

# The dynamics of human capital and the world of work: towards a common market in contemporary tertiary education

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## **Abstract**

The drive for the so-called 'knowledge society', and the expected competitive advantage envisioned, has led to 'power elites' and vested interests applying pressure on nation states to develop and implement policies that push the balance of national education systems towards the economic imperative and away from the social good. This social inquiry will describe items, strategies and objectives relating to the pursuit of the current higher education change policy agendas, as expressed in key Irish policy documents.

The inquiry concentrates on the new 'world of work' and the dynamic association with 'human capital' in particular the relationship between macro change policy narratives, the socio-political intent and implementation strategies. Critical considerations are given to 'claims, issues, and concerns' relating to components of the new order change policy as expressed in this modernisation agenda, with particular reference to awards systems. The conceptual approach is located in constructivism, the mode of inquiry utilises critical policy analysis and components of critical ethnography. The methodology is grounded in 'non-numeric' research discourse. The method consists of a systematic review, of documents, artefacts, and 'critical self reflection' as an actor in the sector.

From an initial review of the evidence gathered, it can be argued that the higher education policy strategy is directed towards systems convergence and underpinned by a new common currency award framework, lubricated by a narrative of technocratic speak. In this new higher education strategy knowledge is codified, commodified, quantified, marketable and open to the emerging pressures of the free market.

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## Introduction

Over the last twenty years both developing and developed countries have placed a policy priority on developing investment strategies in tertiary education<sup>1</sup> and training, as a means to stimulate economic growth, maintain competitive advantage, facilitate high-level skills employment, social cohesion and socio-cultural development. Influential ‘supranational organisations’ (Ball 2008) such as the World Bank (WB) the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have all produced reports proclaiming both the economic and social benefits that follow on from national investment policy initiatives in education and training. In the European context, the European Council in March 2000 adopted the Lisbon Strategy. A key component of this strategy was that further strategic investment in education and training by member states was necessary in order for Europe to become the most competitive economy and knowledge-based society by 2010. The Irish Government set forth its own intended investment priority in education and training in both the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000–2007, ‘Employment and Human Resources Programme’ and the NDP 2007–2013, ‘Human Capital’. Within these documents there seems to be a correlation drawn between the investment in ‘human capital’ and the positive effect this has on economic growth, productivity, competitiveness and employability.<sup>2</sup> From these emerging policy agendas it would seem that tertiary education and training is being positioned as a primer for economic development, perceived as a crucial ‘intermediate zone’ between the world of learning and the world of work. Underpinning the political drive towards the knowledge economy are an array of high-level modernisation policy initiatives which seek to stimulate reform in higher education structures, systems, standards, developing processes and procedures that enable cross-national compatibility and comparisons.

## Research approach

The focus of this short paper is to critically review the policy agenda from an Irish context, with specific reference to human capital accumulation and recognition, and the characteristics of the new world of work. Comparisons will be drawn between the European policy agenda and the Irish Government policies. Specific questions will be explored.

- Is there systems convergence?
- Is there an emerging new pedagogical narrative?
- Is there a regulatory discourse of quality?
- What are the market implications?

The research approach is based in the domain of social science, located in the constructionist paradigm (Blaikie 2007; Crotty 2005; Guba and Lincoln 1989). As a social actor in the field of tertiary education I endeavour to ‘make sense’ of the policy environments that influence and engage the world of work in higher education. As Blaikie (2007: 22) notes the knowledge claim of constructionism ‘is the outcome of people having to make sense of their encounters with the physical world and with other people’. The research framework is developed by applying a ‘mixed methodological’ approach (Creswell 1998), combining components from Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) ‘claims, concerns, issues’, Thomas’s (1993) ‘critical observations and accounts from an insider perspective’ and Yanow’s (2000) ‘subjective interpretivism, defamiliarisation process’. The method comprises of a ‘systematic review’ (Hart 2005) of the ‘encoding process’ (Trowler 1998) of contemporary milestone higher education policy documents of the Irish Government. Broader contextual information is gathered from European policy and prominent ‘supranational organisations’ such as the OECD, WTO, UNESCO, the European University Association (EUA)

and several Irish agencies, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), Institutes of Technology Ireland (IoTI). Finally from engaging in critical ‘self reflection’ (Schon 1983) as a professional in the field of higher education over the last ten years. Personal observations and considerations are detailed in relation to the actual ‘lived experience’ of policy implementation in the workplace.

Table 1: Research framework

Constructivist paradigm (‘Making sense’, defamiliarisation, interpreting tertiary education and training reform) Establish Context: EU Policy; Bologna Process, Lisbon Agenda, EQF. Supranational Organisations; WTO, OECD, UNESCO.		
Policy encoding process in Ireland	Irish Policy: 1996 University Act, 1999 Qualifications Act, 2006 Institutes of Technology Act, NDP 2007–2013, National Agreement Towards 2016	Self reflection: (Lecturer, Central management, Researcher)
Claims	Are favourable assertions make by stakeholders, this is a positive position where agreement can be reached and the negotiated process of inquiry can be finalised	
Concerns	Are unfavourable assertions made by stakeholders, this is a negative situation where negotiations are contested and there is strong disagreement expressed	
Issues	Are disagreements between stakeholders, in this position disagreement is acknowledged, and there is reasonable room for manoeuvring	
Human capital–World of work		

The structure of the research approach is depicted in Table 1. First of all contextual information on the reform process within the European Union will be provided. Considerations will also focus on the strategies advocated by several supranational organisations. Then in the following section the Irish reform context will be explored and critical considerations will be given to ‘claims, concerns and issues’. Through this inquiry approach, signifiers relevant to human capital and the world of work will be highlighted. As a professional practitioner in the field of tertiary education and training I will reflect on experience, providing commentary from an Irish context. This type of approach is associated with ‘insider research’ (Loxley and Sears 2008) located in the social experience of education ‘praxis’ theory and practice in action.

## **The reform context**

Over the last two decades policy makers in developed countries have prioritised the development of policy initiatives focused on reforming tertiary education and training in an effort to stimulate the realisation of a knowledge economy. Policy initiatives were developed in numerous areas such as, access, quality, evaluation, assessment, funding, ranking, pedagogy, recognition and qualifications. Key characteristics of this emerging policy agenda were new systems of accountability, managerialism, rationalisation, performance indicators, application of ICT, restructuring of systems and learning and teaching practice. To gain a picture of the reform context this section provides some details on three major European Union policy initiatives – Bologna, Lisbon, European Qualifications Framework (EQF) – and the strategies of some supranational organisations.

## **European Union**

The European Union has initiated three major tertiary education reform initiatives during the present decade, the Bologna Declaration 1999, The Lisbon Strategy 2000 and the European Qualifications Framework 2006. The Bologna Declaration states:

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.

(1999: 1)

The Declaration aims to achieve a European Higher Education Area that can further the intellectual, social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological base of Europe. It details six principle measures which could facilitate the process of compatibility, comparability and integration of higher education systems in Europe.

1. ‘Easily readable and comparable degrees’ – including a Diploma Supplement, to enhance employability and increase international competitiveness in higher education systems.
2. ‘Two main cycles’<sup>3</sup> – first cycle undergraduate (minimum of three years, programmes should have relevance to the European labour market), second cycle graduate (Masters and Doctorate levels).
3. ‘System of credits’<sup>4</sup> – development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to promote student mobility (credits can be acquired in the non-university sector).

4. 'Promote mobility' – reduce barriers that restrict the free movement of students, teachers, researchers, administrators.
5. 'Promote European co-operation in quality assurance'<sup>5</sup> – develop comparable criteria and methodologies.
6. 'Promote European dimension in higher education' – curriculum, integrated programmes, and mobility.

The Bologna Declaration is a significant policy framework for the integration of the European higher education sector. It has the potential to create a European higher education block, which could advance both the internal higher education market for human capital in terms of students, academics and experts and act as a major attractor for international human capital, challenging the dominance of the USA and Australia particularly in the international student market.<sup>6</sup> The policy intent seems to lean towards convergence of higher education systems in Europe, although the diversity of existing systems in terms of traditions, culture, autonomy, capacity, capabilities, politics, reputations and standards may present some obstacles and even resistance to its full implementation.

Another leading European Union policy, which has a much closer focus on the education and training needs for the world of work and the new economy needs of Europe, is the Lisbon Strategy 2010, adopted in 2000. The main premise of this policy is to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010. The primary means of achieving this is a drive for increased investment in education and training. The measure for increased investment in education and training is set as a percentage of GDP. The average percentage for Europe in 2002 was 5.2 per cent of GDP. Ireland's investment for the same year was 4.32 per cent. The strategy sets the following five key benchmarks for national education and training systems in Europe to be reached by 2010:

1. to increase the number of mathematics, science and technology graduates (MST) to 748,000
2. to increase lifelong learning participation rates to 12.5 per cent
3. to reduce early school leavers to 10 per cent
4. to increase upper secondary level completions to 85 per cent
5. to reduce low achievers in reading to 15.5 per cent.

The Lisbon Strategy also calls for reform in the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of education and training, specifically Vocational Education and Training (VET). VET has traditionally been more associated with providing programmes that are closely aligned to the needs of the world of work. The European Commission Lisbon Update Report notes the following.

Enhancing the relevance of VET to the labour market, and improving relations with employers and the social partners, is an important factor for most countries trying to tackle the issues of quality and attractiveness. Improvements in the structure of VET, access to apprenticeships and the reform of VET standards are crucial in this context.

(2006a: 6)

It is worth noting that compared to the Bologna Declaration which only focuses on high-level knowledge and skills, the Lisbon Strategy provides a more equitable framework for the inclusion of marginalised sectors of society, early school-leavers, and those with literacy difficulties. Although the focus of the Lisbon Strategy may lean more towards the economic imperative, its scope is broader in a social context by the provision of benchmarks for socially disadvantaged sectors in societies. It would seem that the Bologna Declaration has been engineered to maintain the elitist perception of the university as the sole producer of high-level knowledge and culture excluding

other providers of higher education which could be loosely grouped under the heading of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The Lisbon Strategy adopts a more pragmatic position in terms of education and training sectoral boundaries: it offers a seamless range of benchmarks from secondary, VET, adult education to higher education that are non-exclusively bound in a lifelong learning paradigm.

A third major European Union policy initiative is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) introduced in 2006. The European Commission states that

[t]he main purpose of the EQF is to act as a translation device and neutral reference point for comparing qualifications across different education and training systems and to strengthen co-operation and mutual trust between the relevant stakeholders. This will increase transparency, facilitate the transfer and use of qualifications across different education and training systems and levels.

(2006b: 2)

The Commission notes several reasons for the introduction of the EQF:

1. It enables individuals to judge the value of their qualifications.
2. It is a prerequisite for transfer and accumulation of qualifications.
3. It improves employers' ability to judge the relevance of qualifications.
4. It allows education and training providers to compare profiles and assists the development of quality assurance.

The EQF is a meta-framework consisting of eight reference levels, ranging from compulsory education and training to Doctorate studies. The EQF utilises a 'learning outcome' approach. Learning outcomes are based on a combination of knowledge, skills and competence. By adopting this approach the EQF endeavours to establish a 'common language' that has usability in the diverse range of education and training systems within Europe. The EQF acts as a translator device between different national awards systems, offering an assessable mechanism to gain the value of a given award within a European context. Demand for this type of currency framework is also emerging due to the increasing mobility of labour. Industry/enterprise seeks accessible mechanisms to inform the selection process relating to the value and meaning of awards. Particularly where applicants for positions hold awards obtained in other countries, the award title and type may be relevant to the company's work process needs, but does it have creditability and equivalence to similar awards in the host country's award system? The mobile learner/worker also finds it a difficult and lengthy process to have their existing awards recognised and translated into the award currency of other jurisdictions in order to gain appropriate value and remuneration for their work.

In terms of higher education translations the EQF is calibrated with the Bologna three-cycle award system. Cycle 1 (undergraduate) is equivalent to EQF level 6, cycle 2 (graduate) is placed at EQF level 7 and cycle three (postgraduate) is placed at EQF level 8. In theory the development of the EQF should assist the process of mobility of learners and workers within the EU member states, providing a cross jurisdiction currency mechanism to judge the general value of an award. This will depend however on whether other member states have national qualification frameworks in place that can communicate with the EQF and whether employers and other stakeholders will recognise the meta-currency of the EQF. Will all awards at a specific level be judged as the same value or will preferential treatment be given to national awards or judgments based on the institutional reputation of the awarding body? The EQF seeks to promote mutual trust between member states and relies on member states' co-operation to engage in the translation process. How will this

process be monitored, who will assure that quality is met and standards are compatible? Will utilising a common language of ‘learning outcomes’ have any effect on pedagogical practice in member states? These European policy initiatives are presented in their ‘encoding process’ phase (Trowler 1998: 49). This is the first stage of policy development. Throughout the ‘transmission’ and ‘decoding process’ these policies have expanded in both content and context over the last nine years.

New streams and policy initiatives have emerged such as the drive for the European Research Area (2005) and Lifelong Learning (2006). The European education and training reform agenda is inward focused, endeavouring to create an integrated Europe knowledge economy/society, which is efficient, effective, quality assured, enabling mobility and meeting the needs of the new world of work. It is also outward looking, seeking to benchmark achievements with other global players such as the USA and Japan, endeavouring to create an attractive and sophisticated climate for international students and world-class experts, and to market European educational and training provision on the global stage as a high value quality service. This is a powerful multifaceted education and training reform policy agenda emanating from Europe. Early adopters within Europe are at advanced stages of restructuring their systems while other key global education and training providers (USA, Australia, and China) are monitoring developments and/or developing similar strategies in order to maintain their present position.

### **World Trade Organisation**

Other influential supranational organisations are also seeking reform of education and training. Since the 1990s the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has consistently argued for the liberalisation of the education sector. Murphy (2008: 162) states: ‘It is hugely significant, philosophically, politically and pedagogically, that education in general, and higher education in particular was defined as a “service” in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) as a WTO directive in 1995’. According to Verger and Robertson (2008) GATS makes provision for the market liberalisation of twelve service sectors in total. Educational services are included and separated into five areas: primary education, secondary education, higher education, adult education and other education services. GATS outlines four modes of commercialisation of the service sectors:

- cross border supply
- consumption abroad
- commercial presence
- presence of natural persons.

GATS also makes reference to Domestic Regulations in signatory states in relation to education providers, citing three main areas where barriers need to be addressed, with clear, transparent and equitable procedures put in place. These areas are qualifications, technical standards, and licensing requirements. While member states are expected to enter into discussions on GATS they are not obliged to make a liberalisation commitment. In making a liberalisation commitment a state enters into a binding regulatory agreement, which has two primary regulations:

- national treatment (not less favourable to foreign agencies)
- market access (the elimination of barriers that are inherent in national systems).

Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006: 11) in their critique of neo-liberalism, free-market practices and policies in higher education write that ‘The WTO now routinely dictates to governments on the “legality” of their domestic policies with regards to their potential interference with unfettered

global market practices'. Within the discourse of the free market the tertiary education and training sector is not solely viewed as both a producer of knowledge/skills and custodian of award systems which are bounded in the socio-political regulatory traditions of nation states and regions within states. It is also a potential free-market zone, which has been underexploited mainly due to regulatory barriers, diversity of systems and the lack of compatibility, transferability and standardised communication toolkits that can mediate between and within systems. While tertiary education and training is a resource-hungry and investment-needy sector it is also an economic growth area, employing hundreds of thousands of teachers, trainers, lecturers, researchers, administrators, support and technical staff. Making provision for the education and training needs of hundreds of millions of people, this has the potential to generate vast sums of revenue. Lynch (2006), referring to reports by UNESCO and investment bankers Merrill Lynch, estimates the global value of the education sector to be worth more than 2 trillion dollars. However market penetration of education systems is difficult because these systems are complex, differentiation is inherent, bound in the regulatory policy and socio-cultural traditions of nation states and sectoral developments. For optimal free-market mechanisms to operate at national, regional and international levels, a common understanding or currency framework needs to be developed by policy makers.

### **Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development**

The OECD similarly has provided policy makers with numerous reports calling for reform and modernisation of the tertiary sector. Investment in education and training is perceived as crucial to economic development in the new global economy as reliance on natural resources, agriculture and manufacturing declines, while the services and technologies needed to feed unfettered consumerism begin to play a dominant role in economic growth. According to Donald Johnston, Secretary General of the OECD

Knowledge, skills and competences constitute a vital asset in supporting economic growth and reducing social inequality in OECD countries. This asset, which is often referred to as human capital, has been identified as one key factor in combating high and persistent unemployment and the problems of low pay and poverty. As we move into knowledge-based; economies the importance of human capital becomes even more significant than ever.

(OECD 1998: 3)

The OECD (2008) argues that increased investment in education and training throughout the lifespan (lifelong learning) is a necessity to stimulate economic growth due to several factors:

- *Globalisation* internationalisation of national economies, reduction in trade restrictions, advances in technology, cheaper accessible transport, multi-nationals operating on a international stage, mobility of capital.
- *Change in demographics* ageing populations, lower birth rates, living longer, population mobility.
- *ICT* digital revolution, significant increase in ICT take up, increase in broadband and internet connectivity, increase in web-based activities.
- *World of work* working fewer hours, more temporary work, insecure employment, shorter careers, increased female participation.

The OECD notes that investment in education and training makes a positive contribution towards economic development: 'if the average time spent in education by a population rises by one year,

the economic output per head of population should grow by between 4% to 6% in the long run' (Keeley 2007: 34). The return to the individual is also substantial: graduates are more likely to have above average earnings compared to those that only hold secondary school qualifications or lower. According to the OECD: 'There is a strong identifiable relationship between human capital growth and the growth not just in output but also in labour productivity' (1998: 65). Consequently the higher the level of human capital the greater the potential productivity gains and economic growth.

In the current knowledge-driven, globalised environment there is increased competition between nation states to attract high-level human capital, leading to both the 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' analysis. As such human capital is perceived as a valuable resource, subject to the competitive practices of the free market. This can have drastic effects on developing countries that lose the potential benefits that might arise from the human capital of some of their brightest citizens. This is one of the risks of investment in human capital that developing countries face, humans are not like other forms of tangible capital (money, resources, land, etc.), human capital is intrinsically located in the person, who can decide how and where to apply their knowledge skills and competence.

### **United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation**

The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is the specialist section of the United Nations responsible for promoting education and training initiatives within the member states of the UN. Its remit ranges across the whole spectrum of education from compulsory, post compulsory, TVET, higher education and research. UNESCO's work is principally informed by the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals. An area of considerable concern for UNESCO is access to education for all, with particular relevance to this paper in respect of equitable access to higher education. UNESCO has serious concerns relating to the unequal and inequitable opportunities in access to higher education that exist in some developing countries. The UNESCO Position Paper on higher education states the following.

It is clear that new opportunities and new challenges face higher education in its role as actor and reactor to a more globalized society. In response to these developments and trends, international and supranational frameworks are being reviewed or developed by different intergovernmental bodies. It has been acknowledged however, that UNESCO, as the specialised agency of the United Nations with the competence for education, has a critically important role to play. UNESCO has the responsibility to help develop appropriate frameworks for higher education based on the principles of the United Nations and, in partnership with Member States, serve to build capacity and facilitate the implementation of these policy and regulatory frameworks at the national and international level.

(2005: 28)

Central to UNESCO's strategy for higher education is 'capacity building' in terms of appropriate policies and regulatory frameworks that can support the advancement of higher education in developing countries. UNESCO (2003: 8) claims that the process of globalisation is having a major impact on the higher education sector. Key elements within this global context that have relevance to emerging higher education policy initiatives of UN member states are

- the growing importance of a knowledge society/economy
- deregulation of trade barriers in education services
- the immense growth in ICT
- a growing emphasis on the role of the market in education.

UNESCO's report on *Trends and Developments in Higher Education in Europe* (2003) highlights several main areas of change:

- 'democratisation of access' (including the expansion of enrolments in higher education, diversity of students profile and lifelong learning)
- quality of higher education (mechanisms to assure quality, accreditations, standards and qualifications)
- internal functioning and the external environment (the funding, accountability and management of institutes, relevance of programmes to the world of work).

The organisation notes that the key emerging issues are employability, entrepreneurship, technology transfer, and transnational education (TNE). The relevance of higher education to the world of work is strongly questioned, particularly in the context of globalisation and the drive for the knowledge society/economy. UNESCO concludes:

What is urgently needed is further reflection on the substantive aspects of academic globalization, on such issues as a global framework for academic qualifications and their recognition, for students, for staff members, and for study programme mobility, as well as for the rules of market operations or for the provision of higher education as a public good. (2003: 27)

Within tertiary education UNESCO has a specialised subsection which deals exclusively with Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) called UNESCO-UNEVOC.

UNESCO-UNEVOC promotes access, quality, systems, information sharing and networking within the domain of TVET, ranging from VET to higher education activities. The Director of UNESCO-UNEVOC Maclean claimed that over 80 per cent of jobs worldwide required some form of TVET qualification, further suggesting that TVET providers offer a variety of skills levels catering for the needs of the different labour markets in the developed work. He notes that the key challenges for the TVET area in developing countries are access to quality TVET, promoting decent work, TVET in the formal, non-formal and informal sectors, vocationalisation of secondary schools, VET in higher education, global networking, teacher and training, value of education in work, sustainable development, and realising the potential of ICT. UNESCO-UNEVOC carries out work at a European level. Bunning (2006) notes that leading on from the Bologna Declaration call for European-wide degrees a multi-national Master Degree programme in VET has been developed by Otto-von-Guericke University (Germany) and Anglia Polytechnic University (UK). Bunning continues that the Lisbon Strategy is facing some critical issues in relation to TVET:

1. *missing mobility*: barriers are still in place inhibiting mobility
2. *shortage of qualified teaching and training staff*: by 2015 over 1 million teachers will have to be recruited
3. *reluctant participation in LLL*: there is no clear funding strategy for LLL and no visible promotion strategy for LLL exists.

### **The Irish context**

Since the late 1990s the Irish Government has been introducing a reform framework in both legislative (statutory acts) and policy initiatives focused on the field of tertiary education. The principal acts that this paper will focus on are the 1997 University Act, 1992 DIT Act, the 2006

Institutes of Technology Act and the 1999 Qualifications (Education and Training) Act. Policy initiatives that will be reviewed include the White Paper on Lifelong Learning (2000), the National Development Plans (2007–2013) and the Social Partnership National Agreement Towards 2016. Underpinning this emerging policy agenda is the premise that strategic investment in the education and training system will lead to returns in terms of both economic and social benefits to the state in the long term. The Government position is clearly stated in the National Development Plan.

Investment in education, training and upskilling, broadly termed as investment in human capital, has played a very important role in Ireland's successful economic performance. It has provided a well skilled and flexible labour force and thereby helped make Ireland a major attraction for domestic and foreign enterprises.

(Irish Government 2007: 190)

The reform context adopts a modernisation approach, seeking to stimulate reform and in some cases restructuring of systems in an effort to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of access and provision in tertiary education and training. Ireland operates a binary higher education system (see Appendix 1), consisting of seven universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology,<sup>7</sup> five third level colleges and 13 Institutes of Technology.<sup>8</sup> All of these Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) receive public funding through either the Department of Education or Science (DoES) or the Higher Education Authority (HEA). There are also an increasing number of private providers and 'others'<sup>9</sup> offering specific courses at higher education level, the Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC) lists 43 providers who have gained HETAC Accreditation for such courses. Since the 1980s the 'massification' of publicly funded IHE can be graphically depicted in terms of full time student enrolments (see Figure 1).

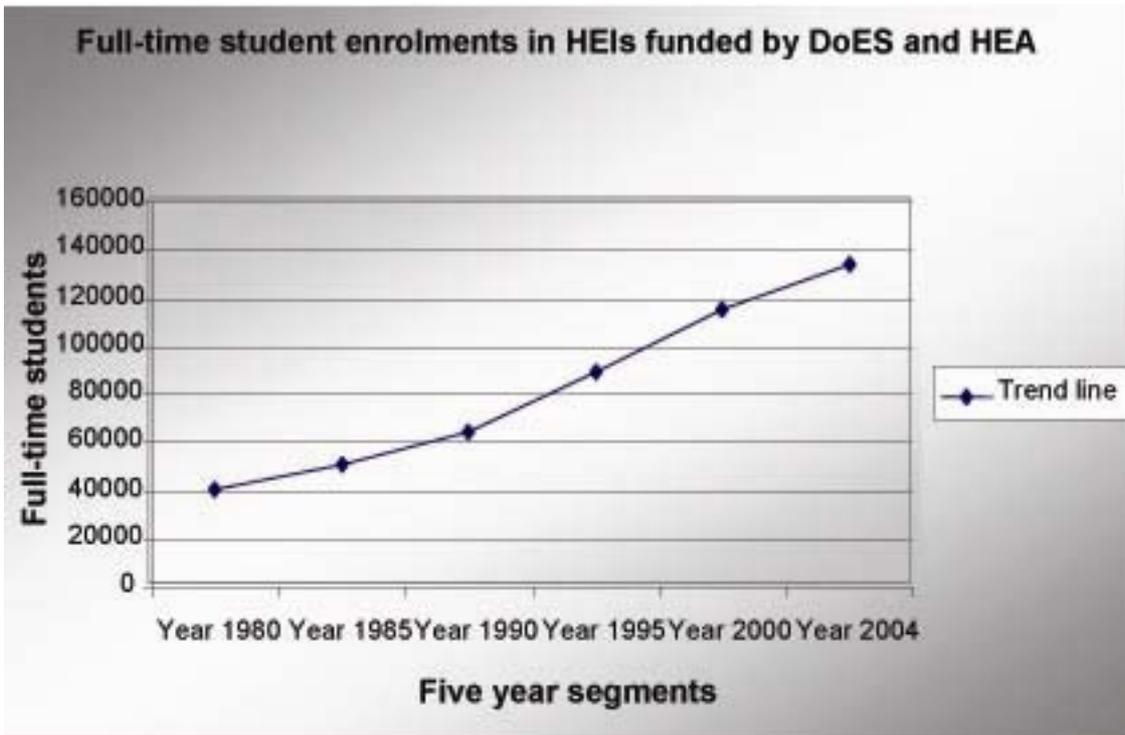


Figure 1: Full-time student enrolments 1980–2004

Source: DoES, HEA

Over the last quarter of a century the number of full-time student enrolments in the publicly funded IHE sector has increased by nearly 100,000. This is more than a 200 per cent increase compared to the 1980 figure. In 2007 the enrolments for the university and five colleges of higher education were 87,033 full-time and 16,518 part-time (source HEA). These figures include both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The figure for full-time students (undergraduate and postgraduate for the Institutes of Technology sector (including DIT) for 2007 was 52,322 (source HEA<sup>10</sup>). The total enrolment for both sectors combined for 2007 is 155,873 (not including part-time figures for the IoT sector [see <sup>6</sup> and <sup>11</sup>). The OECD's review, *Higher Education in Ireland*, makes the following statement in relation to the expansion of tertiary education.

Over 90% of the expansion has been generated from the 18 to 20 year old cohort and has been drawn primarily, as in most European countries, from the professional and managerial classes. Lifelong learning, widening participation and the encouragement of mature students to enter tertiary education have not been given such emphasis and must be reinforced in the future if Ireland is to capitalise on its success over the last decade.

(2006: 8)

The 2004 OECD Examiners Report makes 52 recommendations for tertiary education and training which focus on development and structure, management and governance, widening participation, international dimensions, research and innovation, and increased investment. Some of these recommendations have materialised, others are in progress or under review and some are not yet acted on.

The next part of this paper deals with some of these topics, contained in both Acts and policy. Summaries of the key relevant components of this policy context are provided below followed by an analysis which utilises the research approach presented previously.

### **Irish Government Acts**

The contemporary reform of tertiary education began in the 1990s. Specific Acts<sup>12</sup> detailed below are: the Dublin Institute of Technology Act 1992, the Universities Act 1997, the Institutes of Technology Act 2006, and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999.

The Dublin Institute of Technology Act 1992 began the process of positioning DIT<sup>13</sup> in an intermediate zone between the university sector and the IoT sector. It made DIT a special case, moving it away from the IoT sector and locating it nearer to the university sector. DIT was and still is by far the largest Institute of Technology in Ireland, having the most diverse range of programmes and an emerging research base. The DIT Act 1992 consists of 24 sections, providing details on such items as the legal establishment of DIT as an autonomous<sup>14</sup> institute, the structure, staffing and management of the Institute, the functions, financial and reporting requirements, and regulations. In this paper the main focus will be on the fifth section, the functions of the Institute (see extract in Appendix 1).

The Act states that 'The principal function of the Institute shall be to provide vocational and technical education and training<sup>15</sup> for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the State'. This was a very specific function which emerged from DIT's historical involvement with vocational education and training. It positioned the relevance of DIT close to the world of work. The Act required DIT to provide courses of study for students, making awards at certificate and diploma level. Degree level awards were arranged in

partnership with a university. (This type of partnership operated with Trinity College Dublin for a number of years during the 1990s.) The Institute could engage in research and consultancy and establish limited companies to exploit the potential outcomes from research and consultancy. The Institute, where it saw fit, could develop joint programmes with partners either inside or outside of the State. The Institute had independence to manage its own affairs in terms of administering its function and financial management. There were some restrictions where the Institute needed approval from the Minister such as acquiring or selling property.

The Irish Government Universities Act 1997 provided a new legal framework for the university sector in Ireland. The Act covers areas such as objects, structure, governance, staff, academic council, statutes, evaluation, financing, and amendments to previous Irish Government Acts. The main focus for this paper will be on Chapter 1 of the Act, 'Objects and Functions'. In Chapter 1, Section 12 sets out twelve objects, Section 13 details eight functions and Section 14 deals with academic freedom (see Appendix 2). The objects include (a) to advance knowledge through teaching, scholarly research, and scientific investigation, (b) to promote learning (c) to promote the cultural and social life of society (d) to foster independent critical thinking amongst its students, (e) to promote the official language of the State (f) to contribute to the realisation of national economic and social development, (g) to educate, train and retrain higher level professional, technical and managerial personnel, (h) to promote the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research, (i) to disseminate the outcomes of its research, (j) to facilitate lifelong learning, (k) promote gender balance and equality of opportunities. The principle of academic freedom is assured throughout the Act: academic staff can challenge perceived knowledge and make claims that may be controversial and unpopular. Academic freedom is underpinned by tenure. The Act caters for both national and international collaborations with IHE, students, companies and organizations. The Act caters for the autonomy of financial, management and strategic activities of the university. The university has full degree-awarding powers and can work in partnership with other IHE or accredit programmes delivered elsewhere.

The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 established a legal framework by which to reform the Institutes of Technology sector by amending the Regional Technical Colleges (RTC) Act 1992 and the DIT Act 1992. The Act brought all the Institutes of Technology closer to the university sector not only by developing an environment of and opportunities for semi-autonomous activities, but also under Section 52 the IoTs and DIT came under the remit of the HEA instead of the DoES. The Act consists of a series of amendments to the Regional Technical Colleges Act (22 amendments), the DIT Act (15 amendments), HEA Act 1971 (one amendment), the University Act 1997 (one amendment), the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 (one amendment), and the Vocational Education Act 2001 (one amendment). The Act extends the scope of the executive function of senior management, and makes provision for more independent financial management. The function of the IoTs is still strongly aligned to Section 5 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act Act 1992 (with some amendments), which states the following.

The principal function of a college shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, be to provide vocational and technical education and training for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the State with particular reference to the region served by the college, and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, a college shall have the following functions.

Section 7 of the Institutes of Technology Act (see Appendix 3) introduced provision for the principle of academic freedom to be afforded to the IoT sector and DIT. The Act makes provision for the establishment of companies to exploit the outcomes from research and consultancy. The Act

does not give degree-awarding powers to the IoTs, instead the individual IoT must apply for delegated degree-awarding provision to HETAC. The IoTs are still required under the Act to seek ministerial approval for certain activities.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 impacts on all the aforementioned Acts. It is a reform framework for the whole education sector. The Act makes provision for the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). The Act empowers the NQAI to establish and maintain a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) ‘based on standards, knowledge, skill or competence acquired by learners’. The Act directs the NQAI to establish both HETAC and FETAC, to maintain and improve standards in both further and higher education and training. The Act specifically states that these bodies should promote and facilitate, ‘access, transfer and progression’. The Act states the NQAI should develop policies, procedures and criteria for the implementation of an NFQ. In doing this the NQAI should consult with the Minister, the two awards councils, the universities, DIT and liaise with both European and international bodies. The NQAI should develop a mechanism to review the implementation of the NFQ. In performance of its remit the NQAI should become informed of the education and training requirements of industry, business, agriculture, services, professions, trade and tourism. The NQAI should endeavour to have national awards recognised internationally and develop processes to give recognition to awards from outside the state (see extract in appendix 4). The Act makes provision for education and training providers (public or private) to apply for their programmes to be recognised and receive accreditation from either HETAC or FETAC. The universities and DIT are recognised under the Act as awarding bodies in their own right.

### **Policy initiatives**

In this section three different policy<sup>16</sup> initiatives that have relevance to human capital and the world of work are explored. They are Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (2000), the National Development Plan (2007–2013), the Social Partnership National Agreement Towards 2016.

In 2000 the Irish Governments published its first White Paper on lifelong learning entitled, ‘Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education’ (2000). This White Paper develops a policy agenda for a ‘systematic approach’ to lifelong learning, ‘equality of access’ for learners to programmes, and ‘interculturalism’ serving diverse populations of learners. The White Paper sets out its priorities in adult education as follows.

Adult Education is the last area of mass education which remains to be developed in Ireland, and it will require significantly increased investment on a phased basis if adult learning opportunities are to reach a stage of parity with those in other countries. In facing such a challenge the top priorities are:

- to allocate priority resources to addressing adult literacy needs;
- to systematically increase opportunities for adult learners within the system, prioritising the needs of those with less than upper secondary education;
- to develop supporting services such as adult guidance and counselling and childcare;
- to enhance the responsiveness, relevance and flexibility of education and training provision to meet the needs of young people and adults alike, optimising participation of and benefit to, those at risk;

- to promote and develop a co-ordinated integrated role for adult education and training as a vital component within an over-arching framework for lifelong learning. (DoES 2000: 22)

The White Paper makes recommendations for both formal and informal learning, including the workplace, community, further education and higher education. Within higher education the proposals are aimed at widening participation, access for mature students, support services for these students, funding strategy, distance education and mechanisms to monitor the implementation of this policy initiative. The White Paper views investment in lifelong learning as an important approach which can add active citizenship, social cohesion, competitiveness, cultural developments and act as a vehicle for community building.

The Social Partnership Agreement 'Towards 2016' develops a wide policy agenda which focuses on both the economic and social dimensions of Irish society. The then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern states in the Foreword:

Social Partnership has helped to maintain a strategic focus on key national priorities, and has created and sustained the conditions for remarkable employment growth, fiscal stability, restructuring of the economy to respond to new challenges and opportunities, a dramatic improvement in living standards, through both lower taxation and lower inflation, and a culture of dialogue, which has served the social partners, but more importantly, the people of this country, very well.

(Irish Government 2006: 2)

The partners of 'Towards 2016' give detailed commitments (short-term and long-term) under two thematic areas: 'Marco-economic, infrastructure, environment and social policy' and 'Pay, the workplace and employment rights compliance'. Education and training is dealt with in Part I, Section 17, where commitments include reducing the number of disadvantaged children who have numeracy/literacy problems, enhancing early school provision, strengthening the technical vocational curriculum, improving access to education and training, enhancing lifelong learning and in particular support for disadvantaged adults, increasing ICT literacy, and developing a National Skills Strategy to upskill the workforce. Public sector modernisation is dealt with in Part II Section IX of the agreement. Under Section 31 Education sector reforms are detailed. Some of the common themes are the introduction of performance management development systems, engaging in quality assurance systems, efficient usage of resources, utilization of ICT systems. Specific to higher education are commitments to implement strategic planning processes, engage with new learning and teaching technologies, introduce flexible modes of delivery, review contracts of employment, increase postgraduate supervision, enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of services, and develop review and evaluation systems.

The Irish Government's *National Development Plan 2007–2013* sets out the strategic investment priorities for Ireland over the six year period of the plan. In Chapter 9, 'Human Capital', the Government commits to investing over 25 billion euros into three areas: training and skills development (5 billion), schools modernisation (7 billion) and higher education (13 billion). The underlying drive behind this investment is the shift towards a high value, high productivity, and knowledge-based economy/society. The strategic intent is in line with the EU Lisbon Agenda. Similar targets are identified as strategic objects. Key expected outcomes from this plan are to upskill the workforce, implement the National Skills Strategy, expand the workforce, develop third-level infrastructure, modernise higher education, increase the number of graduates, provide significant school capacity, and provide more teachers. In relation to investment in human capital the NDP states that

Investment in education, training and upskilling, broadly termed as investment in human capital, has played a very important role in Ireland's successful economic performance. It has provided a well skilled and flexible labour force and thereby helped make Ireland a major attraction for domestic and foreign enterprises. Ireland was particularly successful in harnessing European Social Fund (ESF) receipts to very good effect. Human Capital funding in the Plan 2007–2013 will be domestically generated but the objective will still be to ensure access to a very good standard of education and training for all and, in particular, to provide the labour force with the skills and adaptability to meet the challenges of the future. There are also strong linkages between the availability and quality of human capital and the competitiveness of Irish regions. Investment in human capital will have an important role in promoting the development and competitiveness of the regions over the period of this Plan.

(Irish Government 2007: 1990)

The NDP promotes lifelong learning: this learning can occur in formal education and training environments or in the workplace and informal settings. The NDP stresses the importance of upskilling the labour force and initiating strategies of 'activation' for those who are outside of the labour force (unemployed, women at home). The intent is to develop a highly skilled work force that can contribute to the realisation of the knowledge economy and maintain Ireland's competitive advantage amongst higher forms of knowledge economies.

### **Towards an analysis**

The emerging tertiary policy agenda is extremely complex. While there is significant political and ideological diversity inherent in policy narratives there also seems to be convergence in certain areas. As an actor in the field of tertiary education and training, divorced from the policy formation process, having direct experience of the impact of policy implementation in the tertiary education and training workplace, I endeavour to 'make sense'. The objective is to interpret and develop understanding from an 'insider' perspective, in order to provide insights and develop a context for further discourse. The analysis framework is non-numeric, seeking to explore the 'claims, issues and concerns' from a subjective position. While the positions of some supranational organisations and the European Union will be considered, the main focus of the analysis is confined to the Irish context, and items which have relevance to human capital and the world of work.

Within the policy narrative the world of work has changed and will change more rapidly in the future. Some of the main characteristics of the changing nature of the world of work are the reduced expectation of a one career for life, employment insecurity, multiple career routes, reorganized contract of employment, mobility within regions and between nation states, the demand for worker flexibility and adaptability. To cope within this new world of work, workers need to continuously update their skills levels and enhance their employability potential. While credentials are still important in order to gain employment, the relevance of credentials needs to be monitored and gaps need to be addressed through further training and upskilling. Credentialism seems to have been replaced by lifelong learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and the process of human capital accumulation. The concept of 'human capital' which was originally proposed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) is now widely used in tertiary education policy documents. The principle 'claim' is located in the assumption that actors are free to make 'rational decisions' on the type and scope of investment they want to make in relation to their human capital, based on their current knowledge and resources (social and financial). A clear distinction is made between the tangible resources as evident in production, goods and finance and the intangible resource of

human capital which is located solely in the person. Human capital as an intangible resource is accumulated over time by the actor through investment in schooling, access to information, training and health options. It is claimed that the return on this investment is manifest in increased employment opportunities, rate of earnings commanded by the actor, and productivity gains. The accumulated outcome of mass (population) investment in human capital directly contributes towards national economic growth and development. The OECD (1998: 8) defines human capital as ‘the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity’. There is significant convergence in the reviewed policy documents towards a position that increased investment in education and training initiatives will encourage actors to engage in human capital accumulation (upskilling), resulting in long-term economic growth as the knowledge economy/society evolves. The intent is to develop a critical mass of ‘knowledge workers’ within nation states to drive entrepreneurial activities, innovative developments and smarter productivity. There seems to be an underlining assumption that human capital accumulation can meet head-on the challenges that globalisation presents for developed countries. Mainly, competition for manufacturing and low-skilled work from developing countries due to lower labour costs, lower production costs, less labour market regulation and attractive tax incentives for multinational corporations. The emphasis is on moving from manufacturing to the new services economy.

Moore (2004: 9) locates this type of process as a move from a ‘Fordist’ labour force based on the notion of mass production, automation and standardisation to a ‘post-Fordist’ position of ‘flexibilisation’, creativity and higher level enterprises. The intent behind both the NDP and ‘Towards 2016’ policy initiatives is to build capacity of human capital accumulation within the Irish labour force in order to position Ireland as a leading knowledge economy, in order to act as both an attractor for foreign high-skilled work and a stimulator for the creation of indigenous entrepreneurial activities and high-skilled job creation.

The concerns within the policy narratives seem to focus into three clusters: 1) how to increase human capital in an effective, efficient and relevant manner, 2) how to recognise human capital accumulation and 3) how to guarantee the standard or currency of human capital. Let us address the first point. Policy (NDP, ‘Towards 2016’) cites the formal education and training system(s) as the key vehicle for the production of human capital, recognizing the positive contribution that formal tertiary education and training has made in human capital capacity building over the last two decades. There is however an unease in the policy narrative relating to tertiary systems operations, questioning the quality of operations, the appropriate and efficient use of resources, effective management and structures of tertiary education and training. There seems to be a contradiction between the reform narrative proposed by policy on the one hand and the claim that education and training has contributed to economic advancement over the last two decades. The policy narrative seeks to expand education and training throughout the lifecycle, increasing the output of high-level graduates, while simultaneously seeking ‘rationalisation’ of systems that have a proven track record in the production of human capital. The modernisation agenda inherent in policy narrative displays a ‘mistrust’ of the traditional practices (and even values) intrinsic to contemporary education and training systems. The education and training system(s) that have evolved in Irish society over the century are perceived to be inefficient, underperforming and unaccountable. The policy intent seems to lean towards the economic imperative and the logic of the free market, deregulation of national barriers while increasing regulatory mechanisms and performance compliance processes at provider level.

‘Towards 2016’ sets out specific measures for conformance and compliance for actors in IoT sector. A Performance Verification Group (PVG) was established to monitor commitments entered

into by the social partners. The PVG assesses the action plans of individual institutes and makes judgements on whether significant progress has been made in order to approve agreed percentage wage increases. In the context of the reform process and in relation to employability – a term that has significant correlation with human capital – the European University Association makes the following claim about higher education:

employability is a high priority in the reform of curricula in all cycles. This concern transcends national boundaries and implementation priorities. However, the results also reveal that there is still much to be done to translate this priority into institutional practice. This is a paradox for a reform process inspired, at least in part, by a concern that higher education should be more responsive to the needs of a changing society and labour market. It indicates that one of the main challenges for the future is to strengthen dialogue with employers and other external stakeholders. For many institutions this requires a change in culture that will take time. It is essential that both governments and higher education institutions increase their efforts to communicate to the rest of society the reasons why the reforms are taking place, as a shared responsibility.

(2006: 7)

Formal human capital accumulation is encapsulated in the awards systems that are based in the traditions, cultures, norms and socio-political processes of nation states. While awards are recognised at sectoral, regional, inter-regional and national level, the portability of awards at international level is perceived to be problematic. The competition for international talent (undergraduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral students) and the increased mobility of both unskilled and skilled labour has led to the development of award translation systems and in some cases the complete reform of awards systems by the introduction of NQFs. NQFs provide a human capital accumulation currency mechanism. Human capital can be quantified into units of knowledge, skills and competency, mediated by ‘learning outcomes’ and placed on the hierarchical currency table of a national framework. The development of common currency frameworks facilitates the readability of awards, the trans-regional and transnational mobility of talent and labour. By establishing a common currency language frameworks can facilitate the process of private providers’ penetration of the education and training market. Private providers can gain award legitimacy through the recognition of their programmes on national frameworks. This substantially increases the marketability of their programmes and creates a dynamic of competition within education and training systems between public and private interests. This competition dynamic can act as a leverage mechanism to effect change in the publicly funded education and training provision.

In 2003 the NQAI operationalised a NFQ in Ireland, a ten level framework ranging from primary education to higher education. The IoTs and the DIT generally welcomed this initiative and became early adaptors, placing their legacy (former) awards on the framework and incorporating the new ‘learning outcomes’ approach and narratives of ‘knowledge, skills and competencies’ into programme documents. The university sector was somewhat slower to implement the narrative of the framework into their programmes, and more cautious about placing their awards on the framework. The NFQ introduced a new awards currency mechanism into the Irish education and training system(s) underpinned by a new technocratic common language and quality assurance. Young in his international review of NQFs for the International Labour Office states:

Introducing an NQF based on levels, standards and outcomes is not a superficial reform that leaves most existing education and training provision able to go on as before. If taken seriously it involves a complete change, not only in the way qualifications have traditionally

been organized (and in many countries still are), but also in the deeply embedded practices that underpin them. It implies a shift from placing specialist educational institutions at the centre of the system of education and training to a system in which the learner and his/her opportunities to gain a qualification is at the centre. Whether the concept of the individual learner can bear such a responsibility when real learners differ so much in their capabilities is something that needs serious debate.

(2005: 8)

How is the standard or currency of human capital guaranteed? The mechanisms utilised to achieve this are quality assurance procedures and cyclical review processes. Quality assurance procedures are not new to tertiary education and training. In an Irish context quality assurance procedures have gradually developed at programme and institute levels over the last two decades. Institutes either developed their own models of quality assurance type procedures or adopted systems from other professional bodies or sectoral organisations. This diversity of quality assurance is not very compatible with the needs of an NFQ. A more standardised systematic approach was needed. The NQAI and the two awards councils, HETAC and FETAC, developed a common quality assurance approach in relation to the NFQ, which worked in parallel to the new technocratic narrative associated with awards. The universities and the DIT as awarding bodies had quality assurance systems in place already. The NQAI requested the EUA to review these systems in 2005–6. The EUA Quality Review teams reviewed each university and the DIT separately, individual reports were compiled and then a sectoral report was produced. The EUA made positive recommendations on the standard and appropriateness of the quality assurance systems that were in operation in the universities and DIT. The IoTs on the other hand had to fulfil the quality assurance criteria and review process as set out by HETAC. Several IoTs have now gained delegated awarding authority from HETAC. The quality assurance procedures in place in the Irish context are compatible with European Union policy initiatives such as the EQF and Bologna.

The future direction of quality assurance in an Irish context is not clear at present. Whether it will evolve in an inspection model, accountability mechanism or an improvement process is not certain. However it is worth considering Yorke's 1999 article 'Assuring Quality and Standards in Globalised Higher Education' which outlines the intrinsic correlation between the national drive for economic competitiveness and the responsibility of institutes to provide quality 'knowledge capital' to counteract the challenges posed by globalisation. Yorke firmly reiterates that the quality direction (outcome) at both national and institute levels should be one of enhancement rather than accountability: 'The demands of the future require a more forward-looking approach in which enhancement is to the fore, and in which accountability follows' (1999: 100).

The statutory reform of Irish higher education has introduced numerous new measures in relation to the governance, structure, functions and objects of universities, DIT and the IoT. Here I focus on the functions, categorising items into 'claims, concerns and issues'. In terms of claims the 1997 Universities Act, 1992 DIT Act and the 2006 Institutes of Technology Act, offer a variety of options for higher education in regards to independent financial management, corporate activities following on from the commercialisation of research and consultancy, and stating the intent to respect the traditional principle of academic freedom to all academic staff. Within these Acts the universities have the most autonomy and broadest function. This is critical to the advancement of a liberal higher education system. The DIT is positioned between the universities and the IoTs, in that it has a mixed function between liberalism and vocationalism. The IoTs are located firmly in a vocationalist position, and the Act directs the IoTs towards a more utilitarian route.

The Acts cater for international cooperation and engagement with students, education and other organisations. The Acts also demonstrate a concern relating to the usage of resources, directing the respective institutes covered under the Acts to make efficient and effective use of resources, detailing measures for accountability and the responsibility entrusted to senior management for good governance of resources. The Acts give more executive functions to the senior management of institutes. In the Institutes of Technology Act inherent concerns relating to staff matters are addressed by providing executive functions to the senior manager in relation to staff dismissals. There are several issues in the Acts. One issue relates to the non inclusion of 'tenure' in the Institutes of Technology Act. Tenure enables academic freedom, without tenure academic freedom cannot operate without fear of reprisal (dismissal). The Acts preserve the binary divide: obviously there is a perceived issue with the development of a unified higher education system where autonomy to make awards is bestowed to all the institutes. The 1997 Universities Act allows for the purchasing and disposal of property and lands, while the DIT and the IoT Acts cater for the purchasing and disposing of property and lands with approval from the Minister.

An interpretative summary of the main claims, concerns and issues of the policy narratives is presented in Table 2. The items are grouped under context subheadings, knowledge economy (claims), globalisation (concerns) and potential return on investment (issues). These seem to be the main drivers and challenges in the policy context. This is presented as a work in progress rather than a definitive account. It is a starting point, a mapping out of items from which route maps for further in-depth inquiry can be developed.

Table 2: Interpretative summary of the main claims concerns and issues

Categorization of the main 'claims, concerns and issues'		
Claims	Concerns	Issues
Context: the development of the knowledge economy/society.	Context: meeting the challenges of globalisation	Context: realising the benefits from investment
Investment in education and training has a positive return for the individual and contributes towards economic development. Education and training enhances employability, flexibility and adoptability. Lifelong Learning is necessary for both competitive advantage and social cohesion. Qualifications frameworks aid recognition, translation, understanding of the value of awards and mobility. Quality assurance systems provide mechanisms to improve standards. Academic freedom and autonomy are respected. Massification of education	There is a need to reform and modernise tertiary education. Tertiary education and training needs to become more effective and efficient. Regulatory barriers need to be reduced to enhance participation and competition. Tertiary education needs to become more relevant to external factors and the world of work. Performance and accountability needs to be monitored. Award recognition and translation mechanisms are needed. Quality needs to be embedded in all aspects of work. Tertiary education and training needs to proactively upskill the workforce.	Tenure can reduce quality control mechanisms. Performance systems need to be developed and monitored. There is a need to improve standards with underperformance. Staff employment needs to be reopened and reviewed. Institutes need to be funded through alternative funding mechanisms. Need to liberalise the market.

## **Critical reflections from a practitioner perspective**

From the perspective of a practitioner the previous initial analysis framework can shed some light on the questions posed at the start of this paper.

### *Is there systems convergence?*

Within the contemporary tertiary education and training policy agendas there seems to be some convergence in terms of agreement relating to specific strategies and the expected outcomes from the implementation of these strategies. Such as the policy drive towards the knowledge society, the challenges that globalisation poses and developing criteria to manage and insecure the return on investment. The policy agendas show signs of convergence, but whether this convergence is evident at implementation and systems level is not clear. Some items like human capital, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks seem to have a significant convergence rate in terms of priorities and positioning in policy narratives. There also seems to be policy agreement that tertiary education and training needs to become more relevant to the world of work, in terms of the content of programmes and the delivery process<sup>17</sup>.

Particular emphasis is placed on developing partnerships and collaborations between tertiary education and training and enterprise, specifically in terms of research and development and innovation. The policy narratives show agreement in terms of the role of the learner, with emphasis placed on learners engaging in both lifelong and life wide learning in order to enhance their employability. Worker–learners are encouraged to develop a new mind set in terms of work practices and to become more flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of enterprise.

Different policy narratives seek to gain a measurable outcome at systems level on the financial investments made. Some policies seek to reform the tertiary education and training sector in order to make it more effective, efficient and accountable. This is a form of systems' restructuring, a central consideration to this process is the reform of the academic contract. The academic contract is being reformed with the assistance of advanced Human Resource Management (HRM) policies and procedures. The tenured track is under threat with the increased number and variety of part-time contract workers and new forms of researchers or 'post-Doc' workers. Contracts of employments are now time defined (12 months, 2–3 years) or linked into external project funding streams. These new types of casual academic contracted workers are subject to covert HRM control mechanisms at contract renewal time. If the new type workers' performance is not deemed to be acceptable then their contract is not renewed. The new type of workers experience considerable anxiety relating to several issues such as contract renewal, carrying out additional duties, pension provisions and factors to do with the external environment such as obtaining loans from lending agencies due to the temporary nature of their employment contract. Within this new worker cohort collegiality is replaced by competitive compliance in the hope of gaining a renewal of contract or tenured position in competition with other new casual workers. It is questionable whether this practice of recruiting casual labour for the sake of short-term financial savings will make a lasting contribution to the development of the academic missions and culture of HEIs and the respective discipline domains.

### *Is there an emerging new pedagogical narrative?*

A new pedagogical narrative seems to be emanating out from policies relating to NQFs. This new narrative is not only embedding itself in tertiary education and training programme<sup>18</sup> language but also redefining the relationship between the student and tertiary education and training providers.

With the introduction of NQFs, programmes developed had to revise their programme documentation to incorporate the new language of NQFs in order for their programmes to be placed on NQFs. NQFs utilised a precise technocratic language based on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are concise statements of what a learner is expected to know and do on successful completion of a module or whole programme. Learning outcomes also need to detail the level of learning achieved (the complexity) in order to be aligned with a precise level of an NQF. In an Irish NFQ context, programme documents must demonstrate the level of 'knowledge, skills, competence and know-how' (as detailed in descriptor tables) that a programme aims to achieve. The NFQ standardises (and restricts) the pedagogical language that must be incorporated into programme documents. Programme documents can be rejected by validation/review panels on the grounds that they do not conform to NFQ requirements. It is arguable that this type of standardised approach enhances transparency and compatibility between different programmes offering the learner clear and precise information. However the standardised approach can be criticised as being too prescriptive, reducing the creativity and autonomy of the programme developer. Uniformity and conformity become the dominant mantra: dissenters are sanctioned by not having their programmes validated for awards.

Learning outcome effects pedagogical practice, as teaching is reconstructed to meet the defined learning outcomes. Learning outcomes become central to teacher–learner interaction (lectures, seminars, class work), examinations, assessment, and appeals. The EQF and the Bologna Process have stimulated a European style of standardisation based on learning outcomes, standardised structure of programmes, common credit system and common quality assurance criteria. Many programme development committees give more time over to considerations to do with techno-policy issues than pedagogical *praxis*, debating what technically has to go into a programme document (a technocratic checklist of sort) rather than exploring the how and why of theoretical and practical content.

There is also a liberating side of the new pedagogical environment in that new policy caters for alternative types of learning accreditation (formal, informal, non formal). This gives programme developers latitude to incorporate alternative pedagogical practice in the forms of work-based learning, work placements, internships and group work. Assessment criteria can also be moved away from the summative approaches to more formative approaches which include continuous assessment, peer assessment, and problem-based learning. Further procedures that cater for the recognition of experience are developing fast in most HEIs, such as recognition of prior learning (RPL), accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). There is scope within the current policy agenda to move pedagogical practice outside of the HEIs and into the workplace and communities.

### *Is there a regulatory discourse of quality?*

Quality assurance has come to prominence in tertiary education and training over the last fifteen years. Quality assurance in terms of tertiary education and training is now fully incorporated into all major European, national and higher education institute policy documents. Quality assurance has become a new employment growth area in tertiary education and training, with quality assurance officers appointed in HEIs, and at regional and national level there are a variety of quality assurance inspectors, reviewers, advisors and so forth. Quality assurance has become both a criteria for programme development, delivery, assessment and also a structural component of tertiary institutes usually located in the central administrative unit. Quality assurance procedures have become the new regulatory system for tertiary education and training. Quality assurance procedures are utilised to assess the effectiveness of programme content, programme delivery, pedagogical practice, departments, schools, faculties and institutes.

Quality assurance has become a new form of regulatory measurement regime, enforced by both bureaucratic and technocratic discourses of administrative control. The position and voice of the academic as detailed in programme documents has been subsumed by the linguistic doctrine of quality. The power of the academic to make academic decisions in relation to the development of programme content is now framed by the lens of quality assurance. The doctrine of quality assurance has become so embedded in tertiary education and training that it is fair and reasonable to suggest that it is the new hegemony of compliance, it is the accepted necessity, a thinking framework, a way of doing things, a common language. Quality assurance has dramatically and successfully colonised the academic consciousness and space, it has become a taken-for-granted procedure. Actors in higher education now self regulate and monitor other actor's implementation of quality assurance procedures. Pedagogical inquiry and practice are shaped by the types<sup>19</sup> of quality assurance regimes in operation at department, school and faculty levels. Academics and students have become enculturated into the quality assurance mind set. While quality assurance as a process has many worthwhile and positive functions, the ownership, development and operationalisation of quality assurance needs to rest in the academic space and not the administrative functional units. HEIs had a tradition of demonstrating their teaching and research excellence long before the quality assurance was conceptualised. It remains to be seen whether quality assurance will be either a supportive tool to enhance academic practice or a controlling mechanisms for administrative managerialism.

#### *What are the market implications?*

The recruitment processes in the new world of work place a high emphasis on candidates' qualifications during the selection process. Candidates with high levels of qualifications and the right type of experience are in a stronger position to gain employment and less likely to experience unemployment than candidates with lower qualification levels. The reality of this form of credentialism has led both students and workers to seek out programmes of education that can upgrade their qualifications thereby giving them a competitive advantage in the labour market. Both publicly funded and private tertiary education and training providers are in competition to recruit these students/workers into their programmes. Students and workers within their means want to get access to the best programme from an institute that has a good reputation in order to bolster their employment opportunities. Prior to the introduction of the NFQ in an Irish context, publicly funded providers had a competitive advantage in that they could provide nationally recognised awards and the HEIs price for the programmes on offer was reasonable when compared to private providers. This was due the state subsidy that the HEIs received. However since 2003 private providers can get their awards recognised on the NFQ, this creates a new competitive dynamic between the perceived value of publicly funded HEI awards and the private providers' awards. The private sector providers (who have no 'public good' commitments unlike the publicly funded HEIs) can concentrate their provision on lucrative programmes in areas like management, law, teaching and the social science areas. These areas require minimal internal investment by the private provider, and in many cases programmes are delivered through electronic or distance education.

Over the coming years the competition between publicly funded HEIs and private providers will increase. Private providers will want to gain a larger market share, while the publicly funded HEIs will be put under pressure to recruit more students due to the new funding mechanism being introduced by the HEA (unit cost allocation). The growing financial pressures on HEIs and the increased competition with private providers may cause HEIs to reassess their own internal funding allocation for programmes that are expensive to run. Programme content or whole programmes

could be cut back. However publicly funded HEIs have the opportunity to raise funds elsewhere through partnerships with enterprise and industry, commercialisation of R&D, campus companies and alumni. Publicly funded HEIs are also actively exploring the practices of private providers to begin to offer alternative types of programmes and various methods of programme provision. Publicly funded HEIs now offer programmes at a distance and have established international strategies to both attract in foreign students, set up satellite campuses in other countries and in some cases approve the award of their awards to providers of education and training in other countries. Some HEIs perceive their awards as brand names that should be aggressively marketed. Another growing trend is for large multi-national organisations to develop and deliver their own training and education programmes. In some cases these programmes have become so successful that they are offered to external providers and candidates (McDonalds, Siemens, Nokia). Representative organisations such as employers' organisations and trade unions are also establishing their own programmes and institutes (SIPTU, IBEC). The development and rollout of NQF, standardisation of programme language and quality assurance procedures will all contribute to the creation of a new competitive market in the provision of education and training services.

### **A final comment**

The content, substance and extent of the higher education policy modernisation agenda within Europe and Ireland over the last two decades have been substantial. Inherent in this multi-level policy context is a new logic of reform based on quantifiable outcomes, measurability mechanisms, market dynamics and reconstructing knowledge as a form of 'capital'. The contemporary nation-state is not only a producer of education and training policy, it consumes policy from other nation-states and elite think-tanks. It endeavours to negotiate its policy instruments onto the agenda of international consortia. The contemporary education and training policy narrative has become an 'elaborate code',<sup>20</sup> a form and mechanism for formal communication between nation-states and other interested parties, a 'global policyspeak'.<sup>21</sup> The evidence of this policyspeak can be easily explored by comparing the electronic text artefacts that nation-state's departments and 'supranational organisations'<sup>22</sup> utilise to present information to the 'consumer/citizen', via the World Wide Web.

Within this growing policy narrative there is a forceful drive and substantial 'discourse'<sup>23</sup> relating to tertiary education, principally proclaiming the benefits of the commodification of knowledge within the economic imperative, and focusing on maintaining competitive advantage by the creation of new knowledge.<sup>25</sup> are embedded in this new knowledge agenda embodied in the conceptual premise of 'human capital'.<sup>26</sup> The hard currency of this new knowledge is the examination transcript.<sup>27</sup> This formal record of achievement is given official recognition and hierarchical value through national qualification frameworks and meta-frameworks. These frameworks combined with other policy<sup>28</sup> instruments aid the liberalisation process and marketability of human capital.

Contemporary nation-states provide substantial resources towards the promotion and marketing of their education and training system in the endeavour to gain a slice of the lucrative international student market. International trading and commerce in human capital is not confined to the student market, high-skilled workers are viewed as valuable human resource assets. Within this new knowledge policy agenda, the praxis of knowledge provision is facilitated by commonality of function, modality, time and space. Knowledge is codified by deconstructing course content into quantifiable small chunks of meaningful knowledge units. This new knowledge production, knowledge transfer, knowledge assessment, accreditation and utility are monitored by the quality

regime. With this policy framework knowledge production can occur outside of the formal education and training structures. Practical work and life experiences are formally legitimised.

While this new rationality of knowledge production advances at both macro and micro levels who is listening to the lone voice of actors in the field, who express reservations on the traditional grounds of ethics, morals, values and pedagogy? Education and training systems evolved from traditional praxis. Is there now a risk that the drive for modernisation will leave society adrift without any anchorage to traditions and heritage? While change is a given in the process of adaptation and the evolutionary process of societal development, it is both the speed of policy change and the seemingly distance of policy development from actual practice that is most worrying. Practitioners are busy carrying out their duties and responsibilities in relation to their students and discipline domains. They do not seem to have the time or appropriate opportunities to engaging fully in policy development offering counter discourses as alternative options. New policy development is located in the domains of powerful committees and interest groups that have the resources to employ teams of consultants to formulate the future directions of tertiary education and training.



**Appendix 2 Extract DIT Act 1992**

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Extract DIT Act 1992, Section 5

The principal function of the Institute shall, be to provide vocational and technical education and training for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the State

- ( a ) to provide such courses of study as the Governing Body considers appropriate;*
  - ( b ) to confer, grant or give diplomas, certificates or other educational awards, excluding degrees other than degrees provided for by order under subsection (2) (a);*
  - ( c ) to enter into arrangements with the National Council for Educational Awards, with any university in the State or with any other authority approved by the Minister from time to time, for the purpose of having degrees, diplomas, certificates or other educational awards conferred, granted or given;*
  - ( d ) subject to such conditions as the Minister may determine, to engage in research, consultancy and development work and to provide such services in relation to these matters as the Governing Body considers appropriate;*
  - ( e ) to enter into arrangements with other institutions in or outside the State for the purpose of offering joint courses of study and of engaging jointly in programmes of research, consultancy and development work in relation to such matters as the Governing Body considers appropriate;*
  - ( f ) subject to such conditions as the Minister may determine, to enter into arrangements, including participation in limited liability companies, to exploit any research, consultancy or development work undertaken by the Institute either separately or jointly;*
  - ( g ) to institute and, if thought fit, to award scholarships, prizes and other awards;*
  - ( h ) to maintain, manage, administer and invest all the money and assets of the Institute;*
  - ( i ) to accept gifts of money, land or other property upon such trusts and conditions, if any, as may be specified by the donors: provided that nothing in any such trust or condition is contrary to the provisions of this Act;*
  - ( j ) subject to the approval of the Minister to acquire land;*
  - ( k ) to do all such acts and things as may be necessary to further the objects and development of the Institute.*
- ( 2 ) ( a ) The Institute shall have such other functions, which may include the function of conferring degrees, postgraduate degrees and honorary awards as may be assigned to it, from time to time, by order made by the Minister with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance.*
- ( b ) The Minister may, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance, by order revoke or amend an order under this subsection.*
- ( c ) Whenever an order is proposed to be made under this subsection, a draft of the proposed order shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and the order shall not be made until a resolution approving of the draft has been passed by each such House.*

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(3) Awards under the provisions of subsection (1) (b) or under any function in relation to degrees which may be assigned to the Institute by order made under subsection (2) may only be conferred, granted or

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given on the recommendation of the Academic Council to or on persons who satisfy the Academic Council that they have attended or otherwise pursued or followed appropriate courses of study, instruction, research or training provided by the Institute, or by such other institutions as the Minister on the recommendation of the Governing Body may approve, and have attained an appropriate standard in examinations or other tests of knowledge or ability or have performed other exercises in a manner regarded by the Academic Council as satisfactory.

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**Appendix 3 Extract Universities Act 1997**

Objects (Section 12)	Functions (Section 13)	Academic freedom (Section 14)
<p><b>12.</b>—The objects of a university shall include—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) to advance knowledge through teaching, scholarly research, and scientific investigation,</li> <li>(b) to promote learning in its student body and in society generally,</li> <li>(c) to promote the cultural and social life of society, while fostering and respecting the diversity of the university’s traditions,</li> <li>(d) to foster a capacity for independent critical thinking amongst its students,</li> <li>(e) to promote the official languages of the State, with special regard to the preservation, promotion and use of the Irish language and the preservation and promotion of the distinctive cultures of Ireland,</li> <li>(f) to support and contribute to the realisation of national economic and social development,</li> <li>(g) to educate, train and retrain higher level professional, technical and managerial personnel,</li> <li>(h) to promote the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research,</li> <li>(i) to disseminate the outcomes of its research in the general community,</li> <li>(j) to facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education, and</li> <li>(k) to promote gender balance and equality of opportunity among students and employees of the university.</li> </ul>	<p><b>13.</b>—(1) The functions of a university are to do all things necessary or expedient in accordance with this Act and its charter, if any, to further the objects and development of the university.</p> <p>(2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), a university— (a) shall provide courses of study, conduct examinations and award degrees and other qualifications,</p> <p>(b) shall promote and facilitate research,</p> <p>(c) may establish by incorporation in the State or elsewhere, or participate in the establishment of, such trading, research or other corporations as it thinks fit for the purpose of promoting or assisting, or in connection with the functions of, the university,</p> <p>(d) may collaborate with educational, business, professional, trade union, Irish language, cultural, artistic, community and other interests, both inside and outside the State, to further the objects of the university,</p> <p>(e) shall maintain, manage and administer, and may dispose of and invest, the property, money, assets and rights of the university,</p> <p>(f) may collaborate with graduates, convocations of graduates and with associations representing graduates of the university both inside and outside the State,</p> <p>(g) may purchase or otherwise acquire, hold and dispose of land or other property, and</p> <p>(h) may accept gifts of money, land or other property on the trusts and conditions, if any, not in conflict with this Act, specified by the donor.</p>	<p><b>14.</b>—(1) A university, in performing its functions shall—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs, and</li> <li>(b) be entitled to regulate its affairs in accordance with its independent ethos and traditions and the traditional principles of academic freedom, and in doing so it shall have regard to—</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the promotion and preservation of equality of opportunity and access,</li> <li>(ii) the effective and efficient use of resources, and</li> <li>(iii) its obligations as to public accountability, and if, in the interpretation of this Act, there is a doubt regarding the meaning of any provision, a construction that would promote that ethos and those traditions and principles shall be preferred to a construction that would not so promote.</li> </ul> <p>(2) A member of the academic staff of a university shall have the freedom, within the law, in his or her teaching, research and any other activities either in or outside the university, to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions and shall not be disadvantaged, or subject to less favourable treatment by the university, for the exercise of that freedom.</p>

**Appendix 4 Extract Institutes of Technology Act 2006, RTC Act 1992**

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Extract, Institutes of Technology Act 2006, Section 5 and 7, RTC Act 1992 Section 5

Institutes of Technology Act 2006

6.—Section 5 of the RTC Act is amended—

(a) in subsection (1)—

(i) in paragraph (c), by substituting “An tU’ dara’s” for “the Minister”,

(ii) by substituting the following paragraph for paragraph

(e): “(e) in relation to any of the following companies or undertakings and in accordance with the following law, namely—

(i) a limited liability company in the State

— in accordance with the Companies Acts, or

(ii) a company or undertaking (the liability

of members of which is limited) in a state other than the State — in accordance with the law of that state, to—

(I) promote and take part in the formation of it,

(II) acquire, hold or dispose of shares or other interests in its capital, or

(III) participate in the management or direction of it, but only if the objects of the company or undertaking include the carrying on of such business, trading or other activities, as the college thinks fit, for the purpose of promoting or assisting in the performance of, or in connection with, the functions of the college;”,

And

(iii) in paragraph (i), by substituting “An tU’ dara’ s” for “the Minister”,

And

(b) by deleting subsection (2).

*RTC Act 1992*

*5.—(1) The principal function of a college shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, be to provide vocational and technical education and training for the economic, technological, scientific, commercial, industrial, social and cultural development of the State with particular reference to the region served by the college, and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, a college shall have the following functions—*

*( a ) to provide such courses of study as the governing body of the college considers appropriate;*

*( b ) to enter into arrangements with the National Council for Educational Awards, with any university in the State or with any other authority approved by the Minister from time to time for the purpose of having degrees, diplomas, certificates or other educational awards conferred, granted or given and to make such other arrangements as may be approved by the Minister from time to time for this purpose;*

*( c ) subject to such conditions as the Minister may determine, to engage in research, consultancy and development work and to provide such services in relation to these matters as the governing body of the college considers appropriate;*

*( d ) to enter into arrangements with other institutions in or outside the State for the purpose of offering joint courses of study and of engaging jointly in programmes of research, consultancy and development work in relation to such matters as the governing body of the college considers appropriate;*

*( e ) subject to such conditions as the Minister may determine, to enter into arrangements, including participation in limited liability companies, to exploit any research, consultancy or development work undertaken by a college either separately or jointly;*

*( f ) to institute and, if thought fit, to award scholarships, prizes and other awards;*

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*( g ) to maintain, manage, administer and invest all the money and assets of the college;*

*( h ) to accept gifts of money, land or other property upon such trusts and conditions, if any, as may be specified by the donors: provided that nothing in any such trust or condition is contrary to the provisions of this Act;*

*( i ) subject to the approval of the Minister, to acquire land;*

*( j ) to do all such acts and things as may be necessary to further the objects and development of the college.*

*( 2 ) ( a ) A college shall have such other functions as may be assigned to it from time to time by the Minister by order made with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance.*

*( b ) The Minister may, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance, by order revoke or amend an order under this subsection.*

*( c ) Whenever an order is proposed to be made under this subsection, a draft of the proposed order shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and the order shall not be made until a resolution approving of the draft has been passed by each such House.*

#### Institutes of Technology Act 2006

5A.—(1) A college, in performing its functions, shall have the right and responsibility to preserve and promote the traditional principles of academic freedom in the conduct of its internal and external affairs.

(2) A member of the academic staff of a college shall have the freedom, within the law, in his or her teaching, research and any other activities either in or outside the college, to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions and shall not be disadvantaged, or subject to less favourable treatment by the college, for the exercise of that freedom.”

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**Appendix 5 Extract Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999**

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Extract from the Qualification (Education and Training) Act 1999

Section 7 Objects

**7.**—The objects of the Authority shall be as follows:

(a) to establish and maintain a framework, being a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State (in this Act referred to as a ‘‘framework of qualifications’’), based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners;

(b) to establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of the standards of further education and training awards and higher education and training awards of the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities established under section 9 of the Act of 1997; and

(c) to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression

Section 8 Function

**8.**—(1) The functions of the Authority are to do all things necessary or expedient in accordance with this Act to further the objects of the Authority.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of *subsection (1)*, the Authority shall—

(a) establish the policies and criteria on which the framework of qualifications shall be based,

(b) review the operation of the framework of qualifications having regard to the objects specified in *section 7*,

(c) establish, in consultation with the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, procedures for the performance by them of their functions and shall review those procedures from time to time,

(d) determine the procedures to be implemented by providers of programmes of education and training for access, transfer and progression and shall publish those procedures in such form and manner as the Authority thinks fit,

(e) ensure, in consultation with the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities established under section 9 of the Act of 1997, that the procedures referred to in *paragraph (d)* are being implemented by them,

(f) facilitate and advise universities in implementing the procedures referred to in *paragraph (d)* and from time to time and in any case not less than once in every five years, in consultation with An tU´ dara´ s, review the implementation of those procedures by universities, and publish the outcomes of such a review in such form and manner as it thinks fit,

(g) consult with and advise the Minister or any other Minister, as the case may be, on such matters in respect of its functions as the Minister or any other Minister may request or as the Authority sees fit, and

(h) (i) liaise with bodies outside the State which make education and training awards for the purposes of facilitating the recognition in the State of education and training awards made by those bodies, and

(ii) facilitate recognition outside the State of education and training awards made in the State.

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## Notes

1. The usage of ‘tertiary education’ is developed from OECD (1998), which refers to tertiary as a level or stage beyond second level up to university and non-university. When the term is used in this paper in relation to the Irish context it refers to Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) which are listed in the 1971 Higher Education Act (amended in 2006). The paper specifically focuses on the Institutes of Technology, DIT and the universities.
2. For a more detailed account of ‘employability’ see Kenny et al. (2007).
3. The Bologna Process has moved from a two cycle system to a three cycle system, which includes cycle 1 undergraduate, cycle 2 postgraduate, cycle 3 doctorate Ph.D.
4. An ECTS system is proposed for the VET sector under the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).
5. For more details on quality assurance in Higher Education, see Kenny (2006a) and Kenny (2006b).
6. The OECD (2008: 53) estimated that in 2005 there were 2.73 million international students (students in higher education studying outside their country of citizenship), the destination of 75 per cent of this cohort was to OECD countries, Chinese students accounted for 40 per cent.
7. The rationale for including the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) with the seven universities is that DIT has the same autonomous awarding powers as the other universities, its objects and functions under the DIT Act are compatible with the objects and functions of the 1997 University Act. The other fifteen Institutes of Technology are not awarding bodies in their own right and require delegated authority from HETAC. Further the seven universities and the DIT are all members of the European University Association (EUA).
8. The 13 Institutes of Technology are listed in the IoT Act 2006, Section 3, First Schedule, pages 17–18. DIT is not listed in this section of the Act, and thereby maintains a separate legal status from the other IoTs.
9. A distinction is made here between Private (for profit) providers not in receipt of public funding and Others who do not come under the remit of the DoES and the HEA in terms of HE but who may receive public funding from different sources within the state apparatus such as *An Garda* (police force), army, further education organisations and trade union and employers organisations. All these types of providers can submit their courses to the HETAC for accreditation.
10. Figures for part-time enrolments in the Institutes of Technology sector for 2007 were not available at the time of publication of this article. Before 2006 there were two separate systems used for gathering data on the universities kept by the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Science. From 2009 onwards the HEA will provide data for both sectors.

11. Apprentices enter the IoTs and DIT to undertake both Phases 4 and 6 of the Standard Based Apprenticeship system. The apprenticeship population for 2007 was 28,500 of which 6,763 were new entrances (source FAS 2008).
12. Acts in an Irish context are artefacts of State proposed and adopted by the Oireachtas, Statutory Instruments and Legislation of Government. They set out the legal statute and framework.
13. For more information on the evolution of the DIT from its foundation in 1887 see Duff et al. (2000).
14. The 1998 amendments to the DIT Act provided for full degree-awarding power to the DIT, including graduate and postgraduate. DIT gained the same autonomous degree awarding powers as the universities. The evaluation of degree-awarding powers of the DIT came under the remit of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) as detailed in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. DIT now operates to the same status of the Irish universities: however the Irish Government has not as of yet delegated DIT as a university.
15. The principle function of DIT (under the DIT Act 1992) is located in technical, vocational education and training (TVET). It is worth noting that in 2007 DIT linked into the United Nations and became the UNESCO-UNEVOC National Centre for Ireland. The remit of this centre is to promote TVET. For more information see Kenny (2008).
16. Policy in this context differs from Acts. Policy is more of a narrative demonstrating intent and direction. It is more process orientated while Acts are legal instruments.
17. The delivery process includes new forms of delivery such as ICT based mechanisms, and new forms of learning experience such as group work, problem-based learning, work placements and internships.
18. The use of the term programme here relates to a document that outlines the course of study, similar to a curriculum document. However, in an Irish context the use of the term curriculum is usually confined to primary and secondary education.
19. There are various types of quality assurance mechanisms: some focus on procedures and controls, while others emphasise process and enhancement. For more details see Kenny (2006a).
20. Usage here relates to Bernstein's concept of elaborate and restrictive language codes in class formation.
21. See Ball (2008: 1) relating to the convergence of international policy trends.
22. Ball (2008: 26–27) relates this term to influential international organisations such as WTO, OECD, WB, UN, etc.
23. Discourse is used here in its broadest sense – language, culture, symbolic interaction, power relationship.

24. See Gibbons et al. (1994), which details the shift from Mode 1 to Mode 2 knowledge.
25. Generic key skill: transferable skills, employability skills, work experiences, internships and work placements etc.
26. Becker (1964) on economic perspective, which gives theoretical, empirical accounts on the returns from education and training.
27. In Europe the Diploma Supplement and the itemised units of value ECTS and ECVET are the emerging currency.
28. Quality assurance systems: degree structure frameworks like the Bologna process, EQF.

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