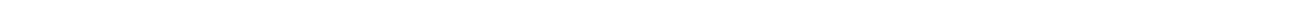


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FOREWORD

On behalf of EURES Cross Border Partnership, I am pleased to introduce this report titled “A study of obstacles to cross-border undergraduate education” based on research undertaken at the request of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council (JBC).

Cross border mobility of undergraduates is an important component in both the development of the all-island economy and the on-going peace process. The very low number of undergraduates registering for courses in the other jurisdiction is a cause for concern.

Enrolment figures indicate that Northern students represent only 1% of the Republic of Ireland’s undergraduate population at Higher Education Authority (HEA) funded universities while the corresponding figure for Southern students in Northern Ireland higher education institutions is just 4.4%. As a result there is very limited cross-fertilisation in terms of education opportunity taking place between the two jurisdictions.

A number of obstacles to (and factors limiting) cross-border undergraduate mobility in each direction are identified in the report. These include a lack of information about universities and institutes of technology in the other jurisdiction; the change in the equivalences between A level and Leaving Certificate grades and unfamiliarity with the respective Central Admissions Office (CAO) and Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application processes.

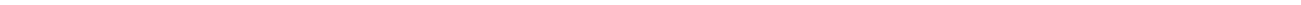
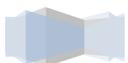
The introduction of large university tuition fees in English and Wales universities in the academic year 2012-2013 will also have implications for universities and undergraduates.

Planning for higher education on the island of Ireland also needs to take account of future demographics with an expected fall in the number of 18 year olds in Northern Ireland and the high birth rates in the South feeding into higher demand for education at all levels.

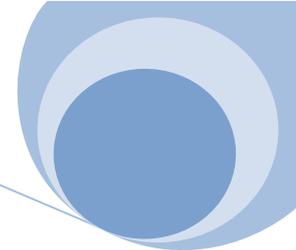
The EURES Cross Border Partnership is happy to be assisting in making a significant contribution to our understanding of the obstacles to cross-border undergraduate mobility. Addressing these obstacles will assist in taking the island to the next stage of economic development.

Pauline Millar
Chairperson, EURES Cross Border Partnership Steering Committee





1. INTRODUCTION



1. Terms of Reference

This study will examine and analyse the current levels and trends in undergraduate mobility between higher education institutions i

n Ireland and Northern Ireland, and the obstacles to that mobility. The study's specific terms of reference are as follow:

- a. Consider the **level of mobility** – i.e. examine the current level and trends in the number of undergraduates crossing the border to undertake study in higher education institutions in the other Irish jurisdiction.
- b. Consider the **obstacles** – i.e. examine the obstacles to cross-border mobility e.g. entry requirements; different fee structures; attitudinal and perception issues etc. Other obstacles that the researchers may become aware of in the course of the study should also be considered.
- c. Present **recommendations** to address/remove/reduce these obstacles and promote greater levels of cross-border mobility of undergraduates.

2. Introduction to university students' situation in Northern Ireland (including fees and grants)

In 2009/10 there were nearly 38,500 full-time and part-time undergraduates attending Northern Ireland's four higher education institutions: Queen's University Belfast, University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College (the last two are Queen's University-associated colleges largely composed of teacher education students). [Another 12,000 were doing higher education courses – including degrees, certificates and diplomas – at NI's five regional education colleges, the merged former further and higher education colleges].

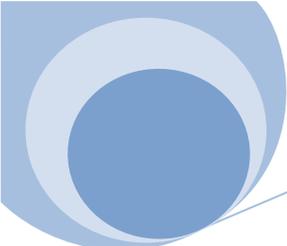
The situation of university students in Northern Ireland is unique among the regions of the United Kingdom in at least three ways germane to this study:

- It has the highest participation rate in the UK regions for students from lower socio-economic groups (in 2008-09 nearly 41.7% of NI's full-time degree entrants were from socio-economic groups 4-7, compared to 32.4% in England and 28.2% in Scotland)
- A very high proportion of NI-domiciled students (31%) study in England, Scotland and Wales
- A very low proportion of students at NI universities (2%) are from the rest of the UK.

The Northern Ireland university system faces a number of challenges in the coming years. Among these are:

- Demographic changes, with the number of 18 year olds forecast to fall by around 15% over the next 10 years, with a consequent impact on undergraduate numbers and finance.ⁱ This, in itself, could provide opportunities for all-Ireland cooperation in the future, as the Republic of Ireland returns to a situation comparable to the 1980s with high undergraduate demand and not enough higher education places at a time when there is spare capacity in the Northern system (*see Williams Report reference in Historical Background below*).
- Following the UK Government's November 2010 decision to raise undergraduate fees (currently £3,290 per annum for full-time UK and EU undergraduates) in the academic year 2012-2013 to £6,000-9,000 p.a. (most English and Welsh universities have opted for the upper limit of £9,000, much to the UK Government's discomfiture), there is considerable pressure on Northern Ireland to follow suit. An *Update* to the Stuart Reportⁱⁱ on student fees in January 2011 (following on the original report in March 2010) recommended an increase in the undergraduate fee cap from the present rate to between £5,000 and £5,750. After a period of public consultation, the NI Department for Employment and Learning is expected to make a decision on this before the summer break in July 2011.





1. INTRODUCTION

The previous Minister for Employment and Learning, Danny Kennedy, appeared to indicate in March that he was in favour of a slightly lower fee rise of £4,500.

- Particularly relevant to this study is Joanne Stuart's recommendation that for all non-NI domiciled undergraduates studying at Northern Ireland higher education institutions (including those from Republic of Ireland), UK Government fee levels of £6,000-9,000 per annum should apply.

The UK Government's decision to change the balance of funding the British higher education system from 'one which is mainly funded through the public purse, to one which is mainly privately funded through an increase in student fees'ⁱⁱⁱ is a truly radical one, and will have far-reaching implications for student flows between Britain and both parts of Ireland (**see below: A Future Obstacle: Rising UK fees**). The head of Higher Education Research Associates, a Canadian HE policy research institute, has called the UK's fees rise 'the largest single increase in tuition fees anywhere in the world since records began.'^{iv}

Even with the current fee levels, Northern Ireland student debt has been rising sharply in recent years. For those who completed their degree in 2009 the average NI domiciled student debt was £9,710. For those who completed their degrees in 2010 it had increased to £12,610, a rise of nearly 30% in one year.

The Northern Ireland **student fees, grants and loans system** is a complex one. NI undergraduates currently have to pay a maximum of £3,290 in annual tuition fees and are entitled to a non means-tested loan to cover this which they will pay back when they start earning £15,000 per annum. For lower income households there is an annual maintenance grant. Students with household incomes of under £18,360 p.a. will receive a full, non-repayable government grant of £3,255 p.a. Partial grants are paid to students whose household income is between £18,360 and £38,360 p.a.^v

The Stuart Report pointed to an unfair anomaly in that NI students from households with an income of £11,805 or less are eligible for separate 'higher education bursaries' of £2,000 p.a. to study in higher education institutions in the Republic of Ireland (with a similar sliding scale for household incomes of between £11,805 and £23,605). Both the threshold and the amount for NI students studying in ROI are thus significantly lower than for NI students studying at UK higher education institutions. Northern Ireland students at TCD commented to this researcher on the difficulties facing NI students wanting to study in the South if they do not have parental financial support: this anomaly only exacerbates those difficulties (**See Annex 1: The Views of the Cross-Border Undergraduates**).

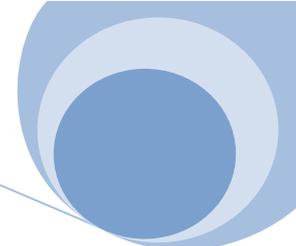
On the other hand, Northern students at Southern higher education institutions have their €1,500 registration fees (€2,000 from autumn 2011) paid by the NI regional Education and Library Boards.

The Stuart Report recommended that 'policies regarding maintenance grant and fee payment for NI students studying in the Republic of Ireland should be reviewed, as they are currently out of step with those which apply to NI students studying at HEIs in the UK'.^{vi}

3. Introduction to university students' situation in Republic of Ireland (including fees and grants)

There were nearly 77,000 full-time undergraduates in the Republic of Ireland's seven universities and four smaller higher education institutions in 2009-2010 (plus another nearly 70,000 – including those taking sub-degree certificates and diplomas – at its 14 institutes of technology). From a low base and a late start, the rate of expansion in higher education places in Ireland has consistently been among the highest of all OECD countries in recent decades.^{vii} In 1960 5% of 18 years olds went on to higher education; in 2010 the proportion was 65%.

1. INTRODUCTION



The great majority of entrants to higher education (third level education, as it is called in Ireland) are traditional school-leavers. Irish higher education students have the narrowest age range across all OECD countries.^{viii} At the same time, only 3% of undergraduate degree students were part-time in 2007-08, very low by international standards; in the two Northern Irish universities the comparable figure is currently

over 20%. This inflexibility in higher education and Ireland's poor performance in lifelong learning were among the strongest concerns voiced in the January 2011 Hunt Report, *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*.

A major resource for part-time and online students in both jurisdictions is the Open University in Ireland (with a headquarters in Belfast and an office in Dublin, and teaching staff in both) which currently has 4,286 undergraduates (by definition all part-timers) in Northern Ireland and 2,670 undergraduates in the Republic of Ireland.

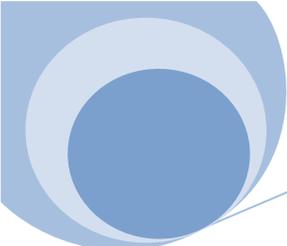
The Irish **student fees system** is unusual by international standards:

- Since 1997 there has been a system of so-called 'free fees' for all Irish and EU undergraduates in Irish higher education institutions, with the Irish exchequer paying all such fees. Successive governments since then have deemed it politically impossible to re-introduce tuition fees under that name, despite the demands of university presidents and the international consensus that university students should contribute to the cost of their own higher education, given that it will significantly increase their earning capacity once they take up employment .
- There is an annual registration fee (soon to be re-named 'student contribution fee') – currently €1,500 per annum, to be increased to €2,000 in the 2011-2012 academic year – which the Irish university presidents admit is a tuition fee under another name.
- The Hunt Report recommended 'a new form of direct student contribution based on an upfront fee with a deferred payment facility.' This is effectively the UK model. The report recommended the setting up by the Department of Education and Skills of an expert group to design an appropriate student loan system for Ireland. It also recommended a reform of the procedures for means testing students' maintenance grants, and their delivery through a single agency rather than the current cumbersome system of distributing them through County Councils and county Vocational Education Committees (this latter recommendation is beginning to be implemented).

Around one-third of undergraduates in the Republic of Ireland are currently eligible for maintenance grants, with a maximum annual grant of €3,250 for students with a family income of over €22,700, and a maximum of €6,355 for students with a family income under that level. These maintenance grants are 'portable' for undergraduates studying in Northern Ireland. The current maintenance grants system has been widely criticised, both for its inequity in not taking into account capital assets or other wealth but only income (which has prevented it being targeted at those students most in need), and for the cumbersome nature of its distribution system, through understaffed County Councils and county VECs. Irish students at Northern universities have often suffered from this system, often not receiving their maintenance grants until the second term of their year of study.

In sharp contrast to Northern Ireland, it is estimated that demand for higher education places in Ireland will rise from 42,500 new entrants in 2009 to 68,000 in 2027^{ix}. This follows from an unprecedented increase in the number of births in Ireland in recent years, which will lead to an expected rise of 12% in primary school enrolments and 7% in secondary school enrolments during the decade 2009-2019^x, with consequent impacts on higher education enrolments. Such demographic growth will put huge pressure on a government which is faced with the need to impose very large public expenditure cuts over the next three-five years.





1. INTRODUCTION

ⁱ <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp20.htm>

ⁱⁱ *Independent Review of Variable Fees and Student Finance Arrangements* (Stuart Report), March 2010, and *Update*, January 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p.27

^{iv} Quoted in Michael D'Arcy, *A Higher Education Scoping Study: Studying in a neighbouring jurisdiction – the potential impact of higher UK tuition fees on the island of Ireland*. Institute of Technology Sligo, 2011 (unpublished)

^v <http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/TuitionFeesandStudentSupportArrangements200809/UndergraduateTuitionFees200809/StudentSupport/>

^{vi} *Independent Review of Variable Fees and Student Finance Arrangements* (Stuart Report), *Update*, p.33

^{vii} *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Hunt Report), Department of Education and Skills, Dublin, January 2011

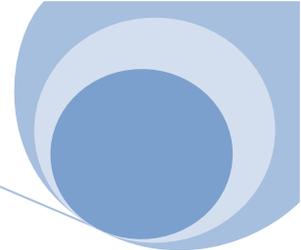
^{viii} *Ibid*, p.46

^{ix} *Ibid*, p 44

^x *Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply: Trends in Education and Training Options*, Forfas, 2009.



2. LEVELS OF UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY



1. Historical background

Observers have noted that until the 1990s the movement of higher education students between the two jurisdictions on this island has been considerably lower than one might expect on a small English-speaking island with similar university cultures and systems.^{xi}

In the 1960s there were two major investigations into higher education provision in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, neither of which even mentioned the other jurisdiction [Nearly 50 years on this has not changed much: the Hunt Report in the Republic and the *Consultation Document on the Development of a Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland*, both published in January 2011, barely refer to the higher education system of the other Irish jurisdiction]. In Northern Ireland the Lockwood Report^{xii} of 1965 was the echo of the UK Robbins Report of 1963. Robbins provided the intellectual and empirical case for greatly expanding higher education. Following Robbins there was substantial expansion of higher education provision in Britain, partly through the establishment of a number of new universities.

The Lockwood Report took the statistical evidence of Robbins as also applying to Northern Ireland and argued for considerable expansion of participation, to be effected through a second university to complement Queen's University Belfast. Three characteristics of Lockwood stand out. Firstly, there was the surprising recommendation to locate the second university in the unionist town of Coleraine rather than Northern Ireland's largely nationalist second city, Derry, despite the fact that Derry already had a third level institution – Magee College – historically linked with Trinity College Dublin.

Secondly there was a total absence of any analysis or even reference to the issue of Protestant/Catholic higher education participation in the province. Thirdly, there was no reference to the cross-border movement of students or indeed, to any other interaction on a north-south basis. In this latter point the Lockwood Report had much in common with the Irish Government's Commission on Higher Education Report of 1967^{xiii}, which while recommending new planning machinery and 'New Colleges' to introduce vocational courses (these were to become the Regional Technical Colleges) was silent on any cross-border dimension to higher education provision.

In the early and mid-1980s, a series of joint National Economic and Social Council-Northern Ireland Economic Council reports explored different aspects of possible cross-border collaboration. As part of this process, Professor Gareth Williams, a noted British analyst of higher education policy, was invited to review the prospects for north-south collaboration in higher education^{xiv}. After reviewing the relevant statistical evidence on the demand for higher education in both jurisdictions, Williams suggested that as demand for higher education provision was set to fall in Northern Ireland (based on demographic evidence) and demographic pressures were set to increase in the Republic, it would make economic sense for the Irish Government to pay for its surplus students to fill the spare capacity in Northern institutions rather than funding additional places in the Republic.

Williams suggested, in particular, that there was considerable scope for cross-border collaboration in the Derry-Donegal border area, and for the extension of the British Open University, already operating in Northern Ireland, to the South. He also proposed a north-south higher education liaison committee which would advise the two governments on 'those aspects of their higher education policies which have, or might have, cross-border implications'. The Williams Report was discussed at a high profile conference in Dublin in November 1985 but the institutions were notably cautious in endorsing its recommendations without clear political cover from the two governments. Hanging over the report and the conference were the forthcoming new arrangements for the governance of Northern Ireland under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was launched later in the same month. In the stormy aftermath of that major policy change any proposals for north-south higher education collaboration disappeared.



2. Increase in undergraduate flows to North in 1990s

In the early 1990s, a conjunction of new developments sparked a new flow of Southern students to Britain and Northern Ireland. At a time of increasing demand and restrictions on the provision of undergraduate places in the South, there was a significant excess of demand over supply. Furthermore, a European ruling that all EU nationals were to be treated on the same basis as ‘home’ students in terms of the cost of their education through fees led to a new market-led cross-border movement of Irish students from the South (mainly undergraduates) to Northern Ireland and Britain. This resulted in a situation where 17% of full-time undergraduate entrants to University of Ulster in the mid-nineties came from the South (the figure in Queen’s University Belfast was 7.2%).

The Northern Ireland authorities control the total number of full-time undergraduate places through the so-called ‘MaSN cap’. This means that each institution is only funded for a set number of full-time undergraduate places. Hence when the figures for each institution appeared they fed the perception that the flow of Southern students to the North was displacing local students who were therefore ‘forced’ to go to Britain to study. A number of unionist politicians took up this cry and it became something of a political football as the institutions were forced to defend their admissions processes as being fair and without prejudice to any sector (they stressed that Irish students applying to institutions in Northern Ireland were well qualified in terms of their Leaving Certificate results and were achieving entry on merit).

It needs to be stressed that the MaSN cap – which is still in existence – only applies to full-time undergraduates and that the institutions are free to recruit as many part-time undergraduates (and full and part-time postgraduates) as they wish.

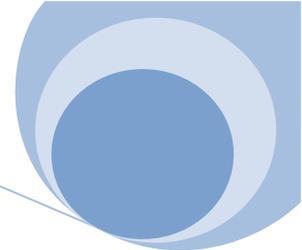
3. Current flows: Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland

With the abolition of undergraduate fees in the Republic in 1997, the numbers of full-time undergraduate *entrants* going from the Republic of Northern Ireland higher education institutions fell sharply so that by 1998/99 they were at less than half (555) the highest point (1,205) they had reached three years earlier (**see Table 1**). UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) figures show that fall continued into the new century so that RoI undergraduate entrant numbers reached a low point of 310 full-time students in 2008/09. They rose slightly in 2009-2010 but the overall trend over the past 15 years is one of slow decline, offset to a certain extent by a rise in part-time undergraduate entrants. By 2009/10 the total number of Republic of Ireland undergraduates at Northern Ireland higher education institutions was less than 20% of the number of RoI undergraduates studying at higher education institutions in the United Kingdom as a whole.

The *total* number of Republic of Ireland full-time undergraduates at Northern Ireland higher education institutions saw a similar sharp decline from 1996/97, when they constituted over 10% of the full-time undergraduate population, to 2002/03 when they made up less than 5.5% of that population. This decline continued so that by 2008/09 they were only 4.2% of the full-time undergraduates (**see Table 2 and Figure 1**). The figures at the two Northern Ireland universities reflect this overall decline, with some variations (**see individual university tables in Annexe 3**).

At the same time, there has been a steady increase from a low base of part-time Southern undergraduates at Northern universities, particularly at University of Ulster. This can be explained largely by the broad range of courses (both full-time and part-time, many of them delivered largely online) offered by University of Ulster, which is known for being particularly innovative in putting on specialised undergraduate courses where there is a market for them. For example the significant increase in part-time undergraduates in

2. LEVELS OF UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY



2009/10 can be explained largely by a once-off University of Ulster certificate course in business methods for staff in credit unions.

Table 1 *Republic of Ireland-domiciled first year undergraduate entrants at Northern Ireland higher education institutions*

Year	Full-time	Part-time	Total
1994/95	840	70	910
1995/96	1205	85	1290
1996/97	755	310	1065
1997/98	875	225	1100
1998/99	555	320	870
1999/00	585	335	920
2000/01	495	330	830
2001/02	510	375	885
2002/03	535	345	880
2003/04	550	400	950
2004/05	565	450	1015
2005/06	580	280	860
2006/07	315	235	550
2007/08	330	280	610
2008/09	310	300	610
2009/10	350	530	880

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). These figures refer to students registered, present and studying on 1 December of the relevant year. The statistics cover full-time undergraduates at Queen's University Belfast, University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College, although the great majority would be at the first two.



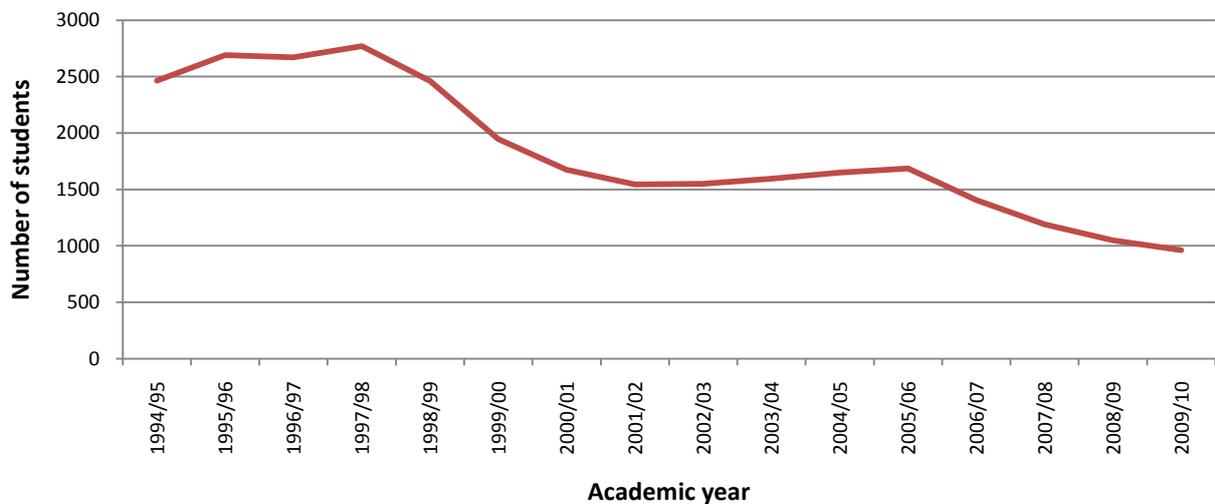
2.LEVELS OF UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

Table 2 *Total numbers of Republic of Ireland-domiciled undergraduates at Northern Ireland higher education institutions*

Year	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Total undergraduates at NI institutions	Rol undergrads as % of total
1994/95	2465	150	2615	26,790	9.8%
1995/96	2690	195	2885	29,240	9.9%
1996/97	2670	435	3110	29,750	10.45%
1997/98	2770	370	3140	32,395	9.7%
1998/99	2460	515	2970	33,525	8.9%
1999/00	1945	545	2485	33,260	7.5%
2000/01	1675	560	2230	34,220	6.5%
2001/02	1545	505	2050	35,810	5.7%
2002/03	1550	495	2045	37,230	5.5%
2003/04	1595	530	2125	39,020	5.4%
2004/05	1650	635	2285	40,960	5.6%
2005/06	1685	535	2220	40,765	5.4%
2006/07	1405	425	1825	38,405	4.75%
2007/08	1190	490	1680	37,265	4.5%
2008/09	1050	510	1560	36,925	4.2%
2009/10	960	730	1690	38,430	4.4%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Figure 1: Republic of Ireland-domiciled *full-time* undergraduates at Northern Ireland higher education institutions



2. LEVELS OF UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

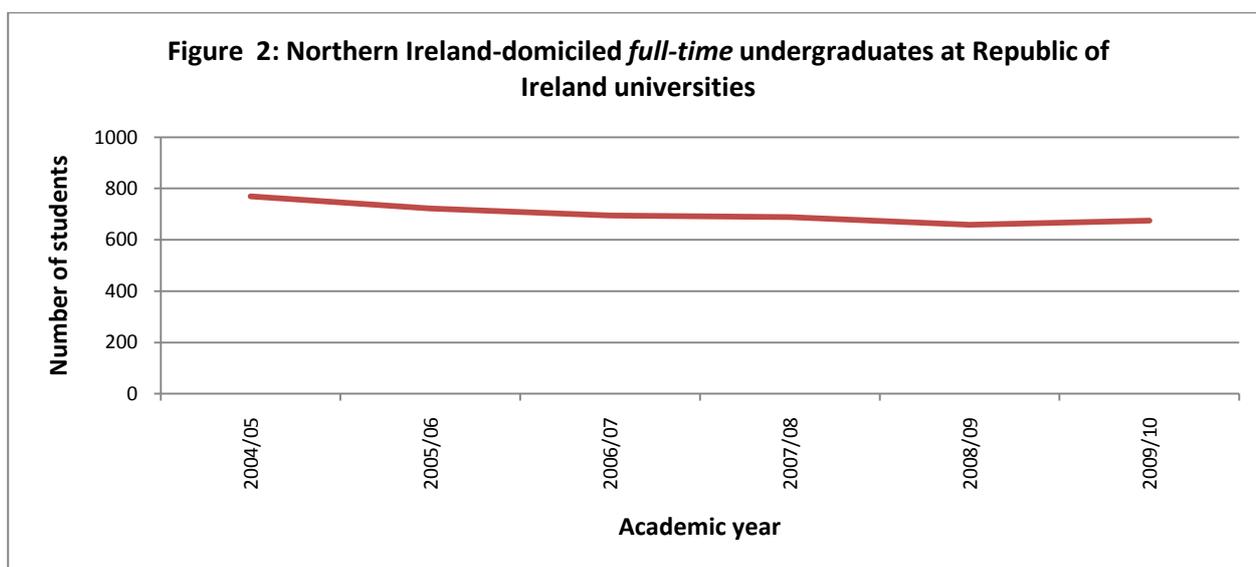
4. Current flows: Northern Ireland to Republic of Ireland

As can be seen from **Table 3** and **Figure 2** there was also a slow decline from an already much lower base in the number of Northern Ireland-domiciled full-time undergraduates at Republic of Ireland universities from 2004/05 (the earliest year the HEA keeps computerised records of undergraduate numbers) to 2008/09, with a very small upturn in 2009/10. The only university which recorded a rise in NI undergraduates during this period (disregarding the extremely small numbers at NUI Maynooth) was University College Dublin. Trinity College Dublin, which has traditionally attracted the largest number of Northern students, and particularly those from a Protestant background, saw its NI numbers fall by nearly 23% between 2004/05 and 2009/10.

Table 3 Attendance of Northern Ireland-domiciled full-time undergraduates at HEA funded universities 2005-2010

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Dublin City University	31	30	19	12	8	1
National University of Ireland, Galway	73	51	33	27	15	33
National University of Ireland, Maynooth	8	14	9	16	14	12
Trinity College Dublin	432	389	396	364	337	334
University College Cork	10	7	7	4	5	8
University College Dublin	210	223	219	256	270	283
University of Limerick	5	8	12	9	9	4
Total Northern Ireland undergraduates	769	722	695	688	658	675
Total full-time undergraduates (at the seven RoI universities only)	60775	60172	61241	63079	65880	66536
NI undergraduates as % of total undergraduates	1.27%	1.20%	1.13%	1.09%	1.00%	1.01%

Source: Higher Education Authority



2.LEVELS OF UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

To check these trends before 2004/05 (in the absence of HEA figures for undergraduates before that date), HEA figures for *all* Northern Irish students – undergraduate and postgraduate – at Republic of Ireland universities were calculated (**See Table 4**) (it is estimated that over 90% of Northern Ireland students counted in this period were undergraduates). These figures confirm the previous picture of a steady decline, with a fall of nearly 27% in the decade between 1998 and 2008.

Table 4 Attendance of *all* Northern Ireland-domiciled full-time students (undergraduate and postgraduate) at HEA funded institutions in Ireland

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
University College Dublin	210	219	201	231	254	260	248*	251	250	282	288	316
University College Cork	24	23	22	22	19	19	13	9	8	8	7	13
NUI Galway	60	51	74	77	87	83	93	81	50	35	27	46
Trinity College Dublin	609	624	590	556	508	501	460	423	427	392	361	366
NUI Maynooth	27	13	13	9	7	8	13*	18	13	20	17	16
Dublin City University	23	29	25	23	39	64	36	39	25	16	11	4
University of Limerick	13	10	6	8	11	8	8	11	15	16	16	12
Other HEIs (mainly National College of Art and Design)	35	48	36	44	35	39	38*	34	23	30	6	35
Total Northern Ireland students	1001	1017	968	970	960	982	909*	866	811	799	733	808

**There appears to have been a 'glitch' in the HEA statistics for 2005/06 –e.g. in one set of HEA statistics seen by this researcher 32 NCAD students were counted; in another set, no students were counted. This table uses the higher of the two recorded statistics.*

Source: Higher Education Authority

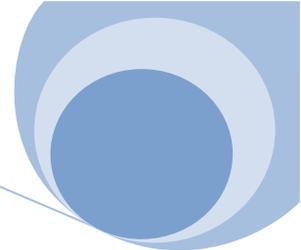
^{xi} For example, Robert D. Osborne, *Higher Education in Ireland, North and South*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1996

^{xii} Lockwood Report, *Higher Education in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: HMSO, 1965

^{xiii} Commission on Higher Education, *Report, Vols I-III*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1967

^{xiv} *Higher Education in Ireland: Cooperation and Complementarity*. Dublin and Belfast: NESCC/NIEC, 1985

3. OBSTACLES TO UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY



1. Summary of obstacles (and other factors)

For this section, the researcher has relied on the views of the careers teachers, the university students and his own experience as a researcher of North-South higher education exchanges and cooperation. A number of main obstacles to (and factors limiting) cross-border undergraduate mobility in each direction can be identified:

From North to South

- a) Lack of information about universities in the other jurisdiction.** This was highlighted by all the Northern groups consulted for this research: undergraduates at TCD, school students and careers teachers. Unlike British universities keen to attract applicants from the region with the UK's highest performing A-Level students, who flood the province's schools with prospectuses, conduct individual school visits, hold special 'training days' (Oxford and Cambridge combine to do this on an annual basis) and have a strong presence at the annual UCAS Convention in Belfast's Kings Hall, the Southern universities have no such presence. Visits from school liaison officers from Southern universities are a rare event, and few are represented at the Kings Hall event. *This is dealt with in further detail in 2. below.*
- b) Lack of information about Institutes of Technology.** This is almost total among Northern Ireland school students and their teachers. The Northern Ireland school students consulted by this researcher assumed – if they had had heard about them at all – that the Institutes of Technology in the Republic were the equivalent of the Regional Education Colleges (formerly Further and Higher Education Colleges) in the North, which do relatively little degree level work (although more now than in the past, with 12,000 undergraduates currently enrolled for higher education courses). The result is that the three border region Institutes of Technology – Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo – have respectively 50, 28 and fewer than 25 Northern Ireland-domiciled undergraduates enrolled – despite their geographical location and ease of access for Northern students living close to the border.
- c) The high cost of living (in Dublin in particular).** This was a major reason highlighted by careers teachers and current undergraduates alike. With the high inflation rate of the 'Celtic Tiger' years, Dublin became as expensive as – or in student accommodation, more expensive than – London, for which Northern Ireland students get a 'weighted' increase in their maintenance loans to cover the extra cost of living in the UK capital. Northern British university cities such as Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester and Liverpool – which are popular with NI students – remain considerably cheaper than Dublin. In addition, these cities – unlike Dublin – have 'student quarters' where the accommodation is geared to university students' pockets. This high cost of living appears to have more than cancelled out the attraction of the 'free fees' regime in the Republic of Ireland, which in the first couple of years after its introduction may have led to a small increase in the numbers going south.
- d) The change in the 'equivalences' between A Level and Leaving Certificate grades,** brought about by Southern universities deciding to increase the requirement for high demand courses like medicine and law from three A Levels at the highest A (later A*) grade to four A levels at the highest grade. This is seen by Northern school students studying for A levels as extremely onerous, and taking four A levels to get into a Republic of Ireland university, when comparable UK universities are seeking only three A levels, is sometimes discouraged by careers and other teachers. *This is dealt with in further detail in 3. below.*





3. OBSTACLES TO UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

- e) Unfamiliarity with the Central Admissions Office (CAO) application process in the Republic of Ireland.** Whereas students in all schools – and particularly the high-achieving voluntary grammar schools – are intensively prepared for the UK UCAS process, there is little or no guidance by teachers in how to complete the Irish CAO application form – school students are usually left on their own to tackle this task. Northern applicants also find it unnerving that there is no CAO phone ‘helpline’; they are required to have their schools certify photocopies of missing exam results, often during the school holidays; and they must depend on an often unreliable cross-border postal service in the fraught few days every August when results are being communicated and offers of university places are being made. Two years ago, when A Level results arrived late, no Northern Ireland students received CAO offers until the second round.
- f) The smaller number of previous Southern university graduates.** This was a less important factor but affected school students considering a university in the Republic as an option in two ways. Firstly there are fewer Northern teachers than previously with a Southern university education. One Northern careers teacher in a mainly Protestant grammar school said that until the recent past, four or five teachers in his school would have been TCD graduates – with all that this implied for teacher encouragement for school students to look to Dublin for their university studies – whereas now there were none. Secondly, the TCD undergraduates consulted for this study mentioned the influence of friends and relatives who had gone to university in the Republic, which becomes less as the numbers decline.

From South to North

- a) The introduction of ‘free fees’ in the Republic in 1997.** This removed one of the main incentives for prospective undergraduates to look North for their university education. Students are shrewd and intelligent young people: as the sample surveys of both schools and undergraduates for this research showed, they will go to university where they can firstly find the course that suits them, and secondly where the cost of higher education is most advantageous. Thus the move by significant numbers to go to Northern Ireland universities in the mid-1990s was driven by a shortage of undergraduate places in the South and an EU ruling reducing fees for Irish students in the North. With the ending of fees and the expansion of undergraduate provision in the Republic, this incentive was greatly reduced. If high tuition fees are introduced in Northern Ireland and Britain, the likelihood is that the traffic will be in the other direction.
- b) Unfamiliarity with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application process in the UK.** In particular, Southern students find the ‘personal statement’, containing personal and extra-curricular activities, which is so central to the UCAS process, unfamiliar and daunting, especially since the guidance counsellors in Irish schools are often equally unfamiliar with it. The concentration by guidance counsellors on helping their students to successfully navigate the CAO system in the South is as total as the concentration of careers teachers in the North on helping theirs’ through the UCAS system. There is relatively little time or capacity by either group to think about the university application process in the neighbouring jurisdiction.
- c) Continuing concerns about the effects of Northern Ireland emerging from conflict** and the still sectarian nature of society in the North. This is reflected in the comments and experience of the Southern students interviewed at University of Ulster. All these students emphasised that they had gained greatly from and largely enjoyed their time in Coleraine. But as one student put it: ‘The university authorities and/or the students union should help us adapt to coming to live in a society still divided along sectarian lines which is unfamiliar to us.’

3. OBSTACLES TO UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

- d) Lack of information about universities in the other jurisdiction.** This issue was voiced less by school students in Dublin and the Southern border region than by their Northern Ireland counterparts. High-achieving Southern school students tend to see undergraduate places in British universities like Oxford, Cambridge, London and Edinburgh as a goal rather than places in the two Northern Ireland universities, and such universities (along with all the Irish universities, North and South, and some universities in Europe) are represented at the annual Higher Options exhibition and conference in Dublin (over 180 institutions exhibited at the 2010 event). In addition, the two Southern schools consulted as part of this research said they had both received visits in the past year from a Queen's University Belfast schools liaison officer (although not from a University of Ulster counterpart), who had made a distinctive impression in both schools.
- e) No financial assistance available in UK.** Apart from having the right to defer tuition fees until they are earning £15,000 p.a., students from Republic of Ireland have no eligibility for any grants, loans or bursaries provided by the NI Department for Employment and Learning and implemented through the two universities. If they have financial difficulties in University of Ulster they can access a small dedicated university fund; in Queen's University the only recourse is a small hardship fund available to all 23,000 students on campus which gives out a few small grants of up to £500.

2. Lack of information about universities in the Republic of Ireland

As indicated above, lack of information about universities in the Republic of Ireland is a bigger issue for Northern students than the other way around. This issue is therefore explored in more detail from a Northern standpoint.

Few if any Republic of Ireland universities are currently pro-active in seeking Northern Ireland undergraduates. The belief among Northern careers teachers consulted is that this is because there are now more than enough highly qualified Southern school-leavers and they do not need to attract Northern students. Southern university admissions officers, particularly at UCD and TCD, reject this, pointing to the continuing flow of Northern applicants to a limited number of high-demand courses; the financial cutbacks which limit resources for school outreach and recruitment work generally, and the poor returns in terms of additional applicants from these exercises from Northern Ireland.

However few Northern schools currently receive visits from Southern university schools liaison officers. TCD, which used to have a dedicated NI schools liaison person, now regularly visits only one Northern school, Methodist College in Belfast – other Northern schools have to write to request a visit and then join together in clusters to receive the TCD visitor. Northern students tend to come to TCD's Open Day in December as individuals, rather than as part of school groups, which is the case with Southern schools.

The UCD Admissions Office admits that school visits in the North have been 'limited, not prolonged or systematic.' The National University of Ireland Maynooth Admissions Officer, a Monaghan man, has a personal commitment to this cross-border recruitment work – in which NUIM have targetted Catholic schools in the North's border region in recent years – but they have seen poor returns from it ('We have much better returns from our school promotions in Tipperary than from Armagh').

NUI Maynooth is one of the few Southern higher education institutions (the others this year were Dublin City University, and Dundalk and Sligo Institutes of Technology) which continues to take a stand at the annual UCAS Convention in Belfast (cost £2,400), but again sees few returns from this investment. In contrast, 108 universities and colleges from England, Scotland and Wales exhibited in Belfast in March 2011.



3. OBSTACLES TO UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

3. Leaving Certificate-A Levels equivalences

Since this appeared to be one disincentive which could be addressed – and one which was raised by several Northern school students and careers teachers – the researcher explored this issue in more detail. It should be emphasised that this is a complex issue, to which a final solution has probably not yet been found.

A senior admissions officer at Trinity College Dublin explained that the change in Advanced Level/Leaving Certificate equivalences in 2005 came about in the following way. In 2003 an Oxford University-led Expert Group reported to UCAS on these equivalences and concluded that whereas previously UCAS had deemed results in each Leaving Certificate subject to be half the value of an equivalent A-Level subject, this should now be adjusted to two-thirds of the value.

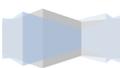
On foot of this finding – effectively downgrading the value of A-Levels compared to Leaving Certificate – TCD decided to start requiring four A-Levels (with A, later A*, grades) for Northern Ireland applicants to high demand, high points courses like medicine, dentistry and law. They felt that to do otherwise would give Northern students with top grade A-Level results an unfair advantage over their Southern counterparts with top grade Leaving Certificate results. This practice was eventually adopted by all the Southern universities' Admissions Offices.

The TCD Admissions Office had noticed that 22% of A-Level applicants were already presenting with four A-Levels, presumably because this improved their chances of entering high prestige British universities like Oxford and Cambridge (there is a long tradition, particularly in UK public schools, of thinking of Trinity as a third choice after the 'Oxbridge' universities).

The TCD admissions officer pointed out that only 33% of Northern students accept their TCD offers – evidence that they are using their application to TCD as an insurance in case they are not accepted by a UK university – and when the UK university offers arrive in August, many accept a UK place and discard their Trinity offer. This is common practice in both jurisdictions: a senior Queen's University Belfast admissions officer said that of the 368 Southern applicants holding either unconditional or conditional 'firm offers' for QUB in June 2010, only 79 took up those places the following autumn.

The TCD admissions officer stressed that the British UCAS and Irish CAO admission schemes looked for different things, and it might be difficult for Northern students to navigate both of them. The CAO points system is based solely on performance in one exam, the Leaving Certificate. In this way it is utterly transparent – particularly important in a small society – but also excludes evidence of independent learning and personal development. The UCAS system, on the other hand, with its stress on a 'personal statement' from the applicant, also takes into account wider student achievements, including extra-curricular activities.

Another issue is that at the two big Dublin universities which receive the overwhelming majority of Northern applications, a large proportion of these are for a small number of high demand courses: medicine, dentistry, law, history and English in Trinity College Dublin; medicine, veterinary, law, history, politics and English in UCD. A senior UCD admissions officer said that before the Southern universities had changed to requiring four A-Levels for such high demand courses after 2005, there were very large numbers of Northern applicants with three top-grade A-Levels applying for them. 'We could have filled medicine and law with Northern Ireland applicants!' What they did was to resort to the unsatisfactory medium of random selection.



This Northern concentration on a small number of high demand courses, the post-2005 requirement for 4 top-grade A-Levels and the pre-2005 random selection of places feeds the perception, voiced by the Northern students and careers officers consulted by this researcher, that there is unfairness in the way TCD

3. OBSTACLES TO UNDERGRADUATE MOBILITY

and UCD allocate limited undergraduate places to Northerners (**Also see Annexe 2: The Views of the School Students and Careers Teachers**).

The TCD admission officer said Trinity continues to use the principle of ‘proportionality’ based on exam results from each jurisdiction – which Northern Ireland students may perceive to be as ‘quotas’. Thus if the proportion of applicants from the UK (including Northern Ireland) with eligible A Level results for a particular high demand course is 25%, they will be allocated 25% of the places on that course.

However the UCD admissions officer emphasised that the Southern admissions officers were very concerned that there should be no inequity in the allocation of places to Northern students. To this end, there is currently a working group drawn from the Irish universities’ representative body, the Irish Universities Association, and the Northern Ireland examining body, the NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) meeting to examine this issue.

4. Imminent higher education reform in the Republic

The new Irish Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, came into office in March 2011 promising a radical reform package for higher education in the Republic. In a speech on 30 May he said that pre-election promises ruling out increased student fees no longer stood because he had less room for manoeuvre than earlier envisaged, and hinted that additional charges might be under consideration for those who could afford to pay.^{xv} He also asked the Higher Education Authority to prepare a report on the funding crisis in Irish higher education.

Mr Quinn also promised a review of the CAO points system, which he said was having an adverse impact on learning at second level, on the Leaving Certificate examination, and on the preparedness of new entrants into higher education. ‘We need to be prepared to think in terms of radically new approaches and alternatives to the current arrangements,’ he said.

The Department of Education and Skills has recently sought proposals on reform of the CAO system from the seven university presidents and the heads of the institutes of technology, and former University College Cork deputy president Professor Aine Hyland has been asked by the Higher Education Authority and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to prepare a report on admission procedures to universities. The university and college heads have been asked to propose various options for change to the CAO system by early September, and this will be followed by a conference on ‘the interaction between second and third level’ scheduled for late September. This could be an opportunity also to explore the admissions procedures for Northern Ireland students to Republic of Ireland universities.

^{xv} *The Irish Times*, 30 May 2011





4. A FUTURE OBSTACLE: RISING UK FEES



The large rise in UK tuition fees due to be introduced by the great majority of British universities in autumn 2012 is likely to have a very significant impact on undergraduate flows between Britain and both parts of Ireland. A 2011 paper prepared by Dublin business consultant Michael D'Arcy for Institute of Technology Sligo says that policy makers in the Republic of Ireland 'have yet to substantively engage with the potential impacts of the decreases and increases in cross-border flows of students in and out of this jurisdiction that will result' from this rise in fees.^{xvi} He warns that if they wait until the 2012-13 academic year they will have little time to respond to a development which will have a major impact on the nearly 9,000 Republic of Ireland domiciled undergraduates who go to university in Britain and Northern Ireland every year.

The situation in autumn 2012 will be as follows. The great majority of universities in England and Wales will charge annual tuition fees of up to £9,000, repayable either upfront or when students start to earn £21,000. Scottish universities will follow suit, but probably at a lower level of £4,500 to £6,000 (the figures suggested in a Scottish Government Green Paper in December 2010). In Northern Ireland, the Stuart Report has recommended the introduction of a fee of £5,000-5,750, with all non-NI domiciled students studying at NI higher education institutions required to pay a fee of £6,000-9,000 (in line with fees in England and Wales).

[In terms of undergraduate entrance to the Scottish universities, another serious anomaly should be noted here. Whereas Republic of Ireland undergraduates – as EU nationals – do *not* have to pay tuition fees, their Northern Ireland counterparts – as non-Scottish UK citizens – *do* have to pay. This anomaly will almost certainly be addressed in the near future.]

The new Irish government has the option of introducing a UK-style 'upfront' fees and deferred payment system, as recommended by the Hunt Report, for the academic year beginning in autumn 2012. This would be politically very unpopular: there is nothing about it in the Fine Gael-Labour Programme for Government, although Education and Skills Minister Ruairi Quinn did not rule out increasing student charges in 2012 and beyond in his 30 May speech. Even if it decided to grasp this nettle, it would then be faced with the unenviable decision at what level to pitch those fees: at a level comparable to the various UK jurisdictions, or at a lower Irish level. Given that a Department of Education and Skills expert group, as proposed by the Hunt Report, will also have to deliberate and report on an appropriate student loan system, it seems unlikely that a new Irish regime involving major fee increases will be in place in time for the 2012-13 academic year.

In this situation Ireland will continue to have a low fees system – with the registration/student contribution fee rising perhaps another €1,000 to at most €3,000 – alongside a much higher fees system in Britain and Northern Ireland. The likely consequence of this is not only a significant proportion of the nearly 9,000 undergraduates who currently go to universities in Britain and Northern Ireland deciding to stay at home, but also a rising number of British undergraduates choosing to study in the low-fees regime in the Republic of Ireland. According to the CAO, the number of UK applicants with A-Levels has already risen by 9.5% between 2010 and 2011.

This would have obvious implications for an Irish university system which is already over-extended in its efforts to cater for the rising demand for undergraduate places at a time of severe government funding cuts. Tuition fees are the second most important factor for school students surveyed for this research when considering cross-border higher education. 92% of the students in three Republic of Ireland schools surveyed by Michael D'Arcy for his Institute of Technology Sligo study said a UK fees increase would 'impact negatively' on their decision whether to study in the United Kingdom.^{xvii} The D'Arcy study also found that less advantaged sixth formers in one school in Northern Ireland were now questioning whether they should go on to higher education at all.





4. A FUTURE OBSTACLE: RISING UK FEES

Then there is the risk of displacement. The 2011 Stuart Report has warned that with a lower fee regime in Northern Ireland (and until now very few students from England and Wales), there is a risk that local students could be displaced by incomers from those countries seeking a cheaper university education.^{xviii} The same warning could be addressed to higher education policy-makers in the Republic of Ireland.

As one Northern Ireland careers teacher put it to this researcher: ‘What will happen as Republic of Ireland universities become increasingly attractive to both Northern Irish and British students as the fees in most UK universities rise to the permitted £9,000 ceiling? How will they meet this new demand, and how fair will access be?’ he asks (**See Annex 2: The Views of the School Students and Careers Teachers**).

It is noteworthy that at the University of Ulster, whose vice-chancellor has spoken out firmly against a major fees increase as inimical to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the number of undergraduate applicants (both from Northern Ireland and Britain) has risen significantly in 2011: up 3% over the 2010 figures, and 15% over the 2009 figures. A senior university planning officer calculates that undergraduates (and their parents) are ‘planning ahead – and, for example, cutting out a “gap year” – so that they can get into university before the higher fees start to bite next year.’

^{xvi} Michael D’Arcy, *A Higher Education Scoping Study: Studying in a neighbouring jurisdiction – the potential impact of higher UK tuition fees on the island of Ireland*.

^{xvii} The guidance counsellor in the Southern Protestant-managed grammar school in this study said that in the recent past up to 50% of his sixth-formers also applied to UK universities through UCAS. This year the number has fallen to under 25%.

^{xviii} *Independent Review of Variable Fees and Student Finance Arrangements, Update*, January 2011, pp 15-16

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve the quality and flow of information about university courses and entry requirements for school-leavers in both jurisdictions (and particularly for prospective Northern Ireland undergraduates who might want to go to university in the Republic of Ireland).

This would in the first instance be a task for the individual university admissions offices. Some Southern admissions officers have told this researcher that they are not convinced that the return (in terms of higher NI undergraduate applications) on such an improved information campaign would justify the expense at a time of severe financial cutbacks.

2. If dedicated inter-governmental funding were made available, a case might be made for a more coordinated campaign to recruit undergraduates on a cross-border basis, perhaps overseen by an organisation such as Universities Ireland, the all-island network of university presidents. However in the present and immediate future, with university fees significantly higher in Northern Ireland than the Republic of Ireland, it is likely that this will mainly lead to larger numbers of Northern undergraduates going to Southern universities. At the very least, a programme of visits by more school groups to university campuses in the other jurisdiction could be organised.

The 2011 Hunt Report says there is 'significant potential for institutional collaboration on a North-South basis to advance cross-border regional development and strategically advance Irish higher education on an all-island basis.'^{xix} If this is going to be more than lip service (and not be shelved in the way that the proposals of the Williams Report were in the 1980s) some government resources will have to be provided to develop this collaboration.

3. The border region Institutes of Technology – Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo – which are almost invisible in Northern Ireland schools, should initiate a joint awareness-raising and recruitment campaign in border region schools in Northern Ireland. As a first step, they should take a joint stand at the annual UCAS Convention in Belfast.
4. Action should be taken by the Northern Irish and British higher education authorities to end the anomaly – identified by the Stuart Report – under which Northern Ireland undergraduates studying in the Republic receive lower 'bursaries' compared to the maintenance grants paid to their counterparts studying in the UK. The system of NI Education and Library Boards paying the registration fees of NI students at ROI universities should also be reviewed.
5. The two Northern Ireland universities should initiate an awareness-raising and induction scheme for students from Republic of Ireland to prepare them for living in a society which is still deeply divided along sectarian lines. This could include a 'buddy system' to link existing undergraduates (either Northerners or Southerners who had spent some time in the North) with newly arrived entrants from ROI.
6. The IUA-CCEA working group examining the equivalences between A Level and Leaving Certificate examination grades for Northern school-leavers applying to Southern universities should make its report available to the Irish university presidents charged by the Minister for Education and Skills with preparing options for change to the CAO system – in order to ensure that the most equitable system of equivalences possible is incorporated into a reformed CAO system.
7. There should be a rapid move towards a central agency – as recommended by the Hunt Report – to ensure the more efficient delivery of Republic of Ireland maintenance grants to all undergraduates, and particularly to those ROI undergraduates in Northern Ireland whose grants are 'portable'. It is understood that this process has already started, and that negotiations have begun between



5. RECOMMENDATIONS

the Department of Education and Skills and the City of Dublin VEC with a view to having CDVEC become that central delivery agency in 2012.

8. A Higher Education Authority/Department of Education and Skills task force should be established as soon as possible to examine the implications for Irish universities and undergraduates of the large university tuition fees that will be introduced in English and Welsh universities in the academic year 2012-2013.
9. A study should be commissioned by the Irish Department of Education and Skills and the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning to examine the implications for higher education on the island of the future fall in the number of 18 year olds in the North and the high birth rate in the South feeding into higher demand for education places at all levels. Among other things, it should re-examine the recommendations of the Williams Report of 1985.

^{xix} *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, p.99





THE VIEWS OF THE CROSS-BORDER UNDERGRADUATES

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

The researcher convened a ‘focus group’ of seven Trinity College Dublin students from Northern Ireland on 11 April. They were studying law, medicine, English, French and drama. They came from Belfast (one from a Catholic and three from mainly Protestant grammar schools), North Down (from a mainly Protestant grammar school), Ballymena (mainly Protestant grammar school) and Enniskillen (Catholic grammar school). The three most important factors which influenced their decision to come to study at TCD are listed below.

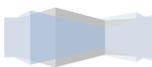
Position	Factor	Numbers
1	Being able to do the course you wanted/get the qualification you need	3 put this 1 st 1 put this 2 nd 1 put this 3 rd
2	Keeping options open by also applying to a Rol university	1 put this 1 st 2 put this 2 nd 2 put this 3 rd
3	Interest in living and studying in Republic of Ireland	2 put this 1 st 2 put this 3 rd

Discussion

As the table above shows, Northern students going to Trinity College Dublin are exactly the same as their Southern counterparts going North (and students in the final year of school in both jurisdictions) in putting ‘being able to do the course you wanted’ as the most important factor which had led to their choice of a university. In this globalised world young people like this group – and these TCD students are the high achievers in their age cohort – are neither narrow nor stupid. They know what they want: they will go to a university which offers them the course they want at the price they can afford – other factors such as going to a different jurisdiction or culture, or taking parents and teachers’ advice, are much less important.

‘Lack of information, lack of information, lack of information’ was overwhelmingly the most important barrier identified by these Northern students at TCD preventing more of their counterparts from seriously considering undergraduate study in the South. ‘There is a total lack of information in Northern schools regarding all aspects of universities and university admission in the Republic. Students are not made aware of their options. This extends to finance, accommodation, facilities, courses and admissions. I went through the entire admissions process to TCD without any prior information,’ said one, summing up the consensus view.

This lack of information extends to information about important incentives such as that NI students do not even have to pay the €1500 (€2000 from September 2011) annual registration fee: it is paid for them by their local Education and Library Board (which immediately puts them at an advantage to their Southern fellow-students). ‘Nobody from Northern Ireland at Trinity knew that this fee would be paid by the Education and Library Boards. If people were made aware of this, that there is a low registration fee paid by the ELB, it would be an incentive to go to a Southern university,’ said one student. [This appears to be confirmed by the fact that neither the student focus groups or



careers teachers in the two high-achieving schools in the North visited by this researcher mentioned this].

The students in this group agreed that all of them (except one, who went back every weekend to Belfast to work in a shop) needed financial support from their families to study in Dublin. Given the high cost of accommodation, food and other essential items in Dublin, they felt it was highly unlikely that a Northern student from a family with modest financial means would be able to study in Dublin. Indeed, a number of them said the annual loan which is available to all UK students studying in the Republic should provide a top-up amount for Dublin (as it does for London) to take into account the similarly high cost of living there, which is significantly greater than in the Northern British universities where most Northern students go.

A lack of information about the Republic's CAO admissions system was another frequent complaint. 'Northern students are spoonfed for their UCAS application. In Upper Sixth there was advice and preparation every week for it,' said another student. 'When I asked about the CAO, I was told there was no information and that I should go on the internet.'

Even when there was some provision for preparation for the CAO system, it was very limited. A student who had been at Methodist College in Belfast, one of the North's largest and most academically high-achieving schools (and one which continues to send a significant if small number of students to TCD), said: 'At 'Methody' the focus was on the UCAS application system. We spent a great deal of time preparing practice applications and previewing good examples of what we should aim to write, including in our personal statement. In contrast group meetings for applications through the CAO system had a small attendance – this may have raised concerns that you would be on your own if you went South or that you were making the wrong decision. There may also have been a worry about not doing a sufficient number of subjects to gain the points necessary for your course, and a worry that the CAO system would forget about you – unlike for UCAS, no personal statement is required and the points requirements for courses change every year.'

Another important disincentive – and one that was echoed in the school student focus groups and by careers teachers – was the translation of A-Level grades into CAO points: 'having to study for four A-Levels to get to a good university like TCD or UCD in the South, compared to only three A-Levels to get to a good university in England' in the words of one student. A student from a Catholic school in Fermanagh said only 10 of her A Level class of around 130 did four A-Levels, presumably because they wanted to get into Oxford, Cambridge or Trinity (among the few universities in these islands that recognise the superior achievement of four A-Levels for entry purposes).

Predictably attitudes towards studying in the South depended on whether the student came from a Catholic or mainly Protestant school. 'Most young people have neither a negative or a positive opinion of cultural differences in the Republic,' said the student from a Catholic school in Fermanagh. In contrast, a student from County Antrim said: 'At a Protestant school like mine, there were those who voiced strong opposition to studying in the Republic. This view comes from a minority but its presence is felt.'

The students agreed that Dublin was 'more relaxed multiculturally and sexually' than the North, and this was another strong incentive to come to Irish capital to study. However not all outdated attitudes have disappeared: one student recalled a cousin at Trinity who had been punched around five years ago for wearing a poppy.

A number of students expressed the opinion that many more outward-looking Northern Ireland school-leavers see going to study in another place or even another jurisdiction as a particularly



attractive prospect. One young woman from a Northern Irish provincial town said a key factor for her was ‘to get away from a kind of subliminal sectarian mindset to a sense of freedom.’ Two others from similar background talked about ‘wanting to escape from small town mentalities’ and ‘people in my year largely choosing university based on the idea of leaving home’. However one student from the largely Protestant town of Ballymena said the pattern from her school was for groups of school-leavers to go off together to Northern British universities like Edinburgh, Newcastle or Manchester.

However several of the Trinity students liked the idea of *both* leaving home *and* remaining on the island of Ireland, thus being within a relatively short train, bus or car journey from their homes. This tallies with recent surveys of Northern Irish students which have shown that a higher proportion than in other regions of the UK prefer to attend universities in their home province.

The extra option offered by application to a Southern university was a factor mentioned by a couple of the students. For example, a second student from Methodist College Belfast said she had applied to do drama at Trinity after failing to get onto her first choice drama course at a British university.

It is clear from talking to these students that in some of the higher achieving subject areas – notably medicine – there is still a significant minority of Northern students at Trinity. One of the medical students in this group estimated that around 15% of the students in his year were from Northern Ireland.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

The University of Ulster is the Northern university with the largest number of students from the Republic of Ireland, many of them from border counties such as Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan. The researcher convened a focus group of five students from the university’s Coleraine campus on 5 May. They were studying nursing, dietetics, French and history. They came from Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Meath and Cork. The three most important factors which influenced their decision to come to study at University of Ulster are listed below:

Position	Factor	Numbers
1	Being able to do the course/get the qualification you need	4 put this 1 st
2	Keeping options open by also applying to a NI university	1 put this 1 st 3 put this 3 rd
3	Other costs (accommodation, transport, cost of food etc)	2 put this 2 nd 2 put this 3 rd

Discussion

All the students agreed that they had decided to come to University of Ulster for a combination of reasons to do with being able to do the course they wanted and keeping their options open in case they did get not get enough points for an equivalent course in a Southern university.

However the main topic of this discussion was the continuing sectarianism of Northern Irish society and its effects on Southern students attending University of Ulster at Coleraine. These effects continue to be significant, probably because the Coleraine area is majority Protestant and strongly Unionist (unlike, for example, the university’s Magee campus in Derry and its planned new Belfast



campus in the north inner-city area of Belfast). However – and somewhat ironically, given some of the stories told by these Southern students – the majority of Northern Ireland students on the Coleraine campus are now from a nationalist background.

One student from Leitrim said the important thing was to make Southern students coming to Northern Ireland for the first time aware of the pitfalls of living in a sectarian society. ‘I knew broadly about the political issues when I arrived here four years ago. What I didn’t realise was the depth of sectarianism that still exists.’

She suggested that the best way to do this was a ‘buddy system’: to match first year Southern undergraduates with Northern ‘welcoming’ students (or Southern students who had already spent time in the North) who could guide the newcomer in what to say or not to say, which places to go to and which not to go to, as well as simple but sensitive things such as when one can say ‘Derry’ and when one should say ‘Londonderry.’ ‘You have to learn to accept the way things are here and adapt to them’, she stressed.

She recalled a time two years ago when a student from the Donegal Gaeltacht and a visiting relative were speaking Irish together in a local pub. A member of the bar staff waited for her to come out of the ladies’ toilet, told her ‘Don’t ever speak that f... language in this pub again’ and then punched her in the face, breaking her jaw. At that time she and a friend had written letters to the Provost, to the Students Union (which in UU Coleraine is largely run by students from a nationalist background) and to a number of university chaplains, but no action had been taken.

A nursing student from Cork said concerns about Northern Ireland emerging from conflict and the still sectarian nature of society there were a factor in her decision whether or not to come to University of Ulster. ‘But as I was very keen to participate in this course I chose to overlook them. As I went through my first and second years, it became evident that these deep rooted feelings were still to be found in some of the students. In my first week of university one of the students who was intoxicated decided to start kicking down the doors of the Catholic residents of my flat. After being in the North for two years now, I have learned to deal with these’.

This student says she is glad she made the decision to make the long journey from the deep south to study in Coleraine, and she had made some lifelong friends. However she was concerned about the recent rise in attacks from dissident republican groups which ‘may affect my decision in returning, especially if more attacks occur.’ This conversation took place a month after the killing of the young Catholic policeman, Ronan Kerr.

A history student from Louth and a dietetics student from Donegal agreed that the high-pressure Southern points system meant that points for the high demand, limited access courses they wanted would have been difficult to achieve if their aim had been a Southern university. They had found the option of a course at University of Ulster demanding slightly lower points attractive.

The County Louth student had also been attracted by the prospect of meeting new people and experiencing a different culture rather than following most of his peers to a predictable history course in a Dublin university.



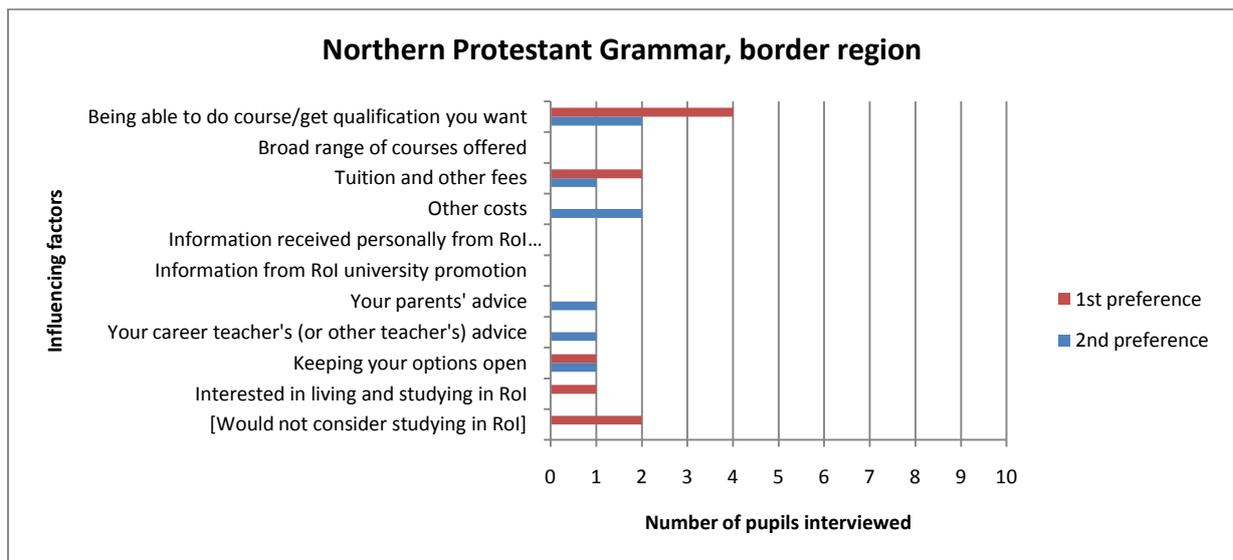
THE VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL STUDENTS AND CAREERS TEACHERS

In March and April 2011 the researcher held focus groups among fifth and sixth year students in four schools. Two were in the North: a mainly Protestant co-educational voluntary grammar school and a girls’ Catholic maintained secondary school, both in the border region. Two were in the South: a co-educational secondary school under Protestant management but with a majority of Catholic pupils in the border region, and a girls’ secondary school under Catholic management in Dublin. The careers teachers/guidance counsellors in each school were also interviewed.

NORTHERN PROTESTANT GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BORDER REGION

A focus group of 10 students in the Upper Sixth year filled in a questionnaire (*see Annexe 4*) and discussed the findings. The four most important factors (out of 10 listed) in influencing their decision about whether or not to consider going to a university in the Republic are listed below.

Position	Factor	Numbers
1	Being able to do the course you want/get the qualification you need	4 put this 1 st 2 put this 2 nd
2	Tuition and other fees (lower in the Republic)	2 put this 1 st 1 put this 2 nd 4 put this 3 rd
3	<i>I wouldn't study in the Republic of Ireland</i>	2 put this 1 st
4	Keeping your options open in case you are unsuccessful in your UCAS application	1 put this 1 st 1 put this 2 nd



Discussion

The first thing to note is that in this largely Protestant (and thus unionist) grammar school only two of the 10 students said they would not even consider studying in the Republic of Ireland. Only two also said they would have concerns about how their nationality or religion would be seen in the Republic. On the other hand only 1 of the 10 said she was 'strongly considering' going to a Southern university (in her case to study medicine or pharmacy). And this is in a school with a strong tradition of sending students to Trinity College Dublin in the past.

The second is the theme which will recur again and again among Northern school-leavers and students in this study: the lack of information about Southern universities and the Central Admissions Office (CAO) entry system.

The third was another theme that will also recur: the need to achieve a top mark (A*) in four A-levels to achieve the near-600 points required to get into a high prestige course in a Southern university like medicine, pharmacy, veterinary and some law courses. Students can get into the equivalent courses in many leading English universities with a top mark in 3 A-levels.

The views of the students in this school were summed up in the following comment: 'In hindsight, if more information had been provided in order to make me more aware of Southern universities (including undergraduate prospectuses, open days and CAO promotions), I would definitely have considered applying to universities in the Republic. A change in culture and lower tuition fees are certainly factors which would have influenced my decision.'

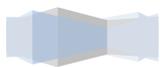
They agreed that they would very much like representatives from Southern universities to come to talk to Northern schools, whether individually or collectively through a 'universities fair'.

Careers teacher

The careers teacher said that he organised a meeting every autumn of A-Level students to discuss the possibility of students going to a university in the Republic, and around 15-20 of the 70-90 students doing A-Levels turned up. He would then take a group of around 10 to Dublin to visit Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. Four or five a year might apply, but this would include several from the Southern border counties studying at the school.

He said that some years ago the Southern universities had redefined the 'equivalence' between Leaving Certificate and A-Levels because they believed that Northern students doing the latter had an unfair advantage and were able to gain the maximum 600 points more easily. This has effectively meant that to have a chance of gaining entry to a course like medicine, pharmacy or law in TCD (the most popular destination for his students thinking about going south), students would have to get at least four A*s at A-level. He believed that at least one-third of TCD courses would now require four A*s. This was a very heavy workload for a school student, and was not encouraged by many Northern schools. He believed that system was now unfair to Northern students as a result.

He also believed that TCD in particular had 'gone cold' on students from Northern Ireland. Around 10 years ago Trinity had a specific Northern liaison officer, who used to meet teachers and students from the North and even take them to lunch. The last time he visited with a group they were met by 'a secretary in a corridor.'



Student accommodation was very expensive in Dublin compared to most English and Scottish universities. Most British universities, unlike universities in the South, provided guaranteed student accommodation in the first year.

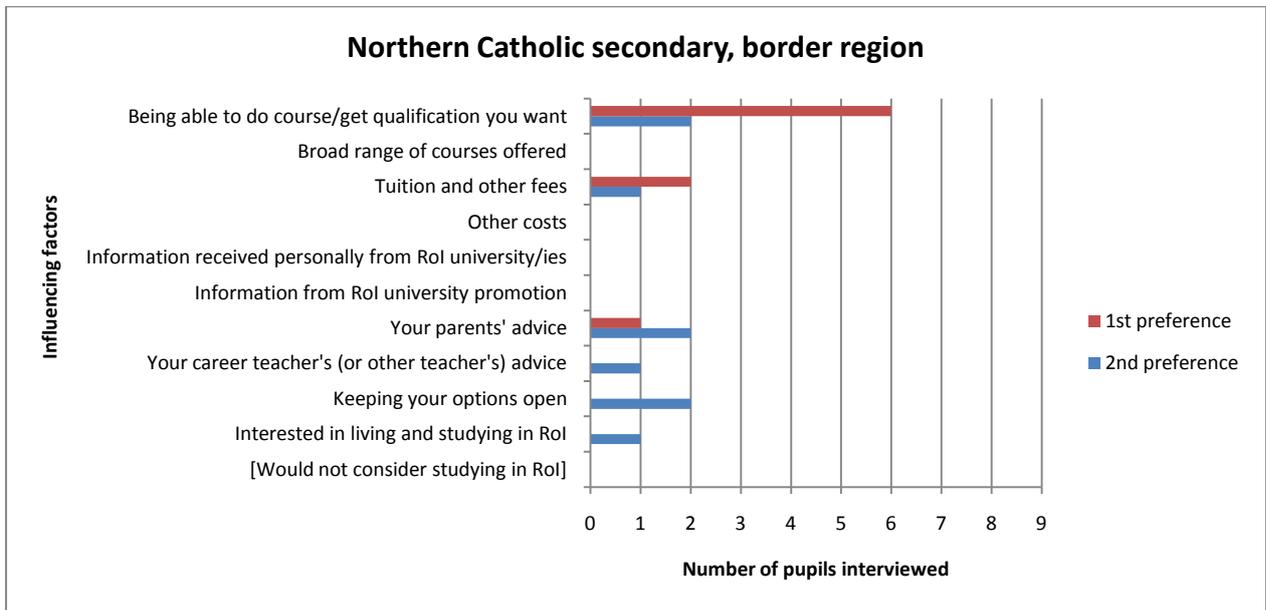


Another problem was that fewer and fewer teachers were now TCD graduates. In the past four or five of the school’s teachers would have been Trinity graduates: now there were none.

NORTHERN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL, BORDER REGION

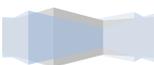
A group of nine students – a mixture of Upper and Lower Sixth – completed the questionnaire and took part in the discussion in this large Catholic maintained girls comprehensive school, which has a high academic reputation. The four most important factors (out of 10 listed) in influencing their decision about whether or not to consider going to a university in the Republic were as follows.

Position	Factor	Numbers
1	Being able to do the course you want/get the qualification you need	6 put this 1 st
2	Tuition and other fees (lower in the Republic)	2 put this 1 st 1 put this 2 nd 1 put this 3 rd
3	Parents advice	1 put this 1 st 2 put this 2 nd
4	Keeping your options open in case you are unsuccessful in your UCAS application	2 put this 2 nd



Discussion

Only one of the nine students had actually applied to a Southern university: she had applied to do pharmacy or children’s nursing at University of Ulster Coleraine, Queen’s University Belfast, University of Brighton and University College Cork. However most of the girls were in Lower Sixth so would not be applying until next year. Another girl said she didn’t want to leave Ireland, so would be applying to Queen’s and NUI Galway.



The student views here were summed up by one student who said: ‘The main barrier for me is the high grades in the South and the fact that we haven’t had much information about the universities there.’ Everyone in the group agreed that they would like to study in the South but there was little or no information available.

All the other points mentioned by the Protestant grammar school students were mentioned again: Southern universities did not come to the school, unlike Northern Irish and British universities (the Universities of Liverpool, Edinburgh and Aberdeen had visited the school); there was no promotion of Southern universities within the school – this is despite the principal, a UCD graduate, saying that she told students to ‘look south’; and the disincentive of having to achieve high marks in four A Levels to get into many courses.

One student said she had had difficulties with the CAO form and had unsuccessfully tried to phone the CAO office in Galway on several occasions.

Principal and careers teacher

The principal was very enthusiastic about encouraging more students to consider going to Southern universities. Currently two-four go south each year out of the 100 or so students who go on to third level. She said there was a certain snobbery in the Republic about Northern Applied A Levels in subjects like health/social care and business, which universities like TCD did not recognise for entry purposes. She had raised this with Trinity but they said they had no plans to recognise such subjects – which are fully recognised by Queen’s – for entry purposes.

The careers teacher had strong views about the introduction of a new A Levels/Leaving Certificate ‘equivalences’ system in the few years, which he viewed as unfair to Northern school-leavers wishing to go to Southern universities. In Northern Ireland in recent years for the first time a new ‘top mark’ A* grade had been introduced into A Levels; this meant that the top mark (A*) was equivalent to 140 UCAS points compared to the 120 points for the A grade (previously the highest). He believed that the Southern universities, in response to this, were now making entry harder for Northern applicants by demanding four A* grades (instead of their previous demand of four A grades) as the requirement for entry to high demand courses like medicine, pharmacy and veterinary (medicine in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland is complicated by a new requirement to take another exam/aptitude test called HPAT in addition to the Leaving Certificate or A Levels). **[This belief is incorrect – see Leaving Certificate-A Levels equivalences above].** This careers teacher said this was ‘extremely off-putting’ for high-achieving students from Northern Ireland wishing to take these courses in the South.

He said that Southern universities – apart from NUI Maynooth – are now ‘not pro-active’ in recruiting students from the North. Again, apart from NUI Maynooth, they rarely turn up to the annual UCAS Convention in Belfast, which is attended by the great majority of universities and higher education colleges in England, Scotland and Wales. Whereas Queen’s and University of Ulster deliver several hundred prospectuses to be distributed in the school, the Southern universities send two or three (for an Upper Sixth of 120 students). A wide range of British universities send representatives to the school, while Oxford and Cambridge put on special Northern Ireland ‘training’ days. All this reflects the high standard of A Level results in Northern Ireland: the highest of any region of the UK. The very high calibre of Northern students is apparently no longer of interest to Southern universities, given their current minimal outreach to the province.

This careers teacher also said that it was difficult for Northern students to access the CAO system. He said the CAO demands that all exam certificates – GCSE as well as A Level – are stamped by



the school and signed by a senior teacher, and then posted to its headquarters in Galway. The CAO has no phone helpline. The UCAS service to Northern Ireland students is, in contrast, seen as enormously applicant-friendly. ‘I give it 10 out of 10 for customer service,’ said this careers teacher.

Given the uncertainty of the North-South post, the CAO process every August can be a nerve-racking experience for students. There have been several examples of students being phoned by the CAO because their documentation is deemed inadequate and being pushed back into the second round of offers despite their very high grades, he said.

There is also a perception in Northern schools – among teachers and students alike – that universities like Trinity College Dublin operate an informal quota system, depending on the number of applications from the different jurisdictions. Thus if Trinity College Dublin has 150 places in medicine, the number of places allocated will depend on the total number of applicants from overseas, Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland. Many believe that if there is a large number of Republic of Ireland students with the requisite high marks in the Leaving Certificate (and the HPAT test), the number of places offered to Northern students will be smaller.

This careers teacher asks what will happen when Republic of Ireland universities become increasingly attractive to both Northern Irish and British students as the fees in most UK universities rise to the permitted £9,000 ceiling. ‘How will they meet this new demand, and how fair will access be?’ he asks.

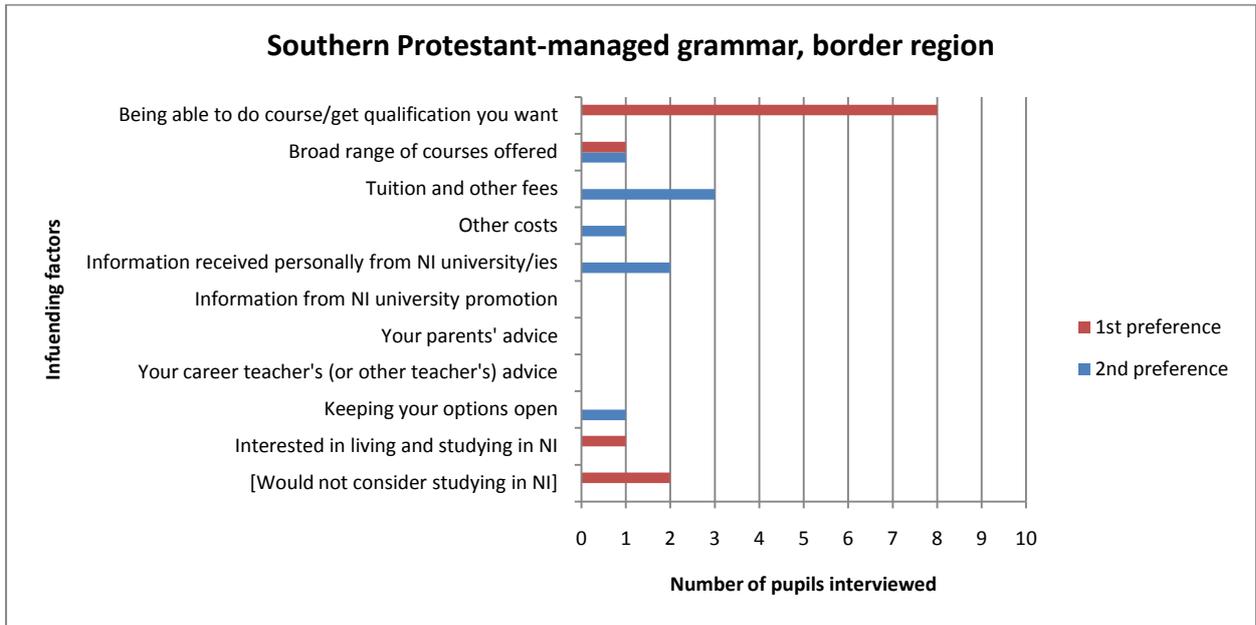
The Institutes of Technology barely register on the radar for students at this border region school, apart from a small group from South Armagh who go to Dundalk IoT. However the careers teacher said that at least the other border region IoTs – Letterkenny and Sligo – make sure that significant numbers of their prospectuses are sent to the school, unlike the Southern universities.

SOUTHERN PROTESTANT-MANAGED GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BORDER REGION

A focus group of 10 sixth year students doing the Leaving Certificate at this co-educational grammar school completed the questionnaire and discussed the findings. An interesting dimension of this school is that although it has Protestant management and a Protestant ethos, its 500 students are over 85% Catholic. The four most important factors (out of 10 listed) in influencing their decision about whether or not to consider going to a university in Northern Ireland were as follows.

Position	Factor	Numbers
1	Being able to do the course you want/get the qualification you need	8 put this 1 st
2	<i>I wouldn't study in Northern Ireland</i>	2 put this 1 st
3	Broad range of courses on offer	1 put this 1 st 1 put this 2 nd 1 put this 3 rd
4	Information I got personally from Northern universities	2 put this 2 nd 1 put this 3 rd





Discussion

Three among this group said they or their parents were still concerned that Northern Ireland was still emerging from conflict (the discussion took place two days after the killing of policeman Ronan Kerr in Co Tyrone).

Among the points raised in the post-questionnaire discussion were the following. Several had friends or siblings at a Northern university, not surprising given the area’s proximity to the border and location half way between Dublin and Belfast. Several mentioned that a Northern university was an ‘extra option’ if they did not get a place in a Southern university, and that the grades required were sometimes lower. At least one had found a specialised course – music technology – which he could not do at undergraduate level in the South. Two said that ‘because of the fees’ in the UK they would probably go to a Southern university.

Guidance Counsellor

The guidance counsellor said Queen’s University in particular targeted schools in this border area with visits and invitations to come to Open Days. However he said one university in Wales, University of Glamorgan, offered a particularly attractive package of incentives to go there. The university itself offers Irish students €1,000 and the Welsh Assembly another €1,500, which leaves students only having to pay around £600 of the current £3,290 fee themselves.

This teacher said that these sharply rising fees, which most see as coming to Northern Ireland eventually despite the NI Executive’s current stand against them, would be the main disincentive for school leavers thinking of going North to study in the future. He noticed the decline in applications in his school to UK universities: traditionally nearly 50% of the 80 or so students taking Leaving Certificate would also apply to UCAS; this year it is 18 out of 74 (just over 24%).

One incentive for students to go to Northern Ireland is the broader range of courses in Northern universities, he said. Undergraduate courses in Southern universities tend to divide along traditional lines: arts, science, engineering, business, medicine and so on. At the University of Ulster, in



particular, there is a greater choice of ‘modern’ courses and combinations of courses: subjects like human resource management and combinations like business and psychology.

In addition, for many courses at University of Ulster the points requirements are lower than at Southern universities. For example, he said the lowest entry point for a Ulster humanities degree is the equivalent of 325 Leaving Certificate points, 30 points lower than the lowest humanities entry requirement in the South.

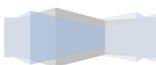
The requirement for a personal statement to accompany any application through the UCAS system – which many Republic of Ireland sees as a disincentive – this man sees as a potential bonus: he knows of several of his school’s students who have gained entrance to British and Northern Irish universities because a good personal statement overcame the obstacle of lower Leaving Certificate grades.

One problem he saw with Northern Ireland (and British) universities is that all university programmes on offer are degree (Level 8) programmes. Thus a student from his school with Ordinary level maths in the Leaving Certificate could not do engineering at a Northern Ireland university, but he or she could go onto a three year pass degree at neighbouring Dundalk IoT with the option of then transferring to an honours degree for another two years. On the other hand a convenient way for student from the Louth/Monaghan area to do a more specialised course like sports science is to go to the Southern Regional College in Newry for two years for a Level 7 course, and then move to University of Ulster for another two years for a Level 8 degree. This is one route to become a PE teacher in a school in either part of Ireland, he said.

This careers teacher also appealed for some clarity for students hoping to study law in Northern Ireland. He understood that of the eight areas of law required to become a solicitor in the Republic of Ireland, seven are common to Britain and therefore can be studied as part of a law degree at a Northern university. However one area – land law – is different, which would mean that a Southern student with a law degree from a Northern university would have to do an extra course in land law to be able to register with the Law Society in Dublin.

SOUTHERN CATHOLIC-MANAGED SECONDARY SCHOOL, DUBLIN

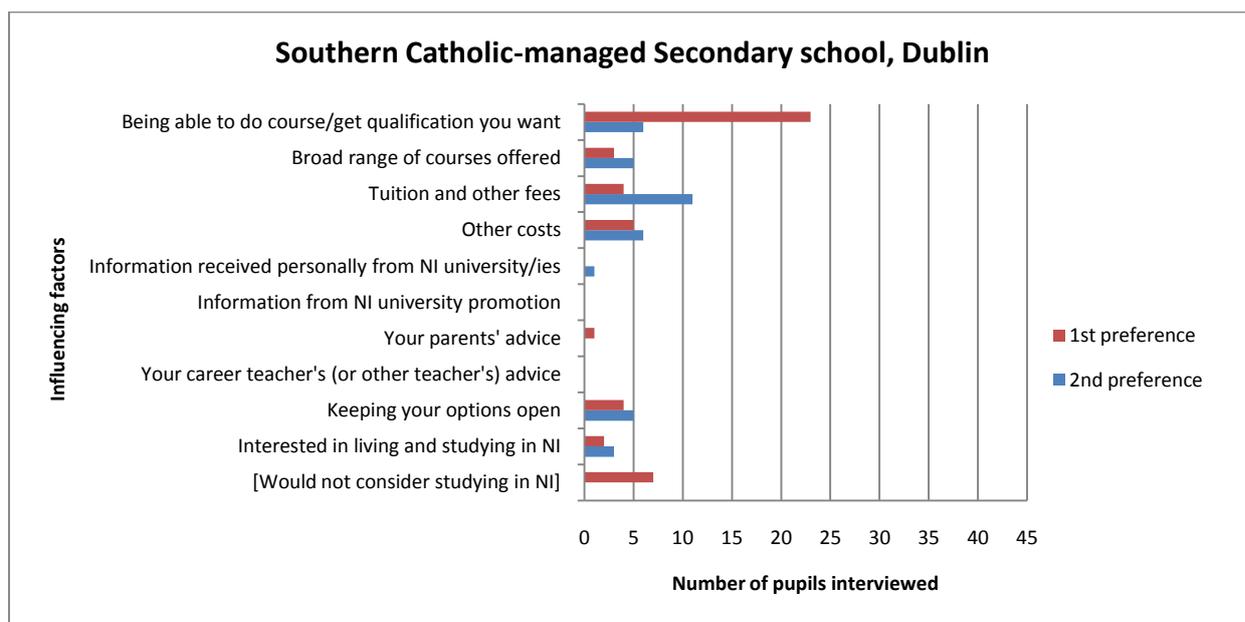
At a Catholic girls secondary school in Dublin 4 with a very good reputation for academic achievement, the researcher spoke to two classes of fifth year students, 45 students in total. This is a school with a high level of university entrance, mostly to University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin. It is situated in a belt of high prestige (and mostly fee-paying) second level schools in the prosperous inner ring of suburbs just south of Dublin city centre. The five most important factors (out of 10 listed) in influencing their decision about whether or not to consider going to a university in Northern Ireland were as follows.



ANNEXE II

Position	Factor	Numbers
1	Being able to do the course you want/get the qualification you need	23 put this 1 st 6 put this 2 nd 1 put this 3 rd
2	<i>I wouldn't study in Northern Ireland</i>	7 put this 1 st
3	Other costs (accommodation, transport, food and drink etc)*	5 put this 1 st 6 put this 2 nd 6 put this 3 rd
4	Keeping your options open in case you are unsuccessful in your CAO application	4 put this 1 st 5 put this 2 nd 4 put this 3 rd
5	Tuition and other fees (higher in the North)*	3 put this 1 st 12 put this 2 nd 7 put this 3 rd

*The significant numbers opting for these factors – despite it being made clear on the questionnaire form that these costs are higher in Northern Ireland – can be put down to the younger age of the group and the greater ignorance (because they are further away) of the cost of living in the North.



Discussion

Nearly everyone mentioned (on the questionnaire) that a speaker from Queen's University Belfast had visited the school the previous autumn (four also mentioned a visiting speaker from University of East Anglia). The careers teacher praised both the Queen's Open Day and the Queen's school visitor, underlining the impact a good schools liaison officer can have in a school.

One student said: 'Queens is more widely advertised and publicised than University of Ulster. I must admit that I know nothing about that university.' Another student said she had a cousin studying physiotherapy at University of Ulster Jordanstown. Another said – partly as a result of this visit – that she was considering going to Queen's, but she was still concerned about the high fees. A bus for Dublin school students goes to the Queen's Open Day every September, and the careers teacher encouraged the two classes to go.

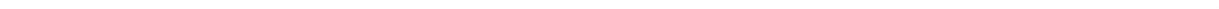
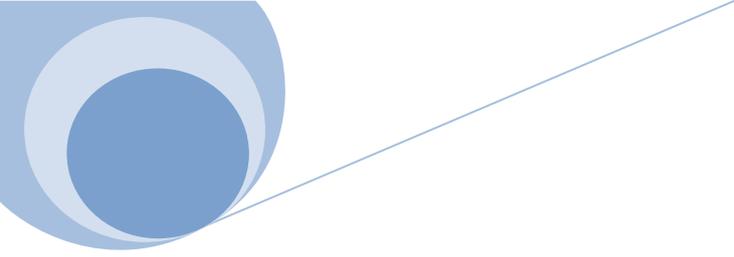
Several said they were only seriously considering UCD and TCD, and indicated (without saying it explicitly) that they saw Belfast, like Cork and Galway, as a university in a provincial city.

Guidance Counsellor

The guidance counsellor said it was an extra and time-consuming burden – and therefore a disincentive – for Irish students to have to complete a personal statement to apply to a Northern Irish or British university, something they do not have to do to apply to a Republic of Ireland university through the simpler CAO process.

She said that Northern Ireland universities ‘need to market themselves better – a good, lively speaker will make students’ ears prick up.’





QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST AND UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER STATISTICS

According to the January 2011 *Consultation Document on the development of a Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland* (Steering Group chair Sir Graeme Davies), currently 9.7% of the student population of University of Ulster and 4.1% of the student population of Queen's University Belfast are from the Republic of Ireland. The pattern of change in the undergraduate populations of the two universities is shown in the two following tables.

It is interesting that in 1991/92, before **Queen's University Belfast** began keeping computerised records of these patterns, the number of Republic of Ireland-domiciled undergraduates at the university was 432. So after a temporary 'bulge' in numbers in the mid-late 1990s (in 1995/96 the total number of RoI undergraduate *entrants* to NI universities reached 1,290, representing 17% of full-time undergraduate entrants to University of Ulster and over 7% to Queen's University Belfast), the number of RoI students at Queen's in recent years is actually lower than 20 years ago, when the Northern Ireland conflict was still active.

RoI undergraduates at Queen's University Belfast

Year	Population			Entrants		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
2001-02	460	102	562	143	48	191
2002-03	417	137	554	107	80	187
2003-04	405	87	492	113	55	168
2004-05	405	73	478	135	39	174
2005-06	423	76	499	136	43	179
2006-07	383	80	463	79	50	129
2007-08	330	72	402	74	42	116
2008-09	275	99	374	65	43	108
2009-10	236	42	278	63	21	84
2010-11	250	79	329	88	61	149

The numbers for RoI undergraduates at **University of Ulster** have held up well and even increased in the past few years (although one of the largest increases, in 2009-10, was mainly due to a once-off injection of 500 part-time students doing a certificate course in business methods for credit unions). The most notable change is in the balance of part-time and full-time students. The former overtook the latter in 2007-08 in terms of entrants and in 2009-10 in terms of total student population. This is indicative of trends not only in University of Ulster, but in many of the more technological, entrepreneurial and ICT-oriented universities worldwide. The balance in a more traditional university like Queen's has not followed suit.

RoI undergraduates at University of Ulster

Year	Population			Entrants		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
2001-02						
2002-03						
2003-04	1094	324	1418	383	203	586
2004-05	1104	357	1461	363	207	570
2005-06	1148	380	1528	396	189	585
2006-07	981	371	1352	203	202	405
2007-08	828	475	1303	226	304	530
2008-09	726	496	1222	217	260	477
2009-10	683	814	1497	254	638	892
2010-11	723	1395	2118	256	677	933





SCHOOLS' FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE TO STUDENTS AND A QUICK SURVEY

(Republic of Ireland schools)

I am doing a study into why so few students consider going to universities and other higher education colleges across the Irish border (Republic of Ireland students going to Northern universities and Northern Ireland students going to Southern universities). Why do so few students from the Republic of Ireland consider going to university in Belfast or Coleraine? What are the barriers that prevent them from seriously considering this as an option? These are the kinds of questions I am seeking answers to.

I would be grateful if you could fill in the short questionnaire below (since I don't know your names the answers will be completely anonymous):

(a) Please rate the importance of the following factors in influencing your decision whether or not to consider going to a university in Northern Ireland. Rate them from 1 to 11, with 1 being the most important factor.

Being able to do the course/get the qualification you want

A broad range of courses offered

Tuition and other fees (currently higher in Northern Ireland)

Other costs (accommodation, transport, cost of food, drink etc.)

Information you have personally got from a Northern university/universities

Information from a promotion by a Northern university

Your parents' advice

Your career teacher's (or another teacher's) advice

Your confidence about what mark you will get in the Leaving Cert (i.e. keeping your options open by also applying to a Northern university)

Interest in living and studying in Northern Ireland

[I wouldn't consider studying in Northern Ireland]





ANNEXE IV

(b) Do you think any of the following non-educational factors would be important in your decision? Mark 'Yes' or 'No' followed by a comment if you wish to make a comment.

Concerns about Northern Ireland still emerging from conflict

Concerns about going to study in an unfamiliar jurisdiction

Other difficulties or worries that might concern you (please specify)

Other positive non-educational factors that might attract you to study in Northern Ireland (please specify)

(c) If tuition fees were to rise significantly in the North (as Queen's University Belfast would like them to), would that be a significant disincentive to going to study there? Answer 'Yes' or 'No'

(d) Has a parent, careers teacher or anybody else ever suggested that you might consider studying at a Northern university? (If 'Yes', please specify)

(e) Would you consider applying to a British university? ('Yes' or 'No')

(f) Have you ever had any contact with or approach by a Northern Ireland university or college?

(g) Do you have any other comments you would like to add?

Andy Pollak
Director
Centre for Cross Border Studies
Armagh