



**INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS IN IRELAND:
AN ANALYSIS OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND
RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

2005

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INTEGRATING IRELAND

The National Network of Refugee, Asylum-Seeker & Immigrant Support Groups

Integrating Ireland is an independent network of community and voluntary groups working in mutual solidarity to promote and to realise the human rights, equality and full integration in Irish society of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants.

Integrating Ireland was conceived as a means to ensure the lessons of other countries vis-à-vis the integration of ethnic minority groups, refugees or migrants into the social, economic and political spheres of a nation do not go unheeded. History shows that in most countries immigrant communities fall quickly to the bottom of the social ladder, working in menial jobs or on the black market, they are disenfranchised without a voice. Not surprisingly, social problems develop as the next generation grow up in a marginalized world where opportunity does not exist in a society where they do not have a positive identity.

Integrating Ireland aims

- *To promote a positive model of integration*
- *To encourage a vibrant community, voluntary and statutory sector response to the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants*
- *To develop a strong and vibrant representative network*

Through the provision of fora for networking and information sharing at national and regional level, training and direct support, and the development of common policy positions, Integrating Ireland seeks to support the community and voluntary sector working with Refugee, Asylum-seekers and Immigrants. Thus enabling this sector in society to speak authoritatively and coherently on the issues relating to being a refugee, asylum seeker or immigrant in Ireland and prevent the negative experiences of other societies repeating itself in Ireland and ensuring the positive is transferred.

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**Integrating Ireland
October 2005**

Summary and Recommendations

Summary:

1. Nearly all participants expressed frustration, and many expressed despair and anger at the situation they are in with regard to access to third level education and recognition of qualifications. The extent of the feelings on these issues among the migrant/refugee/asylum seeker community is not as widely known as it could be for a number of reasons:
 - a. Many of them have been here for only a comparatively short time.
 - b. Many are grateful to be in Ireland, and particularly in the case of refugees and asylum seekers, not prepared to draw attention to themselves by complaining about the situation they are now in.
 - c. Quite a lot of them are either not yet allowed to work, or are only very recently allowed to work. As a result, they do not yet realise the full extent of the difficulties they will face trying to get qualifications recognised or access education. They lack proper information in this area.
 - d. Some are keen to move on, retrain if they have to, and put their disappointment behind them. By definition, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants tend to be fairly resilient and resourceful people.
2. The most commonly expressed view as to what should be done to improve the situation in these two areas is that it is not a question of changing a few rules, or tweaking the existing system. It is a question of changing a mindset. The view held by participants is that the Irish authorities and people have not taken on board the fact that there are new people now living in Ireland, who are going to be staying, and who have to be accommodated.
3. Of those participants who did not want to access education, all expressed a very strong desire to work rather than depend on the state.
4. Many participants remarked in frustration on the fact that Ireland needs new workers, and is importing them from other countries, but is not using the skilled foreign nationals it already has because of problems with recognition of qualifications.
5. There was a general feeling among those with professional training that the professional bodies charged with registering people to practice need to be more flexible and proactive in their approach to the recognition of overseas qualifications. However, a number of participants perhaps had unrealistic expectations in this regard. Some of them had perhaps further to go than they realised in the areas of language competency and knowledge of Irish professional norms.
6. A number of participants expressed frustration and puzzlement at the fact that they seem able to do a large number of courses of various kinds (through FAS, adult education, etc) on subjects that they may not necessarily be interested in, and often do not find particularly useful, but there seems no way that they can get assistance to either recognise or upgrade their existing qualifications.
7. All participants expressed anger and frustration at the refusal of the Irish authorities in many cases to recognise educational qualifications gained in other countries. This is particularly the case with African qualifications. Many were of the view that prior educational and work experience gained in other countries was simply ignored by

employers and universities. No attempt was made in most cases to assess their worth. Only work experience and qualifications gained in Ireland were taken into account, they felt.

8. The main barriers to access to education identified were: fees, language problems, problems with recognition of earlier educational achievement and various social welfare traps and barriers. A number of participants expressed the view that the problems they faced were as a result of discrimination. Some openly described it as racism.
9. A number of participants pointed out that as a result of the failure to recognise educational attainment, qualifications or work experience gained in a non-EU country they were having problems with accessing employment, and that this in turn was leading to a failure to integrate properly into Irish society. They warned of the dangers to social cohesion in Ireland in the future if a large body of migrants felt discriminated against and were unable properly to integrate.
10. Several participants had already taken part in similar research, and expressed frustration that such research did not appear to lead to any improvement in their situation. Many of them wanted reassurance that the research would result in a report that would be sent to government, and that therefore it was worth their while participating. One group in particular expressed strong views on the weakness and inefficiency of the NGO sector that is supposed to be working for them, and at the lack of ethnic minority representation among those running such NGOs.

Recommendations:

1. Access to education and recognition of qualifications will greatly facilitate the social integration of non EU people in Ireland. To this end there is an immediate need for a coherent national approach involving the various Government departments and agencies to deal with these issues.
2. Agreed guidelines across the third level sector are needed in order to provide for a transparent and consistent approach to the evaluation and recognition of qualifications.
3. Entry requirements should not be evaluated according to ‘the discretion of individual departments and staff’ as often happens but should be clearly defined on the Departmental and Institutional Website
4. Introduce standardised norms, in relation to language proficiency, across the third-level sector, in order to rectify what is often a confusing, opaque and contradictory set of requirements, leading to a perception of a discriminatory practice of deliberate exclusion of non-EU nationals.
5. With standardised norms and thresholds of proficiency in place, language classes leading to official accreditation should be offered across the public educational sector through a flexible and accessible system of delivery, accommodating the requirements of non-traditional students.
6. In the case of Convention refugees who under the Refugee Act of 1996 are entitled to have ‘access to education and training in the state...in all respects as an Irish citizen’ due respect and consideration should be given to either a lack of or insufficient

documentation, in addition to a lack of financial security in order to support fully the transitional phase either back into education or the bridging into formal employment.

7. Fees for non-EU nationals need to be set at affordable levels otherwise they may act in a discriminatory manner.
8. There is a need for Fás to examine ways in which the previous work experience of non-EU nationals can be given the consideration it deserves by Irish employers and by Fás itself.
9. Cooperation between the various Professional Bodies, Fás, Universities and Institutes of Technology is essential to provide relevant courses to up-grade qualifications where necessary
10. All of the above will require further training and awareness building on the part of educational authorities in order to adapt and constructively respond to an increasingly diverse set of student constituencies in addition to changing entry demands and conditions.

Chapter 1. Research Brief

This report comes from a piece of research initiated by an ad hoc, multi-agency and multidisciplinary working group set up by Integrating Ireland. The report addresses the issues of access and recognition from a broad perspective, that is cognisant of the major changes currently underway in Irish society. Migration on a hitherto unprecedented scale is presenting both opportunities and challenges to Ireland. Economic needs must be balanced by a strong policy of social integration. The picture we paint below points to the urgent need for ‘joined up thinking’ on these issues, that must be addressed as matter of urgency. There are some provisional policy recommendations drawn up below on the basis of our research, that involved considerable consultation with those directly affected by the issues. It is now time for policy debate on wider scale, so that Irish society can rise to the challenge presented here.

Some research has already been carried out on the problems associated with access to third level education and the recognition of qualifications for non-EU nationals in Ireland, and as a result there have been a number of reports published which cover aspects of these two issues. To date, however, there has not been a holistic approach to the issues that are often inter-linked. There is also a need to draw out some clear policy recommendations for the relevant government and educational bodies so that a genuine policy of social integration can be followed in this increasingly important area for the lives of the new immigrant communities. This report also aims to complement the research already done by putting at its centre the views of those non-EU citizens directly affected by these issues. It is an attempt to reflect accurately the opinions expressed by those affected by the problems outlined, while it will also carry out a situational analysis of the current situation with regards to access and recognition of qualifications. It is important to bear in mind when reading this report that there is a very real human drama lying behind what sometimes might seem legal or bureaucratic issues. One of our respondents told us eloquently that:

“I lost my past. In a few years, if it continues like this, all of us will have lost our past. We talk about losing the past. It’s psychologically very difficult. To understand, to deal with. Its’ very, very difficult to lose your past. Why does Ireland, which needs the people, and lets us stay, let us lose our past? I don’t see the point. Why does Ireland need people who don’t have any past? It’s very difficult to understand.”

In order to find out the views of non-EU citizens affected by these issues, seven group discussions were held during July and early August 2005. The discussions were held in Dublin, New Ross, Limerick, Longford and Dundalk. The groups varied in size from three to thirteen. Participants were invited to attend these sessions by means of circulating information about them through e-mail lists, NGOs working in the area and individual contacts. In order to fill some gaps identified among those who had participated in these sessions, four one to one interviews were also held. There were an additional two participants who sent in information by e-mail to the project. People interviewed for this project included migrant workers, those with leave to remain on the basis of being parents of Irish citizen children, recognised refugees and asylum seekers. The Table below presents an analysis of those who participated in this research:

Table1: Social Breakdown of Project Participants**Total Number of Participants: 51 Gender of Participants: 29 women, 22 men****Country of Origin of Participants: Total Number of Countries 20**

Afghanistan	1	Ghana	1
Bahrain	1	Iraq	1
Burundi	2	Liberia	1
Cameroon	3	Nigeria	19
China	4	Pakistan	3
Colombia	1	Palestine	1
Congo (Brazzaville)	1	Philippines	1
Congo (DRC)	3	Romania	1
Eritrea	1	Sudan	1
Georgia	2	Ukraine	2

Professional Training of Participants: Total Number of Professions 27

(Please note: some participants have no professional training, while others may be trained in more than one profession. Students are not included)

Accountancy	3	Lay Missionary	1
Agriculture	2	Marketing	1
Architecture	1	Masseuse	1
Business	9	Medicine (Doctor)	4
Chef	1	Midwifery	1
Communications	1	Nursing	2
Computers	1	Personnel	1
Dentistry	1	Post Office Work	1
Dressmaking	1	Secretarial	2
Engineer - Electronic	1	Social work	2
Engineer – Mining	1	Sociology	1
Fisheries	1	Teaching	7
Journalism	2	Veterinary	2
Law	2		

Chapter 2. Situational Analysis

2.1 Recognition of professional qualifications

The rights of EU citizens to establish themselves or to provide services anywhere in the EU are fundamental principles of European Community law. Within European countries it is possible for Professionals qualified in one member state (home) to seek professional recognition of their qualification in another member state (host) for the purpose of practising that profession in another European country. This procedure came about under the EU directives for the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualification between member states.

The above directives apply to professions that are regulated i.e. where there is a statutory requirement to hold a diploma in order to pursue the profession in question. These directives outline a framework for freedom of movement of workers, students and graduates within Europe and they apply to all regulated professions.

Outside of Europe, some professions may have reciprocal agreements with professional bodies in certain countries for example American, Australia or Canada. Other countries outside Europe do not have these agreements with Ireland and this adds a degree of difficulty, or in some cases impossibility, to getting professional recognition to practise in Ireland.

In Ireland regulated professions include the following areas: Health related professions, Law and Accountancy, Teaching, Social Work related and Tourism, Technical and Transport professions. Criteria for professional qualification recognition in Ireland vary by profession. (See Appendix 1 for information on a selection of areas)

In the third level sector recognition of international qualifications is carried out with reference to Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC). FETAC is an awarding body provides certification for all successful learners put forward by further education and training providers. The course provider determines the entry requirements for a course and students whose first language is not English demonstrate that they have the minimum required standard of English prior to joining the course (www.fetac.ie). The Irish National Agent for the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) is the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) effective February 1st 2003. The Centre acts as an information point supplying general information to foreign students. The Centre does not take decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications - they are dealt with on an individual basis by the college authorities after consultation with the faculty or department within the college concerned (<http://www.heai.ie/index.cfm/page/sub/id/504>).

The number of non-EU applications to Irish third level institutions is increasing, but the existing admissions systems were designed for second level Irish applicants primarily and as such need to be reviewed and redesigned with regard to this new situation. The systems of admissions at the various institutions are in general slow and decisions are made on an individual basis, with cut off dates and timeframes that can be problematic for non-EU applicants.

2.2 Access to higher education

How are applications evaluated?

Within the colleges themselves, educational qualifications are initially assessed with reference to the UK NARIC service for the most part, although it is widely recognised that Ireland needs its own equivalent. Institutes use the NARIC system for reference as well as 'A World of Access' issued by the Institutes of Technology. In addition to this certain institutions have developed their own admissions guidelines as they have gathered experience of international education and admissions with some such as University of Limerick, holding databases on student international qualifications and the subsequent UL achievement, which is also used as reference.

Often in the larger admissions offices, where there is sufficient staffing, the applicant's results are compared to the relevant entry requirements in top universities in their home country and also assessed on this basis and/or the minimum entry requirements sought by leading universities in the UK on a country by country basis is determined and the applicant's results are looked on in the light of this information. However, in Admission Offices with less resources, adequate time may not be allocated which in itself creates an unfair situation, this due to the fact that it takes a lot longer to process a non-EU application than an EU one.

Transcripts of examinations done and an English translation of the same are required. In addition proof in the form of letters and references are required. It is difficult to assess the entry level of asylum-seekers or refugees, as often they are unable to provide educational transcripts from their home countries and previous qualifications may not always be recognised. This makes the application process very difficult. If applicants have refugee status and no educational transcripts, it can be possible to arrange interview and assessment for entry to Foundation (Level 5) programmes at some Institutes of Technology.

How centralised are decision-making processes?

The decision process is centralised in the majority of colleges for the majority of undergraduate applications, and centralisation is considered necessary to ensure a consistency of approach. Exceptions to this process are mature students, non-standard applications and transfer applications. Postgraduate applications are given an Admissions recommendation and then referred on to the relevant department. Admissions office, academic departments and registrar's office combine to assess applications. In the first instance the Admissions Office in the international section takes decisions. After this there can be a varying role played by Heads of Department across the sector. Sometimes they play no role whatsoever, sometimes decisions 'may' be referred to relevant Head of Departments and in others institutions they 'must' okay the admissions decision, or indeed must make the final decision. Joined up thinking between government departments and third level institutions does not always occur and while an educational institution may spend a lot of time in progressing an application the Department of Justice may deny a visa to an applicant.

What evidence of English language competency is required?

There is no uniformity in requirements in this area and there are in fact a variety of tests applied to establish competency in the English language. There is very little consistency across the sector. Some institutions have no official requirement for English tests, but require proof of competency. There may be an internal test administered by the institution or the applicant themselves may be simply required to provide proof of competency.

The opposite of this situation may also be the case, that is, that an institution has a straightforward non-negotiable requirement such as an IELTS test with a score of 6.5, or in other institutions a TOEFL test with a minimum score of 560. More commonly the institution will give the student a number of options listed and indicate that any one of the qualifications would be acceptable. The range presented looks something like the following:

- Leaving Certificate English at Grade D Ordinary Level or above
- Trinity College English Composition at a Pass level
- GCE 'O' Level English Language at Grade C or above
- GCSE English language at Grade C or above
- GSE Grade 1 Pass in English

This approach is considered more reasonable as students applying for courses may not have to go to the expense and trial of a specific external examination for language competency.

Costs for non-EU students

In general there is a radically different fee structure for EU and Non-EU students for all courses full-time and part-time in the Universities. Part-time degree courses, where available charge differently for Irish, EU and non-EU students, and almost double the fee that is charged to EU students is charged to non-EU students. However, in some Institutes, where part-time and non-certified courses are available, the fees are a flat rate for all students but there are no visas available to students for part-time courses and the applicant would need to have an immigration status with a work permit to avail of these. For the most part non-EU students are not offered places on part-time programmes as they will not meet study visa application requirements. In addition to this it is quite often unclear as to who pays EU fees and who must pay full fees. In addition to this the status of the applicant at the time of application will largely determine the requirement to pay fees or not although the status may change over time. Migrants resident in Ireland who do not qualify for EU fees and those on low incomes cannot afford to enter third level and this issue remains to be addressed for long-term residents.

Chapter 3. Needs Analysis

The aim of this section of the report is to outline the views and experiences, of those directly affected by access and recognition policies and practice in Ireland. In so far as possible, this section relies on direct quotes from those who took part in the group discussions organised on these issues. Some participants had problems in one area rather than the other, but many had problems in both areas. In general, during the course of the fact finding part of the research it was found that the two issues could often not be separated out, since those who could not get the qualifications they had obtained in their country of origin recognised in Ireland were very often then trying to find a way to return to third level education, either to upgrade their existing skills or retrain in another area.

The main problems and issues highlighted by the participants in the research are outlined under the headings listed below. It should be noted that all participants spoke on the basis that their contributions would remain anonymous. Where it is relevant, some of the circumstances of the individual speaking have been outlined.

3.1 Information issues

Lack of information was not only a problem identified by a very large number of participants in the research, but in some cases it was very obvious from the answers they gave that they either did not have the information they needed, or had incorrect information. For most participants the commonest and most reliable source of information was through talking to friends. .

“Another thing I find really difficult is getting information. Even now, for me getting information is very difficult. For me, getting information from a friend who has experience in Ireland is more easier than going to a legal body... because if you go there, finally you won't get the whole information that you want. You will get mixed up information and you will mix every thing more up in you mind. To me things doesn't seem very systemic, so that you can go very very fast and get results. Finding information is very difficult. In some places you go, there is no answer to your questions. And you cannot find information that you want.”

3.2 Language Problems

Problems with the English language were experienced in a number of areas. The most basic one was the inability to communicate with those in a position to provide information and assistance. For those who had managed to get the information they needed, there was then a requirement for many of them to pass an English exam to either get their qualifications recognised (for example in the case of doctors), or get into college.

There was a particular problem with access to colleges in that the colleges have different requirements of proof of level of knowledge of English. Some asked for a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or IELTS (International English Language Test) certificate, others had their own exams, and some relied on interviews.

Once students had managed to get into college, there was then a difficulty experienced by some of them in studying through English. For those trying to improve their English by paying to attend language schools, there were problems with high costs and poor standards.

“I think the language barrier is still the big problem, no matter what you want to do, even if you just want to buy something. The first thing is to solve this. I studied hard, because the culture is different and the communication skill is very different. Even though I’d been learning English since grade 4 in elementary school – maybe 9 years old. That’s a standard course in China, you must do it. They even start from 6 now. But we are very good at grammar or words but most Chinese people are very poor at spoken English and listening. Mostly even if they understand the words, they can’t speak very well.”

“I did a course for four months in FAS and then I got a TOEFL cert, not the actual TOEFL cert online, but the certificate was issued by IILT [Integrate Ireland Language Training] and then it is written on the certificate that I qualified for third level education. Now in every college that I apply they ask me to sit an English test. While their English test is very easy, very easy than TOEFL, because TOEFL is extremely difficult. And then I have other certificates from [various countries] and I have studied English for years. But when I send them, they would look at them, just like piece of paper, even the certificate that have I got from IILT, which is a governmental language training body. That is a problem because for example, if I don’t have that problem they would tell me three or four months ago that I got my place in a college so I could set up my decisions and everything according to that acceptance. But now I have to wait till 26th August, which is only eight days before the start of college. Until that time I cannot make a decision because I’m not sure that I will get the place or not.”

3.3 Recognition of Previous Education and Qualifications (in order to access education or register with a professional body)

The majority of participants described difficulties with getting previous educational attainment and qualifications recognised in Ireland. This applied to second and third level education attained in their countries of origin, as well as recognition of prior registration with professional bodies there.

Some had problems of lack of documentation to prove their qualifications or level of education. Others had degree certificates, but were then asked to supply full transcripts detailing all courses taken in each year of university, certified by the university. This was apparently required as a means of ensuring degree certificates were not forgeries, and also as a means of comparing course coverage in the different countries. In many cases the participants did not have such transcripts, and had extreme difficulty getting them from universities in their country of origin. Either the universities would not supply them, or else they requested large fees to do so. Very often there was a long delay before such transcripts could be supplied, if at all.

There was a particular problem with professional bodies, such as the Irish Medical Council, asking for letters of confirmation of training and professional status from the medical councils of countries of origin of refugees. As one Iraqi participant put it, how could somebody write for a letter of confirmation of their status to the Iraqi Medical Council, which at that time was directly controlled by Saddam Hussein, when they had been granted refugee status on the grounds of persecution by the regime of Saddam Hussein? For migrants in general, participants stated that there was often reluctance on the part of professional bodies in countries of origin to supply documentation, which would allow those trained in such countries to work elsewhere.

There was also a problem indicated by some participants with the translation of degree and diploma certificates, and with an understanding of the course level that a certificate indicated. One Romanian participant who had graduated with first class honours, and subsequently obtained a Masters degree had extreme difficulty persuading an Irish university that her certificate, which translated as ‘graduation diploma,’ was a university

degree certificate. A Chinese participant with a diploma had difficulty with the fact that in China a diploma course is three years, with a final year on the same course leading to the awarding of a degree. The general assumption in Ireland is that diploma courses involves a much shorter period of study, at a lower level, and he felt insufficient weight was being given to the extent of his studies.

Similarly, those who had taken courses which were partially completed in their country of origin found that the third level study they had done was generally ignored.

As a result of these problems, participants who were applying for higher level college courses were often asked to repeat one or more years of an undergraduate course, while those who were applying at undergraduate level were often asked to do access courses or even the leaving certificate.

A number of participants made the point that other countries with more experience of immigration seem to have far fewer problems with establishing the equivalence of education and qualifications gained in other countries. They made the comparison with Canada, the USA and even the UK in this regard. They could not understand why there was not a centralised body charged with the job of establishing the level of qualifications gained in non-EU countries (only two participants had heard of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland).

Similarly, they could not understand why universities and colleges in other countries had systems or guidelines for evaluating educational attainment in non-EU countries, while this did not appear to them to be the case in Ireland. Participants stated that in many cases whether or not someone from a non-EU background was accepted into a college or university was dependent on the attitude of the department concerned, or an individual within it, rather than clear entry criteria. One participant told of going to visit one university department, being informally interviewed by a member of staff, and told he would have to repeat the final year of an undergraduate course to get into a Masters programme. On going to another college, and talking to another staff member there, he was told they would set an exam to test his level of knowledge, and that he could then enter the Masters programme immediately.

A number of participants had been told that if their qualification was recognised in another EU country, such as the UK, it would be recognised here. They could not understand the logic of giving such an answer to people who had arrived legally to live in Ireland, especially if they were refugees. A number expressed indignation at the fact that qualifications from the new EU accession countries were far more likely to be recognised, as a result of EU law, than those acquired under an identical education system in other countries of the former USSR.

For those going through the asylum system, there was among participants a unanimous view that they should be allowed to work and to study. For those very few participants who were asylum seekers and who had managed to access third level education, there was the problem of trying to study while in fear of possible deportation. One participant felt that there was an urgent need for better collection of data and assessment of educational attainment of asylum seekers, so that their educational and employment needs could then be properly addressed.

“ I think it is discriminatory of Irish government or employers not to recognise some certificate or qualification brought from abroad, and recognise [others] from the same country. Take for instance Nigeria. How will you find a hospital in Ireland today where

you not find a Nigerian doctor? How will you go to some hospital in Ireland today where you will not find a Nigerian nurse and they got their certificate from the same university that somebody else got a certificate, a qualification from [in another] field, apart from health, apart from medicine, apart from nursing but they recognise that.

“I would like to say about this situation in United States...I found job as nurse in the United States, I must take two exams, professional English maybe Cambridge exam, IELTS or other test, TOEFL and plus nurse exam. Very simple structure in United States. I connected by internet with California hospital, with manager, she was very happy to speak with me and I can take nurse exam in London and TOEFL and Cambridge test I can take in Cork. It's very simple structure and very simple advice. In Ireland only restrictions and difficulties are around. Why?”

“The government should allow asylum seekers to work. And if they're not confident enough that they can just walk in and work, then they should process your status, and if you still don't have your status in six months, and its still being processed and you're not being denied, you are still in the state, you can then either access education or you can get to work.”

3.4 Attitudes of Colleges and Universities

Many participants saw the attitude of Irish universities to universities in non-EU countries, particularly in Africa, as patronising and uninformed. As one participant remarked, the university in his country was far older and better established than the one he was trying to enter in Ireland.

As a result of the experiences they had had, a number of participants expressed the view that colleges had discriminated against them in an attempt not to admit them. One participant described being told by a nursing school that it did not take people who were not Irish because ‘we train our own children first.’ She said that she then read the prospectus from that nursing school and that it specifically stated that foreign nationals were not admitted. In order to overcome this discrimination, some participants felt that had constantly to fight against the educational system.

Others, however, did not feel that the colleges and universities discriminated against them, and felt that the problems they were experiencing lay elsewhere. In addition, at least one participant also recognised that some Irish people also suffered from educational disadvantage and problems with accessing third level education.

“Do I have to do a second degree to get accepted? Mass comm. [mass communications] is mass comm., wherever it is in the world.’ And some of them will tell you, ‘well, I'm told that Nigerian qualifications are not the best. They sometimes go on strike, they do this, they do that.’ That we're half baked. One of the interviewers actually told me that the universities are half-baked, and I was really angry about that. I said, ‘you don't have that right. You don't have the right to tell me that. After all, I'm not stammering or stuttering. I'm actually looking you in the face and answering your questions.’”

“They told me that they are not sure that my certificate was recognised in this country, and that have I checked with FETAC. They actually asked me that. And I said no, but I mean it's a degree, and if you guys are in doubt, you should check it out. The address of the university is there. I mean I graduated from the biggest university south of the Sahara. So if there was any doubt about my university, or about the course I did, you check it out. “

3.5 Attitudes of Professional Bodies

Some participants were of the view that their education and qualifications should be accepted without question in Ireland. Others accepted the need to meet language requirements and professional standards here.

Apart from the problems of language and lack of information described earlier, there was a general feeling among participants with professional training who needed to register with a professional body in Ireland that these bodies lacked flexibility and did not have a proactive approach to assisting non-EU nationals to register as easily and as fast as possible. Some participants also felt there was a need for professional bodies to embrace diversity and be more inclusive in their attitudes.

There was a view among some participants that there needed to be more coordination between the professional bodies and the universities, so that those people whose qualifications were either unverifiable or seen as not reaching the professional standard required to work in Ireland would have a clear and simple path to upgrading their skills.

“What about recognition of overseas qualifications? It’s not fair. It’s not fair. Something must be done. If we are given a chance to stay in the country – like me, now I’m not just a refugee, I’m an Irish citizen – I think the best guarantee to make sure that we are really part of Irish society is to secure a good education – which I already have. I’m sorry, nobody can prove to me that I don’t have a good education. The second thing is to give me employment in the professional area I was trained in. If I’m prevented from practising in my professional area, how can I be integrated? How can I be socially included?”

“The other thing is, it’s necessary to put some coherence between third level institutions and professional bodies. It seems to me that professional bodies have their own idea of what kind of requirement they need so people can work, can be accepted, but third education is quite different. I think to be practical, the National Qualification Authority should maybe look at this issue.”

3.6 Educational Fees

Those participants who had managed to get as far as being offered a place in college or university identified large fees and lack of grants as major problem for them to overcome before they could start a course. Many of them would be liable to pay fees at the non-EU, international student rate, which is very much higher than the rate paid by Irish or even EU nationals. This meant that many migrants are in the position of trying to work part-time and study at the same time, either part-time or fulltime.

For some, it affected the choice of course, since going to college meant running up large debts, and it was essential to be able to immediately access employment afterwards. For others, it meant trying to access the social welfare system while studying (see section below on social welfare).

Following a recent change in the regulations, many foreign students here on student visas no longer have the option to do part-time courses and work at the same time. In order to get a student visa, they must enrol in a recognised, fulltime course, which is financially very difficult for them to do.

Some of those participants with professional training expressed resentment at being forced to pay either for retraining or registration to get their professional qualifications recognised

here in view of the fact that the Irish government and people had paid nothing towards their education and training, but were now going to get the benefit of this professional training.

Some participants pointed out the difference between those non-EU students from a poor background struggling to pay international fees, while others may be either from a rich family background, and therefore able to pay, or here on scholarships paid for by their government. One participant stated that in order to access state sponsored scholarships, it was sometimes necessary for applicants to be supportive of corrupt governments overseas, and that this mitigated against human rights or democracy activists who might bring about change in such countries.

The fact that the level of fees faced by many participants was so high meant that for many it was cheaper and easier to get into a private college than to access state run colleges or universities.

“They gave me the seat but I was recognised as an overseas student and the fees was around fourteen thousand something. I had no choice, I went to the college for the first year. I paid nine thousand something, but it was all loans from friends but I couldn’t finish it so I left and went back after two years. My money was still there, the nine thousand, so I only had to pay two thousand more, I pay the two thousand and I finish that year and I say that’s enough, I cannot continue. After that they rang me and changed my status from overseas to European and it was only five thousand and they made up the balance so I’m continuing now.”

“There was some research done in the UK very recently which said that when you have somebody qualified from overseas, when you upgrade them by having some training to bring them up to the same level as a UK citizen, it costs just something like 5,000 to 10,000 sterling. But when you train the person – the full training – it will cost more than 25,000 sterling. So let’s think economic if they want to just to stress on economy.”

3.7 Social Welfare, Unemployment and Volunteering

For those trying to access education, there were a variety of social welfare traps and barriers that they encountered, depending on their residency status. Many expressed frustration at a system which they found to be inflexible and at times nonsensical. Several participants expressed the view that it was only by breaking the social welfare rules that they could survive. At least one participant noted that the problems he was experiencing with accessing college while on social welfare were also being experienced by Irish people who were friends of his.

Of those participants who did not want to access education, all expressed a very strong desire to work rather than depend on social welfare. However, many found it extremely difficult to find employment of any kind. They were told that they ‘lacked experience,’ even though many of them had extensive work experience in their country of origin, often in very high level positions requiring far higher skills than the jobs they were applying for. Many of the participants made the point that the work experience they had in their country of origin was ignored in Ireland in the same way that they felt their education and qualifications were. Some participants put this failure to get jobs down to discrimination or racism.

Quite a few participants took up voluntary work in order to keep busy or to increase their skills. Some encountered difficulties getting voluntary post which were necessary for them to upgrade their skills. These participants were often told that such voluntary posts could not be supplied because of problems with insurance. Those who did take up voluntary

posts testified to the number of such posts that are now being filled by non-EU nationals in Ireland.

“I was taking my money from the health board. I told them I was a student, they told me, that’s it, we cannot pay you anymore. You have to go to the social welfare and apply there, because I had the right to work, so I should change. So I went to the social welfare, I thought they would help me. They told me to leave college for a year. So I did, I had to leave college for a year, and they didn’t pay me until the academic year finished. I went there in September, I had to wait until October to get paid. I waited and I didn’t go to college that year because I have to be unemployed for six months, at least.”

“And so, as for employment, nobody wants to employ you because you don’t have the experience. And I was thinking, where will I get the experience, if I didn’t start from somewhere? Even if we apply for a cleaning job, they say, ‘where did you work last?’ Where will I get work experience if I can’t start somewhere?”

“The few interviews that I’ve been to, most of them come back with a reply – ‘sorry, the competition for the position was very high, and unfortunately they can’t offer me such and such position’ Sometimes they tell you that they’ll keep your CV on file, and when they have a suitable position they will call you. Sometimes I’m tempted to call and ask, ‘what do you mean by suitable position?’ I’ve done it once. Because most of the time, the people that I’ve been to – I mean when you’re going for an interview, you’re opportuned in a way to sit with some of the candidates as well, and I’ve discovered that 99% of the time I have more qualifications, and better experience really to what it is they are applying for. But because I may not have the certificate of ground, or the Irish experience so to speak, I can’t get that job.”

“They didn’t even say anything about my experience. The thing is that they are not looking at our experience from Africa, they are looking at the degree first of all. And once they don’t recognise it, they say that degree is not recognised, then you’re not given an opportunity to even talk about your experience.”

3.8 Retraining or Upgrading Skills

While all participants wanted the qualifications they had gained in non-EU countries to be recognised in Ireland, many had accepted that they would have to do some extra training to match their skills to Irish requirements. These participants found that while a considerable number of courses were available to them, these courses by and large were not in areas which would help them upgrade their skills. The courses available depended on the location and residency status of the applicant, and were often provided free of charge. The ones mentioned by participants were mainly run by FAS, adult education providers and some immigrant support groups. Participants in this group expressed frustration and puzzlement at the fact that while the courses on offer were often interesting, and none of them were a waste of time, there seemed to be little effort and few resources being put into providing courses which would actually help them utilise their existing often very high level of skills in Ireland, while considerable effort and resources was going into providing these courses which were not meeting their needs.

This group of participants also described their experience of registering with FAS. After giving full details of previous qualifications and sometimes extensive previous work experience, which was often documented with references, some of them were either told that their qualifications and experience was not relevant in Ireland, or they simply heard nothing further from FAS.

Other participants had given up on trying to get their qualifications recognised, and had decided to try to retrain in a different profession. While some of these were extremely grateful for the training opportunities they were getting, others found the choice of training on offer to them to be limited in many cases to computing, business studies and English language classes. Few of the participants had knowledge of English of a sufficient level where they felt that English classes would not be a benefit, but not all of them wished, or had the aptitude, for a career in the areas in which other training was available to them.

These groups looking for retraining or upgrading of their skills, and trying to access third level education in order to do so, experienced the same problems as others had experienced with getting to college or university.

Some of the participants who had managed to access third level education and were studying while on social welfare mentioned the need to do inappropriate or unnecessary FAS courses in order to remain on social welfare.

“Now I have wasted two years doing different courses. These courses are not systemic courses, you know, six month in one place, another six month in another place, and at the end you get no real profession that can support you. When you cannot support yourself, somebody will have to support you. And that’s the government at the end.”

“Before you have your papers, you’re not allowed to work. But as soon as the paper came, I was at FAS to register with them, and all the information that I gave to you was disclosed to them as well. But one of the major things that I was told was that I might not be able to get a job here in Ireland because the certificate would not be accepted here. If I was going to get a job I need to start all over again... what the man told me was that because I’m a Nigerian, I’m from Africa, that the rule is that people that have certificate from foreign country, especially Nigeria, Africa, their certificate is not acceptable here. That was what I was told

“ I was stopped from college and they told me to go for a FAS course, a special FAS course for asylum seekers. I told them, like, you’re taking me from Trinity college to do a FAS course, what’s that for, like? And I had to do it, I had to go because if I didn’t go they tell me to...they’ll stop my payment.

3.9 Social and Legal Factors

The most important factor affecting the ability of all participants to access education or employment in Ireland was their residency status. People interviewed for this project included migrant workers, those with leave to remain on the basis of being parents of Irish citizen children, recognised refugees and asylum seekers. All of these categories have different rights and entitlements, and therefore face different problems with regard to employment and access to education. Many participants were reluctant to talk about their status, and beyond establishing whether or not they had the right to work, very often the question of their legal status was not discussed further. Several participants made a point of saying that they liked Ireland and wished to stay here. Others did not articulate this view, but clearly wished to remain in Ireland.

When the question came up as to whether or not they thought their nationality was a factor in accessing education or employment, some participants felt that coming from Africa made it harder to get qualifications recognised, but they did not differentiate between different African countries. Two participants mentioned cultural differences as being a factor affecting integration in general, which would include accessing employment and education.

When asked whether women found it harder than men to access education and employment, some participants thought this was not the case in Ireland. They felt it was hard for all non-EU nationals, and that gender was not a factor which made any difference to this. However, some participants mention the problems of the low status of women in Africa, which persist among Africans living in Ireland, and said that this combined with the problem of being a Black woman living here.

One participant mentioned childcare as being a problem, for both women and men, since many participants would be trying to access education at a time in life when it was normal to have children, and there was no extended family present to help with childminding.

One participant felt that age could be a factor in interviews to access college, in that there was a preference for younger students.

“As a black woman, what we have noticed in this country is that you just have to distinguish yourself.”

“Otherwise you get nowhere.”

“This is it. I want to get a Ph.D. because I want people to believe that, yes, she has brains. She knows what she’s doing. What is common in Africa is that women achievers are seen as those who use what we call bottom power to get what they want, but I want people to associate me with brains. That is why I’m doing what I’m doing.”

“A friend of mine also had an age problem. She passed her TOEFL and got really high points...When she had her interview in [name of college omitted] one of the questions was ‘do you think you will have any difficulty because of your age studying here?’ Because she’s older than most of the Irish students, but only about three or four years older. But I don’t understand why this question was asked in the interview...This was a year or a year and a half ago.”

3.10 Personal, family and community impact of access and recognition problems

Even though this section of the report uses direct quotes from participants as a means of expressing their views as accurately as possible, the depth of the participants’ feelings on these issues when they spoke about them cannot be fully conveyed in print. Anger, frustration and depression would be an accurate description of the emotions expressed by many participants. They spoke of psychological problems, alienation, low morale and low self-esteem. At the same time, participant after participant asked why the Irish government is seeking to import skills from abroad when it has people with those skills, who are not allowed to use them, already in Ireland.

Some participants saw the reason for this as being discrimination or racism. Others saw it as a waste of resources, a waste of skills and a waste of their time. They pointed out that while they had useful skills now, the longer the delay in being able to utilise them, the more likely the skills were to be lost.

One participant pointed out that those who were retraining to gain employment in another field were likely to suffer from the loss status and prestige they had had when holding a high level, well-paid job in their country of origin.

Perhaps the most serious result of the failure to gain proper employment because of the problems outlined in this report is that many participants have experienced a failure to integrate into Irish society. As can be seen from other countries, this can have very serious consequences not just for the non-EU nationals directly concerned, but also for their children. One participant pointed out the dangers of raising children in an atmosphere

where their parents felt, in the words of several participants, like second class citizens. As the example of the UK has clearly shown, the effects of this on Irish society in the future should not be underestimated.

One participant also articulated the view that the problems he and others were facing with recognition of qualifications had already been researched and were well known, and yet still no action was being taken on them. In particular, he referred to that section of the NGO community which was supposed to be working for people in his position and which had failed to bring about change. He felt that these NGOs were weak in comparison to those in other countries, and that they had too few Black and minority ethnic members involved in them. This view of the lack of effectiveness of NGOs was shared by one other participant. Others had a more positive view of NGOs and expressed a wish to campaign with them on these issues.

“There are a lot of professionals – doctors – and I’ve seen some people that came from even Africa, or other countries as doctors and nurses. Why do we have a lot of them here who are not working but are just sitting down at home? Can’t they work? They are getting people from outside to come and do the same job we are sitting down not doing”.

“I think like, as I have experienced of my life in Ireland there are resources being wasted on the people who came to Ireland, but those resources doesn’t give a good result. Because it is not a managed way of integrating people into the system and into the society. For example, I think if the people came from their country here and start to live in Ireland, it’s a good thing to assess their abilities and their background, and their education, and according to that assessment provide them some help, so that they can soon find their way up and stand on their own feet.”

“If you are considering education, you have to think not just of us, but of our children. If they do not get proper education, they will end up on the streets.”

“People don’t know where we should go, to whom we should share our frustrations. There is nobody to share, to share this kind of frustration, nobody at all. This is a kind of boiling pain inside me, there are so many problems. People don’t know where to go to share our problems, who can raise the voice for us.”

Chapter 4. Recommendations

From amongst those we interviewed and spoke to the most commonly expressed view as to what should be done to improve the situation in these two areas is that *it is not a question of changing a few rules, or of tweaking the existing system. It is a question of changing a mindset.* The view held by participants is that the Irish authorities and people have not taken on board the fact that there are new people now living in Ireland, who are going to be staying, and who have to be accommodated. There is a need for a vision of where Ireland will be in future years, and how migrants will fit into Ireland in the future. *This requires political leadership.*

In order to bring about this change of mindset, some participants felt that they needed to become involved in campaigning on these issues, through NGOs, through the media, and through the political system. Two participants felt that this necessitated becoming involved in politics in Ireland, since only by becoming part of the political system could they hope to influence it.

Some participants equated this need to change a mindset with the need to tackle racism in Ireland. Some participants gave various examples of racism in the workplace, at their homes, in the media, and from politicians. They felt that the specific issues of access to education and recognition of qualifications could not be tackled without first tackling the racism which they found to exist generally in Irish society.

Other participants did make specific suggestions, some of which have been highlighted under the various sections of this report to which they apply. Among the main suggestions was that there should be a body that could evaluate non-EU qualifications and issue their holders with an authoritative document which would establish the standard they had attained in comparison with Irish educational and professional norms. One participant said that this job should be done by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (as stated before, only two participants had heard of this body, and neither were familiar with all of its activities).

Participants also called for cooperation between the universities and colleges and the professional bodies to allow those who needed to upgrade their qualifications to enter courses which were specifically designed for this purpose, did not charge international fees, and were not overlong in duration.

There was also a perceived need for the courses already provided by FAS and other bodies to be tailored to the actual needs of those arriving in Ireland from non-EU countries, and for FAS to take proper account of work experience and qualifications gained in non-EU countries.

In the area of education, among the main suggestions were that fees needed to set at a realistic level, and that there should be some flexibility and rationality in the way the educational and social welfare needs of participants were met. There was also a need for systems or guidelines to be agreed by the colleges and universities for evaluating educational attainment in non-EU countries. In addition, there was seen to be a need for colleges and universities to decide on a common and realistic test of knowledge of English which applied to applicants to all of them.

Several participants made the point that there had been enough talk on these issues, and now there needed to be action:

“Ireland is not ready at this moment to accommodate. It is surprising. [It should] try to accommodate foreigners. It could be – I don’t want to use the word scared – of being controlled... So I’ve discovered that there’s that cautiousness, that psychological cautiousness about accommodating people. They have not been able to put that in their mind, that these people, they are here now. They are here to stay for one reason or another. Either you have given them status, or they have children here, they already have Irish children, they are going to bring their children up, and are here to stay. They should allow them to bring their potential...Ireland should be ready to accommodate and accept the reality and plan to move forward. ”

The issues of recognition of qualifications and access to third level education may seem to some observers to be of lesser importance to non-EU nationals than other issues, which have been highlighted in the media to do with their presence here in Ireland, such as forced labour and gross exploitation by unscrupulous employers. However, for both the non-EU nationals themselves and for Irish society, the integration of migrants is now and will be in the future a key issue to be dealt with by Ireland. Central to effective integration is a policy that facilitates migrants in their desire to work here in their chosen professions.

Only by accessing appropriate employment can migrants hope to access fully the other economic and social rights, such as adequate accommodation, to which they are entitled. As workers in Ireland at a level appropriate to their training, the status of many migrants will be raised, which in turn will help in the fight against racism. And most important of all, that anger and resentment that so many participants expressed at the failure of Ireland to recognise their achievements in their countries of origin will be dissipated.

Numerous studies have been undertaken on the subject of ‘International Access Qualifications’ (see e.g., Intergovernmental Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, 1999 and the Council of Europe Working Party on Refugee Qualifications, 1999, among others) indicating that the ‘right to education’ and the ‘recognition of qualifications’ are central components underlying the right to education in a society which is actively promoting social, cultural and economic integration. Social integration policies have long emphasized the importance of equal access to education for economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, since one of the principle instruments of successful social integration is the unfettered ability to access all levels of employment, supported by equal access to all levels of education.

It is clear from the accounts narrated above that there is an urgent need for more ‘joined-up’ thinking with regard to national criteria in the assessment and evaluation of non-EU academic and professional qualifications. It is equally clear from these selected responses that there appears to be no coherent and standardized model of assessment in place to both recognize and evaluate qualifications. What exists in practice, therefore, is often the dissemination of contradictory and misleading information, resulting in the construction of unnecessary institutional barriers and obstacles.

In summary our own recommendations, based on our needs analysis and the situational analysis carried out above, are as follows:

1. Access to education and recognition of qualifications will greatly facilitate the social integration of non EU people in Ireland. To this end there is an immediate need for a coherent national approach involving the various Government departments and agencies to deal with these issues.
2. Agreed guidelines across the third level sector are needed in order to provide for a transparent and consistent approach to the evaluation and recognition of qualifications.
3. Entry requirements should not be evaluated according to ‘the discretion of individual departments and staff’ as often happens but should be clearly defined on the Departmental and Institutional Website
4. Introduce standardised norms, in relation to language proficiency, across the third-level sector, in order to rectify what is often a confusing, opaque and contradictory set of requirements, leading to a perception of a discriminatory practice of deliberate exclusion of non-EU nationals.
5. With standardised norms and thresholds of proficiency in place, language classes leading to official accreditation should be offered across the public educational sector through a flexible and accessible system of delivery, accommodating the requirements of non-traditional students.
6. In the case of Convention refugees who under the Refugee Act of 1996 are entitled to have ‘access to education and training in the state...in all respects as an Irish citizen’ due respect and consideration should be given to either a lack of or insufficient documentation, in addition to a lack of financial security in order to support fully the transitional phase either back into education or the bridging into formal employment.
7. Fees for non-EU nationals need to be set at affordable levels otherwise they may act in a discriminatory manner.
8. There is a need for Fás to examine ways in which the previous work experience of non-EU nationals can be given the consideration it deserves by Irish employers and by Fás itself.
9. Cooperation between the various Professional Bodies, Fás, Universities and Institutes of Technology is essential to provide relevant courses to up-grade qualifications where necessary
10. All of the above will require further training and awareness building on the part of educational authorities in order to adapt and constructively respond to an increasingly diverse set of student constituencies in addition to changing entry demands and conditions.

Appendix 1: Recognition of Qualifications

a. Professional Bodies

Doctors

All doctors who wish to practise in Ireland must be registered with the Medical Council. A non-EU doctor may apply for temporary registration, which allows for employment and further training. Doctors must pass the Temporary Registration Assessment Scheme (TRAS) to obtain temporary registration.

To apply for temporary registration an applicant must have/hold:

- Primary qualification in medicine awarded by a medical school listed in the World Health Organisation Directory of Medical Schools.
- Full registration with an overseas registration authority and be in good standing
- Completed internship training acceptable to the Medical Council of at least one year's duration in hospital based specialities.
- Recently passed the Academic International English Language Testing system (IELTS) and obtained an overall band score of 7.0 with a minimum of 6.0 in the listening, reading and writing modules and a minimum score of 7.0 in the speaking module.

Once an applicant satisfies the above requirements, they may sit the TRAS. The TRAS is designed to assess a doctor's communication and clinical skills.

An exemption from TRAS may be gained on the basis of entry to a Recognised Postgraduate Training Programme.

Temporary Registration may be granted for an aggregate period of seven years.

Doctors should apply for Temporary Registration at least 6 months before the start date of any post, which they may have been offered.

Fees – Applications must include a document examination fee of 675euro. There are additional fees for sitting the TRAS and the IELTS.

(www.medicalcouncil.ie)

Nursing

Since July 2003 the Nursing Board has implemented a new policy on the eligibility of nurses from overseas to register with An Bord Altranais. *Information for Nurses & Midwives Educated and Trained overseas in non-EU countries* (available at website below) outlines the procedure involved in registering as a nurse in Ireland.

Two new procedures are particularly relevant, the introduction of an English language testing system and the introduction of a competency based assessment during a period of adaptation.

The International English Language Testing system (IELTS) is used to provide competence in English. The candidate must achieve an overall band score of 6.5 by a combination of

not less than 6.0 in the writing and speaking modules and not less than 5.5 in both reading and listening modules.

The period of adaptation involves supervised practice plus further education and training if necessary. Competency is demonstrated by the ability of the candidate to practice safely and effectively, fulfilling their professional responsibility within the scope of his/her practice. The Adaptation period takes at least 6 weeks to complete but it is acknowledged that most candidates can require up to 12 weeks to achieve the identified competencies.

Application for registration as a nurse in Ireland is divided into two sections. Section one, is completed by the candidate. Section two, deals with the forms which must be submitted, this may involve requesting them from the appropriate authorities in the country of origin.

Section one includes the application form, current nursing license, copies of certificates or degrees awarded, birth certificate, results of English language test and registration fee 126euro.

Section two includes verification of original nurse registration, transcripts from school of nursing and clinical experience form, two current Professional Nursing References and confirmation of Professional Employment.

(www.nursingboard.ie)

Veterinary Surgeons

It is a legal requirement and therefore essential that you register with the Veterinary Council before engaging in any type of veterinary work in Ireland.

A. EU nationals with a registrable qualification from a Member State

In order to be eligible for registration and to practice as a veterinary surgeon in Ireland:

- i. You must be a national of an EU Member State, Iceland, Norway or Switzerland.
- ii. You must possess a registrable qualification from a Veterinary Faculty in an EU Member State, Iceland, Norway or Switzerland.

B. EU nationals with a formal qualification obtained outside the EU which has been recognised for registration in a Member State and evidence of training undergone and/or proof of experience gained in a Member State for examination by the Veterinary Council in accordance with Article 17(c) of Council Directive 2001/19/EC

Upon satisfying the above requirements it is necessary for you to:

- (1) Request the competent authority with which you are currently registered to forward directly to this office a letter of your good standing (which must not be more than three months old).
- (2) Produce to the Veterinary Council the original or a certified copy of

your academic qualification (as specified in Article 3, Directive 78/1026/EEC).

(3) In the case of B above evidence of training and/or proof of experience gained in a Member State.

(4) Make an appointment to attend in person at this office in order for you to sign the register and pay the current registration fee of €50.00. You will be asked to provide proof of identity i.e. Passport/drivers licence.

Please note certified English translations of the certificates referred to in (1) and (2) above are required.
(www.vci.ie)

Solicitors

The Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT) is a conversion test that enables lawyers qualified in certain countries outside the Republic of Ireland, to qualify as solicitors in Ireland. Before entering for the QLTT examination, you must first obtain a Certificate of Eligibility from the Law Society's Education Committee. Qualified lawyers who can apply for the Certificate of Eligibility include those from Northern Ireland, England and Wales, New York, Pennsylvania, New Zealand and California. Also included are those qualified in countries within the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

All other lawyers (not qualified in the European Union or subject to a reciprocal agreement) are required to undergo the entire training process which is set out on the law society website (www.lawsociety.ie)

Accountancy

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland (ICAI), the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (ACCA) and the Certified Public Accountants (CPA), these are the three organisations that deal with accountants in Ireland.

The above organisations have reciprocal agreements with professional bodies in certain countries, Australia, USA and Hong Kong for example. Outside these agreements and the EU, anyone wishing to have their overseas qualifications recognised in Ireland will to apply to the relevant accountancy group, chartered, certified or public.

The candidate will need to supply details of their qualification, the awarding body, translated academic transcripts, subjects studied and grades obtained. If necessary further study may be required but exemptions can be obtained for certain subjects already completed. Holders of recognised certificates, diplomas, degrees and professional qualifications are entitled to exemptions from some of the papers on a subject-by-subject basis. Candidates are then placed with a training body and local exams are taken e.g. Irish Company Law and Taxation in Ireland.

Of the three accountancy groups the ACCA is the most widely recognised. It is a UK based organisation and has international recognition with members and students all over the world. Their web site is www.accaglobal.com.

Social Worker

To work as a social worker in Ireland it is necessary to hold a National Qualification in Social Work (NQS), a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) or a Letter of Accreditation from the National Social Work Qualifications Board. The Letter of Accreditation must be obtained by anyone who has studied social work abroad and is interested in working as a social worker in Ireland.

The process of obtaining accreditation can take two-four months and is based on four criteria:

- Length of training: Undergraduate qualification e.g. Bachelor of Social Work.
Postgraduate qualification e.g. Masters of Social Work
- Level of training: Professional training at a third level institution, college or University.
- Curriculum content: Academic content to include essential core subject as outlined in the NSWQB handbook of Accreditation Standards.

Practice content must include successful completion of practice placement to at least 1000 hours.

Professional recognition in country of qualification – A statement from the Authority in the country of origin that your qualification is recognised for employment as a professional social worker.

The fee for the Letter of Accreditation is 125euro for EU citizens and 150euro for non-EU citizens.

To accreditate non-national qualifications the NSWQB compares these qualification to the national standards of social work and EU Directive 89/48. In the future a change in the Directive will mean that competency in English will become a fifth criteria for accreditation.

Engineering

The Institution of Engineers of Ireland (IEI) is empowered to admit to membership, classify and confer titles on its members to indicate their professional standing and classification or grade. In doing so it has regard to current international practice and the various international agreements it has entered into in promoting the standing and standards of Irish engineering expertise.

The International Agreements come under two headings, Mutual recognition of Accredited Engineering Degree, Mutual Recognition of Engineering and Technology programmes and Bilateral Recognition of Registered professional Titles.

The range of countries covered in these international agreements covers Ireland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK, USA, South Africa and Hong Kong.

The IEI also has alternative routes to membership. Individual Case Procedure, Mature Route and IEI examination, these methods are suitable for candidates who came to work as engineers through a non-traditional route.

If the country of qualification is not covered in the International Agreement, it is necessary to retrain to obtain a recognised qualification in Ireland to gain membership of the IEI. The range of engineering diplomas and degrees is very extensive and it is important for candidates to seek advice from the IEI on how their qualification fits into, or not, the Irish framework. The IEI web site is at www.iei.ie.

Architecture

The Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland is the representative body for professionally qualified architects. No information is available on-line on recognition of overseas qualifications in Ireland. In Europe there is the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications, which covers qualifications obtained in European countries. Outside of Europe it is necessary to apply for Associate Membership of the RIAI to practice in Ireland. The fee for this is 155euro and can take one-two months to process depending on when the application is submitted.

The procedure involves submitting the following

Copy of Academic qualification

Copy of Academic transcripts

Translation of qualification and transcripts

Letter from the Professional body in the country of origin to verify the qualification

Qualification must be a five-year degree course in a recognised school.

(www.riai.ie)

b. University Sector

The Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) is an awarding body and will provide certification for all successful learners put forward by further education and training providers. The entry requirements for a course are determined by the **course provider**. Students whose first language is not English must be able to demonstrate that they have the minimum required standard of English prior to joining the course.”
(www.fetac.ie)

The UK’s National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) was established in June 1984. The Irish National Agent for the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) is the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) effective February 1st 2003. The Centre acts as an information point supplying general information to foreign students. Decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications are not taken by the Centre - they are dealt with on an individual basis by the college authorities after consultation with the faculty or department within the college concerned. Precise information should be given by the applicant on the qualifications held, the content and length of course followed in achieving the qualification, and the marks obtained. Particulars should be given of the institution or body which awarded the qualification. The course which the applicant wishes to follow in the Irish institution should be clearly indicated.” (<http://www.heai.ie/index.cfm/page/sub/id/504>)

University College Dublin

Applicants presenting qualifications gained outside Ireland are assessed for admission purposes on an individual basis by the *Overseas Selection Committee*. However, applicants must normally meet the matriculation requirements and attain examination qualifications which equate with the entry standard of Irish students. There is keen competition for admission to all courses and the standard required is consequently very high.

UCD is represented in some countries by educational agents which have full information on courses and application procedure and which provide advice and guidance. Applicants availing of the assistance of an agent should apply directly to the Admissions Office, via the relevant agent. All other applications for admission to undergraduate courses should be made via the Central Applications Office (CAO). Applications are considered for admission to the first year of full-time degree courses only. (www.ucd.ie/international)

Trinity College Dublin

EU students apply through the CAO. Non EU students apply directly to the Admissions Office. "Applications must be supported by letters of recommendation, secondary school transcripts and other appropriate test results. Entry is very competitive and students are urged to send in their applications as early as possible." (<http://www.tcd.ie/ISA/dc/dcindex.html>)

NUI Galway

Non EU applicants apply through the CAO.
(http://www.nuigalway.ie/admissions/under_non_eu_app.html)

University College Cork

Applications from non-EU students for all undergraduate degree courses are made directly to the University. Applicants are assessed for admission purposes by Faculties depending on which degree a candidate is applying for. There is keen competition for admission to degree programmes and a high standard of academic achievement is sought.

Applicants, whose first language is not English, must achieve a minimum score of 6.0 in the IELTS Examination or a minimum of 550 in the TOEFL Examination (paper based) or a minimum of 213 (computer based) in addition to satisfying the school entry requirements. Please note that some faculties may require a standard higher than the minimum.

Specific requirements for Chinese, Indian and Norwegian applicants.

(<http://www.ucc.ie/international/>)

University of Limerick

The University of Limerick accepts direct applications from non-EU candidates. All intending applicants must apply to the International Education Division before May 1st every year to guarantee a place at the University of Limerick.

(http://www.ul.ie/internationaleducation/how_to_apply_undergrad.php)

Dublin City University

All Non-EU applicants are required to apply directly to the University by the 15th February. There is also a late closing date of the 1st July, which is used only if all places have not been allocated.

Certification of English language competency is also required.

Specific qualifications required for China, Malaysia, Nigeria, Norway.
(<http://www.dcu.ie/registry/ugnoneu.shtml>)

National University of Ireland Maynooth

There are specific entry requirements for Chinese and for Nigerian students. These include an 80% result in final years study *or* Irish Leaving Certificate examination.

All students must produce an English language certificate.
(www.nuim.ie/international.apply/noneu_requirements.shtml)

Dublin Institute of Technology

International (non EU) applicants must submit an application to the DIT International Student Office as early as possible for entry in September each year. Certified translations in English of qualifications and/or examination results must be furnished with each application along with a certified qualification of proficiency in English.

(www.dit.ie/international)

Appendix 2: Further Participants Views

3.1 Information Issues

“We need help or an agency for deliver of true and correct information, in what way we can get to college or university according with my qualifications. It’s very simple... It might be possible to organise the information centre at the colleges. Maybe at the colleges, like a citizenship agency, yes, where we can find all necessary information about our career and our study, that would be very useful for us.”

“I called some schools, because I wanted to practice my law here, but they said I have to do constitutional law, because it’s different. So you must do the legal system and you must do the constitutional law” (participant had not been told about the need to register with either the Bar Council or the Law Society in order to be allowed to practice as a lawyer in Ireland. She came from a country where registration of this kind was done through the universities).

3.2 Language Problems

“I am here nine months. When I come I can’t speak English. Now I learn everyday English, alone. Everyday, everyday, everyday.”(the same participant, who is living in a village outside Limerick with limited transport describing how he is trying on his own to learn the English necessary to reach the standard required by the Irish Medical Council).

“In the first six months I studied English, but the teachers kept changing, and each time a new teacher came in, the course started again. In the first four months my English did not improve at all...It was terribly expensive.” (a participant describing her experience in a language school).

“Most people coming from China, even though they speak English, for a year they can’t catch what the lecturer says, so most of them don’t go to lectures very much, and don’t go to tutorials at all. But the results are very good because they spend most time in the Library concentrating on books, because the word is the same.”

3.3 Recognition of Previous Education and Qualifications (in order to access education or register with a professional body)

“My suggestion is that Ireland should have a Board, under the Ministry of Education, to reconcile overseas qualifications. The candidates should be required to submit their certificates and academic transcripts (transcripts break down grades to details: A, A+, B, C etc) to the board for vetting and working out the exact equivalent to that from the Irish Universities, and then issue the candidate with a letter, or document, or whatever, which would stand as a recommendation that such overseas qualification has been vetted and graded and that it meets so and so standard. A holder of such recommendation should then be deemed to be carrying an exact equivalent to that with an Irish graduate when seeking for an employment or admission.”

“A friend of mine, he’s a pharmacist. He studied pharmacy in X [country name omitted so as not to identify him] and then work in US as well. But when he returned to X he was put under house arrest, so finally he managed to escape from X and came to Ireland. But he could not prove that he was a pharmacist because he did not have his documents with him.”

“I have friends who can prove they were doctors but still they’re not recognised, you know. Lots of my friends, most of them from Iraq, they cannot work here because they have to get their registration from the medical council and the medical council would not give them the registration because they have to make sure that their certificate are right, they’re not fake. And what they do in the medical council, they send their certificate to Iraq to confirm if they’re a doctor or not. And Iraq will not reply because the Iraq government will not help the people who are outside, you know.”

3.4 Attitudes of Colleges and Universities

“There is discrimination in some of the schools. I know some real stories from my friends. One of them was the outstanding student in China. She was in the top 10 students in her university... She has talent and can study well, and she had already passed the language TOEFL test two years ago. She can speak English like an Irish person. But when she applied for a postgrad course, she was refused by all the colleges. There was no real reason.”

“For example me, I came here, I was nineteen years of age, I could have been in much better place now. I could have finished my study, I could have been an engineer. But because I was struggling for seven years and a half and getting nowhere. If I wasn’t fighting myself for my study and everything, I would have been just waiting now for somebody to look at my paper and give me a decision, you know.”

3.5 Attitudes of Professional Bodies

“I applied to the national social work qualification board which is the institution which recognises social work qualifications here in Ireland. They have a procedure. I complied with all the procedure, and was waiting for about a year for the result. You have to gather some information about all your studies, where you did your practice, if you are a member of the union of social workers – lots of requirements. I did all of that. I had to translate things into English as well, and I did it. It takes about from six [months] to one year to get a result from the study they do. And at the end, they said I was the first [country of origin omitted so as not to identify participant] looking for that, and from the beginning it was a problem. Because they didn’t have any reference from anybody else to compare. But at the end, after almost a year they came out with the resolution that I have to complete three months adaptation period, and the reason they argue is because my experience which was, I think, bigger than any average social worker in Ireland, was done always in the same place, and in community development. I find it really very ridiculous. Because I have more experience than any Irish social worker would have. Because they usually take less time, less experience. I don’t know what is the difference to do the experience in one or two places. Then I have to do three months adaptation period, and those three months have to be supervised by a qualified social worker with at least five years experience... I have been applying for doing this to – I don’t know- I have got at least I think thirty rejection letters. At least. I think it’s about fifty. I apply to different places, trying to find somebody who will do that. I will do it even for free. Just to get the recognition.”

“As soon as I got my refugee status which means that I would be able to work, I sent a letter to the medical council asking them how can I register with them”.

The registration requirements in general are:

- 1. Permanent registration number from the country of qualification.*
- 2. A certificate of good standing from the country of qualification which would be issued after having been permanently registered in that country.*
- 3. Doing an exam with the medical council called temporary registration. "In order to fulfil number one, I should have done a military service in addition of what I had done, but I was forced to leave my country before that. Their answer was simply that they just want their requirements done. I was not satisfied with that because I knew that the medical council in the UK does not ask refugee doctors neither about number one. I contacted the National Qualification Authority of Ireland and explained the situation. After a few months I got this answer: 'the Medical Council agreed to help refugee doctors but they have not implemented that policy yet and as soon as they do, we will contact you again.' And that was almost two years now and they did not get back to me."*

3.6 Educational Fees

"Because what they are looking for is for you to pay the international fee, which cannot be possible. You cannot expect me to pay ten thousand five hundred Irish now. I said to one of the ladies, if you are my mother can you pay that money? And she just laugh and said, 'I'm not the one that made the rules, it's the financial bodies.' During the holiday trying to raise a couple of money, no matter you got to do it, finish your college, you cannot be able to work more than maybe at the weekend or something. It's a lot of work."

"I didn't have enough money, and that's a problem for many many people. They have a student visa but they're not allowed to work fulltime. "

"More and more Chinese students study in private colleges in Ireland. One of the reasons is that the tuition fees are not much different. Also, it's much easier to get in."

3.7 Social Welfare, Unemployment and Volunteering

"In the social welfare, you have to wait six month, then you can go to college or to do any third level education. I don't see any reason for it. Because if it was my will I wouldn't come to the social welfare, anyway."

" I remember when I was at the end of first year, my social [welfare officer] find out I was in college and she said to me straight away that if I don't stop she's gonna stop my money. So at some point I lied to her, 'well I've stopped and I'm not going to college again'. Maybe I'll find something else to do. I don't know, maybe they don't want us to go to college, I don't know. She said to me 'where have you been yesterday?', I say 'I'm doing some course' and she say 'no you're not allowed to go the third level education, whatsoever'. So, at the end of the day, finish secondary school and what else to do? Nothing!"

"I know that for recognition of diploma at the hospital, I must find job as volunteer at the hospital and it's very difficult to find this position because hospital must pay for me insurance."

"Normally, when we came we ask for voluntary work and always they ask insurance, insurance. At time you being confused because you be in the hostel doing nothing and you just want voluntary thing and you can't get. So if it would be possible, I don't know if it's

the NGO or any organisation that can help so that if you want voluntary work you go to any company you want. Maybe computer for those who want to learn computer, any kind. You go there, they will assist you, you can do voluntary work to release the stress which would be better.”

“These all here, we want to volunteer because we forget information. I want to volunteer in the hospital. Without money. I want... money never important. For me it is very important [that] nine years I am studying for this information.” [he studied medicine for nine years in Russia].

3.8 Retraining or Upgrading Skills

“I enjoyed ECDL. At least on the computer you can do everything. Nobody is going to push you back when you are with the computer...none of the knowledge is wasted at least. Let me say food and nutrition, at least we know how to do the kind of food we would cook for our babies and ourselves.”

“We did an integration course. How to integrate in the society. We did it for close to six months and at the end of the day they told us we can't use it any more – that it's not – it was just useless. We were just coming out every day for [integration course], and at the end of the day they said that we can't use it for anything, that the integration course doesn't matter anymore.”

“I've already done many courses. I've done ECDL, I've done childcare, and caring for children. So I've done other courses, so I just feel like going into this other course now to do it so maybe I can work with it. I don't feel like using that childcare. I don't want to work as a secretary. I don't think it will be even necessary for me. It's better I change to another route. I want to do something different. With ECDL and other computer courses and everything I did I can maybe go ahead to look for a job in an office, but I don't feel like I want to. Just do a different thing.”

“I went down to FAS, I gave them my qualifications, and I said I can – because when I was in my third year I did IT [industrial training] at a fish processing company. So I did a lot of quality control. So in FAS I told them everything that I can do, that I can work in any food processing company as a quality control supervisor or manager. So they just put that down and they said they would get back to me. But here, I've tried to, maybe if I can't go that way, I've tried to do some other courses here. I did ECDL just to boost my computer [skills], both advanced and basic course. And I did some childcare. Still FAS hasn't got back to me.

3.9 Social and Legal Factors

“I think if you are from other European countries it's easier. Even if you are from America, it's easier. But once you are from Africa – I don't know.”

“Do you think it's more difficult, or easier, or the same, the fact that you're women, in the position that you're in?”

“I think it's the same, because the men are treated the same way too... It's the same thing because a job is difficult to get here...Generally it's quite difficult getting a good job. When you get a secondary school kind of job you jump at it.”

“I just remember another difficulty in getting into college. That's age. Most people come into Ireland after graduating from School or college. They're young and at the age of getting married and having babies. I've a friend who wanted to study, but has two babies and is not able to.”

“Does this affect the men as well as the women?”

“Both. If they were at home the grandma and grandpa would look after the babies. The family can help, but they don’t have family here. They wouldn’t have the money or the time to go to college or to work.”

3.10 Personal, family and community impact of access and recognition problems

“We’ve got this amount of people here who are already in our country. I consider myself, this is my country. With this amount of people, with this amount of education and qualification, what can we do for these people? And how are we going to utilise them, and use them instead of going to far east Asia to bring an amount of people at our own expense. We have already a workforce here. So lets just give them a chance because they are hungry for a job. To be, or consider themselves, as Irish. Rather than bringing someone from far east Asia or India or China or Pakistan who doesn’t know even about Ireland.”

“I was reading [an article] that the national social work qualification board did about social worker positions in Ireland and they even recognise that they will need a lot of social workers, that they are not here. And people like me, I am waiting. Why don’t they organise something for these people that are already here, to convert them to the Irish social worker force as well? And they even say that they will need social workers coming from abroad to cover all the places they need.”

“ I’m not sure that even the dean or lecturers from my generation if they were put in a position where they had to sit an exam that they would succeed. Now I’ve spent almost eight years since I came here, and I haven’t practised my profession. How would you expect that if I’m given a chance to practice now in my professional area as a researcher that I would be at the same level that I was seven years ago? I’ve lost almost everything. I can’t go back to the top level as I was before.”