

## IUA Review [09/1] for IUA Meetings in University College Cork on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2009

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## **IUA Review [09/1] for IUA Meetings in University College Cork on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2009**

### **1. Research**

#### **1.1. National Research Policy – SSTI and the Innovation Island**

*“There will be continued substantial investment in R&D through implementation of the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, as demonstrated by significant allocations in Budget 2009, launch of a 5th cycle of the Programme for Research in Third-Level institutions and the preparation, by June 2009 of an Action Plan for Health Research”*

*(Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal)*

For the past two years national research policy has been dominated by the SSTI and its implementation. The first report on the implementation of the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006-2013 was published in December 2008<sup>1</sup>. The investment made in 2007 and 2008 to date is in excess of €1.4bn. The Report shows that growth in research activity in Third Level Institutions is paralleled by equally dynamic growth in business sector R&D, which is almost double the level recorded in 2000.

There has been a major change in focus with the publication by the Government of the new policy document *“Building Ireland’s Smart Economy A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal”*. A presentation on this new policy was given by C. O’Carroll to the VPDOR Group on 9<sup>th</sup> January as part of setting priorities for 2009. It is important to understand that the SSTI has not disappeared however it is seen simply as input and a means to stimulating activity. The new policy focuses on the intended consequences of this major R&D investment. The new term that enters the R&D vocabulary is that of creating the Innovation Island. The focus now is to translate knowledge creation into economic return. The five action areas identified are:

- 1. Securing the Enterprise Economy and Promoting Competitiveness*
- 2. Building The ‘Ideas’ Economy – Establishing ‘The Innovation Island’*
- 3. Enhancing the Environment and Securing Energy Supplies*
- 4. Investing in Critical Public Infrastructure*
- 5. Efficient and Effective Public Services and Smart Regulation*

It is clear that there is a firm commitment to SSTI as evidenced by the announcement of €300m for PRTL Cycle 5. However, it must be noted that the emphasis has changed. For example, in 2008 Frank Gannon spoke of SFI supporting research with consequences. In

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.entemp.ie/publications/science/2008/firstreportonSSTI.pdf>

the new policy document it is clearly stated that SFI will support world class research capacity in strategic areas allied to the needs of industry. The VP/Deans of Research Group is setting its priorities for 2008 informed by this new national direction and these will be finalized at the meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009 in UCC.

### **1.1. *Implementing SSTI 2006-2013***

The SSTI is overseen by two key groups, the Higher Education and Research Group (HERG) and Technology Ireland. The IUA is represented by N. Costello / C. O'Carroll on HERG along with delegates from the key funding agencies and government departments, and the Group is chaired by the Department of Education and Science. Updates on two of the working groups, Capacity Development and Research Careers are below:

- ***Capacity Development***

1. *SSTI Numbers*

On 5 November the IUA convened a meeting of the university research officers to discuss agreed definitions of postdoctoral researchers, administrative and support staff, and principal investigators. It is proposed the agreed definitions would constitute the basis for counting the respective categories of staff as an accurate report on universities' contribution to SSTI targets.

2. *Co-ordinated Research Audit*

This proposal was made to the Working Group by the IUA at the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2008. The EPA chaired a working group of research funder representatives who reported back to the Capacity Group on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008. Their position was highly negative and rejected completely the IUA proposal. We agreed that this group should meet IUA representatives to discuss their (unhelpful) conclusion.

- ***Researcher Careers***

1. *National*

There has been significant activity on this issue since the last IUA meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

- The Advisory Science Council's report with recommendations on Research Careers was formally launched on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2008.
- Following meetings on 6<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October the DES/HEA through the HERG working group proposed a detailed structure for research careers in the universities.
- The IUA Research Careers Group has met and prepared a sectoral response to the HERG recommendations. From the IUA perspective the DES/HEA have failed to appreciate the costs associated with the introduction of a research career structure that include pensions and other social costs

(redundancy, sick and maternity leave) and the need for significant cooperation between funding agencies. There is also a lack of understanding of the IR issues and in particular that of the Fixed Term Workers Act. The summary IUA recommendations are:

- Need for new Job Titles/Categories
- Determine associated standards of skills and competency
- Develop remuneration framework
- Put in place performance management and development system
- Promote mobility
- Cost and agree funding mechanism to cover the costs of all of the above

The discussion of these issues will continue with the HERG this month.

## 2. *European*

The issue of research careers is seen as one of critical importance for the future of R&D in Europe. The European Commission with the agreement of the Member States is setting an agenda focusing on the following four areas<sup>2</sup>:

1. Open recruitment and portability of grants
2. Social security and pension needs of researchers
3. Attractive employment and working conditions
4. Enhancing training, skills and experience of researchers

All Member States have agreed to adopt a national action plan in 2009 with priority actions to be implemented by the end of 2010. The IUA has met with DEFE and agreed to work together to report on the current situation in Ireland and fix targets for 2009. The IUA will rely on results of the Researcher Survey that is currently in the field as part of the SIF 1 project, the Irish Universities Study (IUS).

## 3. *French Presidency Conference – Young Researchers in Europe*

As part of the European initiatives on Research Careers the French Presidency organised a high level conference in Rennes on 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2008. IUA was strongly represented with Dr Conor O’Carroll and Dagmar Meyer as invited speakers.

## 1.2. **Science Foundation Ireland**

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Better Careers and More Mobility: A European Partnership for Researchers’ (COM 2008 317).

***“Science Foundation Ireland will continue to build Ireland’s world class research capacity in strategic areas allied to the needs of industry”***

***“To accelerate Ireland’s global science reputation, by 2013, SFI will attract to Ireland a premium cohort of world class researchers who have been nominated for, or secured prizes, awards and honours that will drive up the international visibility of Ireland to the global research community and the global high-tech business community”***

*(Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal)*

The above quotes are from the “Smart Economy” document and denote a change in focus for SFI. Over the past year the VPDOR Group has been working closely with SFI holding regular meetings to discuss new research programmes and policy. At a meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2008 the following topics were discussed -

- VPR feedback/input to SFI Strategy 2009-2013
- Stokes Research Professor
- STARS and UREKA
- Plan 2009
- SFI Salary Scales (added by NUIG Research Office)
- University contract requirements for RFP applicants
- Inflation costs for PhD fees

In 2009 the VPDOR Group will continue to work closely with SFI.

### **1.3. Fourth Level Ireland Network Group**

#### **1.3.1 Progress**

The IUQB-IUA conference took place on 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> October. There were approximately 220 participants. Participant feedback from the event was very positive. The outcomes of the event will inform the Network’s work and approach in the coming twelve months.

The IUA Fourth Level Network has arranged the distribution of the skills statement, which has featured in a number of university induction events for PhD students. The IUA have distributed 10,000 copies to the universities and other interested parties.

The Network Coordinator attended a Bologna Process meeting in Helsinki that discussed the third cycle degree competences and researcher careers. This conference explored the challenges and opportunities inherent in the changes in PhD education, how it equips graduates for their future careers and the influence of the Lisbon Agenda and Bologna Process upon PhD education. Further information is available from <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tapahtumakalenteri/2008/09/bologna.html?lang=1>

On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2008, the Deans of Graduate Studies formed the university representation at the first meeting of the IUQB expert panel to consider the redrafting of the *National*

*guidelines of good practice in the organisation of PhD programmes.* At this meeting, the expert panel considered a draft institutional questionnaire, which will form one of the primary elements of the review. The other elements of the review include institutional focus groups of supervisors, students and PhD programme administrators. The universities returned the institutional questionnaires on or before 9<sup>th</sup> December 2008. The focus groups took place throughout November and December.

The Network Coordinator met officials of the Brazilian embassy on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 to continue discussions on the practicalities of Brazilian postgraduate students studying at Irish universities. The IUA continues to keep both the Deans of Graduate Studies and the International Officers briefed on developments.

The Network aiding the coordination of a university response to an upcoming call in early 2009 for applications under ‘Action 1’ of the Erasmus Mundus II programme. This European Commission’s [Education, Audiovisual and Culture Agency Executive Agency](#) (EACEA) will manage this programme. EM I funded the development of international joint masters degree programmes. EM II will fund the development of structured joint doctoral programmes. EM I did not fund doctoral programmes.

### **1.3.2 *Activities for the next period***

On 26<sup>th</sup> February, the Deans of Graduate Studies will attend the second plenary meeting of the IUQB expert panel to consider a first draft of the updated *National guidelines of good practice in the organisation of PhD programmes*. The IUQB have secured two international experts who will be present at the meeting.

The Network will continue to liaise with the HEA to aid the coordination of a university response to the upcoming call under Erasmus Mundus II for joint degree masters and doctoral programmes. Successful and unsuccessful GREP and Marie Curie ITN applicants represent strong applicants to EM II.

The Network Coordinator will participate in the IRCHSS-HEA Foresight Exercise in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences and will be a participant in a consultative Forum taking place on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2009

The Network will liaise with the HEA on the universities’ response to the HEA review of Structured PhD education. Please see below.

The Network Coordinator, IUA Director of Research and Network Chair will continue to represent the Network and the IUA on the HERF working group on Research Capacity. The working group will consider the outcome of the HEA structured PhD education review and the realisation of SSTI targets.

#### 1.4. Higher Education Authority

##### 1.4.1. HEA Review of Structured PhD Programmes

The consultants CIRCA conducted the review on behalf of the HEA. The review's scope included both the universities and the institutes of technology. The review involved the completion of an institutional template and institutional consultant visits. The review did not include professional doctorates. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008, the HEA delivered a presentation of the preliminary outcomes of the review to the HERG Working Group on research capacity. It also highlighted the inter-institutional initiatives the universities and IoTs have undertaken in graduate education through the GREPs, PRTLIs and SIF. The primary metric outcomes to date are as follows,

#### Number on structured PhD programmes

	Total PhDs	No. of Structured PhDs	Structured as % of total PhDs within the HEI	% of Total Structured PhD Enrolment
Universities + RCSI	5,510	1,152	20.9	88.0
Institutes of Technology	768	95	12.4	7.3
Other HEIs	202	62	30.7	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,480</b>	<b>1,309</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.5 – Numbers on Structured PhD Programmes 2007/2008

'Emerging effects' highlighted by the review within universities include

- Introduction of generic and transferable skills modules
- Increased collaboration
- Engagement with enterprise through placements and taught modules.

'Suggestions' include

- Agreed national definition of a structured PhD
- Common agreement on aims for graduate schools
- Embedded structures at department, school and faculty level should be developed.

'Other areas for consideration' include

- Monitoring and reporting
- Quality assurance and enhancement
- Research student experience

The Deans of Graduate Studies received a matrix contrasting the characteristics of the ‘traditional PhD’ with ‘structured PhD programmes’. This is a provisional outcome of the review. The Deans of Graduate Studies provided the HEA with a response to this matrix. The HEA have informed the IUA that the report’s availability is imminent.

#### 1.4.2 PRTL Cycle 5

*“A particular focus will be on opportunities arising from research in the renewable energy and environmental technologies areas, including the development and commercialisation of ocean energy and Science Foundation Ireland’s recently added third pillar of energy”*

*“Higher Education institutions will be supported in pursuing new organisational mergers and alliances that can advance performance through more effective concentration of expertise and investment”*

*(Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal)*

The above are quotes from the “Smart Economy” policy document and have certainly influenced PRTL Cycle 5 as announced by the Minister for Education and Science on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2009. The total budget is €300m and the majority will be dedicated to capital programmes. The investment under the PRTL Cycle 5 will be targeted under four headings:

- **Capital facilities:** an important outcome will be the delivery of new and additional state-of-the-art facilities for researchers. It’s anticipated that accommodation will be provided for over 1,400 researchers in higher education institutions.
- **National shared facilities:** higher education institutions will submit proposals for the development of a number of national shared facilities in areas of strategic national importance. Proposals will be sought in the areas of biomedical and health research; chemistry and pharmaceutical research; marine environmental research; environmental (waste management) research; and cultural heritage.
- **Structured PhD programmes:** the Government strategy emphasised the need to restructure our PhD programmes to maintain their high international reputation. The restructured programmes will enhance the quality of PhD education, provide students with multi-disciplinary skills and enable PhD students to take up a variety of careers in academia and in the private and public sectors.
- Institutions will be invited to submit applications to support research in **new and emerging areas**. Examples include areas such as plant/crop bio-sciences, new ways to generate and manage electricity and initiatives that focus on the service industries such as finance/business and IT.

From IUA discussions with HEA it is clear that this Cycle will be very strongly influenced by the Smart Economy document. In particular there will be a strong emphasis on collaboration/rationalisation. While not explicit thematic areas of national relevance (e.g. relevant to the Green Economy) will certainly be favoured. The first phase will take on a greater importance than in Cycle 4 with an expectation that collaboration will be an integral component of strategy. The full call details are available at <http://drupal.heai.ie/en/node/1224>

### 1.4.3 Mapping Study of Research Activity in Ireland

Forfás and the HEA are jointly undertaking a mapping study to record current research activities in Ireland. The objective of the exercise is to better understand the areas of emerging and existing research activity in both the higher education and research institutions and in the enterprise sector which will inform the evolution of public policy and agency strategies.

## 1.5 European / International Funding

### 1.5.1 Sixth Framework Programme

Forfás is conducting an evaluation of Irish performance in FP6 and Conor O'Carroll IUA is a member of the Steering Group. The consultants engaged to carry out the evaluation are Erik Arnold and James Stroyan, Technopolis. Forfás took the unusual step of finalising the Terms of Reference and selecting the consultants before convening the Steering Group. There has been an impression that the universities under performed in FP6 however this is not the case. This is a welcome study as it will provide IUA the opportunity to refute any implication that the university sector has abandoned European funding.

### 1.5.2 Seventh Framework Programme

The Director of the FP7 National Support Structure, Dr Imelda Lambkin, has reported on Irish performance in FP7 from December 2006 to September 2008.

**Table 1 Funding to Ireland from Framework Programmes**

	Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) Source: Eurostat (€m)	Total Public Funding of R&D (GBAORD) Source: Eurostat (€m)	Framework Programme Funding to Ireland Source: Forfas (€m)	Framework Programme Funding as % of Total Public Funding of R&D (%)
1987-1990 FP2	1,058	419	44	10.5%
1991-1994 FP3	1,874	512	88	17.2%
1995-1998 FP4	3,289	766	191	24.9%
1999-2002 FP5	4,964	1,376	148	10.8%
2003-2006 FP6	7,818	2,851	200	7.0%

The data in Table 1 shows the historical trend in data to Ireland from successive Framework Programmes. The drop in FP funding as a percentage of national funding is a consequence of the major increase in R&D exchequer funding from 1998 onwards. It should be noted that during FP6 funding from the Marie Curie Programme amounted to just over €60m representing 30% of the total. This is the activity directly supported by IUA.

**Table 2 Income to HE sector in FP7 (12/06 – 9/08)**

<b>HES Institution</b>	<b>Funding to Irish Participants (€)</b>	<b>Funding to project</b>
TCD	11,559,202	180159169
UCC	8,643,212	117433189
UCD	5,771,883	80220399
NUIG	5,702,716	93084641
UL	5,266,220	142533029
DCU	1,837,310	24224727
NUIM	929,600	9962840
RCSI	299,500	11999999
WIT	4,461,733	47536392
DIT	563,372	8119234
CIT	317,050	2830960
GMIT	246,560	6319346

This data for FP7 in Table 2 is provided directly by the European Commission's own database and therefore is highly accurate. However there is a gap in the data for the People (Marie Curie) programme. This will be estimated directly by the IUA Marie Curie Office. The total funding to Ireland is €80.4m in that period with 57% to the HE sector and 32% to industry.

### **1.5.3. IUA Marie Curie Office**

Both the National Contact Point and the National Delegate for the Marie Curie Actions programme were invited as speakers at the French Presidency Conference "Young Researchers in Europe" which took place in Rennes/France last November. Dagmar Meyer (NCP) contributed to a Round Table on the topic "Young researchers in Europe, which careers for tomorrow?", while Conor O'Carroll (ND) gave a presentation in a workshop on "Mobility and attractiveness of the European Research Area" and ran a special session entitled "Improve your awareness of the Charter and Code principles", see also 1.1.1.

#### **1.5.3(a) 'People' (Marie Curie) Programme**

Overall, the results achieved by Irish researchers and organisations in the Marie Curie Actions in 2008 have been very encouraging. With regard to the results that came out

since the last IUA Review, the following tables provide an overview of the performance of Irish applicants (numbers refer to coordinators/participants in RoI):

Individual actions:

<i>Individual Fellowships</i>	<i>Proposals submitted</i>	<i>On A list (funded)</i>	<i>On B list (reserve)</i>	<i>Irish success rate</i>	<i>General success rate</i>
Intra-European	23 out of 1738	5	2	21.7%	26.6%
International Outgoing	6 out of 441	2	0	33.3%	25.0%
International Incoming	11 out of 661	2	1	18.2%	21.2%

<i>Reintegration Grants (second cut-off)<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>Proposals submitted</i>	<i>On A list (funded)</i>	<i>On B list (reserve)</i>	<i>Irish success rate</i>	<i>General success rate</i>
European RG	2 out of 97	2	0	100%	89.0%
International RG	3 out of 196	3	0	100%	48.0%

Host actions:

<i>Industry-Academia Pathways and Partnerships</i>	<i>Participations in submitted proposals</i>	<i>On A list (funded)</i>	<i>On B list (reserve)</i>	<i>Irish success rate</i>	<i>General success rate</i>
As participant	26 out of 613	10	4	38.5%	25.1%
Of these, as coordinator	9 out of 141	5	1	55.6%	29.1%

<i>Initial Training Networks</i>	<i>Participations in submitted proposals</i>	<i>On A list (funded)</i>	<i>On B list (reserve)</i>	<i>Irish success rate</i>	<i>General success rate</i>
As participant	122 out of appr. 7600	11	5	9.0%	not yet available
Of these, as coordinator	29 out of 886	2	2	6.9%	10.4%

While the success rates for Irish applicants lie broadly within the range of the overall success rates across Europe (not all numbers are statistically relevant, given the small sample sizes), the high success rate in the Industry-Academia scheme (IAPP) is particularly noteworthy, especially given the fact that in 2007 out of 7 proposals that were submitted, none made it to the A list. The next deadline for the IAPP scheme will be on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2009. The IUA Marie Curie Office is planning to organise a national information event for potential applicants from both public and private sector in April; individual visits to the universities and other targeted institutions will follow.

As in 2007, the call for Initial Training Networks was extremely competitive (in some areas proposals achieving more than 90% did not even make it to the reserve list). There will be no call for Marie Curie ITNs in 2009. However, the new “Joint Doctoral Programmes” scheme under the ERASMUS MUNDUS II programme (Action 1) which is due to be published at the end of January could help to fill this gap.

<sup>3</sup> Based on information received from the universities – no official information from the Commission available yet  
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With regard to the first COFUND call (deadline was in March 2008) in which Ireland had a success rate of 100% (three proposals were submitted and all three were successful), negotiations have been finished and the signature of the Grant Agreements is imminent. Both IRCSET and HRB have already launched their programmes and are satisfied with the response rate to their first calls. Based on the numbers of applications or expressions of interest they have received so far, the success rates for their new outgoing fellowship schemes will be comparable to the success rates for the individual Marie Curie fellowship schemes at European level. The new “Career Enhancement Mobility Programme” run by the NBIPI (represented by RCSI) is currently recruiting a Programme Manager and will publish its first call in the spring. The next deadline for submission of proposals under COFUND to the Commission is on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Despite the high success rate in the previous call and dedicated support to potentially interested organisations (for example a special COFUND meeting in November 2008), so far only one organisation (IRCHSS) has indicated to us that they will submit a proposal to the Commission. This is regrettable as the scheme certainly could offer very interesting opportunities for leveraging of exchequer funding for organisations benefitting from SFI and PRTLTI funding (for example CSETs, consortia of universities etc.). No new call is foreseen in the 2009 Work Programme, but it is foreseen to continue the scheme with a call in early 2010 under the Work Programme 2010.

A further interesting opportunity in the Marie Curie programme that universities should investigate is the currently open IRSES call (International Research Staff Exchange Scheme). This scheme provides funding for the exchange of staff (up to one year) between European and Third Country partners in consortia of HEIs and non-profit research organisations. The overall success rate in the first call was more than 80% (only half the budget allocated to this action could be spent). There was one proposal with an Irish institution as coordinator and one with an Irish participant (non-coordinator); both were successful. The deadline for the current call is on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

The IUA Marie Curie Office is available for any questions regarding the above mentioned calls as well as any other issues related to the Marie Curie programme. We provide assistance in the preparation of proposals, including finding the right partners for a consortium (among others, availing of the large number of contacts in other countries that we have through the network of Marie Curie National Contact Points across Europe). We can also provide help at the negotiation stage if needed. Presentations on specific parts of the programme can be arranged for specific groups or in the context of broader events, but should be requested a reasonable time in advance.

### ***1.5.3(b) European Network of National Contact Points for the ‘People’ (Marie Curie) Programme (“Mobility NCPs”)***

The “PeopleNetwork” finally had its kick-off meeting in early December in Tel Aviv. The National Contact Point is in charge of developing a number of surveys for different groups of Marie Curie fellows to obtain feedback on the reception of the programme by

the end-users, any recurrent issues that hamper the smooth implementation of the projects/fellowships and suggestions how these could be addressed. The first survey will go online within the next few weeks.

### **1.5.3(c) FP7 National Support Structure (NSS)**

One of the responsibilities of the IUA Marie Curie Office within the framework of the FP7 National Support Structure is to provide feedback to Enterprise Ireland on applications for support under the Coordinator, Travel and Feasibility Study schemes, as far as they concern Marie Curie activities. In November 2008, following discussions with the members of the NSS (National Contact Points and National Delegates), EI launched a new scheme to support Strategic Approaches to FP7 by Irish research centres. In order to be eligible to avail of up to €100,000 funding from EI, applicant organisations had to submit an outline of their approach to FP7 within their broader strategy for research capacity building. The NCP and ND provided feedback on all proposals submitted, noting that only in rare cases the Marie Curie Actions programme had been made best use of to support the described institutional strategy. Because of its bottom-up approach and the diversity of schemes available, the Marie Curie programme offers opportunities to practically any type of research centre, regardless of discipline, size, status (well-established centre or emerging entity), level of international connectedness, etc.. Not all applicants appeared to be aware of this.

### **1.5.2 NIH Funding**

A presentation was given by Dr Dara Fitzgerald<sup>4</sup> on opportunities for researchers in Ireland to access US National Institutes of Health (NIH) research funding. IUA is following up on this opportunity for leverage funding in collaboration with SFI.

## **1.6. Irish Researcher Mobility Office and Web Portal**

### **1.6.1. *Hosting Agreement Scheme and Extranet***

The office has processed 457 Hosting Agreements since February 2008 with a total of 17 accredited organisations which includes one from Industry (LM Ericsson Ltd.). Hosting Agreements originate from 54 non EEA countries – China (86), India (78), USA (53), Russia (25) Canada (18) and Australia (18). The most active organizations in employing non EEA researchers are the following: UCD (92) NUIG (87), TCD (78) and UCC (69).

A leaflet was designed and published to promote the Scheme and was disseminated at the SFI Summit in November.

### **1.6.2. *SFI Summit***

SFI's Summit at Lyrath Estate, Kilkenny in November was an excellent opportunity to promote the researcher mobility office and in particular the Hosting Agreement Scheme. Interest for the mobility stand was hugely increased following an official introduction about the office during the opening proceedings. It was encouraging that a number of

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Fitzgerald is on secondment to the NIH from EI.

researchers who visited the stand had already heard about the IUA initiative and indeed had high praise for the office, portal and positive experiences from the Hosting agreement scheme. However a large number of the 350 researchers that approached the stand over the two days were not aware of the service provided by the IUA and the event gave an opportunity to reach out to these key people. The office has plans to strengthen links with SFI and participate in any relevant events that would ensure their researchers avail of the services and assistance provided.

### **1.6.3. *Statistics***

Statistical analysis collated prior to the preparation of this report can be summarized as follows:

- 14,755 Job Searches on the portal – a remarkable increase on the last report.
- 263 - Job Applications made directly via the portal application facility but this does not reflect the large number of applications that have been made directly to organisations
- 2,235- organisation profile searches have been made by registered users

There are now 3,243 users registered on the portal and this number is continuously growing.

### **1.6.4. *EU Projects - ERAMIND***

Turkish Co-ordinators TUBITAK hosted the kick off meeting for the MOREBRAIN Project on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2008. Partners from Netherlands, Italy and Ireland were in attendance and the project objectives were discussed and agreed. During the meeting, the composition of the Advisory Board was discussed. The Advisory Board will consist of 6-7 people and should be balanced with people from different sectors and from different countries. The IUA will nominate some Irish representatives for the Advisory Board. The next project meeting will take place in March 2009 at the EURAXESS Conference in Potsdam where the partners will also deliver an information session to the participants.

## **1.7. National Research Platform**

***“IDA, Enterprise Ireland and SFI will develop a marketing campaign for ‘The Innovation Island’”***

*(Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal)*

The objectives for a National Research Platform have been agreed by the working groups involved in the project. The two initial main working groups were subdivided into five working groups under the focus areas of:

- Expertise,
- Brokerage,
- Resources,
- Funding,
- Facts & Figures.

The goal of each working group is to define the Information Content and list of outputs for each focus area of the National Research Platform, based on the agreed objectives, and

needs of the identified users and stakeholders. The working groups are also outlining any work that needs to be done if the information is not available or cannot be easily obtained. The members of the working groups have representatives from the following organisations:

- American Chamber of Commerce
- Chief Science Advisor's Office
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
- Enterprise Ireland,
- Forfás,
- Higher Education Authority
- IBEC and IBEC R&D Working Groups
- IDA
- ISME
- Marine Institute
- Molecular Medicine Ireland
- Research and Technology Transfer Offices – Higher Education Institutes
- SFI
- Teagasc

The expertise working group has had extensive meetings with Industry representatives and IDA Ireland. The group has identified the expertise information requirements for all identified users and stakeholders. The slogan used by IDA Ireland to promote new investment from overseas is “Knowledge is in our nature”. The Higher Education Institutions and research bodies on the island of Ireland are the creators of this knowledge and the provision of such to the IDA will ensure active marketing of the knowledge base.

The facts and figures working group have identified the numbers that would be required by all identified users and stakeholders to meet the agreed objectives, and also deliver on the SSTI objectives. The information needs from this group feeds directly into the Research Definitions subcommittee, which has been established to identify National research terms definition. A set of agreed defined research terms will result in an elimination of duplication in the Higher Education Sector Research Information Systems and greater efficiencies and value to the numbers generated.

The resources group have identified resources available to, and from, all identified users and stakeholders which should be showcased on a National Research Platform.

The funding working group have been investigating the possibility of a National Funding Information Service to publicize the funding calls, outcomes, link to funding agencies, funding agency strategies to a wide range of audiences. This Service would provide information on funding opportunities available to all Irish researchers. The funding working group created a survey to estimate the time spent by researchers and research offices looking for funding opportunities not provided by their local funding information

providers. The results show that researchers are currently spending approximately 5% of their time looking for additional funding opportunities. One of the main requests is to have a funding calendar detailing calls which would allow researchers and research offices time to adequately plan proposal submissions and potential recruitment.

The completion of the report for this project is going to be brought forward to the end of February 2009, and the primary goal of this quarter is to obtain funding for the next steps of building and implementing the National Research Platform.

The objective of the recent Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal, Building Ireland's Smart Economy is to make Ireland an innovation and commercialisation hub in Europe. The report for this project will detail how the National Research Platform will assist IDA Ireland deliver on FDI by providing specific information used for this purpose. It will also detail how efficiencies can be achieved across the sector and how the Platform will play a vital role in the emergence of converging technologies and marketing of the Innovation Island.

#### **1.8. Conflict of Interest**

The IUA has been engaged in a project with the funding agencies, led by Enterprise Ireland, to introduce agreed Conflict of Interest guidelines. Final revisions to the guidelines were proposed by IUA to EI in December and we are awaiting a response.

#### **1.9. Research Integrity**

In 2008 the VPDOR group discussed the need to deal at a national level on the issue of Research Integrity. The term Research Integrity covers issues on misconduct in research including plagiarism, falsification of data and authorship. In many cases there are no clear internal university policies apart from standard disciplinary procedures. The fact is that the universities could be seriously exposed if any incident were to occur as has been the case recently in Austria.

It was recognised that there should be an independent procedure in place to deal with this issue. As a consequence the IUA met with the RIA to discuss their possible involvement. IUA contacted the EUA and as a result Ireland is now representing the EUA on a project in this area led by the European Science Foundation (ESF). The IUA is represented on this project by Dr. Alan Donnelly, University of Limerick; Alan is a member of the Irish Council for Bioethics. Dr. Donnelly presented at an ESF workshop in Madrid 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008 and will be a member of the one of the working group established. We will be collaborating with HRB who are also involved.

#### **1.10. Immigration**

***“Fast-track visa arrangements will be provided for key researchers and highly skilled staff and their spouses. They will also be eligible for fast-track progression to long-term residence”***

***“We will seek to position Ireland as a location of choice in the International Education market”***

*(Building Ireland’s Smart Economy – A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal)*

Both of the above quotes are from the “Smart Economy” policy document. It is worth noting that fast track arrangements for researchers are already in place. The IUA is responsible for the Hosting Agreement that provides fast track immigration of non EU researchers and their families to Ireland. This is a very successful scheme but in dealing with these issues we have come across many situations where students coming to our universities face major obstacles. A draft policy paper has been prepared and discussed with the International Officers Group and an article on the topic by C. O’Carroll appeared in the Sunday Tribune. The kernel of the problem is that the classification of student is applied equally to those with no qualifications doing an English language course and a first class honours graduate coming to do a PhD in an area of national priority. At one of our regular meetings with DETE and the Dept. of Justice (we emphasized that while the issue of non EU researchers has been resolved the same is not true for students. We argued that non EU 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> level students should receive special treatment for immigration as is now done for non EU researchers. The Dept. of Justice indicated that they are in the process of revising immigration rules for all students and will take this into account. It is clear to us that unless these immigration issues are resolved then Ireland will not become a location of choice for international students.

#### **1.11. Irish Technology Leadership Group (ITLG)**

The ITLG consists of Irish and Irish American senior executives based mainly in Silicon Valley active in the global technology industry. They are committed to ensuring that Ireland remains a strategic area of investment and opportunity for US technology companies, and committed to supporting the global growth and development of Irish based technology companies. A meeting was held in IUA on 20<sup>th</sup> November between ITLG and the VP/Deans of Research and Directors of Technology Transfer.

#### **1.12. Boyle Medal**

The Call for the Boyle Medal was announced by the RDS / Irish Times in December. This is a highly prestigious award and has a long history of selecting outstanding Irish scientists. It is to be noted that there was no medal awarded on the last occasion due to the quality of the applicants. The first recipient of the Royal Dublin Society's Boyle Medal was George Johnstone Stoney (1826-1911). Stoney is best remembered in the history of science for introducing the term 'electron'. The award in 2009 is open to scientists based in Ireland and the deadline is 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2009, [www.rds.ie/boyle](http://www.rds.ie/boyle) .

## **2. Strategic Innovation Fund**

### **2.1. Irish Universities Study**

The IUA and the UCD Geary Institute are conducting a three-year study of students and researchers in the universities. Arising from the First Module of the student survey there are three reports being finalised by the Steering Group (Undergraduate, PhD and International Students). The Second Module of the student survey is due to go into the field in late January. The Researcher Survey is in the field since mid December and first results are expected in early February.

### **2.2. Full Economic Cost Project**

The detailed design and implementation phase of the FEC project under SIF Cycle II continues to progress. Each of the university FEC Managers and the IUA central project manager have been meeting at three weekly intervals and the various national projects, each of which is being led by one of the institutional FEC managers, have progressed significantly over the last few months. The deadline for completion of the individual national projects is 31<sup>st</sup> January 2009.

The Academic Activity Profiling (AAP) project, which is a fundamental element of the overall FEC project and is being led jointly by UCC and DCU, has been finalized and was approved subject to minor modification at the most recent FEC National Steering Group Meeting. A detailed AAP form together with data definitions has been designed and methodologies for the collection of AAP data for the pilot phase have been agreed.

AAP data will be collected twice during the 2008/09 academic year; in March 2009 (for the period September – December 2008) and in September 2009 (for the period May 2009 – August 2009). Final decisions regarding the long-term AAP collection methodologies (including the frequency of data collection and the possibility of sampling) will be informed by the outcome of the pilot phase.

Universities will be commencing the detailed AAP roll-out and communications to academic communities in January 2009.

The overall governance framework for the FEC Project has been finalized and agreed and an FEC National Steering Group (NSG) has been established. The primary responsibility of the NSG is to ensure that the FEC project direction is appropriate to the achievement of the project objectives and to provide operational direction and decision making. This Group comprises the Chairs of the individual university Steering Groups plus a number of other technical representatives (from areas such as Finance, IT, HR, Research) across the universities. This Group has met on the 12<sup>th</sup> November and 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2008.

Following a tender process SAS consultants have been formally engaged to provide FEC software solutions and IT and costing technical support and expertise. The IUA and SAS have been engaged in a project planning process over the past few weeks. A detailed technical plan has been devised with SAS. This technical plan forms part of an overall draft FEC project plan (comprising broad timelines for data collection, production of reports from the system etc.) and was presented to the National Steering Group on the 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2008.

### **2.3. Strategic Planning & Decision Support Project**

This project, funded under SIF Cycle I, is now coming to completion. A draft final report has been circulated through the project steering group for final comment and input. It is proposed that the final report will be signed-off and published in February 2009. The draft report proposes that the sector should now commence the process of implementing a standard system of performance measurement and associated performance indicators in accordance with the framework and prioritized set of indicators agreed by the project steering group. It also proposes that a detailed implementation plan for the introduction of the headline set of KPI's would now be developed.

## **3. Funding**

### **3.1. Recurrent Funding**

#### **3.1.1. Current Funding**

The 2009 Book of Estimates allocation for the HEA sector (subhead E4) was €1.356 billion, a decrease of 2% on the prior year. However, the DES subsequently informed the HEA that a further €17m would be transferred from subhead E4 to E1 (student supports) in respect of funding for students eligible for local authority grants. The revised allocation therefore represents a decrease of approximately 3.5% on 2008.

When funding for the grant in lieu of fees and further earmarked funding is taken into account the decrease in core grant for the sector for 2009 amounts to 6.5%. As a result of the application of the RGAM moderating factor individual university allocations range from a decrease of 5.5% to 7.5% on 2008 core grants.

The impact of the decrease in core grant has been offset to some extent by the effect of the increase in the student services charge in 2009/10 announced by the Minister in his post-budget speech. The Minister announced that institutions would be permitted to increase the student services charge in 2009/10 to €1,500, an increase of €600 on 2008/09.

The DES and HEA have calculated that once the increase in student services charge and fee income are taken into account the overall income available to institutions in 2009 would be in line with that received in 2008. This however does still represent a significant reduction in income in 'real' terms particularly given that allocations include

funding for O'Brien Review and 'T2016' pay increases and consequently presents significant challenges for universities.

The increase in the student services charge also presents challenges for universities as there are issues in relation to the timing of the recognition of such income as well as potential restrictions on the use of such income.

The outlook for current funding in 2009 remains very bleak. Indications are that further cuts in the 2009 grant allocations for universities are very likely given the on-going work of An Bord Snip Nua, the continued deterioration in public finances and the Minister for Finance's recent announcement that a further €2bn will be cut in public spending in 2009. The DES is due to appear before An Bord Snip Nua on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

### **3.1.2. *HEA Reporting Templates***

The Department of Finance has requested that all Departments and Agencies report to them in respect of savings in pay and non-pay expenditure. The HEA and IUA have been liaising to agree an appropriate template that would meet the HEA's obligations in respect of universities while respecting the autonomy of universities to operate within overall budgets.

The IUA has been liaising with the HR Directors Group and the Chief Finance Officers Group in this regard. Draft templates have been circulated for completion and the HR Directors have been asked to take the lead in agreeing an appropriate pay template. The recent grant allocation letters which issued to universities indicated that completed templates were overdue in respect of the quarter ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

### **3.1.3 *Recurrent Grant Allocation Model***

The HEA has again applied a 1% moderating factor in respect of 2009 grant allocations in order to maintain financial stability. Accordingly individual university grant allocations range from -5.5% to -7.5% (i.e. +/- 1% of sector decrease of 6.5%).

RGAM allocations for 2009 were based on 2007/08 student numbers returned by universities. The Student Audit Group in its review found that there was '*...remarkable consistency and adherence to the HEA Framework for price group assignment*'.

### **3.1.4 *Medical Consultant Contracts***

The IUA has received confirmation from the DES that additional funding will be provided to meet the costs of the new medical consultant contracts in 2009.

### **3.1.5 *Tuition fee increase submission 2009/10***

The 2009/10 tuition fee increase submission is currently being finalised. Indications are that an increase in the region of 5.8% will be required to cover the cost of known unavoidable cost increases.

### **3.2. Pension Issues**

#### **3.2.1 *Proposed transfer of university pension schemes***

Work in relation to the proposed transfer of university pension schemes is continuing through the HEA Pension Working Group. As reported previously it had been hoped that the primary legislation would be enacted before the end of 2008 through legislation being sponsored by the Department of Finance. This did not prove possible due to legislation required in respect of the banking sector and the finance bill, which took priority in the DoF.

Department of Finance officials remain optimistic that the legislation will be passed early in 2009. An outline of the likely heads of bill indicated that the following would be addressed in the legislation:-

- Benefits payable to or in respect of members will be paid on a pay as you go basis by the bodies on a no less favourable basis pursuant to existing approved rules of schemes;
- Trustees will be indemnified against any liability arising from any action taken after the effective date of transfer except where they continue as administrators of the scheme;
- No subsequent amendment to be allowed to schemes except with consent of Ministers;
- A provision to say that funds to pay the pensions on a Pay As You Go basis would be provided by the Oireachtas in the relevant votes taking account of contributions etc.
- An appeals mechanism would be provided for.

In order to fully embed the benefits and rights of members it is important that universities urgently obtain formal approval for all changes made to schemes since 1997. The HEA will be writing to universities in this regard.

#### **3.2.2 *FRS 17 & University Financial Statements***

As reported previously there remain unresolved differences of interpretation between the external auditors and the C&AG in relation to the application of FRS 17 in university financial statements. The IUA and HEA met with the DoF in this regard with a view to trying to progress matters. It was agreed that the HEA and DoF will work together to draft a letter which may assist universities in demonstrating to auditors that an appropriate guarantee currently exists.

### **3.3. Shared Services/Procurement**

Recent correspondence from the HEA invited universities to make recommendations on areas where shared services might be expanded or introduced with the objective of obtaining genuine cost savings and efficiencies across the sector. The University Chief Finance Officers Group is currently considering this with a view to identifying potential areas and potential barriers/constraints which would need to be addressed.

UCFOG is also developing a proposal in respect of a central procurement resource to assist universities in developing a strategic procurement capacity with a view to maximising cost savings and efficiencies through sectoral procurement initiatives.

### **3.4. Nursing & Midwifery**

As reported in the October IUA Review the HSE had written to universities notifying them that they would not be applying the agreed 2.6% fee inflator in respect of 2008/09 academic year. Further correspondence subsequently issued from the HSE notifying institutions of reductions in student intakes to apply from the 2009/10 academic year. Such cuts in student numbers would result in very significant funding reductions for universities. At a subsequent meeting with the HSE and DoHC the DoHC outlined further cost saving measures including reductions in funding for post-registration education programmes and the cessation of funding for part-time nursing degree programmes.

The IUA delegation pointed out that Nurse education was a partnership between two arms of the public service and that binding agreements existed in respect of nurse education provision. It was also noted that arising from the transfer of nurse education significant fixed costs were transferred from Health to Education. It was now completely inappropriate on the part of the DoHC/HSE to unilaterally apply such cost saving measures which in effect would have to be absorbed by the Education vote.

At the meeting the DoHC also announced their intention to undertake a review of nurse education provision. The IUA argued that nurse education provision is an education matter and consequently any such review should be lead by the education sector and should involve all relevant stakeholders including both government departments, HEA, HSE & HEI's.

The IUA has written to the Ministers for Education & Science and the Minister for Health & Children as well as to the DoHC and HEA in relation to these issues and we await a response in this regard.

The HSE has also written to the IUA recently seeking a nomination for the Nursing & Midwifery Education Advisory Committee to oversee the implementation of the HSE Report of Nursing and Midwifery Post-registration Education Review. Prof. J. Ward, Registrar NUIG, agreed to represent the IUA at the first meeting of the Committee.

### **3.5. Taxation Issues**

Following the response from Revenue to the submission made by UCC in respect of PAYE issues as reported in the October IUA Review UCC subsequently wrote to the district inspector in respect of these issues.

## **4. Borrowing Framework**

We await a response from the HEA to the sector's submission in respect of the borrowing framework.

## **5. Charities Bill 2007**

The IUA through the Charities Bill Working group, led by Mr. J. Coman, has been in extensive consultation with the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs and DES while the Charities Bill has been progressing through the Houses of the Oireachtas. The IUA was successful in getting approval for the amendments proposed to the Bill as it passed through the Seanad. These amendments helped to ensure that the administrative impact of the Bill on universities is minimized and addressed some concerns in relation to university foundations. The amended Bill will go back to the Dail for final approval. This is expected to happen in February 2009.

## **6. Access**

### **6.1. Background**

The IUA-led Equity of Access project, involving the seven universities and DIT, seeks to address both strategic and operational challenges associated with increasing the numbers of students from under-represented groups entering higher education. The primary focus of the project is the reform and mainstreaming of two supplementary admissions routes, namely the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Supplementary Admissions Route- Students with a Disability. Following a pilot year in which current schemes were reviewed and new elements tested, the project is now in a 2-year implementation phase aligned with the 2008/09 and 2009/2010 admissions cycles.

### **6.2. Current status of the project**

#### **6.2.1. *Delivering a more equitable and transparent system of assessing applications to the supplementary admission routes***

##### **6.2.1i *Socio-economic disadvantage:***

Following extensive research and engagement with experts in the field, a new model of assessment for HEAR has been agreed by all the key stakeholders and is now in operation on a pilot basis. Under a revised scheme, eligibility will be based on applicants meeting a number of indicators of disadvantage – relating to their economic, social, cultural and educational circumstances. All of the proposed indicators are utilised in other spheres of Irish life and can (in the main) be easily and reliably verified by a neutral party. The application of the new indicators will ensure transparency in the assessment process, thus significantly reducing the risk of the university being challenged on the assessment process and/or the outcomes. Application of these new indicators is likewise considerably less labour intensive than under the previous system, releasing access staff to work with (prospective) students rather than operate a cumbersome system.

### **6.2.1ii *Students with a Disability***

Following consultation with experts in the field and an examination of practice in other jurisdictions, detailed assessment criteria relating to each category of disability are in the process of being drafted and will be made publicly available. Clarification and dissemination of the criteria will support informed decision-making by applicants regarding likely eligibility, as well as greater levels of transparency and equity in the assessment process. Quality control mechanisms were introduced in 2008 to ensure consistency in the interpretation and application of assessment criteria. The new procedures will likewise result in a less resource-intensive process of determining eligibility.

### **6.2.2 Centralised processing – Operating from the CAO platform**

As part of a HEAR national scheme (proposed for 2010 entry), applicants will be invited to submit information about their socio-economic circumstances directly to the CAO as an appendix to their main college application. This aligns with the procedures already in place within the CAO for gathering disability-specific information from applicants indicating a disability. The latter moved to an online form for the first time this year (i.e. for entry 2009).

Agreement has been reached in principle with the Board of CAO to incorporate HEAR, and work is at an advanced stage on the development of a secure system for receiving, collating and processing HEAR supplemental information. This centralised system-wide approach will simplify the application process for students and strengthen the administration of the scheme through greater coordination and integration of procedures. A similar approach to the management and processing of data to inform admissions-related decisions for applicants with a disability is at proposal stage, and subject to agreement with the key players, will be integrated into the technical spec for HEAR.

The data collected through both supplementary schemes will augment other sources of data on the target groups and their progression onto higher education, thus supporting *evidence-based policy* in this area of work.

### **6.2.3 *Extending higher education opportunities to students nationwide***

As a targeted scheme, HEAR has traditionally been open to students attending a limited number of second level schools, i.e. those with DEIS or designated disadvantaged status<sup>5</sup>. It is arguable that the exclusion of applicants from non-designated schools is itself inequitable and open to legal challenge, thus the proposal to extend HEAR to all second level schools nationwide. Some progress has been made in this regard for entry 2009, with an additional 120 schools (in the BMW Region) joining the scheme, bringing the total number of schools benefiting to 430. All schools with DEIS designation continue to be included. Opportunities for these students have also been greatly enhanced in 2009 with the full participation of NUI Galway in HEAR for the first time.

## **6.3. Issues & Recommendation for consideration:**

### **6.3.1 *Sustainability of national schemes***

There are undoubtedly resource implications associated with delivering national admissions schemes for these target groups. These might be considered under the following headers:

#### **6.3.1i *Supporting the delivery of a centralised operation***

Expert assessment of applications is a crucial element of these admission schemes. Access and Disability Officers currently undertake this in a distributed model with limited systems support. Delivering both schemes from the CAO platform will provide significant benefits in terms of data management and administrative support. However the actual assessment of applications for eligibility is a separate task that will require a combination of system-based solutions, manual review of applications and expert judgement.

There are arguments in favour of the Access and Disability Officer Groups delivering the assessment function for the first and perhaps second years of rollout of new national schemes. The new schemes should exploit fully these officers' experience of working with the target groups and their extensive input to the development of new assessment criteria and procedures.

The long-term solution however lies in the establishment of a centralised assessment unit or 'clearing house' with the appropriate expertise, structure and resources to carry-out

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Education & Science Programme - *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)*

assessments and oversee the management of the entire application-assessment process. There are a number of existing agencies that could be considered in this regard, such as HEA-NAO; DES; VECs; DSFA; National Council for Special Education; CAO and POBAL. Alternatively a new unit could be established by the DES/HEA in consultation with the HE sector to deliver this function.

### **6.3.1ii Supporting entrants from the target groups**

As part of the project the universities and DIT have been asked to outline details of their Access-Admissions Policies including quotas of places available via the supplementary routes and post-entry supports offered. To date, 5 of the 8 institutions have provided this information.

The main costs associated with supporting entrants from under-represented groups include pay costs (student support personnel), non-pay costs (equipment, orientation programmes, etc) and bursaries.

The ‘access’ weighting to be applied to students from the target groups under a revised RGRAM will not meet the full costs associated with ‘access’ support. With plans for national schemes in the advanced stages of development and data from this year’s pilot coming on-stream shortly, there may well be an opportunity for the universities and DIT to collectively negotiate a separate ‘access fund’ with HEA/DES to supplement the 1.33 weighting thus delivering ‘real’ money for access places filled.

### **6.3.2 Legal exposure**

A national HEAR scheme will raise the profile of activities in this area. IUA is currently awaiting a response from HEA regarding any potential exposure to legal challenge on the grounds of positive discrimination. In addition, the proposal to continue to limit HEAR to students progressing through the Irish second level education system (i.e. Irish residents) may also need to be examined in the context of EU legislation. While current concerns relate to plans for a new national scheme, the existing scheme is not immune to challenge. Indeed, the very fact that the existing scheme operates in a less structured fashion probably makes it more open to challenge.

### **6.3.3 Demand for places**

The reform of the current supplementary schemes is primarily driven by a strong commitment to delivering more equitable and transparent schemes that will stand up to public scrutiny and minimise any risk to the institutions of accusations of mismanagement. A related objective is that of operational reform of the schemes through a combination of system-based solutions and centralised management. The latter objective serves two key outcomes:

- A reduction in the time that Access/Disability Officers spend processing applications, thus allowing them to redirect their work toward developmental activities
- The capacity of the schemes to manage larger volumes of applicants efficiently and expand number of entrants to institutions if desirable.

The project is on course to deliver on both of these objectives.

It is anticipated that the volume of applications from the target groups will rise with the launch of national schemes. Expansion of numbers entering through access routes may have to be restricted in line with resources available to support these students. Such a move would invariably impact on competition for places, particularly in the case of the HEAR scheme. However the new multi-indicator model will allow for prioritisation of applicants through a system of applying weightings and/or combining the number of indicators met. Operating within the agreed framework of multi-indicator model, individual institutions could make decisions locally in line with their own strategic priorities, to weight some indicators over others as a means of determining final selection of entrants. The details of any such local weighting arrangement would need to be made public, along with all other elements of the schemes.

## **7. National Qualifications Authority of Ireland**

### **7.1. Placement of University Postgraduate Diplomas, Higher Diplomas, and minor, special purpose, and supplemental awards on the NFQ**

Following the submission by each university in summer 2008 to NQAI regarding the placement of their Postgraduate Diplomas, Higher Diplomas, minor, special purpose and supplemental awards on the NFQ, and consideration of these placements by the NQAI Authority on 24 September 2008, a response was received in October 2008 proposing the following course of action:

- That the listings provided by the universities should be published on their websites using an agreed template, with separate lists for major and non-major awards. Links to the universities' website listings will be made from the NFQ and NQAI websites, with accompanying contextual information.
- That a number of matters arising from the listings provided by the universities, largely related to the credit ranges and naming conventions associated with non-major awards and the credit ranges associated with the major Diploma awards, and the prevalent use of the Professional Certificate as a named award, should be discussed further to see whether there is a need to accommodate a further award-type in the Framework. In order to advance these issues, the Authority proposes that a higher education forum be established, to include representation from across the higher education sector.

- That the NQAI and universities continue to seek to secure the inclusion in the Framework of the remaining university awards, including those made by the National University of Ireland
- That the NQAI and the IUA develop a policy approach for the placement on the Framework of the former awards of the universities (legacy awards).

This work is underway and should continue during the first half of 2009.

### 7.2. IUA / NQAI Framework Implementation Network

The fifth meeting of the joint IUA / NQAI Framework Implementation Network took place on 8 December 2008, chaired by Prof. John Scattergood of TCD. The three working groups in this network are working on specific topics, see below, and are expected to produce draft reports which will be brought together as a network publication in mid 2009.

- *Working Group 1* - The importance of consistent award/programme titling and the basis for determination of award/programme Framework levels and links to quality assurance
- *Working Group 2* - Addressing assessment of learning outcomes: including academic and administrative dimensions
- *Working Group 3* - Designing and supporting the design of discipline-specific learning outcomes.

The network is preparing a report bringing together the outcomes of this work, to be published in June 2009. As part of preparing this report, a colloquium is being organised, with the support of the HEA and Bologna experts, on the topic of “Supporting the Design of Discipline-Specific Learning Outcomes”, using examples from Business studies, English, Music and Physics. The colloquium will take place in Dublin on 6 February 2009, involving speakers from the UK and Ireland.

### 7.3. Study of the Implementation and Impact of the National Framework of Qualifications

The NQAI is in the final stages of a study on the implementation and impact of the NFQ, see IUA review autumn October 2008. The study is led by a Study Team chaired by Tom Collins of NUI Maynooth, and including representatives from Scotland (David Raffé, University of Edinburgh) and New Zealand (Frances Kelly, NZ Ministry of Education), as well as a retired assistant director of FÁS (Henry Murdoch).

The reports from the university sector (by IUA), schools, FETAC and HETAC sectors as well as a background paper from the NQAI, are available on the website [http://www.nqai.ie/framework\\_study.html](http://www.nqai.ie/framework_study.html)

A well-attended consultative forum was held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008 in Dublin, and the study team is now finalising the report, which is expected to be published in April 2009.

#### **7.4. Bologna Process**

At the suggestion of IUA and NQAI, greater synergies are being sought between the work of the Bologna Experts (and the EU resources made available for this) and the work of the NQAI/IUA Framework Implementation Network and the Irish Higher Education Quality Network (IHEQN). One example is the workshop to be held on the topic of supporting the design of discipline-specific learning outcomes (see 7.2 above), to be held on 6 February 2009. Links to the NAIRTL project are also being sought.

The national Bologna Process working group, in which IUA is a member, has drafted an Irish national report on implementation of the Bologna process, to be submitted in advance of the May 2009 Conference of Ministers in Louvain/Leuven.

### **8. Internationalisation / Work Permits**

#### **8.1 Update**

Following verbal confirmation at the end of 2008 from DES that the proposed Education Ireland agency would not be established, the HEA contacted IUA, IoTI and Enterprise Ireland to discuss alternative scenarios. Following a meeting, the HEA wrote to the parties on 18 December 2008 seeking feedback on a draft Terms of Reference for a working group on international higher education.

The IUA sought feedback from the IUA international officers group on this draft, and responded to the HEA in early January 2009. In the accompanying message, IUA expressed support for conducting such work within a tightly defined timeframe, and the need to consider the wider range of issues concerning international HE. The IUA also expressed reservations regarding the focus in the HEA's proposal on international student numbers, which could perhaps lead to an impression that the work is to be driven by short term revenue considerations.

It is expected that the HEA will convene such a working group. In the meanwhile, IUA Registrars have been asked to consider establishing a small group to provide advice regarding what universities currently need in terms of support to increase and improve their internationalization activities.

#### **8.2. Work Permits**

IUA has maintained contacts with DETE regarding an employment permit scheme for non-EEA students [see IUA Review April 2008], and DETE is preparing a revised proposal of this scheme (position unchanged since IUA review June 2008), which has

however not yet been published. In the meanwhile, occasional reports continue to arrive regarding the difficulties non-EEA students experience in obtaining these permits, including for the purposes of work placements integrated in their academic programme. Examples of such instances are being collated in order to present them to DETE and to seek an update.

### **8.3. Erasmus Mundus**

The European Commission has approved the inclusion of joint doctoral programmes within the Erasmus Mundus scheme, and a call for proposals is expected before the end of January 2009.

The new Erasmus Mundus II programme comprises three actions, namely:

- **Action 1 – Erasmus Mundus Joint Programmes** (masters and doctorates + related scholarship/mobility scheme);
- **Action 2 – Erasmus Mundus Partnerships** (including a scholarship / mobility scheme);
- **Action 3 – Promotion of European Higher Education**

The IUA has been working with the graduate studies offices in each university to identify potential Irish applicants to this scheme, and is working with the HEA to promote and communicate these opportunities, and an information event is planned for 24 February 2009 in Dublin, with an expert from the European Commission present. Further information regarding this event will be circulated once available, and can be obtained from Dr. Westley Forsythe, IUA 4<sup>th</sup> level coordinator.

## **9. Garda Vetting**

Following pressure from the universities and other concerned parties, the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) informed the universities in October 2008 that it would now agree to process applications from full-time students under 18 years of age. The IUA has not seen any formal confirmation of this situation, and is seeking to obtain same from GCVU. However, it is understood that these applications are now being processed in a satisfactory manner.

## **10. Communications / Events**

### **10.1. Marketing the University Sector and IUA Services**

#### ***10.1.1. New IUA Newsletter***

IUA has agreed a one year contract with Cork based company Newsweaver for the development of a new online newsletter. Once a template has been designed and agreed the production of the newsletter becomes part of the IUA communications function and

allows for a greater number of issues and greater frequency of delivery. The first issue of the new newsletter will be published in February.

#### ***10.1.2. EUA Communications Meeting***

The IUA Communications Manager attended EUA's first meeting of communication professionals from National Rectors' Conferences on 30 - 31 October 2008 in Brussels. The meeting was the first opportunity to bring together communication professionals from National Rectors' Conferences to discuss and share experiences of communicating higher education issues and reforms to members, key stakeholders and the wider public. Also invited to the event were representatives of national associations of university communications specialists (such as SUPRIO, Switzerland; AICUN, Italy; ARCES, France; VONU, the Netherlands). The event included an overview of EUA's new projects and activities, a trip to institutions in Brussels, and an informal networking session where participants shared experiences and best practice.

#### ***10.1.3. Irish Indo Advertising Proposal***

Following a presentation to an assembled group of 3<sup>rd</sup> level communications officers on 3<sup>rd</sup> September in HEA the Irish Independent, represented by deputy managing director, Joe Webb, met separately with IUA in January to give a detailed outline of their marketing/recruitment proposal. The proposal includes discounted advertising rates and a weekly editorial platform for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Level issues. The Irish Times had made contact a number of months ago expressing interest in engaging in a similar proposal but have not progressed it further to date. The Irish Independent proposal will now be discussed at upcoming HR Directors and Communications Officers meetings.

### **10.2. Publications**

#### ***10.2.1. IUA International Brochure online***

The existing hard copy IUA international brochure has been updated and is now being produced in electronic format. Key to the success of the dissemination of the brochure will be placement of the finished brochure on university and other related websites. To cut the high cost of shipping hard copy brochures to international fairs the IUA brochure along with individual university electronic brochures will be placed on cd or memory stick for distribution to potential students. Production of the new brochure will be completed by the beginning of February.

### **10.3. Communications for SIF Projects**

#### ***10.3.1 'Access' Communications Working Group***

The Access communications working group met a number of times since their formation in September to progress the communications plan for the access project. The group is continuing to work alongside the advisory committee and project manager to put forward a comprehensive plan for the roll out of the new supplementary admissions route. One of the first tangible outcomes of the group is the development of a password protected project extranet site which will be hosted on the IUA website and will be accessible by all

project teams and senior university officers with a vested interest in the project. The site will be up and running by the beginning of February.

### ***10.3.2 Publication of e-tender for SIF Librarians Project***

A tender notice for this project was published on [www.etenders.gov](http://www.etenders.gov) before Christmas inviting tenders for the design, development and delivery of an open access portal for the IREL Open project. So far 83 parties have noted interest in the tender and the deadline for applications is February 6<sup>th</sup>.