for 35 years. His previous posts have included that of Spokesman of the Commission and its President, Jacques Santer; responsibility for relations with the Newly Independent States (formerly the Soviet Union); and negotiator for the Commission during the Swedish accession negotiations.

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh is a professor in the Department of History at National University of Ireland Galway. He has been visiting professor at universities in the USA and Canada. His historical publications have been mainly in 19th and 20th century Irish and British history, but he has also published and broadcast on aspects of Irish public policy, including education.

Professor Áine Hyland is Vice-President of University College Cork and Professor of Education. She has been involved in teacher education at primary and second-level for over 20 years. She has written extensively on multiple intelligences, curriculum and assessment in Ireland, educational disadvantage and children at risk, and was Chairperson of the Department of Education and Science's Commission on the Points System.

Ms Jackie Harrison is Director of Social Policy with the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and special adviser to the Tanaiste, Ms Mary Harney TD, when she was Minister in charge of environmental protection. She is a board member of InterTradeIreland.

Professor Robert Osborne is Professor of Applied Social Studies at the University of Ulster and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Higher Education (a joint centre of the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast). His recent publications include *Higher Education in Ireland: North and South*. He has just completed a study of graduate careers four years after graduation, and an evaluation of the Higher Education Authority's Targeted Initiative on Widening Access.

Dr Mary Meaney is Director of the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown in west Dublin. She was formerly Registrar at the IT Blanchardstown, and a lecturer in the School of Chemical Sciences and Assistant Registrar at Dublin City University.

Dr Matthew J Quinn is the founding Executive Director of the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation in Lansdowne, Virginia, which provides an extensive range of scholarships for graduate and undergraduate students and also works with gifted pupils at primary level. He was previously President of Carroll College, Helena, Montana for 11 years and Vice-President for academic affairs at St Joseph's University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Biographies of Chairpersons

Ms Olivia O'Leary (conference chairperson) is a BBC and RTE broadcaster and journalist. Currently she presents BBC Radio 4's Sony award-winning programme 'Between Ourselves'.

Professor Gerry McKenna is Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Ulster. He is a former Pro-Vice-Chancellor for research, Dean of Science, and leader of the university's biomedical sciences research team which won the highest award for that subject in the 1996 UK Research Assessment Exercise.

Dr Art Cosgrove is President of the National University of Ireland, Dublin. He began his career as a lecturer in medieval history at University College Dublin.

Dr Don Thornhill is Chairman of the Republic's Higher Education Authority and a former Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science.

Professor John Coolahan is Professor of Education at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He has headed numerous Irish Government-led education consultations (including the 1993 National Education Convention) and is currently Vice-President of the Groupe de Reflexion advising the European Commission on future education and training policy.

Professor Fabian Monds is Chairman of Invest Northern Ireland, the economic development agency, and BBC National Governor for Northern Ireland. He was formerly Provost of Magee College and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for planning in the University of Ulster.

Ms Brenda McLaughlin is Pro-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, chair of its Women's Forum, and is also the current Northern Ireland Chair of Opportunity Now, the campaign seeking to promote the role of women in the workplace.

Professor Gerry McCormac is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast. He is the former head of the university's School of Archaeology and Palaeoecology.

APPENDIX 4:

Conference Participants

Andrews Harriet Ms	Careers Adviser	Dundalk Institute of Technology
Archibald Ben Mr	NI Convenor	NUS-USI
Bailey Mark Prof		Armagh Observatory
Barcroft Vanessa Ms		Policy and Planning Division, Enterprise Ireland
Barrett Elaine Ms		Armagh Campus, Queen's University Belfast
Barry Niall Mr		An Gaeláras Ltd, Derry
Bell Ken Prof	Pro-Vice-Chancellor	Students and Learning, Queen's University Belfast
Carmody Ruth Ms	Principal Officer	Higher Education Section, Department of Education and Science
Carr Alan Mr	Chairman	AUT (NI) Committee
Carroll Gerry Mr	Head of Development	Dundalk Institute of Technology
Chambers Bill Prof		Liverpool Hope University College
Chambers Celia Ms		Department for Employment and Learning
Clancy Patrick Prof	Dean	Philosophy and Sociology, University College Dublin
Clarke Patricia Dr	Research Officer	Centre for Cross Border Studies
Collins Colum Dr	Director	Institute of Technology Tallaght
Coolahan John Prof	Professor of Education	Education Department, NUI Maynooth
Corbett Julie Dr	Chief Executive	NI Business Education Partnership
Cosgrove Art Dr	President	University College Dublin
Cremin Peadar Dr	President	Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
Cunnane Vincent Prof	Dean of Research	University of Limerick
Davison Robson Dr	Deputy Secretary	Department for Employment and Learning
Delany Ed Dr		Edward Delany & Associates, Meath
Dempsey TD Noel Mr	Minister	Department of Education and Science
Devlin Kate Ms		St Patrick's Boys Academy, Dungannon, Co Tyrone
Donaghy John Mr	Political Adviser	Minister Hanna's Office, Department for Employment and Learning
Dowling Pat Mr		Department of Education and Science
Downer Roger G.H. Prof	President	University of Limerick
Elliott Jean Ms		Aughnacloy Primary School, Co Tyrone
Everett Brian Mr	Assistant General Secretary	AUT (Regional)
Ewart Wallace Prof		University of Ulster
Fee J P H Prof		Department of Anaesthetics, Queen's University Belfast
Finn Peter Mr		St Mary's University College, Belfast
Fraser Tom Prof	Provost	University of Ulster at Magee
Friel Sarah Ms	Assistant Economic Development Officer	Derry City Council
Gallagher Frank Mr	Education Sector Officer	North South Ministerial Council
Gallagher Peter Mr	Director	North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, Derry
Gardner John Prof	Dean	Faculty of Legal, Social and Educational Sciences, Queen's University Belfast
Gibson Chris Dr	Chairman	Centre for Cross Border Studies
Halley Robin Mr	Director	International Office, Queen's University Belfast
Hamilton Rosemary Dr	Director	The Open University in Ireland
Hanna MLA Carmel Ms	Minister	Department for Employment and Learning
Hannigan Paul Mr	Director	Letterkenny Institute of Technology
Harrison Jackie Ms	Director of Social Policy	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
Hegarty John Dr	Provost	Trinity College Dublin
Henry Brian Mr	Deputy Director	Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education
Hesketh Tom Dr	Director	Regional Training Unit, Belfast
Hopkins Tony Mr	Chairman	Northern Ireland Higher Education Council
Houston Melanie Ms		Ulster Teachers' Union
Hughes Mairéad Ms	Administrator	Centre for Cross Border Studies
Hunter Lucy Ms	Head of Division	Higher Education Branch, The Scottish Executive
Hyland Áine Prof	Vice-President	Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department
		University College Cork

Imam Zak Mr	Research Officer	Centre for Cross Border Studies
Jay Richard Mr	Academic Director	Armagh Campus, Queen's University Belfast
Judge Maxine Ms	Co-ordinator	European Studies Northern Ireland, Southern Education and Library Board
Lacey Ann Marie Ms	Principal	St Aidan's Comprehensive School, Cootehill, Co Cavan
Leahy Brendan Rev		Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin
Lee Allister Mr	Administrator	Armagh Campus, Queen's University Belfast
Leitch Ruth Ms	Head of School	Graduate School of Education, Queen's University Belfast
Little Paul Mr	Director	Armagh College of Further and Higher Education
MacMenamin Peter Mr	Deputy General Secretary	Teachers Union of Ireland
Maguire Bryan Dr	Development Officer	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Martin Maeve Dr	Senior Lecturer	Education Department, NUI Maynooth
Matchett Marion Ms	Chief Inspector	Education and Training Inspectorate, Department of Education
McAuley David Mr		Higher Education and Student Support, Department for Employment and Learning
McCormac Gerry Prof	Pro-Vice-Chancellor	Community and Communications, Queen's University Belfast
McCullagh Alison Ms		Armagh Campus, Queen's University Belfast
McDermott Louise Ms		The Registry, Dublin City University
McDermott Patrick Mr		President's Office, Dublin City University
McDonagh Patrick Mr	Assistant Secretary General	Department of Education and Science
McGarry Joseph Mr	Secretary General	Council of Directors of Institutes of Technology
McGrath Michael Mr	Director	Conference of Heads of Irish Universities
McGuinness MP MLA Martin Mr	Minister	Department of Education
McKenna Gerry Prof	President and Vice-Chancellor	University of Ulster
McLaughlin Brenda Ms	Pro-Chancellor	Queen's University Belfast
Meaney Mary Dr	Director	Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
Meehan Elizabeth Prof	Director	Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research, Queen's University Belfast
Monds Fabian Prof	Chairman	Invest Northern Ireland
Moran Anne Prof	Professor of Education & Dean of Social Sciences	School of Education, University of Ulster at Jordanstown
Mulcahy Carmel Ms	Senior Researcher	School of Education Studies, Dublin City University
Murphy Anna Dr	Head of Framework Development	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Murphy Colette Dr	Head of External Relations and Publicity	Graduate School of Education, Queen's University Belfast
Murphy Mike Dr	Director	Faculty of Engineering, Dublin Institute of Technology
Neupert Fiona Ms	Private Secretary	Minister Hanna's Office, Department for Employment and Learning
Newby Howard Sir	Chief Executive	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Newsom Trevor Mr	Director	Research and Regional Services, Queen's University Belfast
Ni Mhaolrúnaigh Siobhán Dr		School of Nursing, Dublin City University
Nolan Paul Mr	Director	Institute of Lifelong Learning, Queen's University Belfast
Nolan Sean Rev		Aughnacloy/Truagh European Studies Schools Project
O'Byrne Dermot Mr		FÁS Training and Employment Authority
Ó Catháin Ciarán Prof	Director	Athlone Institute of Technology
O'Connor Tim Mr	Joint Secretary	North South Ministerial Council
O'Flanagan Margaret Ms	Education & Management Analysis Officer	Dublin City University
Ó Foghlú Seán Mr	Chief Executive Officer	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
Ó hÉalaithe Tadhg Mr	Director of Corporate Services	Higher Education Training and Awards Council
Ó hÉara Gearóid Cllr	Joint Chair	Higher and Further Education Partnership, Derry City Council
O'Leary Olivia Ms		Conference Chairperson
O'Mahony Anne Ms	Assistant Principal Officer	International Section, Department of Education and Science
O'Neill Peter Mr	Manager	NUS-USI
Ó Tuathaigh Gearóid Prof	Vice President	Development and External Affairs, NUI Galway
Osborne Robert Prof.	Professor of Applied Social Studies	University of Ulster at Jordanstown
Parsons Michael Mr	Principal	Portlaoise Vocational School, Co Laois
Pollak Andy Mr	Director	Centre for Cross Border Studies
Pritchard Ruth Ms		Office of the Vice President for Research, Dublin City University

Quinn Matthew Dr	Executive Director	Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Lansdowne, Virginia, USA
Quinn Mrs		
Rees Nicholas Prof		University of Limerick
Reynolds Margaret Dr		St Mary's University College, Belfast
Riley Richard Mr	Former US Secretary of Education	
Riley Tunky Mrs		
Roe Gill Ms	Director of Programmes	International Education Board - Ireland
Shanahan Con Mr	Regional Director	FÁS - Training and Employment Authority
Sheehy P J Mr	President	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
Skilbeck Malcolm Prof		
Sloan Gary Mr		The Open University in Ireland
Smith Alan Prof	UNESCO Chair	School of Education, University of Ulster at Coleraine
Smyth Peter Dr	Joint Secretary	North South Ministerial Council
Smyth W J Dr	President	NUI Maynooth
Sullivan Kevin Mr		
Tate Billy Mr	Principal	Aughnacloy Primary School, Co Tyrone
Thornhill Don Dr	Chairman	Higher Education Authority
Trant Mary-Liz Dr	Development Officer	Further Education and Training Awards Council
Travers Pauric Dr	President	St Patrick's College, Dublin
van der Pas Nikolaus Mr	Director General	Education and Culture, European Commission
von Prondzynski Ferdinand Prof	President	Dublin City University
Walshe John Mr	Education Editor	Irish Independent
Warleigh Alex Dr	Deputy Director	Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research, Queen's University Belfast
Wrixon Gerard Prof	President	University College Cork