

Review of Ireland's International Education Strategy 2013 Consultation Paper



INTRODUCTION

Investing in Global Relationships: Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010-2015 was published in September 2010¹. Significant progress has been made in implementing this strategy, to complement and support the work undertaken at institutional level:

- **A strong national brand is now in place: *Education in Ireland*, managed by Enterprise Ireland.**
- **There is much closer alignment between education and immigration policies.**
- **A new Government of Ireland Scholarship has been established, managed by the Higher Education Authority.**
- **An International Education Marketing Fund has been developed which allows institutions to collaborate in Enterprise Ireland-led national marketing initiatives.**
- **Promotional efforts are taking place in the priority markets of the USA, Brazil, China, India, SE Asia and the Gulf. Ministers have visited each of the priority markets in the last two years.**
- **Ireland is participating at national level in major international scholarship schemes such as *Science Without Borders* (Brazil) and the *King Abdullah Scholarship Programme* (Saudi Arabia).**
- **Statutory provision is now in place for an international education mark and code of practice, which will be rolled out in 2014 by Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (QQI).**
- **International student numbers have risen in priority sectors: 14% growth in the English language sector and 9% growth in higher education since 2010.**
- **Ireland's international education offering has also diversified, including with increasingly significant levels of cross-border provision.**

However, global demand for education continues to change rapidly. There continues to be a massive expansion in demand for education around the world, particularly in emerging markets with growing middle classes. The conventional model of international education, which involves students travelling thousands of miles to study

¹ <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Ireland-s-International-Education-Strategy-2010-2015-Investing-in-Global-Relationships.pdf>

in the developed world, is also being disrupted through lower-cost online provision and in-country delivery of international qualifications.

It remains in our interests to continue to attract a growing cohort of talented international students from priority markets to study in Ireland. But to succeed in the future, we will also need to offer a more diverse portfolio of international education services which meet the demands and expectations of a global marketplace.

With that in mind, the Action Plan for Jobs 2013 indicated that a short, focussed review of the international education strategy would be carried out by the Department of Education and Skills.

The outcome of the review will be a new Government action plan for the promotion of international education, which will be published by the end of 2013.

Purpose of the Consultation Document

The purpose of this consultation paper is to seek the views of interested stakeholders on the following issues to be considered in the review:

- 1. Creating Irish jobs through sustainable growth in international education**
- 2. Competing globally under the Education in Ireland brand**
- 3. New opportunities in priority markets**
- 4. Strengthening Ireland's reputation for quality**
- 5. Activating Ireland's alumni and diaspora**

Submissions from stakeholders can address any of the issues which they consider to be of relevance, including any not explicitly raised in this document. Submissions containing factual supporting evidence, examples of good practice constructive suggestions regarding how policies and approaches can be improved are particularly welcomed.

When and how should submissions be made?

The Department will work directly with ICOS, the Irish Council for International Students, to facilitate forums in which international students can input their views.

The Department of Education and Skills will ask the education provider representatives on the High Level Group on International Education to submit co-ordinated responses from their respective members. Responses from other stakeholders are very welcome. Submissions will be published on www.education.ie.

Submissions should be sent to Mary Whelan, Department of Education and Skills at Mary.Whelan@education.gov.ie by 11 October 2013.

1. CREATING IRISH JOBS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Job retention and creation is the Government's number one priority. International education is identified as a significant sectoral opportunity for Ireland in the Jobs Action Plan 2013.

Irish jobs can be retained and created through the economic impact of international students, the long-term relationships developed with our international partners and foreign earnings from the provision of international education services.

The review will examine how the net jobs impact of international education can be maximised. An inter-departmental review of the work concession for non-EEA students will be carried out as part of this process to examine whether existing policies remain appropriate in the current labour market conditions.

The new international education action plan will put in place new targets for achieving growth and diversification and to ensure that Ireland is attracting a sustainable number of talented international students.

Questions for consultation:

- **In what ways can international education further contribute to the achievement of the aims of the Jobs Action Plan e.g. direct creation of jobs through international education services, fostering entrepreneurship among international graduates, meeting specific skills gaps?**
- **How can Ireland retain the most highly skilled international graduates?**
- **What institutional capacity is there to take in additional international students, and in what areas and levels?**
- **What targets and goals are set out in institutional strategies? Are these targets realistic and backed up with resources?**
- **What should be our national targets for student recruitment? What targets should be set for other aspects of internationalisation: online education, trans-national education etc? What are the relevant international benchmarks?**

2. COMPETING GLOBALLY UNDER THE EDUCATION IN IRELAND BRAND

Prospective international students now have an unprecedented range of educational options. Ireland has much to offer such students, but to get a hearing in a crowded global education marketplace we need to be clear on why an Irish education is different and why it provides long-term value.

Raising awareness of an Irish education is only the first step. To follow through, we must make the student's journey through the information, applications, admissions and immigration processes as smooth as possible.

At a time when Ireland's competitors are investing heavily in promotion and development of their international education services, it is vital that Ireland maximises its own resources, including through further collaboration.

The roles and expectations for Government agencies, sectoral representatives, institutions and others in delivering the new action plan will be clarified and the effectiveness of current national co-ordination mechanisms will be considered. The potential for additional pooling of resources to undertake strategic projects will be considered.

Questions for consultation:

- **What is Ireland's value proposition as a centre of international education?**
- **How we further differentiate our offering to an international audience?**
- **What are our most internationally competitive academic programmes?**
- **In what areas should the English language sector focus in non-EEA markets?**
- **How can the international student journey through the initial recruitment stages be improved? Are there opportunities for Irish business in this area?**
- **What resources do individual institutions, sectors and representative bodies deploy to promote internationalisation, including on-the-ground in priority markets?**
- **Are there opportunities to further share resources between institutions, particularly among participants in strategic alliances and regional clusters?**
- **What strategic projects could be implemented through additional pooling of resources e.g. a "one stop shop" shared applications portal?**
- **How can national and sectoral co-ordination mechanisms be strengthened?**

3. NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN PRIORITY MARKETS

While still experiencing growth, the model of international education which has prevailed since the 1990s involving large numbers of students travelling overseas for full degree programmes is being significantly disrupted.

A massive expansion in the scope and quality of domestic education options in emerging economies has made staying at home a more realistic proposition for ambitious and talented young people. Trans-national provision has allowed students to experience many of the benefits of high-quality developed education systems without the need to study abroad. The lower costs of online education (particularly MOOCs - massive open online courses) are making further and higher education a realistic proposition for millions of people for the first time.

Ireland will still compete vigorously in the market for talented, internationally mobile students. However, we will also need to broaden our focus and diversify, seeking to develop new opportunities in areas such as overseas skills development, teacher training programmes, consultancy, online and trans-national education and training.

As global demand changes, Ireland will need to keep its prioritisation of markets under review to ensure we are focused on those regions which will yield the maximum return.

Questions for consultation:

- **What opportunities for Ireland are created by the disruptive trends and technologies in international education?**
- **What actions need to be taken at institutional, sectoral and national level to exploit these opportunities?**
- **What is the potential for greater connectivity between education services and other Irish businesses and tradable services –e.g. financing international student mobility, developing new education technologies etc?**
- **Should differentiated approaches be used, depending on the nature of the opportunity in priority markets (e.g. emerging, high-growth, mature)?**
- **Could greater results be obtained by focusing with greater intensity on an even smaller number of countries or regions?**
- **What markets have the potential to become priorities in the coming years and what preparatory work should be taken in these markets?**
- **What foreign Government scholarship schemes should Ireland seek to participate in at a national level?**

4. STRENGTHENING IRELAND'S REPUTATION FOR QUALITY

The 2010 strategy set out a vision that Ireland would “offer a high-quality education, strong integration with domestic students, and an unparalleled experience that adds significant value to the career outcomes of all who are educated here”.

Significant progress has been made with the enactment of legislation to put in place a statutory International Education Mark and code of practice. A separate public consultation exercise on introduction of the International Education Mark is being carried out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, with a closing date of 13 September 2013.

The views of students themselves are particularly crucial in considering questions regarding the quality of international education. The Department of Education and Skills is working with ICOS, the Irish Council for International Students, to facilitate forums in which international students can input into the strategy review.

Questions for consultation:

- **What more needs to be done to ensure that international students have a positive experience in Ireland? What good practice can be shared in this area?**
- **What more can be done to strengthen protection for learners before they arrive in Ireland –e.g. to secure any fees paid upfront?**
- **How can the contribution of international students be recognised at the national level?**
- **How do institutions measure international student satisfaction and progress?**

5. ACTIVATING IRELAND'S ALUMNI AND DIASPORA

A central ambition of Ireland's strategy is the creation of a new global network comprising Irish-educated international alumni. Education is also recognised as a crucial means of maintaining and developing links with our global diaspora.

Tens of thousands of people around the world have had some experience of the Irish education system. They are perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in promoting Ireland as a centre of international education. The review will examine what more needs to be done to develop mutually beneficial relationships with Ireland's international alumni and to examine how our alumni can be activated to promote Education in Ireland. The potential to attract more members of the Irish diaspora to study in Ireland will also be considered.

Questions for consultation:

- **Who are the top international alumni of Irish institutions?**
- **What do institutions currently do to track and maintain relationships with their alumni? What more can be done at institutional level?**
- **What can be done at sectoral and national level to strengthen alumni relationships? Who should lead this process at national level?**
- **How can we activate alumni to promote Ireland as a centre of international education within their networks? What other roles can alumni play?**
- **What can be done to attract more expatriate Irish citizens and members of our diaspora to return to study in Ireland?**