

Substantial Difference in the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications?

A Research Study on the Practices of Credential Evaluators in Irish Higher Education Institutions

Volume II of II

Niamh Lenehan

Education Doctorate

NUI Maynooth

Faculty of Social Sciences

Education Department

Head of Department: Professor Sharon Todd

Department of Adult and Community Education

Head of Department: Josephine Finn

Supervisor: Dr. Pádraig Hogan

February 2015

Table of Contents

Appendix A: Glossary of Acronyms and Terms.....	3
Appendix B: Bologna Communiqués and Recognition	7
Appendix C: Relevant Higher Education Institutions.....	11
Appendix D: Questionnaire.....	13
Appendix E: Individual and Focus Group Interview Transcripts.....	17
- Participant 1.....	17
- Participant 2.....	51
- Participant 3.....	69
- Participant 4.....	81
- Participant 5.....	99
- Participant 6.....	111
- Participant 7.....	124
- Participant 8.....	135
- Participant 9.....	149
- Participant 10.....	168
- Participant 11.....	180
- Participant 12.....	205
- Participant 13.....	216
- Participant 14.....	222
- Focus Group 1.....	237
- Focus Group 2.....	254
Appendix F: Coding Example.....	267

Appendix A: Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

ACA: Academic Cooperation Association – a group of national organisations from Europe and beyond, involved in funding and encouraging the internationalisation of higher education

Access: The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education (definition as per the LRC)

Admission: The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme (definition as per the LRC)

APL: Accredited Prior Learning

APEL: Accredited Prior Experiential Learning

Assessment: The written appraisal or evaluation of an individual's foreign qualifications by a competent body (definition as per the LRC)

ATP: Access, Transfer and Progression

BERA: British Educational Research Association

BFUG: Bologna Follow-Up Group

BTEC: Business & Technology Education Council (Qualifications made by Pearson Education Ltd in the UK)

CAO: Central Applications Office

CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CGT: Constructivist Grounded Theory

CoE: Council of Europe

Competent Recognition Authority: A body officially charged with making binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications (definition as per the LRC)

CoP: Community of Practice

Credential Evaluation: The process of assessing or evaluating a foreign qualification

CSO: Central Statistics Office

DES: Department of Education and Skills

EACEA: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

EACEA P9 Eurydice: a coordinating Eurydice unit within the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (The Eurydice Network acts as a source of information and analysis on education systems and policies across Europe)

EAR Manual: European Area of Recognition manual, developed by ENIC-NARIC centres for use by the Network

EAR-HEI Manual: European Area of Recognition for Higher Education Institutions Manual

EASQ: European Area of Skills and Qualifications

EC: European Commission

ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EEA: European Economic Area

EGFSN: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

EI: Education in Ireland

ENIC-NARIC network (The Network): European Network of Information Centres / National Academic Recognition Information Centres

ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQF: European Qualifications Framework

ESG: European Standards and Guidelines

EUA: European University Association

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK)

GNIB: Garda National Immigration Bureau

GPA: Grade Point Average

GTM: Grounded Theory Methodology

HEA: Higher Education Authority

HECA: The Higher Education Colleges Association

HEI: Higher Education Institution

HETAC: Higher Education and Training Awards Council (amalgamated with a number of organisations to form QQI in November 2012)

ICI: Immigrant Council of Ireland

ICOS: Irish Council for Overseas Students

IEBI: The International Education Board Ireland

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

IEM: International Education Mark

IHEQN: Irish Higher Education Quality Network

IoT: Institute of Technology

IOTI: Institutes of Technology Ireland

ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education

IRC: Irish Research Council

IUA: Irish Universities Association

IUQB: Irish Universities Quality Board

LDF: Learning Design Framework (Wenger 1998)

LOs: Learning Outcomes

LRC (The Convention): Lisbon Recognition Convention

MBA: Master of Business Administration

NAB: NARIC Advisory Board

NAPs: National Action Plans

NCP: National Contact Point

NESC: National Economic & Social Council

NFQ: National Framework of Qualifications

NQAI: National Qualifications Authority of Ireland

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Offshore Education: Term used to identify students studying for Irish qualifications while not physically present in the State.

PAC: Postgraduate Applications Centre

PRBs: Professional Recognition Bodies

PRTLTI: Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions

QA: Quality assurance

QF: Qualifications Framework

QQI: Quality and Qualifications Ireland

QR: Qualifications Recognition (The Irish ENIC-NARIC centre at QQI)

Recognition: The outcome or result of an evaluation process regarding a foreign qualification

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning

SIF: Strategic Innovation Fund

TAICEP: The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

TOEIC: Test of English for International Communication

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USI: Union of Students in Ireland

Appendix B: Bologna Communiqués and Recognition¹

1. Prague Communiqué (2001)

“Ministers strongly encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to take full advantage of existing national legislation and European tools aimed at facilitating academic and professional recognition of course units, degrees and other awards, so that citizens can effectively use their qualifications, competencies and skills throughout the European Higher Education Area. Ministers called upon existing organisations and networks such as NARIC and ENIC to promote, at institutional, national and European level, simple, efficient and fair recognition reflecting the underlying diversity of qualifications.”

“Ministers recognized the vital role that quality assurance systems play in ensuring high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe. They also encouraged closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks”.

2. Berlin Communiqué (2003)

“Ministers...will strengthen their efforts to promote effective quality assurance systems, to step up effective use of the system based on two cycles and to improve the recognition system of degrees and periods of study”.

“Ministers underline the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process, and call on the ENIC and NARIC networks along with the competent National Authorities to further the implementation of the Convention.”

“They appeal to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies”.

¹ Texts for all Communiqués are available from: <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=43>.

3. Bergen Communiqué (2005)

“We note that 36 of the 45 participating countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We urge those that have not already done so to ratify the Convention without delay. We commit ourselves to ensuring the full implementation of its principles, and to incorporating them in national legislation as appropriate. We call on all participating countries to address recognition problems identified by the ENIC/NARIC networks. We will draw up national action plans to improve the quality of the process associated with the recognition of foreign qualifications...We express support for the subsidiary texts to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and call upon all national authorities and other stakeholders to recognise joint degrees awarded in two or more countries in the EHEA.”

“We recognise that mobility of students and staff among all participating countries remains one of the key objectives of the Bologna Process...We urge institutions and students to make full use of mobility programmes, advocating full recognition of study periods abroad within such programmes”.

4. London Communiqué (2007)

“Some progress has been made since 1999, but many challenges remain...At national level, we will work to implement fully the agreed recognition tools and procedures and consider ways of further incentivising mobility for both staff and students”.

“Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components of the EHEA, both internally and in a global context...While we are pleased that 38 members of the Bologna Process...have now ratified the...Lisbon Recognition Convention, we urge the remaining members to do so as a matter of priority”.

“There has been progress in the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), ECTS and diploma supplements, but the range of national and institutional approaches to recognition needs to be more coherent. To improve recognition practices, we therefore ask the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) to arrange for the ENIC/NARIC networks to analyse our national action plans and spread good practice”.

“We emphasise that qualifications frameworks should be designed so as to encourage greater mobility of students and teachers and improve employability”.

“Only in a small number of EHEA countries could the recognition of prior learning for access and credits be said to be well developed. Working in cooperation with ENIC/NARIC, we invite BFUG to develop proposals for improving the recognition of prior learning.”

“We call on HEIs, ENIC/NARIC centres and other competent recognition authorities within the EHEA to assess qualifications from other parts of the world with the same open mind with which they would expect European qualifications to be assessed elsewhere, and to base this recognition on the principles of the LRC”.

5. Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009)

“...the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition.”

“Successful policies for lifelong learning will include basic principles and procedures for recognition of prior learning on the basis of learning outcomes regardless of whether the knowledge, skills and competences were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning paths...Lifelong learning encouraged by national policies should inform the practice of higher education institutions”.

“...mobility policies shall be based on a range of practical measures pertaining to the funding of mobility, recognition, available infrastructure, visa and work permit regulations. Flexible study paths, and active information policies, full recognition of study achievements...are necessary requirements”.

“...transparency tools need to relate closely to the principles of the Bologna Process, in particular quality assurance and recognition, which will remain our priority”

“In particular the BFUG is asked...to follow-up on the recommendations of analysis of the national action plans on recognition”.

6. Bucharest Communiqué (2012)

“To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent”.

“A common understanding of the levels of our qualifications frameworks is essential to recognition for both academic and professional purposes”.

“Fair academic and professional recognition, including recognition of non-formal and informal learning, is at the core of the EHEA. It is a direct benefit for students’ academic mobility, it improves graduates’ chances of professional mobility and it represents an accurate measure of the degree of convergence and trust attained. We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA. We therefore commit to reviewing our national legislation to comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We welcome the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual and recommend its use as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices, as well as encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance”.

“We will encourage the development of a system of voluntary peer learning and reviewing in countries that request it. This will help to assess the level of implementation of Bologna reforms and promote good practices as a dynamic way of addressing the challenges facing European higher education”.

“At the national level, together with the relevant stakeholders, and especially with higher education institutions, we will...Review national legislation to fully comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and promote the use of the EAR-manual to advance recognition practices.”

“At the European level, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference in 2015 and together with relevant stakeholders, we will...Support the work of a pathfinder group of countries exploring ways to achieve the automatic academic recognition of comparable degrees...Evaluate the implementation of the “EHEA in a Global Setting” Strategy [and] Develop EHEA guidelines for transparency policies and continue to monitor current and developing transparency tools”.

Appendix C: Relevant Higher Education Institutions

There are four broad categories of HEI as defined by the DES: the university sector (seven universities in addition to university recognised colleges and colleges of education); thirteen Institutes of Technology and Dublin Institute of Technology; independent/private colleges and other state-aided colleges. Relevant HEIs listed below are those institutions offering postgraduate programmes leading to the following awards on the NFQ, or equivalent - Higher Diploma (NFQ Level 8); Post-Graduate Diploma and Master Degree (NFQ Level 9) and Doctoral Degree (NFQ Level 10).

Universities and University Recognised Colleges

1. Dublin City University
2. National University of Ireland, Maynooth
3. National University of Ireland, Galway
4. Trinity College Dublin
5. University College Cork
6. University College Dublin
7. University of Limerick
8. Institute of Public Administration
9. Milltown Institute
10. National College of Art and Design

Colleges of Education (University recognised)

11. Froebel College of Education
12. Marino College of Education
13. Mary Immaculate College
14. Mater Dei Institute
15. St. Angela's College
16. St. Patrick's College of Education
17. The Church of Ireland College of Education

Institutes of Technology

18. Athlone Institute of Technology
19. Blanchardstown Institute of Technology
20. Cork Institute of Technology

21. Dublin Institute of Technology
22. Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Technology & Design
23. Dundalk Institute of Technology
24. Galway, Mayo Institute of Technology
25. Institute of Technology, Carlow
26. Institute of Technology, Sligo
27. Institute of Technology, Tallaght
28. Institute of Technology, Tralee
29. Letterkenny Institute of Technology
30. Limerick Institute of Technology
31. Waterford Institute of Technology

Independent Colleges

32. American College Dublin
33. Clanwilliam Institute
34. College of Computer Training
35. Dublin Business School
36. Grafton College of Management Sciences
37. Griffith College Dublin/Cork/Limerick
38. Hibernia College
39. IBAT College Dublin
40. ICD Business School
41. Independent Colleges
42. Irish College of Humanities & Applied Sciences
43. St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland

Other State-Aided Colleges

44. All Hallows College
45. Development Studies Centre, Kimmage
46. National College of Ireland
47. Pontifical College, Maynooth
48. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
49. Royal Irish Academy of Music
50. St. Patrick's, Carlow College

Appendix D: Questionnaire

1. In what type of Higher Education Institution (HEI) do you work?

- University
- National University of Ireland (NUI) Recognised College
- College of Education
- Institute of Technology
- Independent Institution
- Other (please specify)

2. What is your principal role at the institution?

- Admissions officer
- International officer
- Mature student officer
- Head of department
- Member of academic staff
- Other (please specify)

3. For access to what type of programme(s) and field(s) of study are you involved in credential evaluation of international qualifications? (Please tick all that apply)

	Access to taught postgraduate programme(s) (National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels 9 and 10)	Access to research postgraduate programme(s) (National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels 9 and 10)	Access to postgraduate Diploma / Higher Diploma / Professional Diploma in Education programme(s) (National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 8)
General Programmes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Humanities and Arts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Science, Business and Law	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science, Mathematics and Computing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agriculture and Veterinary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and Welfare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. The legal basis for ‘recognition’ in the European area is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) which promotes fair recognition. Recognition is defined by the LRC as ‘a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities’. The Convention has been signed and ratified by almost all 47 member countries of the Council of Europe and by a number of non-member states. Ireland ratified the Convention in 2004.

How would you describe your awareness of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)?

- Not aware of the LRC
- Aware of the LRC
- Familiar with the LRC

5. How would you describe your awareness of the concept of ‘substantial difference’ as detailed in the Lisbon Recognition Convention?

- Not aware of the concept of substantial difference
- Aware of the concept of substantial difference
- Familiar with the concept of substantial difference

6. In your opinion, is the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary texts promoted within your institution?

- Yes
- No

Comment? 

7. Do you use the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the concept of 'substantial difference' as a guide in your credential evaluation work?

- Yes
- No

Comment? 


8. The Irish ENIC-NARIC (European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres) centre is called Qualifications Recognition and is based at Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). Do you liaise with or use (phone; email; website) the services of this centre?

- Not aware of the Irish ENIC-NARIC centre
- Do not use the Irish ENIC-NARIC centre
- As required - please elaborate

A rectangular text input field with a light gray background and a thin border. It contains no text. On the right side, there are three small square buttons with upward, middle, and downward arrows. On the bottom left and right sides, there are small square buttons with left and right arrows.

9. Please comment on your practice as a credential evaluator in relation to the following:

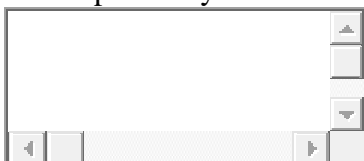
- I. Role:** As a credential evaluator, what do you feel your role entails and what are your priorities?
- II. Values:** What values are important to you in conducting credential evaluation?
- III. Processes:** Is there a specific procedure followed in credential evaluation?
- IV. Policy:** What policies impact on your work and how?

A rectangular text input field with a light gray background and a thin border. It contains no text. On the right side, there are three small square buttons with upward, middle, and downward arrows. On the bottom left and right sides, there are small square buttons with left and right arrows.

10. Are you interested in a possible interview for this study?

- Yes - I am interested in a possible interview
- No - I am not interested in an interview

Please provide your name and contact details if interested in a possible interview

A rectangular text input field with a light gray background and a thin border. It contains no text. On the right side, there are three small square buttons with upward, middle, and downward arrows. On the bottom left and right sides, there are small square buttons with left and right arrows.

Appendix E: Individual and Focus Group Interview Transcripts

Note:

- Interview transcripts are first presented (Participants 1-14), followed by those from each of the two focus groups.
- ‘X’ is used throughout the transcripts, where required, instead of individuals’ names, institutional names, job titles and disciplines to protect the anonymity of participants.
- Underlined words are used to note emphasis expressed by the participant.
- The survey referred to during the interviews, is the questionnaire conducted during the preliminary research phase.

Participant 1

Researcher: I am here with Participant 1, the X [position] at X. And Participant 1, thanks very much for agreeing [to an interview]. I really really appreciate it. Basically, what I just wanted to talk to you about was...just really to have a chat about em the recognition of international qualifications em at X, and kind of some of your ideas around that. Eh, you have already filled out the survey for me, and there was these couple of kind of headings I suppose that I had. I’m kinda using that really to structure some of the conversation so roles, values, if there is a specific procedure that’s followed, and like any policies that might impact on em that. So, it’s really em just to get your just perspectives on the kind of general em, I suppose the general recognition of international qualifications that come your way.

Participant 1: Yeah. So that’s a question is it? Or do you just want me to give a summary of where we stand?

Researcher: Yeah. Or what you do here, or who even comes into you. I notice on your em on the survey, that you actually look at em the qualifications coming in for the purposes of admission to research programmes.

Participant 1: Yes.

Researcher:...so if there is a difference in where the taught ones go or...

Participant 1: I guess they probably go the same way, but by and large my responsibility is admission to research programmes, Masters by research and PhDs. And insofar as we get applications from non-EU or indeed from EU students, eh, we...we and insofar as we have a policy...because to an extent...I am only in this post for a year and a half, so before that it was a bit hit'n'miss I suppose. But since I came into the post, I have tried to put some structure in it, em, without anything being specifically written down and really, I am highly dependent on the comparabilities eh that are 'managed' by QQI.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: You know your international, em. You have a facility...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: ...which allows us to, you know, without...without having a contact with any particular individual, allows us to try and see where foreign qualifications lie, or how they can be mapped across to our National Qualifications Framework.

Researcher: OK, and would you em direct people to us, em, in the first...when you come across them em or...

Participant 1: Em, I would tend to do it myself.

Researcher: Do it yourself, yeah.

Participant 1: People within X would tend to come to me.

Researcher: Right OK.

Participant 1: OK? So I'm not saying that they would all come, but they would often come to me and they'd say Participant 1, where does that eh, you know, this student from India or this applicant from India or from China, or wherever, or from Iraq, or wherever it might be.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: You know, they have this qualification. Where does it lie? And I have to say I am very dependent on the service that ye guys provide...

Researcher: OK, yeah.

Participant 1: ...and I even know exactly. I even used it yesterday, and it had nothing to do with you coming down. It was actually to do with UK qualifications, because I'd been asked to em support em an applicant who was looking for membership of the Institute of X of which I am a member...and this was a former student. He's actually a current student as well, but he was a student who had achieved a national diploma...

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 1: ...and he had applied for membership, and I actually had a difficulty cos I knew he was in the honours degree at the moment as a part-time student. Cos, he is one of my own students!

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: So I actually..I had some information from the membership criteria that the Institute of X has for admitting people to membership eh, and...apart from the obvious route to membership, which is that you have an honours degree in a relevant discipline and three years' post qualification experience. There are other more complex routes...

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1: ...which would apparently allow eh applicants that have a...a level of qualification below that of an honours degree eh entry, if they had you know work experience etc etc so...There was a reference made to the National Vocational Framework of Scotland – level 4 or something which I wasn't that familiar with. So I actually went to your website, touched on the UK, em. I, I actually have an email there that a colleague here sent me, and I always go to that. It brings me onto your website and brought me onto the relevant part of the website, and brought me onto the UK, and I was able to download that document that you guys have.

Researcher: Cross boundaries is it Participant 1?

Participant 1: This one, yeah. It's eh, its...it's this very colourful looking eh document that ye developed along with the UK authorities. Em, its em, this one (holding up a page).

Researcher: Ah, yeah, Qualifications can Cross Boundaries²

Participant 1: Actually, I downloaded that so it's not just in relation to...it's any non-Irish qualifications.

Researcher: Absolutely, yeah.

Participant 1: It's not just non-EU, so I have em, I'm very dependent on ye guys. I kinda believe in what you're doing.

Researcher: Yes, yes, no I'm absolutely delighted.

Participant 1: It's very important you see that I can turn, and I can reference a decision against a kind of a legally solid em framework, which is what the National Qualifications Framework is and...and insofar as ye have made comparabilities between that and international eh qualifications. Now, sometimes of course, eh the comparabilities are not as up to date as maybe you would like them to be you know...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1:...because you obviously have your issues as well in relation to getting time to make all the relevant comparisons.

Researcher: So you think....rather than the ones that the comparabilities are there...that are there already, em, it's obviously not a complete database?

Participant 1: It's not a complete set.

Researcher: Is that what you're saying?

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah and of course, when it's not there then, what do I do?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: I've spoken to somebody in your office.

Researcher: You know what Participant 1, when I was coming down - when you mentioned that you had been in contact with us before, I looked back to see, and I had actually been in contact with you myself about...it could have been a Bangladeshi one. I'm not entirely sure.

² The 'Qualifications can cross boundaries – A rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland' is available at <https://qqi365-public.sharepoint.com/Publications/Qualifications%20cross%20boundaries.pdf>.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah and there was a lad that I spoke to as well in your office I'm sure.

Researcher: X, I'm sure.

Participant 1: X! Exactly X! That's right yeah, yeah, yeah. So I'm very dependent on ye. We have no...I mean basically, I believe in the National Qualification Framework. I think it's one...one of the better developments that we have had. And I actually ...many many times, I speak em in a laudatory fashion about it, particularly if I'm in a non-Irish setting, or even in an Irish setting cos I do some talks and things like em you know - the development of doctoral education and so on and so forth, and I always mention the National Qualifications Framework.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: I always mention Bologna and Salzburg and all those principles, and I always show the slide that maps between our levels - ten levels and the European eight levels...

Researcher: The EQF, yeah.

Participant 1:...eh, and I also mention it to people the few times that I have been approached em to provide some kind of verification of where an Irish, let's say a doctorate, would lie within an international setting.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1: I remember one time being approached by a PhD graduate of X through his former supervisor, and the guy was looking...was...had applied for a position in a German company eh, and they clearly wanted somebody with a doctoral qualification. They weren't sure of these Irish things..you see. So I was able to draw down....there's a document there somewhere, one of the number of documents that shows the relationship between the European Qualifications Framework and the different national frameworks. I think it is one we had done up ourselves so I was able to...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: ...send that to the graduate and it seemed to do the trick.

Researcher: That's great.

Participant 1: Once the German company had that...so things like this, things like this [pointing to Cross Boundaries document] that I you showed are very important. I tell you right that...you guys have to keep on doing this OK?

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: Because I depend on them.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: Right. Em, it could well be that graduates of X, or graduates of X, or graduates of any institution in Ireland will at some point in their career, ask us – Look, can you kind of prove the level of your qualification in international terms?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: Can you kind of place it on, on, against a gold standard you know and em a document that actually looks well...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: ...can be very convincing you know!

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: And remember now, you're not talking about a government official or a lawyer. You're talking about somebody in HR in a company in Germany

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1:...or somebody in HR in a company in America.

Researcher: So it's using the Framework to both recognise international qualifications coming to Ireland, but also to promote Irish qualifications abroad which is what...

Participant 1: They are two sides of the one coin in my mind.

Researcher: That's what ENIC-NARIC centres actually do around the world.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: And I don't know how familiar you are with the...

Participant 1: I am. They are and I...I tend to go to ye guys first though OK and if I can..if I can get the information or if I can talk to somebody in your office. That's usually...that forms the basis of my decision.

Researcher: And who else might you talk to?

Participant 1: The UK one, NARIC.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: They are em our...

Participant 1: They're just bigger..and they probably...

Researcher: Well they're actually a private company would you believe?

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: But em, they are in the ENIC-NARIC network...

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher:...and that's up for grabs at the moment. They are actually going out to tender I think for that ...for the actual ENIC-NARIC centre over there at the moment...

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, a lot of the institutions here use the service, purely because that was in place a long time before the Irish ENIC-NARIC centre.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: And obviously, they have a lot more resources.

Participant 1: But I would nearly always use the Irish one first, you know, and...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1:...usually I only go beyond that if ye guys can't...

Researcher: Yes, I know what you mean.

Participant 1:...and you usually tell me. You advise me to do it!

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: So, I am a firm believer in that system...

Researcher: Yeah and...

Participant 1: ...and I depend on it.

Researcher: Do you em feel then that there...I suppose what I'm talking about in terms of credential evaluation is an extremely small part of the overall selection process. So, it's this one tiny little aspect I suppose of em...if a person comes along and they have an international award that they, I suppose, have a right to be considered...

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher:...this is a kind of a baseline thing that you have to have at the start.

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher: So, is there anything around that that you feel you know, is their past experiences that perhaps..you know...

Participant 1: We are building up the past experience.

Researcher: Building up...

Participant 1: I have only been in this position for a year and a half and certainly, you know, you wouldn't have to spend as much time dealing with the second or third Bangladeshi student.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: If you have looked at it first and looked at it fairly. I should say by the way, that what happens - I mean in the case of someone that you know, your service isn't really in a position to provide, and I go to ENIC-NARIC or wherever it might be. Em, we always have the option of interviewing the candidate, em, trying to get references on them. Eh, you know if em... and usually the interview wouldn't just be carried out by me, but carried out by somebody specific to the discipline. So, if it's an applicant to electronic engineering, which it often actually happens to be the case, I would ask the electronic engineers to interview the candidate, and to get a sense of really where they are. And, eh, so we do have that.

Researcher: Yes. Would that be done in addition sometimes to this credential evaluation as well?

Participant 1: Well it would be done in addition to it, but it would usually be done. ..It would certainly be done in the situation if the credential evaluation didn't produce...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1:...the results.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: OK? It would always be done. We would never ever accept somebody onto a PhD programme without an interview.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: Never. So it would be done. It's, it's...it's always done.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1: Ultimately, it's the research groups who provide the funding for the...for the candidates and they will not...I can't take somebody and say to them yeah, you have to admit this person.

Researcher: No.

Participant 1: There's always that tension in every institution I think.

Researcher: And it's not either because... credential evaluation is kind of just this baseline as I said...

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher:...and then, you know the selection is a completely different thing.

Participant 1: It's necessary but not sufficient.

Researcher: Yes. Exactly. It's...it's a kind of a right to be considered.

Participant 1: It's a right to be considered.

Researcher: I think...

Participant 1: It's one level that you have to be able to get across.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: So the interview could substitute for that in a situation where the credential evaluation just doesn't produce the answer that we're are looking for, but then there will always be an interview anyway.

Researcher: Yes, yes, for Masters as well?

Participant 1: Yeah. There would yeah, there would. Whether it's a face to face, or it's a telephone or it's a skype. If it's somebody from a long distance away, you wouldn't expect them to come across. But remember that with PhD candidates especially - not only are we dealing with em academic legalistic issues, but we're also dealing with immigration legalistic issues.

Researcher: Of course. Of course.

Participant 1: And you know, we will not be thanked by An Garda Siochána or by the Department of Justice if em, it becomes apparent that X or any institution is providing a soft route of entry to the country.

Researcher: Of course, yes.

Participant 1: They in a sense delegate some of that responsibility to us, but they expect us to do it properly you know. Because particularly with a PhD candidate, they have entitlements which go beyond the entitlements of people at levels below. For instance, they can bring family members in, and so on and so forth.

Researcher: Right. OK. OK.

Researcher: So that's definitely like a national policy then that impacts?

Participant 1: Well that's a national policy. It's there. Well there's a document that...yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Well it seems from what you've said then that its em, its very much, em kind of a focus on the student, and being outward looking in terms of em trying to accommodate what they want to do. Because, you said, you know, in cases where the credential evaluation 1. You mightn't be able to find enough information, or perhaps it's just not showing up or...

Participant 1: It's just not showing up or because what, there are 200 countries in the world with 200 education systems and...

Researcher: Absolutely.

Participant 1: Whereas, you know, the mapping between Ireland and Germany is obvious through the European Qualifications Framework, or indeed the mapping between Ireland and the US is very transparent as well.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1: Although the US is actually an interesting case because it is so...so multi levelled, and it's so disparate in many ways.

Researcher: Yeah. I actually often find sometimes that...the UK you mentioned it earlier, is actually more difficult in a lot of ways for us, some of the queries that come in.

Participant 1: The UK – difficult?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. I'm not so sure why but you know...By the way, in relation to this guy from the Institute of X. I didn't support him, and I've told him why.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: Because, I said all I can do is evaluate your education qualifications at X and you don't have an honours degree...therefore...we do have processes. Oh yeah, I should say this to you. X has a strong process and procedure for recognition of prior learning. We are a kind of a lead player across the country in that.

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 1: So we are prepared to give credit, either for purposes of admission, or indeed for purposes of completing aspects of a programme.

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 1: For genuine prior learning, where the prior learning meets the learning outcomes either for entry, either for admission, or indeed for part of the programme. So, we do have to accept it's got its rules and regulations. You can only get credit up to a

certain percentage of the programme and so on. But so, we do have a process for trying to evaluate eh let's say, eh the value you can place on work-based learning, in terms of having an applicant for a Masters or a PhD in a position where they can be considered for entry...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: ...where they don't have the educational qualifications for entry. But it can be extremely difficult.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. Of course.

Participant 1: I mean...like this guy - if I was to try to do that with his work, I mean ..he'd have to provide lots..lots...he'd have to provide a portfolio, which can be a document that (putting hands together) thick. Now, this guy didn't, and I just made my evaluation on the information in front of me.

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 1: You know, again then, that has to be the case. You also, with certain international em points of origin...countries of origin, you tend to get an element of academic tourism. People swinging applications out everywhere and anywhere...

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 1: ...and there comes a point when you have to say - Look, how much time do I spend on considering an application from wherever it might be...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: ...because it can take a lot of my time, and you know I have to...I have to manage my time as well.

Researcher: Of course.

Participant 1: So we wouldn't always be completely... we wouldn't always be as diligent in terms of considering every application if...if the credential evaluation doesn't produce the answer...

Researcher: OK. Is it time...

Participant 1: ...straight away. Time yeah...there is a time constraint on it you know.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. And when you were talking about EU and non-EU, is there a separation there or are they treated the same?

Participant 1: Well there are...firstly about the EU and countries within the EU, or within the European Higher Education Area which is actually...

Researcher: 47 countries.

Participant 1: 47 yeah. Everyone in Europe apart from Belarus, but anyway, em most of those have articulated their qualifications against one another under the Bologna Process so...

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 1: So...and all that is driven sort of by the EU, and in fact piloted by ourselves and by Ireland as much as anywhere else.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: They are just easier to do because normally the credential evaluation is relatively straightforward...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: ...is relatively straightforward you know - might need a small bit of thinking but honestly you can...

Researcher: I understand. Yeah. So that Process has meant a lot in terms of em...

Participant 1: Huge! And it's of huge benefit to those candidates, because it means that I'm not in a situation where I have to reach em a decision as to whether I just have the time to deal with it...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: ...because...like with all of those, if...if all the ground work has been done by ye guys and the other organisations, your equivalents in the other countries then, like I feel that it is incumbent on me to use that.

Researcher: Yes, I know what you mean.

Participant 1: I, I don't think I can use the 'Oh I don't have time to do this' argument in that situation.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: You know.

Researcher: The information is there and it's yeah...

Participant 1: But if it is a situation where it requires an awful lot of digging, it does come up against the barrier of 'do I have the time'? You know...

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 1:...and we are a small operation here. Maybe in some of the universities they have just more people to do this.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1:...and they also have more experience because they have had more applications, and they have been dealing with this for longer.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: I mean the other issue between the EU and non-EU, and it's probably not relevant to your survey here, but it's the you know fees and so on and so forth, because for non-EU candidates, they get charged the full fee, whereas EU candidates em get the support of a government grant towards their programmes.

Researcher: I suppose it is internationalisation policy really that's em impacting on you there?

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. OK, em so, as an institution, there's no kind of standard procedure or ways in which credential evaluation is actually carried out then?

Participant 1: Outside of using the available resources.

Researcher: For postgraduate anyway. Maybe undergraduate is kind of a lot more standardised perhaps?

Participant 1: Undergraduate is probably more standardised yeah. I mean for postgraduate, they are dependent on me, and I am dependent on ye really.

Researcher: Would they all go through you here Participant 1 – the postgraduate ones or just the research ones rather than the taught?

Participant 1: The research ones - well what they do is...we have an applications process, whereby the applicant obviously applies using the standard template, and em all applications em are considered by em a committee called the Postgraduate Research Board (PRB) that em that makes recommendations, eh sorry that advises me in my role as the X [position]...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1:...about various aspects of the application, including the qualifications of the applicant...

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1:...for entry to the Masters or PhD. So there is, that's a definite process, OK. In terms of international qualifications, there is...sometimes the question is raised then, you know, where does that qualification lie with respect to the standard em qualifications for entry to a Masters by research or PhD which is. For Masters by research, the standard entry is an honours degree with at least a 2.1, a second class. That's a minimum qualification, so that's the question that's asked. So, if it's an international applicant, then you have to evaluate that...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1:...and that's where I use ye guys you know.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: But in many cases, we will avail of prior practice.

Researcher: Building up your...

Participant 1: Yeah, building up your experience, so that's the process really.

Researcher: Yeah , yeah. So, is there an increase in volume of the students here in terms of international?

Participant 1: There is...I..I can't tell you...I suspect there is a bit of an increase in volume OK, but I don't have any statistic that I can give you, you know.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: Em, there's certainly a lot of queries, but as I said to you earlier, you don't know if that's just a fishing exercise or not you know.

Researcher: Yes, I know what you're saying.

Participant 1: We get a lot of those from points which are well away from Ireland, and are usually developing countries rather than developed countries.

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 1: Developed countries...candidates from developed countries usually come about either because we have a link with that country or institutions in that country. So, if you are talking about Germany, you are talking about France. Candidates from those countries, usually there are pre-established links, research group links or whatever, and they are usually straightforward to deal with actually you know. They are relatively straightforward.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: It's the kind of the eh solo applicants, the applicants that come out of the blue, usually coming from developing countries and the Middle to Far East.

Researcher: I suppose, yeah, so in some ways, there is a difference between how you might categorise perhaps these students - maybe migrants versus international students that are...

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher: ..purposely being targeted by Ireland say.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. But you see, X's internationalisation policy - and we do have one - is very much built around adopting particular countries, rather than a kind of a scattergun approach. We tend to try and build up an interest within certain countries and within institutions. We'd like actually to develop institution to institution links.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: The solo mover, the individual, is not something that we really push very much you know...that we encourage very much. Its kinda X that are coming from somewhere.

Researcher: But could they be people presenting international qualifications that are already in Ireland though?

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. That can happen. That has happened quite a bit with Eastern European candidates OK. We have had some superb PhD students from places like Poland and Lithuania and Latvia and so on.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: Some excellent...

Researcher: Great.

Participant 1: But in many cases, they will actually have already become immersed in the Irish education system. They may have done a Leaving Cert...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: ...or they may have done an undergraduate here, you know. So, so in a sense, they are treated the same way as Irish candidates really you know from the point of view of admission.

Researcher: Right, yes.

Participant 1: You know and even in those cases...the other thing I should say to you. The other key issue in relation to international students to our admissions process is their ability to speak the language you know– English. With candidates just like we have been talking about...they have already proven...if they have already you know managed to get through a qualification or a Leaving Cert, they have clearly demonstrated that they can speak the language. But for...but for, you know...sole candidates...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1:...their ability to speak the language is very very important.

Researcher: Of course, yeah.

Participant 1: I mean you can judge them to an extent even on the email they send. If the language is all over the place, you say to yourself – are we going to be hand-holding those candidates trying to get them to write proper English?

Researcher: Obviously in my job as well, I come across a huge amount of this.

Participant 1: Yeah, well we use things like TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] scores you know.

Researcher: TOEFL, yes.

Participant 1: We would look for a 6 or something you know, and that would be X policy you know.

Researcher: That's part of the selection.

Participant 1: That's part of the selection if they are coming from a non-English speaking environment, but if they're international but emerging from let's say the Irish education system in any case, then we would not then necessarily expect them to demonstrate...if they have a Leaving Cert, we wouldn't ask them to demonstrate they can speak English.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: Eh, in situations where we don't have a TOEFL score, we don't have that – it comes down to interview.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: That's always...that's always available we'll say.

Researcher: Yes, yeah. OK.

Participant 1: But I suppose one of the issues is trying to decide which candidates are sort of genuine.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: You know, whether the candidate has selected X or a research group in X because they really want to work with that research group, or are they just fishing...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 1:...and you could spend a lot of time dealing with...

Researcher: And when you say fishing. What...?

Participant 1: What I mean is people who have probably gone on to websites, that have you know, interrogated the website and decided that yes, I think I'd like to further my education and come to Ireland. And they would randomly send off emails to lots of different institutions including X, and they really would have a fairly limited background in what they want to do.

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 1: Some people would be more focused.

Researcher: Oh right. OK. OK, em.

Participant 1: Just to develop the international thing there, I should say to you that we would...X policy is to try to develop strong links with individual institutions in particular countries or else to use, or else to ride along with whatever national policies are being developed. I think the 'Science Without Borders' which is em an initiative between Ireland and Brazil is one that we are pursuing at the moment, but probably more at the taught Masters level.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: But it may lead...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1:...so we would always dove-tail on national policy for two reasons. First of all, it is national policy so you would have a X to support national policy, but there is usually a X around the place to help with the process (laughs). Funding is always you know...everybody, particularly from a non-EU setting, where the fees as I mentioned earlier are a lot more significant. They will often look for some kind of financial support.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 1: And the only ways we can offer financial support are if the research project has got some external funding, either national or international funding...EU funding, Framework funding you know PRTL [The Programme for Research in Third

Level Institutions], SIF [Strategic Innovation Fund] funding, which a lot of our research would have. We have a scholarship scheme as well em which is available to national and international students, so we would have some applicants coming through that route...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: ...but even there..I can tell you. We ran this scholarship scheme for the first time last year. It's called the X PhD scholarships.

Researcher: Alright. I saw that on your website yeah.

Participant 1: We ran it last year and we had a situation with a couple – I didn't realise they were a couple actually at the time but they were. A couple from China who really had excellent credentials. Was it China or India? One or other. No – it was India. They had applied separately through our electronics department. They had both scored very highly. Their proposals were both scored very highly with the external evaluators. They were both offered scholarships. And then it emerged that they were husband and wife which was no barrier as far as we were concerned. But then it emerged that she had become pregnant, and then it emerged that she wanted to have the baby in India. Then it emerged that he didn't want to come until she was ready so the whole thing...that's just a family situation so...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: One...two of our ten precious X scholarships which we wanted people to take up when they were offered, were being pushed back down the...

Researcher: Right, right.

Participant 1: So...

Researcher: It was out of your control.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah...we had to withdraw the offer eh in the sense that we said to them look, we have to offer it to...there were other candidates that were on...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: The em, that had you know achieved em you know a level of approval, but at a level below them so we felt that we couldn't hold back and eh, so em, so you

never know you know. I mean their qualifications were fine. Everything had been evaluated. They had been interviewed by the research group and so on you know...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. So you never know. Out of your control.

Participant 1:...and of course that was around the time of the Savita situation...

Researcher: Halappanavar. Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: It was getting into the Indian media as well as Irish, so maybe that was at the back of their head.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: So you never know where the fallout from something like that might happen you know.

Researcher: Desperate...I was interested Participant 1 as well in your responses about the LRC...eh, the Lisbon Recognition Convention em in the survey and you're not...

Participant 1: Oh yeah.

Researcher: You're not familiar with that or substantial difference or anything?

Participant 1: No. No. Unless it's what led to the European Qualifications Framework?

Researcher: No.

Participant 1: No, sorry. Not familiar, no.

Researcher: Right, OK...because if I just tell you for a second. The Lisbon Recognition Convention is actually the legal basis for the recognition of international qualifications in Ireland, and the signatory countries are actually made...we ratified it in 2004 and there is only one EU country, I think it is Greece that has yet to ratify it. Basically it gives I suppose general principles em in terms of fairness and transparency for the recognition of international qualifications, and there is one I suppose part of the em Convention that details substantial difference. Basically it is that a foreign qualification has to be recognised as being equivalent to a similar one in the host country eh unless there is a substantial difference. Now the substantial difference is not obviously something that you can very easily define in all situations. Em...

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher:...so it's a concept that's talked about a lot, but it's actually very important in terms of actually making em recognition decisions.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. By the way, I should have said this at the outset but any...anything that you can give back to me that will help us develop our process here would be very welcome.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: Like that information you've given me...and did that emerge out of Lisbon 2000 or something like that?...

Researcher: It is actually...

Participant 1:...or how is it linked to Bologna or whatever you know?

Researcher: Well the Secretariats are actually...it actually came out of UNESCO em and the Council of Europe. It's actually in the top ten em list of ratified Conventions from the Council of Europe. It's a very well known one so em, in terms of Bologna, it's closely linked obviously between the Council of Europe and through UNESCO as well but em basically, Bologna as a recognition tool em, the actual recognition of the qualifications when you're talking about individual qualifications here is based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the principles contained therein. So there is em actually...I had mentioned in the survey these subsidiary texts they are called so it gives em like practical guidelines for recognition of qualifications. The latest one is due before the Lisbon Recognition Convention committee. This is meeting in Croatia, in Split, next week and they are em meant to be signing off on the latest subsidiary text for...that looks at em the use of Frameworks in international em recognition, so absolutely, there's no problem [in passing on relevant information].

Participant 1: So what you're saying to me so therefore that it wouldn't do X any harm if I was to download some of that stuff and read through it and use it as a Framework you know.

Researcher: Not at all, yeah, yeah as a Framework...yeah absolutely.

Participant 1: Cos it goes well beyond just using the National Qualifications Frameworks and the comparabilities that ye have done.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: It probably also allows the development of a kind of a fair way...of particularly...of going just beyond the mapping of international qualifications into our National Qualifications Framework...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. Well it actually deals with...the Convention itself actually deals with recognition of periods of learning as well which would be of benefit to you in terms of RPL and ...

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher: It might perhaps...I'm just throwing that out to you em you know, but you obviously could have a look at it yourself and see. But I'm more than happy to liaise with you on that and em give you the links and all that.

Participant 1: Good. Yeah, that would be very helpful.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: Yeah because you know, in a sense, we probably should develop a specific policy in X you know. We've tended to just rely on ye guys really you know.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1:...or on the National Qualifications Framework. In the old days, and I'm thinking back maybe 15 or 20 years ago, we used to have this big thick book that had all the qualifications across the world in it. It used to be held by a guy in the admissions office and you would go to that, you know.

Researcher: And would all the qualifications....

Participant 1: There would be a huge amount of qualifications it it. I'm trying to remember now what the book was.

Researcher: Yeah, because em...

Participant 1: It was like a Bible almost you know.

Researcher: I'm just wondering if the Bible you are talking about is the UNESCO list of recognised higher education institutions?

Participant 1: I'd say it was. Yeah. It was a thick book and we had one copy in X. It was held by a guy called X who has since retired and he has been replaced by various other people but X, X is where we would all go to in those days.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: I'm talking about undergraduate entry and so on, but I mean it could equally apply to postgrad but that was kind of...that was the Bible and your facility in a sense has replaced that.

Researcher: OK. Right. OK.

Participant 1: But in terms of due process, we don't really have any...it's...we don't have anything well...we have bits and pieces written down but we don't...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1:...we probably need to develop a more coherent policy you know.

Researcher: If a lot of the postgraduate...it seems as though a lot of the postgraduate em qualifications would go through you...

Participant 1: Well, everything has to go through me so there is no student can be signed off for admission to X without submitting an application form, and a key part of the application form are their qualifications.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: And they have...within that they have to produce the...they have to produce their parchments...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1:...you know at least. In the first instance, in the application, they have to submit copies of their parchments and subsequently...I don't know if we ever insist on producing...yeah I think we insist that they produce the top copy.

Researcher: The original?

Participant 1: The original because there have been instances where there has been forgery and stuff like that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: There's a few famous cases around the country - of medics and so on.

Researcher: I'm sure...yeah, yeah, I have seen some myself but the PAC...they do, once you go through that...I think the next step is that you have to produce your original documents I'm sure?

Participant 1: Yeah. So, that's there...so the documents have to be there and then an evaluation of the credentials needs to be done, and as I say, that's where we would...

Researcher: So that is a first step really then?

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher: So it is relatively centralised then?

Participant 1: Yeah. I should say that it is probably more systematic than I gave the impression...like it's not just like kind of putting a finger into the wind and seeing...it's quite systematic.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: They have to produce an application. They have to state their qualifications. They have to include copies of their parchments, marks and so on and so forth, and we then have to evaluate where for international, for non-Irish applicants, where their qualification lies within the National Qualifications Framework.

Researcher: OK, yeah.

Participant 1: And in many cases, as I said, over a period of experience, it is relatively straightforward to do that for European qualifications, relatively straightforward. Except of course as we mentioned, as you mentioned earlier, sometimes people will have come through let's say a vocational route rather than academic route and...where does it lie then you know?

Researcher: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's interesting. You mentioned a value of confidence in the evaluating authority...do you mean us?

Participant 1: Yeah...we believe in ye.

Researcher: I'm delighted (laughs).

Participant 1: Our...I could put it more negatively. I could say that we have somebody to blame if things go wrong. I could always say 'well, I got on to them. This is their web-page, that's what it says'.

Researcher: No, I appreciate that confidence. That's great and I mean it's...as you know it's difficult.

Participant 1: To that extent, we are not...I suppose coming back to the Lisbon Convention or whatever it is, we are probably not as concerned about the Lisbon Convention, we are more concerned about the national body...

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 1: Do you understand me?

Researcher: Yes, we are using that to...

Participant 1: You can use your Lisbons and all this kind of stuff and we expect you to have all your dots joined up and all of that stuff done so.

Researcher: Fair enough.

Participant 1: We depend on...so I am putting my faith in you guys really you know, and then I expect that you have done all of the other things. You could come back to me and you could say; QQI could come back and say well Participant 1 you know 'there's three other steps or two other steps that you really need to consider you know if you want to make decisions which are in, you know in full compliance with the Lisbon Convention or whatever...em...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: You know, you really need to...

Researcher: No, I understand what you mean because you're really saying that 'we're getting in these applications in X, yourselves as a body that's looking at this or that's consistently looking at this, that knows the background. You are saying 'right, well, we are putting confidence in you to do a good job and then I'm an information-taker from that'.

Participant 1: Yeah, that's pretty much...well you see if we were to do the opposite. Well we have to get into all this Lisbon stuff and all this international and legal framework, I mean...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: We can either come to the same conclusion as ye guys come to or we may not. Now, if we don't, well we don't have the same expertise as ye. You are dealing with this much more often than we are. The vast bulk of our applications are still normal applications you know so to a certain extent, we bow to your expertise. You are set up, there is a proper legal basis for your structure and so on. I mean, I wouldn't try to second guess you, and I think it's safer for me not to second guess or try to become an instant expert on international qualifications because I'm not.

Researcher: OK. I understand. Yeah. OK.

Participant 1: It's like going to the library. If you don't know something, just get the book and you're the book!

Researcher: That's fair enough. That's fair enough and I'm wondering Participant 1, is there a means of...part of my study is that I wanted to try if I could to evaluate the consistency of responses of international credential evaluation across as many institutions as I could in Ireland – obviously all anonymous and all that, but is there a possibility of getting literally – obviously not names or anything like that but name of foreign qualification, the level that it was deemed to be..is there a possibility of getting that information?

Participant 1: I could try and do that for you yeah.

Researcher: If you can. Another institution is happy to give it to me. What I did was I wrote a letter to them saying it was for research purposes, and my supervisor had signed it as well.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. OK. You wouldn't get the statistical cover from the number that we would have; it would probably be a lot less than other institutions.

Researcher: Well, it's really to see – I mean, if there's a certain Indian qualification for example. Is it deemed to be a level 6 in most institutions or a level 8 down somewhere else?

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. What I would say is that if Irish institutions are relying on ye guys in the way that we are – other Irish institutions, well then there should be a consistency emerge. If there isn't a consistency well then, it's either because institutions are actually making decisions outside of the Framework that ye guys are managing, which could be the case, or that people are interpreting things in different ways...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: ...or a combination of both you know.

Researcher: It's not as we talked about....it's dynamic...it's not that there's....

Participant 1: That's one that I approached you about as well...Afghanistan.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 1: They are difficult.

Researcher: Difficult. Right. Yeah.

Participant 1: I would say that if we can't...if we find that we don't have sufficient information to make a decision, we can either have recourse to the whole interview thing, or the alternative is to say that the onus is on the applicant to provide us with enough information to make a decision. A bit like what I was saying there earlier on with a totally different situation. If we can't make a decision based on the information to hand, then tough.

Researcher: Yes. Right.

Participant 1: Now, I don't know if that's a proper principle or not but the onus...I think the onus is on the candidate to make the case, is it not?

Researcher: Well, what we would say is that the onus is on an individual to supply us with what we need...

Participant 1: Yeah.

Researcher:...for the application because it's really the basics that's asked for. It's the transcripts, not the original but the parchment and obviously it's translated if it's not in English.

Participant 1: Oh yeah. We have that requirement as well.

Researcher: Do you know what I mean? There are some ENIC-NARIC centres that are very big and would have language expertise as well, and that's how they deal with applications.

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: But I mean, putting that aside, you can't be expert in every language but what it does say about onus is that – and we talked about the substantial difference that I said to you – the onus is on us to show – if we have a situation whereby we are not, for example, recognising an Indian degree to be equivalent to the same as for example, our Honours Bachelor Degree at level 8; if we don't do that, the onus is on us – not them – to show that there is a substantial difference that we can't fully recognise the qualification. So we have to be very careful there that the onus is on us to show that there is a significant difference there to make it not be equivalent to our level 8.

Participant 1: OK. OK.

Researcher: That's what I would say to you. That's in the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Participant 1: Ah yeah.

Researcher: But as you say, if you are taking our decisions...our decisions are derived from this whole due process before...

Participant 1: I would say that would be the case provided that the applicant has provided all the information because I mean...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: ...what I don't want to get involved with here is a whole you know tic-tac'ing of emails back and forth you know. I don't think the onus is on me or on X [the institution] to keep on grinding the information from them you know?

Researcher: OK. Would you ever get a person coming back saying you know 'you need to recognise my qualification as that?'

Participant 1: No.

Researcher: No? OK.

Participant 1: I never ever...we've never ever had a person to come back and say you know 'you're wrong' or 'I don't agree with you', or 'you're being unfair' or 'you haven't given...

Researcher: So there are no appeals?

Participant 1: Well, I guess there would be...you see again, we don't have a set down procedure...I think we would apply general X principles; that is that – if I make a decision, and the decision is challenged...

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1: ...then, if it was challenged, it would go to appeal, and under appeal it would go probably to the Registrar.

Researcher: That mightn't be necessarily just a recognition em decision. It might be a selection decision could it in terms of such an appeal no?

Participant 1: It could be I suppose yeah, yeah. We haven't really experienced that.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 1: Ultimately, admission to X is the business of the governing body. The governing body has delegated that responsibility to the Registrar.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: It's actually the Registrar that makes decisions on admissions. At postgraduate level, what I do is I make recommendations so I recommend to the Registrar. It is the Registrar that actually admits.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: I base my recommendations on advice that I receive from this Postgraduate Research Studies Board.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: So they advise me which basically means that the applications are sent out to all the members of the Postgraduate Research X. They will look at them and they will send me emails saying 'Participant 1, you know this person doesn't have this' or that qualification – whatever it might be.

Researcher: So you have already sent them what you feel it is equivalent to in the Irish Framework?

Participant 1: Yeah, yeah. So, there's three levels. So if we didn't accept the qualification as being equivalent, and we notified the applicant that we don't regard the qualification as meeting the minimum entry criteria for admission to a Masters by research let's say, I guess they could appeal it, yeah. You're right, they could say...well ...it actually hasn't happened! I don't know whether..I think..I see...I am part of the Registrar's thing...maybe they would have to appeal it to the President. I'm not sure.

Researcher: OK. Someone independent.

Participant 1: Yeah, because the Registrar mightn't...I have advised him so he actually technically would have been the person that would have told him; would have said 'No' you know so it could be appealed to the President, but it's never happened you know.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 1: But in terms of general principles, there are...any decisions at X...there is a route of appeal you know. Sometimes the route of appeal for a particular classification of decisions, such as entry or recognition of qualifications, probably would need to be developed on the basis of those general principles.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: And they would probably only be developed when the need arises (laughs).

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: I mean we can't anticipate every possible...

Researcher: Yes. Absolutely.

Participant 1:...and that is actually a time when the Lisbon Convention principles would probably kick in...

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 1:...at that stage you know.

Researcher: Em, that's great. You know, is there anything else that you would like to say or anything that you feel we could do more?

Participant 1: Eh, I am probably a bit haphazard in my answers because it's a bit em. It might have appeared to you that as if we...as if we have no system here but we do. We have a complete system of admissions you know and we have...but specifically in relation to foreign qualifications and recognition of non-Irish qualifications, we rely on case histories you know, the experience we have built up and then if it is outside of that, they would come to me and as I've said, I'd usually go to your website and see if I can get an instant answer...

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 1: ...and eh, if I can't, I'd email ye! Or I'd go to NARIC or something like that you know.

Researcher: UK NARIC?

Participant 1: ...the UK, but all of that to an extent depends...particularly if difficult...the odd difficult case, it depends on how much time I have to put into it.

Researcher: Yeah, so there is just one thing that struck me there. If you get in an application, and you have what you feel it would be comparable to in terms of how it compares to an Irish level, you send that to the Postgraduate Research Board then. But if you can't determine a level, would it go...would the application go to the Postgraduate Research Board first or to...

Participant 1: First you know, first, it comes in and I send to the Postgraduate Research Board straight away. It is the Postgraduate Research Board that could raise the issue itself, you know 'Participant 1, what do you think about this qualification?'

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 1: You know, actually, I should step back. That's at the point where somebody has submitted an application. A lot of the issues with non-Irish qualifications, particularly, non-EU qualifications would happen at a stage before that where somebody sends in an email to me from wherever...Pakistan say...saying 'I'm interested in pursuing a PhD programme in your venerable institution'. They're very proper eh these countries are, and they think that 'plámáising' you like is the way to go and eh. They'll

give you every title under the sun including titles that you don't have at all you know, and then they'll say look...they'll probably have a CV and they may have some information about their qualifications. So that would be a pre-application stage, so that wouldn't actually go to the PRB. I'd deal with that myself and probably you know consult your website...

Researcher: Yeah and what's the procedure. If you say well I don't have enough information to make...to kinda decide on any sort of a level. At which stage does it go to possible interview then as a means of trying to establish this?

Participant 1: Well, what I would do then is to go to the..if the candidate has indicated a research area...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 1: ...I would also simultaneously evaluate the qualification. I would send it out to the relevant research group or you know principal investigator and say you know, 'this has come in – are you interested?'

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1: And it often dies at that stage. It often dies for the very simple reason that there is no funding available you know...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 1:...or there is no position available. You see, PhDs and Masters by research are different from undergraduate programmes, or even taught Masters in that they are not cohort-based. So every individual applicant is separate from everybody else. It's not as if we are offering you know a 20 or 30 person programme that somebody can bolt into. Every one is individualised.

Researcher: I know what you mean.

Participant 1: So it's a lot different really.

Researcher: So where do the taught ones go then?

Participant 1: They are dealt with by the departments that offer the taught programmes. I wouldn't...at one stage when this position was being set up, eh it was mooted that they'd come through this office and I very quickly offloaded them.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 1: I said 'No'. The Department has got far more of the knowledge base to evaluate them.

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 1: I have no recollection of they ever coming to me in relation to equivalences or anything like that you know of qualifications.

Researcher: But I...so it could be the case that the different departments are kind of building up their knowledge as well?

Participant 1: They might be more and more...I don't know.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 1: It might be...well they're not really, because for many of the Masters programmes, the taught ones. There would be the capacity to take every qualified applicants you know, particularly in science and engineering because you wouldn't fill them really you know. If you had 20 places, you might get 12 or 13 people that are actually qualified to come on it, so any international qualified applicant would get a place and they would certainly be looking for a fair amount of experience, particularly for Indian and Chinese qualifications and so on.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

Participant 1: So there!

Researcher: Thank you very much.

Participant 2

Researcher: Participant 2, thanks very much for coming in today. I really really appreciate it. Em, I'm going to really, I suppose em, I have a copy here of the of the survey. I'm going to just use the questions em on the bottom of it as a sort of a guide for the conversation for about 45 minutes if that's OK?

Participant 2: That's fine yeah.

Researcher: Em, so I suppose really em, you have the participant information sheet. Basically what I'm trying to do is just gain an understanding I suppose, of the perspectives of those in higher education institutions that are actually acting as credential evaluators for international eh awards for the purpose of em access to em postgraduate programmes. Eh, and I suppose to get started, I might just ask you about the, you know the process at X. You know - what happens basically when somebody comes along with an international qualification for postgraduate access.

Participant 2: OK, now, I'm aware that you are talking about postgrad, not undergrad; so my role would be primarily be with undergrad.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: OK.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: Eh, where em heads of department or staff...is that recording all right? [as Researcher checks recorder]

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2: Yeah.

Researcher: That's fine. Thank you.

Participant 2: Where em somebody has a studentship and they need to recruit, they obviously would advertise it. And em, you know, students would apply for a particular studentship or self funded or whatever, em, we have em, I think I referred you to X, one of our researchers. He is in charge of research. And he would, probably, well on a lot of occasions; he would contact me and say, will I just check out the qualifications of the applicant – is that alright?

Researcher: So you are talking about just research ones now rather than taught programmes?

Participant 2: Em, yes, yes. Are you talking about research?

Researcher: Well both, is there is a difference?

Participant 2: Actually, I don't have a difference. Cos to me, we need to be able to check the validity of qualifications of whoever, so I don't differentiate. To me...

Researcher: Exactly, yes.

Participant 2: To me, I have to know...well we can get into those questions...I have to know that we can trust what's come in the door.

Researcher: Yeah, OK.

Participant 2: They would then come to me, and we have various eh resources in-house em to look at eh undergraduate ones you know. We'd have the IOTI [Institutes of Technology Ireland] – 'World of Access' for undergrad...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: ...and we would also have em the universities, they have em a booklet as well you know for European qualifications...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 2: ...and up to recently em we had access to NARIC. Em now, just to give some background on NARIC. When I took over the role - its two years ago in July – em I think it was a year past November, I went to a NARIC conference.

Researcher: UK NARIC?

Participant 2: Yes, and it was probably one of the most informative and best conferences that I was ever been to. But I did get quite a shock em for instance with areas such as eh the UK Border Agency, and things that have happened with some of the universities in the UK with regard to losing their you know eh status to be able to cope with international students. And em some of the workshops that I attended, and I may be straying off your point here, but some of the workshops I attended were to do with em evaluating the validity of qualifications. And we did an exercise for instance

with em some eh Nigerian qualifications that were obviously fake and we had to go through...we learned how to em spot different signs and different badges and images and text. We did some Chinese ones where you know, the college didn't match on the same page and various things. So I found that very very useful indeed because it was an angle...you know I didn't get any internal training when I took on my job, so it was something that I suddenly had to learn very quickly.

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 2: And some of those skills are relevant for undergrad as well as postgrad.

Researcher: Of course, yeah.

Participant 2: Because you know that's why I just asked because I am primarily focused in my role on undergrad admissions. But I think the skills of being able to look at em an application's paperwork and be able to make an informed decision and 'can I stand over that?' You know, what reasons are we making this decision on? And be happy em. Eh, you know, for me it's about em...bringing in the right students who can realistically complete a programme of study em. Obviously their English language ability - I'm talking about international students - is an issue, so we need to check that they've got the right level. I mean, we ask for an IELTS [International English Language Testing System] 6.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: When I was across at NARIC...I did a workshop with IELTS - their advice was you should have a different IELTS level depending on which programme it is. So each programme should probably have a different level depending on how much English is required.

Researcher: Right, yeah, yeah. Interesting.

Participant 2: So, we have it outlined on our website in the prospectus what level we expect so that type of thing...you know. I would check if there is evidence of an English language qualification. If it isn't a qualification I understand, I might have to do a little more research to find out where's this qualification from. Can I stand over it? Em, any other qualifications em, as I said - before we had access to NARIC, em. Unfortunately, just the last few months, we've lost access due to funding cuts, so I am currently in a state where I can't access a NARIC database which em concerns me because you know

I like to...I was reading on NARIC about the countries and eh, you know, then we had our own account manager that I could ring up you know with hard queries; kinda just check out if this is something that's coming through, cos I understand from the NARIC conference - countries or forgeries, they seem to go in cycles.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: So you might get a succession of ones from say Nigeria one year, or another country another year. Em, there was something happening that em people were waiting outside graduation ceremonies and offering students say 50 quid if they could borrow their certificate for two hours. And they would go and copy it and then you know, then all the ones coming in obviously that year are the same. So the students are making money. So, there are all sorts of things I learned that I wasn't aware of. But when I get paperwork to look at, all of these things are in the back of your head, you know. You look at right from the top of the page from the logo that's used em, the type of quality. Had it been authorised, who...if it has been translated, who's translated it? You know, is there something there you can check up.

Researcher: So these applications come through like an online em, the postgrads?

Participant 2: The postgrads would usually...the postgrad would usually just come from say X. Our head of department would ask me to check out information.

Researcher: OK. And have they come from like. Are they submitted online or..

Participant 2: Yes – we have just em...well we are just in the process of implementing an online applications system other than CAO. Now we are just starting with that em so they will be coming through the online route, but the same thing goes back to international qualifications obviously going through CAO, you know, because we evaluate our own this year.

Researcher: You mightn't necessarily have the original documentation...

Participant 2: No, but CAO would be scanned in as well, so that all the time you are looking at documents that are scanned eh you know or copied or photocopied or faxed you know so eh. It's not an exact science em, you know I find, and I mean if somebody really wants to get in and do a jolly good forgery, you know, eh it would be very very difficult to spot. I mean, by the time you have checked everything out, they could because you can't say...you know unless you were to try you know to write to each

college and double-check. But then, if it doesn't exist and they have given you a fake email address well you know, it could still get through the net. So, I would use a lot of the em...I suppose the scare stuff that came up in the NARIC conference was very good for me, because I spent a lot of time talking to people who worked in colleges em fulltime on international applications at all different levels eh, who basically told me an awful lot of horror stories you know...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: ...and I think that was very good because I came back terrified of international applications in general. Because you know, it's the first time that anybody had brought that to my attention how important it was. So, I actually think it's a very important eh angle, and the whole point is bringing in the right students in a fair and transparent way. To be able to stand over the decisions we make, so that people don't end up going to the Ombudsman for unfair rules or whatever. But also have some confidence that the skills and the approach we take to evaluate documentation, em you know; that we are happy enough that we have the skill to do that...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: ...and I think that's really important. And that's why I think when I contacted you a year ago because you know, when you are new and we had seven new admissions officers in the sector...

Researcher: Wow. OK, yeah.

Participant 2: ...and how would you learn to evaluate things other than sitting by Nellie? You know sitting by another colleague...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: ...or just guessing. And I was wondering whether there was a role for QQI in some way to be...I'm not saying a trainer, but to have some event like a workshop that could teach all of us this is the way you need to do it. This is good practice so we are all doing it the same way so you could stand over the fact that...I mean I learned my skill on this from NARIC and from talking to people in the IoT sector.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: You may have loads of extra things that you know that I don't know. It might be to do with An Garda Síochána here as opposed to the UK Border Agency, so you might have a load more information that I could possibly know that I would love to learn from.

Researcher: So that, the UK BA, so that whole thing is another facet of the complications is it in terms of international qualifications?

Participant 2: Well, it's to do with immigration and lots of people getting in with bogus qualifications and evidence, and getting on to programmes and em. There are a lot of bogus colleges set up just for human trafficking and bringing people in, and they're trying to stop it. So, it's a much wider thing than to me, it was just have a look at somebody – have they got the right qualification? Get on the course and off you go. You go to the NARIC and all of a sudden you realise that you could end up in court and all kinds of horrible things with immigration, and lose your status for bringing international students in if you don't abide by certain quality rules [phone rings]. Sorry.

Researcher: Not at all. Yeah.

Participant 2: So you know, you actually have to abide by certain rules to be able to em have international students...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: ...you know, so I think that's really important that...that em the international dimension is em and the importance of getting this right in the country you know and that's where...my focus on quality and reliability and...and a quality standard. And that's where I thought there's a role maybe where we can work together with yourselves. We could share information and its use...

Researcher: Absolutely.

Participant 2: ...to make sure that we are all doing it right.

Researcher: Absolutely, absolutely.

Participant 2: That's just a personal...I'm very new to this and I was very timid because I'm scared to bring somebody in. You think 'oh, if I get this wrong', but there's so much subjectivity, and I actually didn't know who to go to to ask because you're new...

Researcher: OK...so is there anything like – are the procedures written down or what sort of procedure...

Participant 2: No, no, no. Em, the approach I take is what I have learned from NARIC...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: ...with postgrads, and I suppose with regard to international applicants.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: You know, last year...was last year my first time I went there? Yes it was. I went down to X and we did the undergrad ones, and X [colleague] was there for one day and...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2:...and em you know, we sat and we, you know, I think there was eight of us. We sat and went through all the international qualifications, and we tried to put an equivalent score for the international qualifications with an Irish Leaving Cert.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2: That is so difficult to do. Eh, you know...I mean...and we didn't go down to Galway this year. We just did our own, and I had 199 to do. Out of 199 people presenting with non-standard qualifications, I think I have managed to score six....

Researcher: Wow.

Participant 2: ...now, as a country, we want to increase the number of international students coming in, yet a lot of them applying, em well a lot of them apply and they don't put any evidence in so we can't look at them. We have nothing to go on so immediately...

Researcher: And are these outside the country or are they like. Would they be...

Participant 2: These would be non-standard applicants...sorry, people presenting with non-standard qualifications – i.e. things that we can't score through CAO...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 2: Who...who are mature.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: So you know, you can tick a mature box. So these are people who are presenting qualifications that we don't have in the CAO system. So we then have to go and put an equivalence on them so that they can be rated in the em round 1 competition for undergrads, but obviously... so I mean, I would apply the same level of care to that you know to that as for postgrads. To me they are a student, and we have to check what they are coming in with is right.

Researcher: So you don't have it written down. But what tools do you use or..

Participant 2: Yes. I would use...well as I say I use the 'World of Access' book em...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2: The universities just developed a book; basically an update. We have started to work together – our IoT group and I think we have two members on the university group. Of course, we don't see the point in us all scoring using all different systems which is what seems to have been happening. We are now bringing it together a little bit more. Now we have some disparity about say UK GCSE [General Certificate of Secondary Education] and applied A levels and things but...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2:...I think but we are trying to bring it together cos it doesn't make sense if an international applicant is ranked one way with one institute of technology; a different way with another institute of technology and another way with a university.

Researcher: As you say, you are sharing information.

Participant 2: Yes, you know that...they should get the same score wherever they are and...do you know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: And I would have concerns about that but you know. We don't know what the answer is yet to sort that out.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2: So, as for the process, I would use the 'World of Access' book, the universities book and there was a spreadsheet developed that I think X had sent me from X in X. And she sent me a spreadsheet where we can put in the scores and calculate the equivalence as well. So, that's quite useful as well but all of these things need to be updated as well. Because what happens is as countries drop off or include new qualifications you see, somebody has to be responsible for updating those, and that might not necessarily happen. So that's my concern is these things change; countries change; countries disappear and get renamed and you know change their education systems and...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2: You know - Hong Kong is a case in point. They totally changed their system. So, I think there's an awful lot we have to keep on top of and I'm not sure who's role that is you know...because... in the sector...

Researcher: You mean on a national basis?

Participant 2: Yes. You know the way NARIC do it for the UK and they are paid by the British government, but we don't seem to have a NARIC that's exactly the same. Do we?

Researcher: Well, we are the Irish NARIC. I would know the colleagues in UK NARIC very well...

Participant 2: X?

Researcher: Do I know X?

Participant 2: He was our account manager for NARIC. He grew up in em X. It's really funny. He has really posh English and he grew up in X.

Researcher: The name is familiar but he's not one of the people I liaise with em on a regular kind of basis...but the Irish ENIC-NARIC which is equivalent to the UK one; we were set up in 2003 and we came under...we were I suppose housed within NQAI – the National Qualifications Authority so we have actually moved here now. So you are obviously not aware of our website or anything like that?

Participant 2: Well, I've heard of it but I think I didn't...OK...nobody talks about it.

Researcher: Right. OK. Yeah.

Participant 2: Maybe I just haven't heard of them but when I go to look at qualifications; people just say 'will you check NARIC?'

Researcher: Which is automatically maybe UK NARIC?

Participant 2: Yes, so I would never have checked. I probably wouldn't be aware on a day-to-day basis.

Researcher: OK. Right.

Participant 2: Well I am aware now (laughs).

Researcher: It's good to know. We do have our website – qualrec.ie but I mean I can send you on information.

Participant 2: No, I wasn't aware of that actually. Can you calculate qualifications from that?

Researcher: Well, we have an International Qualifications Database on it and what...it's not as extensive as UK NARIC em.

Participant 2: OK.

Researcher: Because obviously UK NARIC is a subscription service as you know yourself. We provide all of it free of charge. We mainly deal – but not exclusively with people coming in asking for academic recognition for the purposes of accessing employment....it seems to be more than institutions, because a lot of people as you know yourself go directly to the institutions directly...

Participant 2: Yeah.

Researcher:...if they want recognition but the ENIC-NARIC centres are different in different countries because each of them might have different remits.

Participant 2: Right. OK.

Researcher: In fact, in some countries everybody has to go to the ENIC-NARIC whereas it's voluntary in other countries so it differs. But I can send you on information about that.

Participant 2: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Definitely.

Participant 2: It might be good though at some stage – I realise this is not part of your study – if you could do some kind of a presentation or workshop to our academic administration group or something...our other colleagues might be aware of this, but see we have seven I think new ones in the last two years...

Researcher: Yeah

Participant 2:...so they may or may not be [aware of QR], but I would probably bring along somebody else from my place, because I like to have more than one person aware of how to do it you know.

Researcher: Yeah. So internally then, you kind of share the responsibility?

Participant 2: No – but I would hope to! (laughs)...

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 2:...in the future. I need to give it away! (laughs).

Researcher: OK I understand. So for postgraduate admission, I know in terms of you feel that they are the same – taught versus research. The credential itself has to be looked at so it doesn't matter what the person is going...but is there a difference in who is actually making that decision like as in...are the taught applications going somewhere, and then the research applications going to somebody else or is there a general procedure for that?

Participant 2: Well that's a good idea. OK. Well the new system em would be...yeah...the new system would I think...the heads of department would make decisions.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: If for instance, em yeah...the head of department will always have the final say. The new system is just an IT system for getting the applications.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: They still push the button and say accept or not.

Researcher: For taught and research ones?

Participant 2: I am sure they would still have...now I don't...I can't tell you if the process for that is written down. I'm sure it's in our quality manual but I would have to go and check that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: I'm sure it is...I'd have to go and give you the page for that...but any...I mean the only decision...that I would make and the Registrar, we make the decisions on undergrad admissions. They don't have any say in that, other than they might be involved in shortlisting or interviewing mature candidates em but as for postgrads...that would nearly always be head of department sign off...they would have to sign off finally you know, and they might go to me and say 'give me the evidence that this is OK'. They would sign off and say 'yay' or 'nay'.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. OK. So it's on them individually.

Participant 2: Now, don't forget, we wouldn't have as many em research students or postgrad students as the universities.

Researcher: Oh yeah.

Participant 2: So we have much, much smaller numbers...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2:...and of course the funding has diminished significantly, so you know there's probably going to be fewer numbers for the foreseeable future. So it's not a huge task to be honest.

Researcher: Yeah, right, OK. So it's kind of an add-on...I suppose the whole em work of credential evaluation is really one that's tagged on say to another job or another function you know?

Participant 2: Yeah. I mean I would...As I say, I would have checked everything was valid, reliable, is it fair? Is there anything I can see wrong with it? You know if I had to make a phone call, check something out, I would do that. I have experience as I worked at X University for several years and you know, I have experience of postgrads you know coming over to X. And I remember back in the 90s, a huge fax coming over from

one university saying 'do not take this student' for a whole load of reasons – a big three page fax.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: The Head of Department desperately needed to use up the studentships or else he would be cut in terms of studentships the future year. So he took the guy and the guy subsequently was arrested because he was synthesising drugs on a Sunday afternoon but the reference said 'do not take him'. But he so wanted...he had to get the numbers or he would be cut by three studentships the following year, so he took a gamble because he was the last person to come in. So that's ingrained in my head as well. You know, if you ask for a reference and it says 'do not take them', there should be bells going off, but fortunately we don't have that problem because we don't have huge numbers of studentships.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: It's different I'm sure in the universities but em you know, that kind of thing would figure in my head as well.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 2: Obviously I have come from the UK where people are nasty sometimes when they are trying to get into courses. You know, they will do anything.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 2: That was my experience. You know, lots of great people, but we did have some difficult cases.

Researcher: So em I suppose we touched on a couple of policies there like immigration policy you mentioned and funding as well that would eh I suppose impact on em credential evaluation maybe. Are there other policies that...internal or external..

Participant 2: Yeah, I mean the things I'm thinking of I suppose is you know...we obviously are trying to increase our student numbers you know so we have...we have internal policies to widen participation, increase our research capacity so you know. We're always trying to get the best we can and this year I think there are present studentships going out. So there have been adverts for those, so there are internal strategies to try and increase student numbers as best they can. Now, depending on who

those applicants are, you know, it could be a member of staff that takes a studentship...they want to get a Masters or Doctorate or something so in which case, that would probably be a sign-off from the head of department. But if it was something they weren't sure of, it would bounce down to my desk at some stage because that's Participant 2's area you know! (laughs). It would come to me and I would just follow the same you know - can I stand over these? Are they right? Do they make sense? Are they valid? Is it fair? Am I concerned that these could be fake? You know, so there is a judgement area in it. If I am uncomfortable in the least, I will say that you know. I'm quite happy to say that for whatever reasons. I think you have to be able to stand over them.

Researcher: OK, so you are obviously building up your knowledge all the time?

Participant 2: Well, that's the thing. You see, when you start, you don't have the knowledge. It's over time and doing it, you start to spot things and you think 'I don't want to go with that'. So I think em the main thing is that it's got to be fair, transparent and it's got to be quality you know and I've got to be able to do it reliably. So it has to be the same you know, so if I am accepting somebody from Zimbabwe so the next one I see from Zimbabwe with the same qualification...

Researcher: Is the same.

Participant 2:...I have to apply the same rule, otherwise, it's not fair.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 2: So you would be cognisant of that as well?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 2: I don't want to disadvantage anybody.

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 2: So internationalisation polices I think for obvious reasons and we want to increase our research capacity. So they would be policies, but I would still be fair. As far as evaluating the credentials, I would still be fair. I wouldn't change them just to get more international students you know, it's exactly the same process.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. Em so they can be...I mean the students coming...are they EU, non-EU?

Participant 2: Mix...anything.

Researcher: Anything.

Participant 2: Yes. Now, em yeah they are a mix. Now, I can't tell you the breakdown of numbers. I can probably get that for you but I don't have it right in front of me.

Researcher: No, that's fine. So it's the same for taught and research then as well - those students. So we talked about the values that are important to you in conducting the evaluation.

Participant 2: Well that would be fairness and transparency. Em honesty is very important for me from their side. I have a personal problem you know with...I am straying off again – with social media where people boost themselves up to be things they're not and lying about what they've done. I find that particularly distasteful and you know when people do applications; the same applies you know. I think it's a time when you have to be honest when you are getting onto a course. It may be funded by an agency in which case, you are taking money which could be spent on another student, so I think fairness and honesty is very important.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: And I would apply...I would always attempt to be very transparent and fair with whatever decision I was making...to make sure I produced the right one and if I wasn't sure, I would always ring up someone up and ask them. [Interruption – door opens]

Researcher: OK, so we talked about the policies and the fact that there's OK...

Participant 2: So we'd have internationalisation; international student recruitment policies. We'd have research policy. We'd have a quality manual. Now, with regard to credential evaluation, I'm sure that's in but I need to go and check where it is because I must admit I don't know where it is, but I can easily check that...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: ...because it should be there, and I should be saying 'yes, we have that', but I'd be lying if I said that because I don't know where it is.

Researcher: No, listen that's fine. I suppose the other thing is your own practice. What your role entails in terms of credential evaluation you know; what are your priorities when looking at a file or...you know...

Participant 2: Well I suppose I am providing a service to the institute and I need to provide it in a professional way; that it's reliable and valid you know, and it's of high quality and it's timely. So as far as I'm concerned you know - if I can do a job and if you came in one day and said I am going to audit how you evaluate stuff, and you went 'yeah that's right', I'd be delighted that I am on the right track and I'm doing it right. So for me, it's providing a professional, valid service.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: Absolutely, it's not just going ah yeah today I'll say yes to them and tomorrow...

Researcher: So you want it consistent.

Participant 2: I'm not sure if I am, but I do the best with the information I have. But I think because things change so much, it might be nice to have some kind of an event as I've said before where we could get a reminder...these are the new things coming up. These are the countries causing us pain, and you might want to look out for this. And if you know you are evaluating this, this is a real bugger - try this spreadsheet or something you know, and to have one place or one person at the end of the phone who we can ring up to and say 'can you give us a hand because I don't know what to do'. I mean to me, it would be nice to have that.

Researcher: OK. Information sharing – you talked before about like a kind of a national overview of how we do things.

Participant 2: I think you know the process of evaluation is I think a sticky one because there are new people in the sector, and there's very few of us do it. And all the time you know, we might be hit with applications from a country we have never had before and you know, it's to take the subjectivity out of it you know, and to make it as clear-cut as we possibly can. And I think it would be nice to be able to as I say to pick up a phone to somebody, and say 'I've got a qualification in and I have no idea how to evaluate it'.

And you know, if we have a drive to get say more international students in and here's an international one, and I desperately need to get more in and somebody's under pressure - 'have you checked that? Have you checked that? Have you checked that?', and you're going 'I don't know how to check it', and you are the person whose job that is; where do you go?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 2: So I'd like to be able to know...

Researcher: So you can be under pressure?

Participant 2: Oh absolutely...all these things happen *mañana*...they have to be done quickly, because if you don't get the student, they can go somewhere else.

Researcher: OK. So you are under pressure then...information is not always readily accessible then?

Participant 2: Well, it's not always readily accessible, but it's not always up to date. I mean the 'World of Access' book that X did - I mean the last date of that was 2011.

Researcher: Yeah. I saw that yeah.

Participant 2: Yeah, you know what I mean, so if that's the information we are kind of working off as well as the universities book for Europe...now that's up to date, but it only covers Europe whereas the 'World of Access' was the whole world more or less. So you know, we're going on information that could be way out of date so that's my worry.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 2: There's a bit of guesswork and I'd like to be able to stand over something 100 per cent saying that this is done well. This is done right and for postgrads you know, a lot of that is common sense obviously. I mean, if they are Irish or UK postgrads, you know, you can pick up a phone to somebody and double check it you know, that's easy but its international ones where I would have concerns you know.

Researcher: OK. OK, yeah.

Participant 2: But Irish ones and English ones are...I wouldn't...you can just check them out. I wouldn't worry about those so much. It's just ones you know from another

country that ends with 'Bongo' (laughs) that you get worried about or some Chinese province that you've never heard of and you can't find on a map.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. It's hard all right. I mean I think we covered it here. It is nearly coming up to time here now. Is there anything else that you wanted to add about this study?

Participant 2: No, not at all. I feel much more informed now than I did before. I would just like at another point to have a conversation with you just more generally about what you do, and how I can leverage off some of your resources for my job. Because then we can...well I think for me anyway, have a bit more confidence that I can go out and talk to people more about what I do in this area you know, rather than saying 'I think this is the way you're supposed to do it'.

Researcher: I'm very happy to do that.

Participant 3

Researcher: I'm here at X with Participant 3 from the School of X and once again, Participant 3, thank you for agreeing to meet with me. Em so, the first thing. I've obviously looked at your survey or em the information from the survey. I think it is really interesting your perspective on I suppose the issue of recognition. And em, to get started em, I indicated to you by email that I would use the questions in the survey as a kind of a means of guiding our conversation. Em, but really, it's a chat about your perspective. So em, I suppose to get started em, I just wanted to ask about em your role and if recognition is just part of that or...

Participant 3: Eh, yes. I mean sort of postgraduate applications are. It's part of my entire role and obviously em with the increasing internationalisation process within Irish universities, the em eh sort of the recognition of international qualifications and assessing their equivalence with the Irish eh Anglo-Irish honours system would you know be sort of increasingly required, and probably will only get greater you know as time goes on.

Researcher: So that has become more – an increasing part of your job?

Participant 3: Yes, yeah. Definitely. Em. It's you know sort of as you know the internationalisation becomes more prevalent obviously - sort of advertising of courses to wider and wider eh...more and more widely you know within the world becomes..you know is very important. So you know, sort of, we'd be seeing applications from an increasingly wide field.

Researcher: And have you an involvement in that yourself? You had mentioned in the survey, national and then some local policy as well that I am interested in exploring.

Participant 3: Yeah. Em. I'm...as a school level administrator em you know sort of the actual majority of the policy decisions would probably take place at management team level.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 3: However, you know...sort of...we are required you know to keep abreast of both local and national and international policies like em Lisbon Recognition Convention and em you know sort of keeping track of where the Bologna Process is.

Researcher: OK, so that's part of your job?

Participant 3: Yeah. I mean its...It probably wouldn't be so much directly but it is something that I have a particular interest in, and it's something that because of that interest, it is a service that I can provide for the admission tutors who would have kind of ultimate academic oversight within postgraduate applications you know.

Researcher: Eh OK. OK. So, in terms of..em.you had indicated some information on the actual process that you have. And you mentioned from when you receive them, but how do these come into you? Or how does it start?

Participant 3: Em, the student would make the application online through the universities online application system. I'd then sort of keep track of the online applications pretty much weekly from once they start coming in. Eh, if it's an international application, em I would then em...I would sort of check the transcript and then I would go straight to UK NARIC. That's probably the database that we use most often. I do... I use that and in some cases where you know where there is more information available from say the universities own website, I'd research how that...the results on that transcript would translate into the Anglo-Irish system. And whether they would be within a certain threshold that I am...that the course director / admissions tutor give me...sort of delegate the ability to process applications once they've reached a sort of...if they achieve a certain level. I'd also use NARIC to check that the institution was you know NARIC recognised for the purposes of making sure that the degrees were fully...

Researcher: So to clarify, eh you would go to UK NARIC and check for the name of the qualification. So, you know, an answer is given there that's quite easy to translate into the Irish system. So, em, what would eh make you do more research then on that when you said you checked the institutions websites. What would you be looking for?

Participant 3: Em, usually if the marking scheme is radically different – sometimes NARIC doesn't have a...necessarily a you know... a direct equivalency. This is a 2.1, you know this is a 2.2. So, usually, it would be that, that would be what I am looking for. For instance...an example would be that you know sort of em...the Italian system has a quite different marking scheme, and you know it would normally be say if there was a question as to the direct equivalence.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah OK, so you would take the information from UK NARIC on the equivalent and then you are looking for em within that – the grading? You mentioned in the survey that you stick to the standard...em... is that for a particular programme?...

Participant 3: Em. It's...the admissions tutors for all our programmes will give me a standard. Usually, they are pretty similar across the programmes but you know, it might vary slightly. One might say you know a high 2.2. One might say a 2.1. So...and then any that...any applications that don't... it's not straightforward to em establish that equivalence, it would then be referred to the admissions tutors...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 3: ...with as much information as I can gather.

Researcher: So the admission tutor then for you is the one that makes the final decision. Do they make the decision on the academic recognition or selection?

Participant 3: Well, they'd make a selection decision but...effectively because they are academic members of staff...you know because postgraduate admissions is very much an academic admission. So ultimately, the admissions tutors are sort of the ultimate arbiters.

Researcher: Yes right. OK, OK...and are you talking about taught and research programmes here?

Participant 3: Eh yes. Research programmes are...would be slightly different in that they are obviously...because it involves research proposals - that sort of thing. You know that would always go to...there would be no delegated sort of authority to process offers for an administrator. An academic would always look at the research proposals but I would em send em the research course director; sort of all of the NARIC information for overseas.

Researcher: So you compile the information. So you give the information from UK NARIC and then any other research you did yourself perhaps on grading systems or something?

Participant 3: Yes exactly, and that would go to the research em...the research admissions tutor to inform the decision, but in actual fact they are generally considered by committee within the school.

Researcher: OK, OK, OK em so in terms of the taught ones then, it's just the course tutor that decides...

Participant 3: Yeah. The admissions tutor has yeah delegated authority to admit to...

Researcher: OK, OK. And em the, you know, have you any idea of the volume of international awards that you are presented with or...

Domininc: Em, it would normally be...it's increasing year on year. I would say at the moment, maybe between about ten and 15 per cent of applications, but that's increased and I have no reason to believe it won't keep increasing.

Researcher: And is there any pattern to those or..where they come from or..

Participant 3: I mean, obviously it's partly economic. The U.S. tends to be... there is a huge postgraduate market in the U.S. em China em...and em mainland Europe not so much for us but it probably...I would say that it very much varies by school but I mean for us, probably the U.S. and Canada would be the main...

Researcher: OK. That's great OK. Now something...em oh yes, you were talking about the Lisbon Recognition Convention and eh I had asked was the LRC and subsidiary texts promoted. And you had talked about em the provisions of the LRC as 'received wisdom'. And then you go on to talk about using UK NARIC as a major resource for evaluation. Could you em just elaborate on that a bit please?

Participant 3: Em yeah. I suppose by received wisdom, what I mean is it's you know sort of from my...in actual fact, I had heard of the title. I'd heard of the Convention, but I'd not really read the text until I actually got the mail about this and...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 3:...and I immediately went and read it. It sparked my interest and you know I looked at it and actually that's kind of the right, you know, it's always been the way it's done. As long as the equivalence of an application to eh the Anglo-Irish system can be established...it's very much looked at...it's purely on academic merit because we consider the international applicant in exactly the same way we consider an applicant from Ireland. You know, that's what I meant by you know 'received wisdom'. It's always been the way it's happened. Em, I mean and where an applicant has a more unusual background...again...the admissions tutors look at that from a purely academic

basis. Sort of whether this applicant is suitable for the course, and indeed if the course is suitable for the applicant...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 3: ...and that would purely be on their sort of...on their academic grounds but we also take into consideration...for instance we have in the school em...we have...we've got a couple of professionally accredited Masters degrees in X and...in those cases..you know...sort of relevant professional experience may very well feed into the consideration criteria and you know...it would...anything like that again would go to the admissions tutors who have the requisite academic background to determine...and for the professionally accredited Masters courses...most of the sort of the staff teaching those professionally accredited courses would be members of relevant professional organisations. So they'd have the practical experience to look and go, yeah, that's...

Researcher: Em...OK. There is a lot there so in terms of the 'received wisdom' then, you mean that it's...the kind of LRC...although it's not spoken about, it's kind of maybe in the background?

Participant 3: I think so. As I say, if you spoke to someone on sort of one of the management panels or whatever, they'd probably have more awareness of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, whereas a school level administrator...might not recognise that that's the text where it's all set down. But when they look at it, they go 'actually that's the way it's done'.

Researcher: And have you...I'm wondering if it even eh feeds into what you do here in terms of...I mean...the information is taken from UK NARIC. Has that ever been questioned or...?

Participant 3: Eh for instance, say you get a situation where the institution isn't listed for example. Normally we check that with our international office cos obviously NARIC like all databases, you know, NARIC would be subject to updating. And sometimes if there is an update cycle, it may just be that if it's a new institution, it hasn't fed into the databases yet. So what we then do is speak to our international office who have the requisite international contacts to be able to establish whether an institution is...to establish sort of the equivalence of an institution. That would be...that would probably be the main time that we would sort of question the database. Sometimes for instance, if NARIC says the marking scheme in the country is this, and

you get an institution and the transcript says something completely different...you know there is completely different information on it, again, we'd probably go to the institution itself or em...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah OK. So you must be...you must see some of the same ones coming through as well. Do you keep records...?

Participant 3: Em, yes. I mean it's...obviously sort of...the data is kept sort of in accordance with data protection, but usually once the data protection time runs out, it comes to the point that stuff would need to be destroyed...and any relevant information – I just transfer onto a general notes sheet and of course you kind of build your own mental database.. you know 'I've seen that before'. You know, a Canadian application comes in because that's sort of French Canada rather than British Canada. That would be you know...the system may be slightly different.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. So, have you had any admissions tutors coming back to you saying they disagree with the comparability on the academic recognition?

Participant 3: Not really. Em...you know...because of sort of staff mobility here within academia, actually you know, staff...academics would tend to have quite a strong picture of systems around the world. It would quite easily be picked up if there was a comparability issue, but since what I'm providing is more sort of you know...this is my interpretation of it. If I was at all unsure...even if it was within the state within which I'd have the authority to process, I would always refer it to the admissions tutors with...

Researcher: So there is one [admissions tutor] for every programme?

Participant 3: Yes. There is one for every programme. This is the information I have been able to find out...

Researcher: So this is for the taught programme?

Participant 3: Yes, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 3: For research programmes, it would always be 'well, here's the information' and that's to help you make your decision rather than...

Researcher: OK. So that's...we went through that. You mentioned where you feel there is a substantial difference from your requirements, you might refer that on. Can you just elaborate on that if you wouldn't mind...

Participant 3: It's kind of...really what I've just said. I mean, what I see as substantial difference would be say – if NARIC for example said a programme was only equivalent to an ordinary...you know a UK/Irish ordinary level Bachelors degree...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 3:..or if the..if sort of professional experience was part of the application process and they didn't have the directly equivalent you know undergraduate academic qualification. Say someone with a sort of ordinary level Bachelor equivalent degree and fifteen years of professional experience in a particular field and various training courses and that sort of thing em...you know, that would be sort of substantial...definitely be the point that it would go straight to the admissions tutor.

Researcher: And do you get feedback on that or...

Participant 3: Eh well I mean because I'm always the end point on the process – I print out the decisions letters and everything, then I'd always sort of be...I'd always know what the outcome was, and because graduate administrator and graduate course directors work very closely together...the course directors have always been quite open and happy to discuss you know the background for a particular decision which means that obviously when a new course director comes in – then I can say this is history. If a similar case comes in, I can say well this is the history from...

Researcher: And would you have experience of these decisions changing or...

Participant 3: Em, again, they wouldn't tend to change sort of too often. If you know, they did it would probably be more for operational reasons. For example, a course was very heavily subscribed one year and we had lots of very strong applicants. It might then affect what point we would accept later applicants...

Researcher: Yes, yes, OK.

Participant 3:...because we operate a rolling admissions process, so pretty much within ten days or so of an application coming in, a decision would normally have been issued.

Researcher: OK, so that might touch on what you meant by em under policy, maybe local policy variations...is that what you mean?

Participant 3: Yes. That sort of thing. Because schools...you know...postgraduate recruitment and admissions is generally in the purview of the schools...there...the schools would be taking decisions on their own postgraduate intakes. So, local operational decisions would be very much things like a particularly strong applicant field.

Researcher: OK, so you mean...I think this is related as well. You say that 'as international recruitment becomes more and more important as a non-exchequer revenue stream, requirement for credential evaluation at the sharp end within schools who manage their own recruitment increases' [In survey as part of preliminary research phase]. Can you elaborate on that please?

Participant 3: Eh, yeah. The...primarily...basically because of the preference towards increasing international recruitment for academic reasons, but also for sort of funding reasons. As increasing amount of advertising dedicated to promoting the universities overseas, then you know, sort of we will get more international applications within the schools from areas we may not have received applications before. So because the school...because postgraduate applications are within the schools purview, it's the schools who would be evaluating the credentials of the intake rather than necessarily sort of a centralised body. But there are central university supports, for example, the international office would be able to provide assistance, graduate studies or you know sort of the...Each school belongs to a sort of a set of thematically linked schools called the colleges em and again, the colleges have graduate schools so they will take...they'll encompass graduate oversight you know – for a group of schools in a broadly linked thematic area. So you would be able to go to the college and quite often they then sort of contact other schools. So there is support but ultimately graduate recruitment is sort of in the sphere of the particular school.

Researcher: You mentioned exchequer reasons. What do you mean by academic reasons?

Participant 3: Em for instance...you know internationalisation...it's very good for a student cohort. It increases the global perspective...maybe coming from different universities and having different experiences at undergraduate level. So that then feeds

into you know, feeds into the postgraduate work because postgraduate would increasingly have you know group work, so having sort of a broader perspective base is...

Researcher: OK, OK. I wanted to ask you about the Bologna Process as well. You mention that it impacts on your work..em and eh that it 'drives apparently patchy or sporadic changes'. What do you mean by that?

Participant 3: Just that...every so often or even sort of...you know...you could get a transcript through that's completely different to what you'd expect to see from a transcript from that particular area. I mean – when I'm reading up on the Bologna Process, I've noticed that it seems that you know, it will sort of...as countries come into the Process...any changes being made on the basis of it would be sporadic. But sometimes you will see a transcript that is completely different from that you are expecting from that particular area. It has seemed to be that it increases the transferability sort of between you know Bologna signatory countries, but as I say, occasionally, you say 'Well that's different – that's not what I was expecting'.

Researcher: So you are saying that these transcripts are changing or...

Participant 3: Yes, you know. It's...it doesn't seem to have all taken...it just seems that you know sort of like ECTS credits. Sometimes it can be really hard to find out the ECTS credit equivalence of a you know a...a ECTS equivalence of a module from a different institution...

Researcher: Even within Bologna or outside?

Participant 3: ...even within Bologna. I mean it's...the information is normally there, but sometimes you have to dig quite a bit to get to it.

Researcher: OK. OK. OK. There was something you mentioned just for clarification under process; you mentioned a comparison would be made when you look at NARIC, and then you might be expected to research the marking scheme. But once this has been determined, a comparison would be made with the X [institution] system to determine whether the results em obtained would be equivalent to the specific degree classification requirement. What do you mean by X [institution] system?

Participant 3: The X system would basically be...it obviously uses the the em 2.2, 2.1, first but it also uses a GPA [Grade Point Average] to determine where a degree would

fall and it is out of 4.2. em, so it would really be for instance, with a U.S. application coming in, the GPA is mostly out of 4, and it would have different bandings within that GPA. And sometimes different states have different bandings.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 3: Basically it would be – if it's easier to do a...you know if a GPA kind of equivalent fits more naturally...you'd normally sort of translate the GPA first, and then compare and then basically look up that GPA against how it fits within the X classification.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 3: So basically, say you need a 2.8 X GPA is a 2.2. You go - right that translates to a 2.8 X GPA.

Researcher: OK. Right...it's a bit confusing!

Participant 3: Yes. It's basically how you know sort of how an individual mark translates, as opposed to the overall degree classification.

Researcher: Right. OK. OK. OK, and you mentioned em the eh looking at UK NARIC. If you got a qualification that wasn't listed on UK NARIC, what would you do or..

Participant 3: If a transcript for a qualification wasn't listed on NARIC, the first thing I do generally is look up the institutions own website; speak to our international office. The international office have people who look after specific geographical areas, so normally obviously they have quite a few contacts within those areas. So they you know, they would be quite well placed to determine...

Researcher:...be a source for this information?

Participant 3: Yes, yes.

Researcher: OK. Thanks for that and em there was another thing I wanted to ask you. Just to clarify really. You had indicated a priority in your work is to evaluate whether there is an obvious equivalent in the background that would allow a particular decision on postgraduate application to be made on the same basis as a domestic one, without 'individualisation' of the decision making process. I am just wondering what you meant by that?

Participant 3: I suppose by individualisation in the decision making process, I'm basically saying you know sort of - say the admissions tutors has said 'any student with a 2.1 or equivalent - you can go ahead and sort of process that decision'. I'd then be looking - is that student's degree equivalent to a 2.1 honours Bachelor's level, rather than you know sort of looking at the application globally necessarily - just basically 'is this students degree equivalent to what I process decisions on? Yes - fine; No - refer to admissions tutor. Em and it may be say that the applicant has any 2.1s; process. Maybe this person has the equivalent of a 2.2, but it's within the sort of category...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 3:...so it's basically; would an international application meet the same objective criteria?

Researcher: OK - so those ones that you are talking about. When you're asked to go ahead and process them - they don't go to the admissions tutor at all?

Participant 3: No. Obviously the admissions tutor has access to all the reports and so can basically oversee them. And as I say, any of them where I have any degree of...any sort of doubt...

Researcher: So when you were talking before about a course where you receive a huge amount of well qualified applicants or whatever, but it's done on a rolling basis. And then you mentioned that the offer might be going out within ten days. So, how...say near to the closing date for something - if you got a huge amount of applications there, the admission decision in terms of academic recognition might be different would it or?

Participant 3: It's possible. You know, it's possible. Certainly from our point of view, we always say on all our literature; we are quite clear that we operate rolling admission and that early application you know is encouraged. Because you know, maybe if we do get a huge number of well qualified applicants; it may be that an applicant applying later you know might find the course...but you know usually in practice, it's...in practice, it generally...historically it's sort of been - it doesn't seem to have come up as an issue historically.

Researcher: And there was one last thing if you don't mind...you mention a situation where you know, em you go ahead and process them if they have a 2.1 or whatever. Are they...is this em for a taught programme and would there be an interview?

Participant 3: What we say is that we reserve the right to interview, but it's not a formal part of the process as such as with references. You know, again, we reserve the right to contact referees and we ask all candidates to give us referees. But eh for example em where we might have some uncertainty surrounding say English language – whether an applicant meets the English language requirement, we might for instance have an interview you know in that case just to assert...because obviously given the course is...

Researcher: So there's not necessarily an interview then?

Participant 3: Not necessarily an interview, no.

Researcher: OK, OK. And sorry I know that I am keeping you but there was one last thing I was thinking of there when you mention 'received wisdom' in terms of the LRC. Do you possibly mean as well that behind the UK NARIC decisions – would you expect them to have looked at the LRC...do you know what I mean, that by virtue of asking for their information that they would have considered...

Participant 3: Yeah. I think so. Given yeah how em sort of how widely used it is, I mean, I know we use...I'm almost certain it is used throughout the university. I would assume that sort of evaluation would sort of be done at that level you know sort of before the information is presented.

Researcher: Yes. Right. OK. Well thank you very much. Would you like to ask me anything or..

Participant 3: Em. I can't really think of anything off the top of my head, but I've been delighted to participate.

Researcher: Thank you. I obviously have your email address and I can send you through details of the centre and to our website. It might be of interest to you in doing your job.

Participant 3: Absolutely.

Participant 4

Researcher: I'm here with em X em from X. X, thanks very much for giving me the time em for this interview. I'm just going to give you em...one is the informed consent sheet em, and one is my participant information sheet that you may or may not...

Participant 4: I have it. I read it. Yeah.

Researcher: yeah. OK. Participant 4, I suppose em. I have indicated just briefly what I'm looking at in the participant information sheet. Basically what I'm looking at or looking for in this study is to focus on the recognition of foreign or international qualifications for the purpose of access to or admission to postgraduate programmes. I'm going to be using, as I indicated to you, em these four broad categories as a means to em em loosely em guide the conversation so role, values, processes and any policy that might impact on your work. So, em I suppose to get started, I'm just wondering if you could explain the practice at X or where the international qualifications end up for postgraduate admission?

Participant 4: OK, em in relation to em postgraduate admissions, we would have two offices here that would deal with postgraduate applications. One is the central admissions office and then the other would be the research office. So, at particular times of the year, eh we would advertise vacancies for Masters by research and PhD em so they are all received. They have an online applications system and they are received through the research office. But the research office would then contact the international office eh from a point of view of em recognition of the qualification. So for example in software engineering, if there was a Masters or PhD, there may be interest from Indian applications so they might ask me em to carry out an evaluation. For example, a four year Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Science is equivalent eh to our em level 8. Em, I am very familiar with the Indian system. I have travelled there, and I suppose countries where you have carried out that evaluation a number of times, it becomes em much easier em so em you know, I kinda have my own em little database built up.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 4: But generally, I would consult the em the NARIC list of recognised universities cos in India there are so many and you know, you want to be sure that you are receiving an application from a recognised state institution. I'm sorry – we generally don't contact QQI in relation to that because we are subscribers to NARIC UK. So we

use that database first of all to confirm that the institution is a recognised one within that particular country, and then we would do the evaluation of, you know - is the Bachelor degree equivalent to our level 8.

Researcher: So you would do the evaluation yourself? Or would you take that information from UK NARIC or use that as a kind of a one step?

Participant 4: I would take a print-out from the UK NARIC first of all confirming that it's a recognised university in the country that the student is applying from and then I would take the NARIC equivalency statement. You know, you can just print them off pretty handy. I would then send that back to the research office, or if it was the em admissions office, they would deal with the application for the taught Masters. So they would consult with me em on the recognition even though the admissions officer has the same access to the NARIC and eh QQI. That's how we generally deal with sort of the non-EU; people who are abroad who are applying but eh you could have a number of non-EU nationals actually resident in Ireland applying so em we actually ask them to eh contact Qualifications Recognition. Many of them have already done so. You had a fairly good advertising campaign maybe about three years ago and...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 4: ...it was mostly about letting employers know about em the possibility of receiving a statement comparing your qualification to the Irish framework of qualifications. So I often find people maybe from Poland or Lithuania...they actually have the statement from QQI so it makes the process em very easy. So our admissions office – that would actually be part of their process once somebody – a non-EU nationality and are resident in Ireland, we would ask them em to take control and provide us eh with the information. Many of them do it anyway so em it's not a problem. Em, so generally, I would just send back the em recognition statement from NARIC either to the research office or the admissions office. Em, the admissions office may not be as active in consulting me to do that as the admissions officer could do it herself...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 4: ...cos we wouldn't have large numbers let's say applying for a taught Masters from let's say India or China. It's very often students who are within our system. They might have done our Bachelor degree in Business or Accounting

Researcher: OK.

Participant 4: ...and they want to go on, so they have our level 8 qualification.

Researcher: So it's an Irish award they're using.

Participant 4: So it's a eh fairly straightforward...I suppose where it can be challenging is eh let's say you have an application in for a Masters or a PhD and the person is from let's say Libya, eh. The Libyan Bachelor degree would not be equivalent to our level 8 qualification, so that would be very important that I communicate that...obviously our admissions office would be very well aware of it, but our research office may not. So they might have engaged in email discussions with this potential candidate so once I send back the statement then that it's not equivalent to our level 8, I think you have to handle it with sensitivity. You know, you have to have respect for their education system. Maybe there is a different focus, maybe. I often see that first year may often be Islamic studies you know, so often there is not an ideal match. X has been in touch with you a few times on let's say diplomas from Middle Eastern countries. So when we look at undergraduate but it can affect postgraduate. So somebody that has a three year qualification. Sometimes they think that they can go to a Masters degree em...now it might have diploma in the title but for some reason you know, they feel they can apply to a Masters programme. And the first year of their three year qualification might have a lot of subjects that really we would not recognise as a pathway towards further study. So if it's the Middle East, it might be you know Islamic law or Islamic studies, maybe religion and while that's part of their education system, we might deem that maybe even they can only join first year of let's say something like accountancy, because accountancy here, you'd have corporate law or you know managerial finance – so core accounting subjects and they are surprised then that they can't get advanced entry. And we're saying then. I'm sorry – you applied for the Masters but in reality we can only offer you a place in first year, so I think you have to handle it sensitively.

Researcher: So you try and offer them something...

Participant 4: Oh yes – we would always try and offer something. [Interruption – door opens] Em so basically you know – a student might be very disappointed if they're applying for a Masters programme and you are offering them eh a lower level. Or in the case of the research office, if they are applying for a Masters or a PhD and let's say eh their Bachelor degree from Libya isn't equivalent to our level 8, then you know, we

can't offer them a place. I think you know, it has to be handled with sensitivity and just to recognise that you know the qualification is very much related to their own system of education. Whereas if you are coming for X [discipline] here at X, we very much focus on the software engineering subjects from an early stage. So I kinda try to explain it that way so I suppose going back to eh roles and processes, em I would be involved in just providing the research office with the statement of ...the equivalency to the Irish framework of qualifications. In a lot of cases, I just take it from the NARIC UK because it very much states that it's equivalent to a BSc or BEng or whatever. Em, I suppose in my experience, where we have problems, OK we've mentioned the Middle East. Some countries would have maybe a BComm qualification em and it might even in some cases only be two years. Some are three years. Again, the applicant may think that it is a direct route into a Masters of Business and in most cases, it's not. Em, so again, you know, you are coming back to say – while you have a Bachelor of Commerce qualification, it doesn't allow entry to the Master of Business let's say. But what we would recommend is you know that it depends on the country. You know, in some countries, the BComm may only be an entry mechanism to undergraduate study and in those cases, there can be a certain degree of upset...

Researcher: OK, yeah, yeah. And have you – I suppose two questions arise from that. Have you em you know – where a qualification is perhaps not mentioned on UK NARIC or if you have other information that you feel it's not correct. One question is, have you come across that and what would you do, and the second question is you have spoken about you know, people coming in and they are obviously disappointed. Have you had, like you know appeals because of that?

Participant 4: Em, I'm just trying to think have we come across a situation where we couldn't get an equivalency em, I don't think so. I think at postgraduate level em...you see our postgraduate studies tend to be like Master of Business, Master of Accounting or in the science or engineering. So very often you know the students applying are from the background, be it like a Bachelor in Computer Science em.

Researcher: So you haven't questioned UK NARIC?

Participant 4: No No. I think I might have had the odd unusual em query and I em a couple of times, I would have sent it to Qualifications Recognition and you have been fairly prompt in coming back. Often we would have an answer within a couple of days, so it's never been an obstacle em. I suppose the only situation is you know where we

have got the feedback that the qualification is not equivalent to our honours level 8 and the student is a little bit upset. Em, in terms of an appeal, em I think that once we provide them with the NARIC statement that usually ends it. Now, I have had a situation where a family member was living in Ireland and working in Ireland and em and paying taxes, and was very upset when they realised that their brother couldn't automatically go to a Master of Business. They wrote a letter to the Registrar's office. I suppose we would consider that to be an appeal. We don't advertise an appeal process em...

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 4:..but by all means if somebody feels...because you know the whole process is a little bit subjective em em. Most of our postgraduate tends to be in sort of technical areas so it's fairly straightforward. So if you were applying for a Masters or a PhD in software engineering, you need a Bachelor in Computer Science or a related discipline. You know, if your Bachelor is even in something like Mechanical Engineering, very often you can't progress to the Masters or PhD and the candidates understand that. So we wouldn't have huge numbers of opportunities whereby you'd have a candidate from let's say an African country applying to do a PhD in something to do with education or your area of research. The universities probably would have a lot more of that, but our postgraduate tends to be in quite technical areas.

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 4: So, in a lot cases the assessment is very straightforward. So when I produce the NARIC equivalency and confirmation that the university is a recognised public university in the home country...for the research applications, there's actually a research committee. So the actual application is discussed and it's made up of academics and a couple of staff from the research office as well, so eh the equivalency statement is taken into account and the background of the student is assessed by a number of people. So my statement and what I provide is not the only factor in the overall assessment of the application...

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 4: ...it's just one part of the process. Em, I suppose it's never happened where I have said, let's say somebody has applied from somewhere like let's say Libya and the qualification is deemed not equivalent to our level 8; it kind of ends there and

then, like that would be brought to the committee and nobody would be making a special case then to take this person on a Masters or PhD because it would end there. The qualification is deemed em not at the same level as let's say an Irish student or anyone who studied within our own system for an Honours Degree. So in terms of appeals or challenges, it would rarely happen em...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 4:...and then I think a lot of students you know from countries where the qualification you know may be considered as not an entry to a postgraduate; they know that as they might have applied to the UK or elsewhere em. Ireland isn't in the top five destinations when you are trying to decide where to go for postgraduate study so in my experience - I know that sounds like a negative thing to say - but we do have a mountain to climb in terms of promoting Ireland as a destination for well undergraduate and postgraduate study. But in my experience em you know, em an applicant for a Masters or a PhD from India may have already applied to a UK or an American university, so they have some feedback already. So, if you are giving them a negative response, it's not a huge surprise to them.

Researcher: OK, OK.

Participant 4: I suppose where we can have challenges is em we like to accept candidates onto Masters programmes who have the equivalent of what we call second class honours degrees, so another challenge can be determining you know sort of em the status or the classification of the degree em. So you know em first class honours in some countries could be something above 60 per cent so really that's second class in our system so...

Researcher: So you present both some information on the grading and the institution and the level?

Participant 4: Yeah yeah. Now obviously where you have the full transcript, there's a GPA stated so that makes it much easier em, but then you know em, in terms of the sort of North American system the GPA system is slightly different to ours. Like their GPAs can be out of 5 or 4 in some cases so we sort of need to have our minimum classification that matches our second class honours. Em so again, when it would go back to the research office for evaluation, let's say we decide the equivalent of a second

class honours degree is 3.75 out of 5, and then you have an application where the person has I don't know 3.7 out of 5...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 4: ...you know, I don't make a call on that. It's up to a committee then you know, and what it might boil down to is maybe they have excellent grades in computer programming languages but they haven't such high grades in let's say a management subject. So when the transcript is assessed, maybe an academic from software engineering will say – 'well I really like the fact that this student has a really high grade in let's say programming language and I'm not so worried that they have a lower grade in a management subject and that has brought down their GPA'. So it's up to the committee at that stage then if the candidate has a slightly...now obviously if you are looking for 3.75 and they've only got 3.5, you know, they may decide then not to proceed, but then if...maybe the person has very relevant work experience and has worked like in a software company for a few years, that might be taken into account.

Researcher: Would that conversation only take place if they had the proper level at the start? Do you know what I mean – or could the work experience be taken into account with perhaps a lower level?

Participant 4: It would only be taken into account where the GPA was under discussion, so let's say the Bachelor degree is deemed not equivalent to level 8, other factors would not be taken into account.

Researcher: It wouldn't even get to that.

Participant 4: No, so we have had applicants applying with what we would deem a pass degree for Masters and they worked for a few years and when they receive their refusal letter, they could ring up and just say 'did you take into account the fact that I have five years work experience' and generally no...if you have a pass degree and we are looking for an honours degree for postgraduate, it doesn't add to your case so unfortunately the application is then rejected.

Researcher: OK, OK and you mentioned that you travelled to India and you're very familiar with the system. Would you then – I suppose this is related to my other question on ever questioning stuff from UK NARIC you know...maybe you haven't come across anything that you felt might be different or...

Participant 4: Well going back to the example of India you know. Like if somebody has a four year Bachelor of Engineering em qualification, it is fairly straightforward. But let's say they have a BComm or a BA. In the Indian system that's generally a three year qualification so if you consult UK NARIC, UK NARIC would deem that as satisfactory for entry to Masters. It would be equivalent to their Bachelor degree level...at honours level in the UK, whereas in our system we actually don't accept three year Bachelor degrees from abroad for entry to Master of Business. So if the person is very disappointed, what we would offer them is a place on our level 8 as a kind of a pre-Masters almost. So we would register them on the final year of the add-on...our degrees tend to be like either three plus one you know, like the ordinary level 7 plus one for the honours.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 4: So, we can offer a place but in the case of the Indians. They are not interested in that idea because after a three year qualification, they can gain entry to Master degrees in other countries like the UK for example.

Researcher: yes. So you don't take them here with a three year...

Participant 4: No we don't em now I know in Ireland, you'd have three year BComm qualifications you know like from the NUI...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 4: ...system, but that's deemed to be an honours degree you know so...on their parchment...it's you know an honours degree but from the Indian system em eh we don't deem that as equivalent, so that can present a challenge.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 4: And again, with some of these three year qualifications, the first year can be very very general em, and we tend to sort of have subjects very much related to the area of study within first year eh so em. And I think as well you know if you are coming for a 1 year taught Masters in particular. You know, it is an academic year. It can be quite tight so you know, you need to give yourself time to adjust to our education system. So we like to be fairly confident that students coming in directly from international markets will be able to cope with the Masters level programme. So I suppose we are a little bit risk averse you know.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 4: Even with China you know their first year can be very general. So you need to be careful about just transferring from a Chinese Bachelor degree in let's say business straight into a one year taught Masters because you know the systems are very different. I'm not saying we don't take them, but it would be very small numbers and usually students with very good grades and a good IELTS score as well.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 4: We want them to do well and succeed on a Masters programme. Now we have quite a few Chinese students on Masters by research and PhDs, but they have come through our own system you know. They have done their Bachelor degree in whatever – science or software engineering here...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 4:...and then when they go on you know to further studies, they do really really well. They are top researchers.

Researcher: OK, OK. You mentioned international markets. So there is a difference in how they are handled because you said people that contact you that might want access to postgraduate that actually live here or are resident, you might send them on to us first but the other ones aren't.

Participant 4: Yeah. Well we actually tend to try and figure out the qualification ourselves. So let's say I get an application in from China or India for a Masters programme. Rather than saying to the student in wherever they are – go off and contact Qualifications Recognition, I tend to do it myself and X [colleague] I think does it as well. He would send you an email if he had an unusual em qualification in that he wasn't very familiar with, so we more or less take it upon ourselves to do it. Now we wouldn't be receiving huge volumes of applications. Maybe if we were, I'm sure in some of the Universities like X, they probably put the onus back on the applicant to provide that information to them em. The nationalities who are resident in Ireland seem to be very familiar with the Qualifications Recognition process. I think some of that as I mentioned goes back to the promotional campaign you launched. But then within let's say the Polish or Lithuanian communities for example, they are helping each other and you know if they want to access higher education, they are talking to friends who might

already be studying in a university or IoT and they say well actually, I contacted Qualifications Recognition before I ever apply to X or X or wherever it is, so they seem to know about the service and are using it.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 4: So very often when you get an application from somebody who is resident in Ireland, they are sending in with that. But if it's missing, we actually ask them to go and provide us with that information.

Researcher: OK and are you like actively targeting...does X actively target both the international markets and people that are living here or...

Participant 4: Em, I suppose from the international markets point of view we tend to participate in Enterprise Ireland led education missions, or if there was a...for example, the Minister of Education is gone out to China. So if there was something with an education theme, we'd participant in that event. So you could be at an education exhibition in a big hall or if the Minister for Education was going to China, he might be hosting a breakfast meeting or something in Beijing, and you are allowed invite maybe a university partner to that so from that point of view, we would follow the lead of Enterprise Ireland in terms of key markets. They have actually identified priority markets in Asia – obviously China would be the main one. India is a significant one as well, so we follow the Enterprise Ireland strategy in that regard. In terms of Ireland, I suppose we wouldn't really differentiate between Irish and sort of non – Irish who are resident you know. We do our own sort of general promotion. We have our own marketing office here so em you know, everyone applying is more or less applying on an even level. So if you are let's say Polish and you want to apply for a Masters, everything goes in through – if it's a taught Masters – through the admissions office. Generally those applications would come with a statement from Qualifications Recognition. They have it already done. If it's not there, we ask them to provide it so we would actually wait you know. Let's say the closing date was the 1st of June and you know the information or the application comes in without that, we would just say, 'can you provide it to us?'

Researcher: Yeah yeah.

Participant 4:...and usually they you know come up with it within two or three weeks of the request.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 4: In terms of the research office then, they only have a particular number of vacancies and they advertise them at a particular time of the year for example May. Now they just finished a recruitment period, so they would have got a small number of applications from abroad, but a significant number from either Irish or non-EU nationals who were studying in the Irish system of education for Masters or PhDs by research and they are all treated the same.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 4: So I wouldn't necessarily be involved if somebody is let's say is Chinese or Indian and they have their Bachelor degree in computer science from X Institute of Technology. Then the research office wouldn't contact me, whereas if the application was being sent directly from India and it is a transcript eh with a Bachelor from an Indian university, then they would contact me to become involved in the process that they engage in.

Researcher: OK, OK, so for the taught programmes then, the admissions office makes the decision?

Participant 4: Yes, yes, admissions and it's not just the admissions officer. It would be...the head of departments are involved so they would be called in. Now, if there was a query or something, yeah I would be consulted, but the admissions officer herself is very familiar over the years with the system, and very often they would ask the candidate then to provide the Qualifications Recognition statement.

Researcher: And would you Participant 4 have any opportunity at any of these events, say even Enterprise Ireland or any other events, to liaise with other Irish institutions on this topic or...?

Participant 4: Oh yes, especially if you are going into a new market. You know, the universities for example would have been in the States for a number of years. I remember going to em the US many years ago and not being entirely familiar with the whole you know credit system, and eh you know study abroad. So a lot of the Americans just want to come here for credit and bring it home with them for recognition, so I wasn't overly familiar eh with that system. But then colleagues from X [university] who had been active in the U.S. for a number of years, gave me a little

crash course over a cup of coffee (smiles) at the break, and I kinda did my own research then when I came back. I suppose I am more likely to contact you if I sort of an unusual...somebody from Uzbekistan...you know, I might send that to you (smiles). I remember sending one. I can't remember what country it was, but it was an unusual one and I don't know if it was you but whoever I contacted...it was a few years ago but they actually had to get in touch with their counterpart who has a similar role in that particular country, so a lot of countries have their own Qualifications Recognition. So I suppose the process might have taken maybe two to three weeks as opposed to two to three days em because of that requirement and then you know, I got the statement back from Qualifications Recognition so I suppose I'm fairly familiar. A lot of our applications are from the countries that I have travelled to but where a different one comes in, yeah, it's just in my head, 'I'll contact Qualifications Recognition and get some help on this'.

Researcher: OK, OK, OK.

Participant 4: Do you do that statement of recognition for universities like I mentioned with the UK...I've never actually consulted you on that...

Researcher: Eh, as in the statement that we provide...do we do that...

Participant 4:...for a university as well? Just to say, let's say...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I suppose who our service mainly ends up accommodating is individuals who want to access non-regulated professions in Ireland. But we also act as a I suppose a referral point for those that obviously want to access professional recognition because they have to go to a competent body. Whether it be the Medical Council or Teaching Council or whatever. But increasingly I suppose, we have very good relationships with kind of individuals in institutions. So often individuals would just send off an email saying this is just what I got in; I'm not that familiar with it and we either maybe you know have seen it before, and have the information on hand or as you say, we are part of a bigger network of these centres around the world. So we can send off an email and hopefully get the response back as quickly as possible. Because each of these centres in different parts of the world; they have slightly different functions in the sense that some of our colleagues...all higher education institutions...say for example, our colleagues in the Netherlands – you know all of the higher education applications actually go through them em because the institutions send them in. Like it's

different here obviously. Well we do get people obviously that are wanting to access you know X or wherever it might be and we give them the statement first eh. Similarly for the professional bodies. Some professional bodies ask people to come to us first for the statement, and they then proceed with their own procedure. Em, so I suppose increasingly we are dealing with more and more em requests from educational institutions. And it's probably a reflection of you know increasing international students and wanting to attract those and everything else. And I suppose em what's important to me really is information sharing across the country because its...I feel anyway that the more information that we can share well, then the less time it's going to take to kind of get through this, and I suppose that we might have some level of consistency across the country you know.

Participant 4: Yeah, yeah. I mentioned that X deals with the European applications. I think it's easier to have a consistent approach with the European applications, with the Bologna Framework and all of that em. Whereas some of the non-EU qualifications then can be a little, I suppose more challenging, and can take more time to get the right assessment of where the qualification maps to the Irish Framework.

Researcher: OK, OK and do you find that difficulty because they are not on UK NARIC or...

Participant 4: em...eh I don't with Bachelor degrees generally, but where I find it is with some sort of a Diploma.

Researcher:...that they are presenting...

Participant 4: Yeah, and some students will present a diploma for entry to postgraduate you know and I don't like to just give a straightforward no you know. Like once you see Diploma in the title you know it's not equivalent, but yet you want to get the information so it can take a little bit more time. I can remember a couple of years ago seeing a Diploma from a TV university in China and trying to work out what this was, but basically it is a diploma gained through part-time study you know. It might be somebody who is working or in some cases, it could be a full-time Diploma but I remember the first time I saw the transcript wondering you know – a TV University – what is that you know?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 4: So just thinking back to sort of the more challenging ones...of course, that would not be an entry mechanism to a postgraduate programme, but then you'd like to give some level of feedback. While it mightn't be entry to a postgraduate, but maybe can allow access to further studies - be it a year or two of a Bachelor degree or something like that. So you know I do like to give some response, not just a regret we cannot offer you a place on the Masters programme. It's nice to be able to say... and in some cases, the candidate has an idea you know, and in some cases they will accept the lower level access route you know, because you are mapping out a pathway to postgraduate studies eventually within the Irish system.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, OK.

Participant 4: So like in that case you know, I think those TV universities - those graduates may not gain immediate access either to a postgraduate diploma or a postgraduate course in China. So they've a fairly good idea you know when you say 'well I'm sorry you haven't been offered a place on the Masters however, if you wish to consider an offer for year two or something of an undergraduate programme'. And you know, in some cases, they could be interested because they know themselves in their own system, they wouldn't be gaining direct access to a postgraduate qualification.

Researcher: Yes. You mentioned earlier that you kind of well, it wasn't your exact words, but you kind of err on the side of caution in terms of progression with some awards in terms of postgraduate. Is there a particular concern that you have? You know, if somebody got on a programme, you know what I mean?

Participant 4: Eell eh, one year taught Masters tends to be in quite technical areas, like, we have a Masters in X so you need to be a graduate from a sort of bioscience background to be able to cope because it's quite specialised. So you know if you were to take a candidate who had studied for example botany. While they may be eligible, you know they might have an excellent classification in their degree, but have they got enough core subjects in their prior undergraduate qualification to be able to cope with a very specialised Masters programme? So in those cases, we tend to give priority to students who have a much closer match between their core Bachelor and the Masters that they are applying for. Similarly, you know in software engineering, if you had somebody who had totally concentrated on hardware throughout their Bachelor degree and suddenly they want to change towards a Master in software. You know, that could

be too great a leap you know, to focus on software after spending all of your undergraduate studies at a sort of more electronics or hardware level.

Researcher: OK, OK.

Participant 4: So, we prefer to have a closer match in the discipline.

Researcher: OK, you mentioned also the Bologna process. So this is a policy that is impacting on your work. Are there any other policies that you feel impacts on your work?

Participant 4: The HEA would kinda keep us up to date. We are an Erasmus institution, so if there is any sort of changes em or you know, you'd be invited to workshops, so that's fairly straightforward. I suppose policies from government departments in Ireland can affect our... even our application numbers. What I mean by that is em changes to maybe immigration policies, visa processing times em possibly. I'm going beyond what you had in mind by mentioning those areas...

Researcher: No. No.

Participant 4:...but like you know, if you participate in an Enterprise Ireland em education or trade mission to a particular country, and you know the Department of Justice now has visa offices in certain countries like China and India which is wonderful. And they make the decision within you know a few weeks of the student applying, but then if you go to other countries where all the applications have to go back to Dublin for a decision, em that can be time-consuming, and students you know can get...maybe even tired. They might have applied to the UK or a few other countries and they might decide then not to...even if you produce an offer letter. Like for postgraduate study you know, from the time of admission, it does take us about two weeks to turn it around. And for certain courses, like the Master of Business, there's an interview so we usually arrange it by Skype, but then that has to be all tied up with time differences...I suppose a lot of the applications would be from Asian countries so we can interview them in the morning in Ireland and them at home in the evenings. It's not a huge challenge, but I suppose our admissions processing time for postgraduate would be two weeks em and then if the student then has to apply for a visa, that can be you know another maybe four , five, six weeks depending on whether there is a visa office in the country they are applying to. So sometimes students lose heart and don't want to wait that long so you lose the student. So that can be disappointing, particularly if you visited

the country and you have met them at an education fair and you know they would be a good candidate. They have met the requirement in terms of an English language result. So that can be a little bit disheartening so no matter what you do, sometimes there's other constraints..

Researcher: Yes of course.

Participant 4:...that are a little bit beyond your control but em eh there is a new working group you know Education Ireland spearheaded. So they are trying to have a coordinated policy amongst government departments. So there is somebody from the Department of Justice on it. There is somebody from the Department of Tourism. So if we are out promoting Ireland as a destination for education, that we are kind of having a joined up thinking, and that services are there to help to make the decision that Ireland would be a good place to study.

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 4: So sometimes, you know just X going out on its own to a market won't work, whereas if we are going out in a group of higher education institutions with the you know Education Ireland brand behind us...

Researcher: So that's a new group or...

Participant 4: Yeah. It's led by Enterprise Ireland so they would go to particular countries promoting...you know the way you would have Education UK, or you'd have Edu France. So they are going out now with Education Ireland. I think they are calling it Education in Ireland eh which is a little bit of a mouthful. I think Education Ireland sounds better, em and they have kind of given the website an overhaul; so it's kind of like a one-stop shop. If you are in let's say China or India and you are thinking about study abroad you know, Education In Ireland might be one of the websites that you'll visit, so they are trying to present a one-stop shop you know. How do you apply for a course in computer science in Ireland? How do you apply for a visa? So all that information is there...

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 4: ...which is good but then you know, if the visa is going to take 8 weeks, well then – no, you're not going to come to Ireland...

Researcher: Yes. I understand.

Participant 4:...so that can be a little bit disheartening.

Researcher: OK, OK. Em, I think that is it for me. We are on about 45 minutes there. Is there anything else that you would like to add Participant 4?

Participant 4: I suppose we have focused on postgraduate. I would use the CAO website for undergraduate you know...they have their own...

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 4:... so I find that useful in terms of em first year applications, so basically it is either yourselves or the CAO website and for postgraduate, yeah UK NARIC. Those would be the main databases that I would consult.

Researcher: So you are not familiar with our database?

Participant 4: No – I haven't used it for the university listings, no.

Researcher: Well no – the university listings are not there em, but there are comparabilities that we em have on the website.

Participant 4: So let's say I get an email in from you know an applicant applying and they are from the University of X in India and I wanted to check out if it's recognised - would I have to send you an email?

Researcher: Yes, you would have to send us an email.

Participant 4: What I like about the UK NARIC is that I can go in myself straight away and it's just there, and it comes up, and I just put it in and it comes up on a big list. You know – public institution. There is another listing of private, and I have it straight away, and I actually print that out and I send it to the postgraduate office. They like to have it as well and it's all kind of in a printable format under NARIC and...

Researcher: Perfect.

Participant 4:...so yeah if there is anything complicated, I have been known to send a few emails and X [colleague] is definitely using you.

Researcher: Yes yes. I have been back and forth with X a few times so...sorry I interrupted you. I think you were going to say something else.

Participant 4: Oh no. I was just thinking because I was trying to gather my thoughts yesterday evening about you know...you kind of engage in the steps in a sort of robotic mode. I have been doing the job now 13 years so I was kinda trying to kind of different databases that I do access, but I do know in the very early days of Qualifications Recognition, I probably did contact you a lot more. You build up your own knowledge from contacting you and em but then if it is postgraduate, you have to have your statement of recognition. You used to provide a letter but everything is email now...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Participant 4:...so em those would be the main databases.

Researcher: OK, OK. Thank you very much.

Participant 4: That's everything.

Researcher: Thanks once again for all your time.

Participant 4: Not at all Researcher and best of luck with your thesis.

Researcher: Thank you.

Participant 5

Researcher: OK Participant 5, you are being recorded there now.

Participant 5: OK.

Researcher: OK. Thanks Participant 5. Just for the tape, I am speaking to Participant 5, Head of School of X at X. OK Participant 5. So, I have explained briefly what the study is about and I've also sent on the participant information sheet. Basically, Participant 5, I just wanted to talk loosely about your impression or your feelings or perspectives on eh international credential evaluation. So basically, where an individual with a qualification from outside of the State presents with their qualification eh for access to either you know a taught postgraduate or research postgraduate programme. You know, what the procedure is or what tools are used etc etc.

Participant 5: Well, I'll try and get some of this as it comes to mind...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 5:...I think in the first case is we get people that really fall into two categories which is em people that are coming from Europe within the EEC [European Economic Community], and then people outside of that em. The people that are inside the EC, we have the ECTS em credit scheme...European Credit Transfer System and therefore, anybody coming from any institutions within that sector will have ECTS or ECTS equivalent.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5: This allows us determine the number of credits. We then can ask them about the nature of the modules, if we needed to find out that they had X amount of credit specialised in a particular area to get onto a Masters or postgraduate course em. So that's the first port of call. The second area then is to do with the international students that are outside the EC and in those cases there Researcher [researcher's name] we wouldn't have been able to evaluate the qualification ourselves, so what we did do was to defer them to your Qualifications Recognition.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 5: Em. I think that might have had a slightly different name a couple of years ago. Maybe it was the NQAI at the time, and I would have got letters then from

students, particularly students that were coming from eh probably round the Middle-East direction or Africa or Asia, where we wouldn't have been very familiar with them at all. We would send their qualifications and then I would get a letter back eh from the student saying that the NQAI who might have been the scribe at the time, saying that this award is at such and such a level...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 5:...and then based on that then you would look into the award to find out - well have they X amount of credits in accounting or X amount of credits in marketing or whatever that area was, that they had enough specialisation done.

Researcher: And Participant 5, would you question that information coming from ourselves or?

Participant 5: No – I wouldn't really. I mean, em, because all it's really is saying is...it's telling me is it a level 8 or a level 7 right...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 5:...or is it worth the paper it's written on right? Those sorts of things and then the next stage...I mean that's all it really says on the one-pager.

Researcher: Yeah,

Participant 5: Eh, it's up to me to look at that in greater detail or to ask the student for greater information. In some cases too, if I had question marks, I would eh try to phone the actual institution itself...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 5:...eh and make contact with them, and ask for their academic registrar if I needed further information.

Researcher: OK, OK, OK and would you em...would you get students appealing maybe if you went back to them and said 'well, you know, such and such is not considered comparable'. Would you have any students coming then...

Participant 5: No – never really.

Researcher: Oh right, OK.

Participant 5: I mean no, never really got that much. In fact, never, because it doesn't come to mind so for students outside the EC, I would have deferred them to the NQAI at the time. They would have produced a one-pager then to say it's a level 7 or level 8 or level 6, or whatever level it was at...I needed a level 8 and em, I needed to know it was an honours degree etc etc and it was up to me then to do another level of analysis on top of that, as I say - how many credits they had in different areas.

Researcher: OK, so you would only send them if was non-EU, not...

Participant 5: Yeah, I mean because if it was EU then we are all affiliated with the ECTS right.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 5: So I know how many credits the student has then and like...like if you look at the UK right. If I get an award from the UK...like we actually do joint awards and collaborative awards with an institution in the UK...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 5:...and we would have found out that our Masters would have been 90 credits and when they added up then they had 180 credits...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 5:...but their ECTS is 90 credits, the same as our 90 right, so once you have the ECTS equivalent em you know how many credits the student had in their degree – was it 180 or 240 etc etc.

Researcher: But how would that give the level?

Participant 5: Well also, you would see...you would ask them for the levels like, I mean, you would know...you would know on the qualification if it was telling you it was an honours degree or not and if it wasn't clear from that there...because the UK system, we would be very familiar with...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5...right and there is actually another document that we defer to...I'm just trying to find it there...was it Qualifications...

Researcher: Qualifications can Cross Boundaries?

Participant 5:...Can Cross Boundaries. That's it right...and that does the UK, Scotland, Wales; one that's agreed between us and Northern Ireland as well. That was a great framework for that. If it was outside that again, if it was France or Germany or somewhere, again, I get the ECTS equivalent which they would have, and then I would defer to our international office here in the Institute. And they would ring them up and obviously get assurances in terms of 'was this degree an honours degree' or a level 7 or level 8 etc etc and our international office deals with all our Erasmus programmes...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...so they are quite familiar with the different education systems in France, Germany, Spain or around that area and also because we're placing the students and they need to be at the right level so that works out OK.

Researcher: OK, OK. Is there consistency then across the institution do you think in the use of resources or..?

Participant 5: I couldn't answer that question now...I mean it's not that I couldn't answer it, I can't. I don't know. All I can tell you is to do within the school, that's the general model and it seems to work. I mean, we haven't had any hiccups Researcher. Now, is that documented? – No. Is that in my head? – Yes. Should we document it? – Yes. As a new head of school is that something I'm probably going to do after talking to you – Yes. That I'll put down a kind of a flowchart – guidelines in terms of how we should address this from a school so that we are consistent about it.

Researcher: Yeah. I understand. So the schools at X are responsible for their own postgraduate admission?

Participant 5: No – I mean postgraduate admissions go through the admissions offices of the institute right? However, that is how they are processed from a paper perspective so they come into admissions; from admissions then, they go out to the school; the school will then have to decide whether the person is at the right level to get onto the course

Researcher: OK – is that for taught and research Participant 5?

Participant 5: Eh, my experience is really only on the taught. We do do research Masters but to date they have all been eh Irish students.

Researcher: OK, OK, OK eh

Participant 5: I mean if it's a research masters, well we have to send off a special registration form to QQI where we put down the qualifications of the student, the nature of the research proposal and also who the supervisors are as well and their CVs...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 5:...so there is another level on that before we would get a student admitted or registered

Researcher: Yeah. I understand. I understand. And em do you do interviews for the taught programmes?

Participant 5: Yes.

Researcher: I'm just wondering...

Participant 5: Other institutes don't for example Researcher. I mean here...you know very close to us, we have a University in X and em and they just...if the student fills the qualification, they're on the course, the Masters course, right? We tried that here one year because maybe we thought that we are putting more resources into this than we needed to but in actual fact we now...if you are a 2.1 and above, you are not interviewed; if you're less than a 2.1, you are interviewed. Everyone's interviewed.

Researcher:...and what if a...Participant 5, somebody presented with a qualification that was deemed to be level 7 – is it just cut off right there or would they be interviewed or?

Participant 5: Well, if it is a level 7 we also have a well-developed RPL policy – recognition for prior learning and eh, if the person was a post experience as opposed to pre-experience, then we might say there is a possibility that this student or applicant may have achieved significant learning – accredited or unaccredited em through their work experience, and we would look to see if that could make up the difference.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 5: Now, in terms of the schools here, we put through the most amount of RPL in the Institute goes through this school.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 5: We are very well advanced on that area. Our whole learning philosophy is a parity of esteem between academic knowledge and practical wisdom, and therefore experience counts in terms of transformative learning in terms of developing students, but also in terms of getting access onto the courses as well.

Researcher: Yeah, OK, OK.

Participant 5: So if someone had a level 7, you...you would take it into consideration. Does that happen very often for the postgraduate courses – No...

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 5:...because they are very specialised areas. You are looking for someone to get into you know a specialised Masters in accounting you know. You really need to have the core prerequisite knowledge covered to get on.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. I understand yeah. OK em so are there policies then that you feel impact on your work in this area?

Participant 5: Well, we have an RPL policy to do with RPL. That's a well-developed policy that we have here. It's been hugely successful to date. I would say everyone who has been RPL'd in the school in terms of getting onto programmes, and that there has been a shining success in terms of completing the programme...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...so that's a policy. The other documents that we defer to obviously are the ECTS framework and how that works, the sectoral agreement...sectoral national agreement which is Qualifications can Cross Boundaries.

Researcher: Yeah, OK.

Participant 5: We use that there. Is there any other ones that come to your mind

Researcher?

Researcher: Well I mean, are there international ones, or they are all national or is there any kind of institutional ones that impact on you?

Participant 5: Eh...institutional ones...eh...you know unless we did you know due diligence somewhere and looked into a particular institution and their qualifications eh...we may have equivalence that we made sense of, but that hasn't really come across my desk.

Researcher: Hmmm, and would a lot of the students presenting then with qualifications from outside the State be ones from the UK?

Participant 5: Northern Ireland.

Researcher: Right. Northern Ireland. Yeah.

Participant 5: You know, we've got a few Middle East eh...eh Africa...that part of the Continent there onto the accounting programme, but they weren't successful because they just hadn't enough credit.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 5: They might have had a level 8 right? And the NQAI OK'd it as a level 8, but when I might have looked into it in greater detail, I might have found out that they hadn't specialised enough in financial accounting or they hadn't specialised enough in some other area.

Researcher: OK, so this is em you looked at it and said 'I don't think the person could successfully like participate in the programme say based on their undergraduate.

Participant 5: Yeah, yeah - based on the level of specialisation that's in it Researcher.

Researcher: OK and that...

Participant 5: That would be the same too for a student say from Northern Ireland. We might get a level 8 student in business or a level 8 student in business and accounting from Northern Ireland and when we would go in and look at it, we might say you know, you are very short on auditing, or you are very short in whatever it is because our Masters in accounting is built for our students...

Researcher: Yes. I know what you mean.

Participant 5:...it's not but it is in the main...I mean like we have a high level of specialisation in our accounting undergraduate degree, so you know other students coming in mightn't have that.

Researcher: Hmm. OK, OK. Em, I am just wondering if there is anything else there. Yeah, so the ECTS would be very important in terms of the specialisation really.

Participant 5: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. I don't think necessarily there's anything else. I mean, you have given me an overview there. One of the other things that strikes me is how do you get these in? Are they from students actively recruited or?

Participant 5: Well you see, you know, you have to take in our geography as well so we are on the X of Ireland so it's not like we're Dublin eh, so you know the number of international students that we get is on the low side of things.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 5: When I say international, I'd be talking about outside of Europe but the number of students that we would get from Europe applying to postgrads is low too. Our highest area would be from Northern Ireland...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...that's to do with geography...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 5:...so the Qualifications can Cross Boundaries...if you were asking me about a document I'd defer to, it's that framework...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. I can understand that with your geography and everything.

Participant 5:...and the other thing that we use then is our own institute policy on RPL.

Researcher: OK, OK and do you feel you know, is there any support that could be given to you for doing this work or...?

Participant 5: Well, you see, I think we're doing OK.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5: You know, em, but if we got an awful lot more non-EC international students – suppose that was happening a lot more, you know, they take time. They take time after you get the NQAI to come back and tell you it's at level 8 and it's at this

standard. It takes time then to make sense of the actual modules and the credits at level of specialisation, so if we got an awful lot more of them it would be more challenging. They are not dealt with any different to the overarching process which is; are you level 8? Have you got the number of credits specialisation? And you know, where did you come in the pecking order then in terms of us offering places in round one and round two, that kind of way.

Researcher: Hmm. Yeah. Right. OK. At what stage would you do an RPL then maybe or...you know, if they have significant experience or something like that?

Participant 5: How do you mean what stage?

Researcher: Em, say if em, you had a lot of applications for a particular programme and you know there was em one or two level 7s or whatever. Would it be automatically offered to them, this RPL or...?

Participant 5: Well, you would mention it to them...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...there's a significant amount of work in it. RPL is you know, not a free pass or anything. You have to prepare a portfolio. We design the portfolio to match up against the level 8 descriptors. They have to put the portfolio together which is a combination of maybe unaccredited training that they got, other accredited training that they got on courses, and experiential learning. And then after the portfolio is put together, we also interview them. So there is a lot of work in that so you would just suggest to them; look there is a possibility of this if you want to pursue that. They have to pay a fee as well to get that and we give them the policy and we explain it to them.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. OK. Yeah. It's definitely not an easy option as you say.

Participant 5: No, it's not. I mean, the one good thing about it though is Researcher is that I would say sometimes. You have people that would like to do a course right eh and you know, they haven't got the level 8 right. It doesn't happen very often...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...but what the RPL process gives them because they have completed it successfully is confidence...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...because they actually find out then – hold on a minute. I actually knew far more than I thought I knew...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 5:...you know, so we find the RPL process on one hand robust in terms of the people that are successful on it do successful on the courses, but also we find out that it's pervasiveness in terms of its examination of the learning accumulated by the learner, and the work they have to put into that is actually a confidence builder for the student...

Researcher: Absolutely.

Participant 5:...but for us, they have to do a fair bit of work. I mean, you know, it's not something you can do in a couple of weeks.

Researcher: No, No.

Participant 5: You know, there's a fair bit of work to do in it...

Researcher: Hmm. OK.

Participant 5:...and we would have an RPL officer that would work to help them and support them in putting together a portfolio. But for some people, I'd say you know, if you're working and you're trying to do this; this might take you a couple of months.

Researcher: Wow. Yeah. It's a lot.

Participant 5: Well, and if they're not doing anything, then you know, you are full time at it like putting it together but it takes time.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely.

Participant 5: And they are interviewed as well Researcher

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 5: So the portfolio has to match against the level 8 descriptors right, but on top of that they have to be interviewed as well.

Researcher: OK, OK. I think...

Participant 5: And then, you are evaluating also the currency of the qualification. How long ago did they get them.

Researcher: Does that have a bearing on the...

Participant 5: Yes, yes. All of that has a bearing on it. If you had a qualification that was over ten years old, we might decide to...that you know we are not just RPL'ing you for the difference between a level 7 and a level 8. We might be RPL'ing you all the way up to the level 8...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 5:...particularly if it was something like to do in accounting. Like you know, I mean, the basic accounting stuff, yeah but when you go into financial accounting which is to do with the FRS standards [Financial Reporting Standards] and all that sort of stuff, currency is important...

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 5:...you could be letting a student onto a Masters course and they could just be swamped because they are just so out of date.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 5: There are a lot of issues that you take into consideration really, but it's a very very robust process that we use here.

Researcher: Well, it could be very difficult for international students then if...are these FRS...I have heard of them but are they kind of international or...?

Participant 5: Yeah, absolutely. That has all gone to international standards.

Researcher: OK, so it mightn't be as difficult then. Participant 5, I think we have covered really what....I mean you have given me details on what the process is and what you do really so unless you have additional questions for me?

Participant 5: I suppose I , but not to do with the interview really. If you have picked up on anything that you could tell me that would be a help or greater support to what we are doing here, it's all greatly appreciated because there is nowhere Researcher that, you know, I can hit a website and here's a...a flowchart of best practice of what to do. This is something we are learning by doing and this is how we do it now...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 5:...you know, if there is anything else we should be deferring to document wise or policy wise - happy to hear it.

Researcher: OK and just another question that arises from that. Do you liaise with other people internally then or...do you know what I mean as head of the school, are you just responsible for this by yourself?

Participant 5: Well, I mean I would get help from admissions as well you know...

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 5:...they might be more familiar with this and I get help from the international office too. So you are not just on your own and you'd get help from the Registrar too you know...if you just said 'look, I need a steer on this one'. It's come...you know sometimes we get a lot of stuff there more recently, it's come in from Zambia or somewhere like that there you know.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. Well maybe I'll em stop the recording and then I'll indicate how we might be able to assist maybe?

Participant 5: Yeah, so we're moving from describing to prescribing (laughing). It's like being on a doctor's chair...help me now Researcher (laughs).

Researcher: I don't know if I can, but just a minute Participant 5 until I turn this off.
Thanks.

Participant 6

Researcher: [Following initial greetings] I had sent you the participant sheet.

Participant 6: Yes.

Researcher: I suppose really you know what I am doing the study on but em...I really wanted to talk I suppose about your own role in terms of...you said you looked after the non-EU. You look after the undergraduate and postgraduate?

Participant 6: I do yeah...for the taught postgraduate programmes.

Researcher: For the taught ones. Yeah, yeah OK. I suppose it's just really a chat about what you do when you get them in or something about your role really I suppose to get started.

Participant 6: OK. Sure. So, basically, what I do is I look after admissions for all of the non-EU applicants to undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6: So my daily role would be em processing their applications. For our postgraduate programmes, students apply online...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 6:...em and our undergraduate students then submit their application directly to me em. Do you want me to go through the application process for both of them?

Researcher: I suppose just how they get to you, or who you might send them on to or...

Participant 6: Yeah. Sure. So, our undergraduate students; the majority of them would normally apply through an education agent. So we would work closely with a number of education agents em around the world especially in countries such as China, India, Russia, Malaysia. So they normally directly send the application to myself...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...or we do receive direct applications from students as well.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6: For the undergraduate students, I make the decision on their application. So I decide whether or not they're going to get an offer or rejected em or whether they are eligible for entry to a programme. Once I have...I write up a recommendation on their file so I check their qualifications. I check the standard of their highest qualification. So we would have our own internal document on the admissions requirements for each country that I look after. I would kind of update and have entry scores and that for each country, but we would also then also refer to NARIC which would be our main admissions database...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...em and then once the offer is prepared; for undergraduate students it's the director of admissions who would sign off on those offer letters. She would have the final say.

Researcher: OK, OK and do...I suppose em, is that the same for postgraduate?

Participant 6: Postgrad is a little bit different. Postgrad - we liaise with the course leader of the programme so for postgrad; once we transfer...once a student applies online – what we have to do then is transfer that application on to our student system so that it is live. And the moment that we do that, the course leader can see it so we do that every morning. We transfer any applications em from the night before and what I do then, is I look at the application. Again, I process it using UK NARIC and using our own admissions documents internally, and then I recommend whether the student should be offered or...if the student has nowhere near the minimum requirements for the programme, for example, if they don't have a level 8 degree, and they don't show any previous experience in the area, normally, we would...they would not be successful, and it doesn't go to the course leader for review so it stops there. But if the student is borderline or em may satisfy RPL requirements...if there is any inkling that the student should get em an offer, or should be reviewed by the course leader, then I then notify the course leader that the file is ready for review. And what they do is they read down through my recommendation, which would be a summary on everything that the student has presented em and then they will make a decision.

Researcher: OK, OK and is the em...in terms of what you might present to a course leader, is it mainly information on the actual credential that they are em presenting or?

Participant 6: Mainly, but it's really everything to be honest with you. It can depend on the programme. I tend to report on everything the student has presented to me so if they also have a CV, I'll bring that to the course leader's attention, or if their degree is a few years old, I'll look for what they've been doing since and I'll report on that also. So it's really to give the course leader you know a broad overview of everything the student has, so that they don't make the decision solely on for example the student's credentials. And then for some programmes, you know, their degree may not carry as much weight as for other programmes...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6:...and the course leader may look at the applications you know from a more holistic focus looking at their work experience and that, and I will be aware of those programmes. So it really depends on which programme they are applying for and what I know the course leader normally looks at.

Researcher: And what's an example of a programme where the credential mightn't be as important?

Participant 6: Em, for example with X studies. The course leader really looks for a student's experience in that area so they may not necessarily hold a level 8 degree...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...but they may have several years work experience or voluntary experience in that area...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...or demonstrate an interest by writing you know a very strong supporting statement for application to that programme. X would be another programme em so for those I would never not show the application to the course leader. And then for other programmes, it's very clear for example, mechanical engineering; the student would have to demonstrate a very strong degree in mechanical engineering from a very highly ranked university with very good grades em so it really depends.

Researcher: Is that because it is very competitive as well or...?

Participant 6: Very competitive yeah absolutely yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, OK. You mentioned older qualifications there that you might bring to the attention of the course leader - that they were older or what do you feel about those?

Participant 6: No, not that I would bring it to the attention of the course leader. But what I would do is if a student's degree is a few years old, I would want to know 'well what have they been doing since then' because I know the course leader will want to know that also, and more often than not, it will support their application. Because more often than not, it means they have been working for several years hopefully in a related industry, so I always would ask a student in that situation to give me in a CV or supporting statement just outlining what they have been doing since that time.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, yeah. OK, OK. So you mentioned NARIC as one of the major I suppose em information sources. Is that the only one or do you use something else?

Participant 6: That would be the main one to be honest with you. That is the system that was approved by both of the admissions offices here – undergrad and the graduate school so it's therefore the one that I have to use as well. I facilitate the applications – the non-EU applications for both of the admissions offices, but they would have the last word on for example on what databases we use and what is approved and what's not approved. So it is mainly UK NARIC, but I would also consult the other Irish universities if I came across a country that I hadn't had much experience in...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6:...em, I would always contact other universities, and see if they have seen applications from that country and what would their minimum requirements be because it tends to be em...normally we would like to make a decision that it is line with the rest of the Irish universities...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...so we would tend to consult them quite a lot as well if we come across anything unusual.

Researcher: Great, great...is there em...you know say if you looked up NARIC, have there been any instances where you don't agree with it or you thought it wasn't fair or...

Participant 6: No to be honest. The majority of the time, it is quite fair. I have come across instances where a student would have their qualifications assessed by the NQAI for example, and the NQAI tends to put it at a higher level than UK NARIC would put it...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 6:...which can cause problems for us but we have to go with what NARIC says. Now, we would normally draw it to the attention of the course leader and leave them have the final decision on it but that can cause problems. It tends to be...my impression is that perhaps the NQAI are a little bit more lenient with the student's qualifications, I don't know...that would be my impression...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 6:...I think NARIC most of the time is quite accurate.

Researcher: OK, OK. Would you maybe deal with the student that was not happy with a decision or...would they appeal a decision or...?

Participant 6: Yeah normally when they appeal the decision, they would come to me. And then I would look into their file and I would liaise with the course leader and for example, if it was the...if it was an undergraduate applicant, I would always defer to the director of admissions as well just to get her say on it...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...and em you know, if it really is a contentious issue, then we would definitely also consult other Irish universities to see what their minimum requirements is for that country and really go from there. If it is a postgraduate student, I would tend to involve the course leader in it and see if there is anything at all we can do.

Researcher: So, they would be appealing...am I right in that they would be appealing the credential evaluation maybe?

Participant 6: Not necessarily because we don't tend to give that out, but what I would say to the student is that they didn't meet the minimum requirements...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6:...and that, and then if they really push it, I will give them information 'well your degree wasn't equivalent to a level 8' etc but it does tend to cause a little bit of confusion. If they are from another country, they don't know what that is...

Researcher: Of course.

Participant 6:...and it can just make everything worse, so what I tend to do is if they are appealing is just to let them know the decision that was made on their file, and give them as much information in terms of the course leader's decision as possible - if it was the course leader's decision, or if it was my own em and then go from there. If they are still looking for information, then I would then liaise with faculty on it.

Researcher: OK, so you provide I suppose a recommendation file for the course leader and have there been instances when they came back and maybe questioned a comparability, or did they look at NARIC themselves maybe or...?

Participant 6: Yeah, they question it all the time (laughs).

Researcher: Oh right. OK.

Participant 6: They question it quite a lot but in terms of 'Oh, I wasn't aware of that. I didn't know'...they may not have seen a qualification from that particular country before, and are surprised that it's not equivalent to level 8 and more often than not, they're just coming back to say 'OK, look this student was in touch with me. Can you just let me know was it not equivalent and what would it normally be equivalent to and what do you use' and normally that's it really. They're just not em...they're not up to scratch with the systems we're using or with that particular country, so that's normally what it is in relation to.

Researcher: OK, OK and presumably then you're building up a database of maybe decisions then or...

Participant 6: Yeah exactly. So every decision we make on the students' file is recorded on their student record, and they can submit as many applications on top of that as they wish em. Their previous decisions will be seen and then every time the course leader makes a decision on their file as well, that's also recorded.

Researcher: Is that just a 'yes' or a 'no' or how it was compared?

Participant 6: No, they have their dropdown where they choose you know whether it's going to be an offer or a reject or whatever, and then there's a notes field directly underneath that where they're prompted to put in their feedback. It's really vital that we get that because the students do tend to ask for that so...it helps if we can give a rounded explanation with the letter as to why they weren't accepted onto the programme.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6: And also then whether or not we can look at...normally when a student applies, they apply for a second preference programme also. So, if the student for example, did have a level 8 degree but just wasn't successful in their application to a particular programme at X, then I look at them for their second preference. What we do is we contact the course leader on the same day that they were rejected for their first preference, and try and get them an offer for their second preference instead.

Researcher: OK, OK. It sounds like you see quite a few then Participant 6?

Participant 6: Yeah, we would do. We would normally process about a 1,000 applications...I wouldn't normally process about a 1,000 applications (laughs) a year, but I would say it's increased this year. It would be about 1,500 or more.

Researcher: Right, OK. That's undergrad and postgrad?

Participant 6: Undergrad and postgrad yeah.

Researcher: Wow. Right. OK...and em, right and is there...you work kind of across disciplines then really?

Participant 6: I do yeah.

Researcher: Ok, so the...I think different institutions work in different ways because you could have some...well I suppose what I've come across so far is that some of the graduate schools would be doing their own recruitment within that school but it seems to be more centralised then in X?

Participant 6: It is, yeah yeah.

Researcher: OK, OK. So then it's more likely that there is you know...you do have a very set procedure for the whole institution then really?

Participant 6: We would yeah, absolutely.

Researcher: OK, OK. And is there information on that on your website on the specific procedure?

Participant 6: Em, there would be information on our entry requirements for key countries, and we do have a 'how to apply' section in the international website also so...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 6:...let me see...our website was just changed just last week there...

Researcher: Right OK.

Participant 6:...the 'how to apply' button has gone, but yeah if you go into the undergrad and postgraduate section there, there's a section on applying to X, and it just outlines the procedure for undergraduate and for postgraduate applicants. Em, we are hoping to have an online portal for undergraduate applicants in the next few months because it's quite unusual at this point in time you know that we would still have a paper process.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 6: So, that's it. We would also focus a lot on application turnaround. We don't like to keep students waiting very long for a decision especially because a lot of them are coming from countries that require a visa which can take time. So we do have very set procedures around processing an application and turnaround as well so for our undergraduate applicants. They should expect to receive a decision after two to three days after submitting an application...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6:...and for postgraduate, it's normally five to seven days.

Researcher: OK, OK and you mentioned that you mostly deal with agents...these would be for specific international students. Do you have people with international qualifications applying directly to you then?

Participant 6: We do absolutely yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 6: From America, for example, the majority of our students would be direct applicants.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. And so it's a completely different procedure for people trying to access a research programme?

Participant 6: It is indeed yeah. They would have to contact the department, submit their research proposal and then if that's approved, they would normally deal with X in the graduate school and em complete the application process with them.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah and you asked me about the LRC as well in an email, so you don't really em have an awareness I suppose of the LRC?

Participant 6: No, unfortunately not.

Researcher: No, no, that's fine. It's kind of I suppose the legal framework behind a lot of the recognition work I suppose. Em, what else had I wanted to ask you? Yeah - are there specific policies that you feel impact on your day-to-day work or...?

Participant 6: Not really. Em, not as such, no. Not that I can think of.

Researcher: OK. OK. In terms of contacts with the other universities...do you meet up then? Is there a kind of a group or is there some kind of more formal means of communication there?

Participant 6: No, it's relatively informal. They would be involved in recruitment as well though so if I am abroad - I have gone to India and China. If I am away, I would tend to just chat with other admissions officers that are on the trip and that...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6:...and so, I would often attend Education Ireland meetings or...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6:...IUA meetings; sometimes admissions processes are brought up but it tends to be more about recruitment. So, there wouldn't be any formal meetings.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6: It's a good suggestion. I would welcome them (laughs).

Researcher: Right. OK. OK. So, if you were on a recruitment drive or trip...

Participant 6: Yeah.

Researcher:...would you be asking...would you receive questions about how somebody's qualification might be viewed when you are back in Ireland?

Participant 6: No, it would be more for example if I'm in India, another university might say to me 'do you accept three year degrees from India', you know; you are just really comparing what do you guys accept as opposed to what we do you know. Do you accept for example, BComm degrees from India which would largely be considered pass degrees, so it really would be just an informal conversation, but then if we came across anything where you know...for example, I was dealing with X a few months ago because em we had come across an applicant...an undergraduate applicant from a country that we really didn't have any experience with before, and they did have experience of that country so they were just em giving us information on their admissions processes for that country...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 6:...and what their exams would equate to because sometimes, I think NARIC will only bring you so far. But if you are looking to set requirements for a country that you haven't looked at before, it is really useful to consult with the other universities who may have come across those.

Researcher: Yeah, so you are looking for grading rather than comparability as such?

Participant 6: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I mean we definitely would have conversations with other institutions in regards to 'do you accept you know this degree or would you not accept it' but it wouldn't really have a bearing on the decision that we would make more often than not.

Researcher: OK, and you mentioned there just a three year...is consideration given to duration?

Participant 6: Em, it is and it isn't. So long as the degree is comparable to an honours Bachelor degree – a level 8 then we really don't mind whether it is three or four. Now in India, it's just that the majority of pass degrees would be three years in duration and it wouldn't always be specified on transcripts. It wouldn't always be immediately clear

whether or not it's honours or pass, but if you are used to processing applications from that country, then it will be quite obvious. For India for example – if you have a BComm or a BA with no major in the title; if it's not a BA in English and History for example; it's just a BA, then you know it's a pass degree, whereas if there is a specialisation in the title regardless of the duration, then it's honours. That's what I consider but another university might not consider that.

Researcher: Yeah yeah and em I'm just wondering if you came across...you obviously go to NARIC and look up comparability's but what...if you came across a qualification that wasn't on em NARIC...what would the process be?

Participant 6: What I would firstly do is em send the transcripts to NARIC. So, they have a process where we would deal directly with them...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6:...and they would assess the documents. So even if there is comparability on NARIC, but I'm just a little bit unsure as to whether that is exactly what the student has, I...just to be safe, what I would do is send the transcripts and student's documents to NARIC, and they would assess them for me. And then if I still wasn't happy or satisfied with that outcome, then I would look at speaking to other universities. I would never show the documents to another university, but I would certainly liaise with them as to whether or not they had seen a similar qualification from that country previously.

Researcher: Oh right. OK. OK. I think that's very clear Participant 6. Thanks very much. So you deal with all non-EU ones. You have a tough enough job (laughs). I suppose one thing that struck me – is there a difference between disciplines or do you find them all as difficult as one another or...?

Participant 6: Em, in terms of how difficult a programme might be?

Researcher: I suppose in terms of international qualifications presented for access to particular disciplines.

Participant 6: Yeah, I mean we would definitely look at how well students did on particular programmes, and that would influence my recommendation for the course leader. For example, we have one particular programme that is nearly 60 to 70 per cent research based, which a lot of our students are not used to if they come from countries you know where they wouldn't have done quite a lot of research work during their

degree. So they can really struggle on it, so I would just inform the course leader and we would look for maybe a student with more research experience or better grades or a better university just to make sure that they are actually able for the programme. Because it's not really fair to be just giving out an offer because 'oh, he ticks a, b, and c box' but you know, behind the scenes may not actually do very well on the programme at all.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 6: Our job then would be to suggest an easier pathway for that student...maybe another programme you know, two years as opposed to one year and would be far easier to do. And they'll get far better grades on that programme, so I definitely would influence the admissions process in that way but also the course leaders tend to do that themselves. They tend to say 'no way, I had three students from that country last year. They didn't do well' you know...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6: ...so we take that on board.

Researcher: OK, OK, so that's experiential which is very useful. I'm not sure if there is anything that you would like to ask me about the study em or anything?

Participant 6: No, No. I don't. I think I'm good.

Researcher: Well listen, thanks very much for your help.

Participant 6: No problem at all.

Researcher: It is very very appreciated and I know you are looking up figures for me as well. I was just wondering - are those figures all applicants or just the ones that were accepted onto programmes.

Participant 6: No, No. They'll be all applicants.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 6: Yeah, yeah absolutely so I will be pulling a report that pulls all applications for that year for all taught undergrad and postgrad programmes and em, then I can break that down into who was offered and who wasn't and go from there.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. I really appreciate your help because I know you're putting effort into it.

Participant 6: Yeah, no problem at all.

Researcher: Take care.

Participant 7

Researcher: Participant 7 – that’s recording there now. Participant 7, once again, thanks very much for having a chat with me about this. It is very appreciated. Basically, I sent you on the participant information sheet. So I’m looking from the point of view of perspectives em of those in higher education institutions looking at foreign or international qualifications eh. In particular I am looking in this study em at...for access to eh postgraduate programmes and just really your experience of that or what you do. So, I suppose even to get started, just, you know...what do...what is your role in this area?

Participant 7: Right. OK. Now...we wouldn’t have an awful lot of postgraduate programmes running here...eh. We would have in computing more so than any other area. This is in my own school and we would have taught programmes in computing. We would have a level 9, a Masters in X and eh level 9 Masters in X.

Researcher: They are all taught eh Participant 7?

Participant 7: They’re all taught, yeah. Most of our Masters here would be taught. We would have very very few masters by research em...and any of the Masters or PhDs by research that we would have had Researcher, the students...a lot of them would have been our own graduates to be quite honest with you, and maybe it’s because we’re in the X of the country. Maybe it just doesn’t attract a lot of people from outside the region.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 7: We would have been taking a lot of our own students but the process we would have gone through for any research em position...Masters research posts. We would advertise and then we interview, but they would have to have a minimum of a 2.1 or a first in a cognate area, a 2.1, 2.2 or a first in a cognate area.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 7: So for example, one of the areas that we have been doing research in has been in the whole X area. We had a research area here called X which was research into the area of X...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 7: ...so that was an X programme that set up that centre. Now, the funding ran out for that a couple of...maybe about two or three years ago. So we had a lot of students that came through that, that did Masters and PhDs through that research centre. But again, the position was advertised and students...graduates would have applied. They would have had to have a 2.2 in a cognate area and in all cases, I think...the majority of them would have been our own graduates. Now the postdoc positions would have been slightly different. We would have had a few of those and would have taken people from around the world as postdocs.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 7: We would have taken...I wasn't involved cos that was in place before I actually came along, but we would have had an [three sentences removed on request by interviewee].

Researcher: OK.

Participant 7: ...and then we would have had a postdoc...a X [nationality] lad and he would have come from having completed his PhD in X [location].

Researcher: OK.

Participant 7: So X was with us for a couple of years as our centre manager and he left to go work with X and he helped...we're part of a consortium, an X with him in the area of this X...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 7: ...and so that has been useful to us. So, the X has really taken over from the X centre. We have a postdoc now in eh running...eh as part of that Framework 7³ process and again, we would have advertised. And we got this lady, X, [sentence removed on request from interviewee] ...and she worked in industry for a couple of years. Now she is postdoc in this Framework 7 project that we have...so those sort of people, postdoctoral people would have been outside the region.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

³ This is a reference to the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, an EU funding programme for research (2007-2013). See: http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/index_en.cfm?pg=understanding.

Participant 7: I suppose doing Masters or PhD by research would probably...since my time, the majority of those people would have been our own graduates.

Researcher: OK, OK. So are you ever presented Participant 7 then with applications from people with international qualifications for access to Masters or doctoral programmes?

Participant 7: Not...not really. Where we have international qualifications would be at the undergraduate level...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 7:...em from the UK. That is our biggest market and its getting bigger and you know, we are looking at this level 3 UK versus level 3 extended BTEC [Business & Technology Education Council], and there's a whole load of issues there but no, not so much at postdoc level – no.

Researcher: So even for...it's interesting...even for the undergraduate and recognition of those UK awards...

Participant 7: Yes.

Researcher:...where do you go for the information or?

Participant 7: Well, I suppose Researcher, I have come through the X system myself.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 7: I have a very good understanding of what were the original ONDs - Ordinary National Diplomas – BTECs and eh, what is happening in the North. People who do those BTECs are getting into year one of a three years honours degree programme in the North, and the argument here in our sector is that 'oh well we have to bring them into year one as well because they bring them into year one in the North. We have to bring them into year one here'. And my argument is that these qualifications are at a much, much higher level than our first year programme...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 7:...and..[sentence removed on request from interviewee]. I shouldn't be bringing in these level 3 people in to year two - as direct entry into year two. We brought one or two...we brought I think two in last year and those two have excelled...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 7: ...excelled. They have done exceptionally well. It's not so much BTEC level 3; it's more BTEC extended, which is an 18 month course.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 7: They are doing it in a cognate area like you know I...I have to try to explain to people that these people coming in to us have em...for example, we have a degree here at level 7...analytical and forensic science. They are doing a BTEC level 3 extended at X in analytical sciences. They are coming in with the instrumentation; all the things that they actually start in year two of our programme.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 7: These students are actually coming in having this completed, but we don't take them beyond...[two sentences removed on request from interviewee].

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. Well you know what. I would be saying to you as well that you have a huge amount of personal experience, and as you say yourself these students have excelled but I wouldn't..I don't know if you are referring to the information that we gave you [referring to previous contact] but academic recognition em I suppose is only one type of recognition and it's...you know...I'm sure you know the background to academic recognition in that we have our own Framework. The UK has theirs...

Participant 7: Yeah.

Researcher: ...you know and they're referenced to EQF and all this sort of thing. And there's you know, the levels are matched up and you know that's one form of recognition, but what you're talking about is another form of recognition which you know, is perfectly acceptable in its own right because...

Participant 7: [sentence removed on request from interviewee]

Researcher: Oh, right. But you see...if somebody is saying to you...well NQAI – it's not NQAI anymore – [sentence removed on request from interviewee]. You know, the advice on academic recognition is given...

Participant 7: Yes.

Researcher: ...but it is actually the institution that does the admission.

Participant 7: Absolutely. I explained that to them just as you said to me and em, one of my colleagues in the area of humanities was going to take somebody in with a BTEC extended into a sports degree in year two and she was told [two sentences removed on request from interviewee].

Researcher: And that's just based purely on the...

Participant 7: Pure documentation.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 7: Hmmm. They said nowhere else in the country do they do this, but as I keep explaining, nowhere else in the country do they need to do this because they are not getting applications from X, from X. They are only 20 miles from us.

Researcher: Yes – it's different because of your location.

Participant 7: Absolutely. Also what's confusing too Researcher is that in X, they offer what they call access programmes for example access science course. It is equivalent to a foundation degree so they should be going into our year three as they do in X, but because they have access in the title, they are well no, access is equivalent to our access. I said for goodness sakes, our access is for those people who have been out of education for years you know.

Researcher: We compare the foundation degree to our level 6 here, yeah.

Participant 7: Absolutely, absolutely but because they call it access degrees so again, I think I am making a little bit of progress with that. They are equating it to a level 4 or something, whatever they are doing here but you know, it's just very difficult. I have gone through all the syllabi in the [sentence removed on request from interviewee].

Researcher: That's hugely interesting though from a recognition perspective because you know, I suppose what you are really saying to me is that the advice is taken, but the recognition that the institution can actually provide itself is not being done.

Participant 7: No, No. I think you know...I think what the college are doing here is looking at the total, the black and white. They are not looking at the grey area. They are looking at the black and white – [segment of sentence removed on request from interviewee] and I think QQI should maybe revise...not revise. What they should be

saying is that ‘yes – level three for year one, but in those cases where they feel in a cognate area or whatever then, recognition should be given for advanced entry...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 7:...or some provision for advanced entry. I think if that was put in some of your documentation, I think it would...it would make life an awful lot easier for us because in the X what’s happening is, the X students are traditionally staying or going to X, or they go to the University of X and the numbers...places in those two institutes now are at full capacity so people coming out of the X College eh, what’s happening to them, is that they have to go abroad. They have to go to England to do their final degree; to finish off if they don’t get into X or if they don’t get into X and they are saying to us, ‘well you are right on our doorstep and we come to you and you are putting us into a four year degree programme, yet we can go to the UK to do it in three years and you are on our doorstep’ you know. And this is happening. We are having it all the time here and what is now happening is we went up to the X College; I think it was about March time or April and they were very enthusiastic whenever I said ‘look, I would consider people for year two of our programmes and I said let’s go with that’, and that was hit on the head here by the powers that be.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 7: We could have had a load of students coming to us. Now, we only have one student I think coming to us because of this problem.

Researcher: Wow.

Participant 7: It’s very very frustrating Researcher, extremely frustrating so it is, and I am in the sector 23 years. I do know what I’m talking about you know. I’m a long time in the sector and I came through the North and know what the equivalences are.

Researcher: Your personal experience is really essential there as well. I’m just wondering Participant 7 and I’m just throwing this out there that em at the moment. Obviously I am doing the study, but a lot of people I have been speaking to in institutions have expressed an interest you know in possibly meeting us you know and see what we can do for them, or explaining further what we do. I’m just after getting a very unique insight into your situation about how basically to explain recognition.

Recognition is a very broad word and it encompasses many various types. It may be something that you are interested in.

Participant 7: Yeah, yeah. I am interested. I think also to be quite honest that invitation should be extended to our Registrars.

Researcher: Well you see, I mean, we are open to this all the time. I mean I for one, I manage the recognition service here and at NQAI, and I should say that the majority of people that we get through with formal applications for recognition are those that want access to unregulated work in Ireland. Now, we do have very close relationships with certain individuals in institutions that would constantly liaise with us on what they're getting. Those relationships are obviously very much based on individuals and individuals that know us, and I've kind of been thinking for a long time about you know, the increasing importance of sharing the information that we have...

Participant 7: Yeah.

Researcher:...because obviously you know I don't pretend to be any expert on anything. Because you know, people that are working in institutions em are just so experienced in the area of recognition that you know, I would love to be able to share what information we have with them. Being part of the ENIC-NARIC Network – I don't know whether you know much about ENIC-NARIC, but basically em there are similar centres to ourselves all over the world and they are sharing information.

Participant 7: Hmmm.

Researcher: They're looking at the...I think you em you mentioned that you did the survey for me as well. I would have mentioned the Lisbon Recognition Convention in that as being the legal basis for recognition, and not a huge amount of people know that. And there are concepts in there em because the LRC looks at the recognition of both completed qualifications and periods of learning. There are important concepts in there em for people in institutions looking at qualifications...

Participant 7: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher:...and indeed there are what we call subsidiary texts. They are supplementary looking at the practical implementation of the Convention, and they are quite interesting so I...you know, we are open to meeting with anyone. We have a few requests for this Autumn.

Participant 7: Yeah, I would be delighted to be part of that.

Researcher: It's really that individuals are initiating it for their institutions so you know, if you are interested in that, we'd be very interested in that as well.

Participant 7: Yes. Very much so. Absolutely interested in that because I would say...we're in discussions as you know with X IT so I must actually ask X. You see, I don't know if they would get as much of this in X because X College has 20,000 part-time students and 10,000 full-time students, and is right on our doorstep whereas X wouldn't. X has an institute in X and places like that, but I don't think they would have the numbers and I don't know if they would have the same em number of enquiries. Now, I'm not so sure about X [institution]. I must ask X does she have that because there would be a big enough college in X there, so I wonder what they do but it would be interesting. I didn't get to talk to X yet because we are more chatting to X [institution]. I don't think they would have as big a difficulty with this as we would have. I think it's just because we are on their doorstep.

Researcher: So obviously...I mean UK qualifications are obviously in the definition of this (referring to scope of current research study). They are outside of the Republic. When you are looking at them you know, is there a specific...I know because of your personal experience as well that you have an advantage there, but is there some specific eh channel that you have to go through with these or?

Participant 7: Well you see, for example...I'll give you an example that happened this year and it frustrated me no end. We spoke to the X College, we spoke to the head of the department of science there, and to his three heads of school or whatever their management structure is. We met with them. We went through the syllabi. We went through everything with them particularly about this access course, and em on the science...and we decided that yes. This is definitely a foundation degree and we would take them into year three of our programme. So we told them to apply for advanced entry. It went to our Admissions. One of our admin people, Grade 4, decided that...she saw access course and left a note on my Head of Department's desk, 'well this is an access course, so therefore they can't get advanced entry. I'll just write to this person saying no – that they can't get advanced entry'. I of course blew the fuse, and I went to Executive Board and I said 'how dare a Grade 4 tell us what we should or what we should not be accepting?'

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 7: I said 'surely that is up to the Head of Department to decide – the qualified person, not the admin person?' In fairness to the admin person, I shouldn't be complaining about her, because I suppose access programmes here mean something totally different to what they do in the North. It was very embarrassing because we had gone through this whole process with the X College; had looked at their syllabi and we admitted that this was definitely advanced level 3. Then the admin person was about to write to the person saying 'oh gosh no' you know?

Researcher: No, I understand where you are coming from. So I had a question you know about the policy that impacts on your work and it is obvious that you know, the Frameworks then impact on your work as they are providing academic recognition.

Participant 7: Hmm. Absolutely, I think what we should be doing here is what we done in the school of science. We went in through all the documentation in the X College, all the courses that we thought you know had a link to our programmes here in the school of science; computing programmes, science programmes and the healthcare, early childhood, and we went through all those syllabi in great detail. And we had a couple of meetings with our counterparts at the X College and we had made these decisions, but because the other schools are not doing it and we shouldn't be doing it, because we were told 'anything at level 3 should go into year one'. So you know, I am in the wilderness.

Researcher: That's great work. I mean it's like taking initiative to do that you know.

Participant 7: Well you see, look even yesterday, there was a talk about retention being one of the criteria for our funding, and you know traditionally what happens is if students come in to do first year computing or first year science, we're getting much much better. Our pass rates are much higher than they were a couple of years ago, but what I am trying to do is...let's say X [colleague] takes 150 first years into computing. At the end of first year, he may have 100, maybe 110 left because they come in to do a course that they know absolutely nothing about. It's not done at Leaving Certificate so they are not familiar with it. So my suggestion was to go to X College to make up the deficit in year two. So that, where we had 150 coming into first year to us; instead of holding onto 100 in the second year, which may be only coming through from our own

cohort from first year, to try and build up our numbers in the second year from the likes of X College, who do a level 3 advanced in computing...

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 7:...and in a cognate area.

Researcher: And they are obviously well up for it as you said. You have the proof in the pudding. You have students there already.

Participant 7: We are adding to our numbers in second year, where particularly in computing would be a big enough drop-out in first year. And you know that was the whole intention, and then I was told well 'oh gosh no, level 3 no - with the equivalence, they have to go into year 1'. And these students are looking at us and saying well 'why would we go to your college when we can go to X [university], and go in to first year of a three year programme there. Why bother?'

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 7: You know?

Researcher: I understand your frustration there.

Participant 7: Even our head of nursing here now has come from head of nursing at X [university], and she even recognised these people you know.

Researcher: And are there other policies that you think impact on your work you know either locally, nationally, internationally?

Participant 7: Well I suppose that is probably the biggest one for me at the minute. As I say, I'm just looking at criteria for funding of our sector. To be honest with you, I would love to get involved in something where we looked at Northern Irish equivalents. I would love to be involved with a national group rather than just here trying to fight myself all the time. I'd like to be part of a bigger group that made these decisions or did more work in it you know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 7: If there is anything I could do via QQI in this context, I would be delighted to help, because I think we are losing a market there; really quite a strong market in Northern Ireland and [three sentences removed on request from interviewee].

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 7: I find it so frustrating you know, but I think we should do so much more particularly with the UK. I'm talking about Northern Irish qualifications. Maybe it's just because we are close to the border here and I am frustrated with it. I just think there is so much more we could be doing.

Researcher: Yeah, well I agree. I agree. Perhaps the first thing we could do is organise a meeting to explain what we do. What I could do in the meantime Participant 7 is that we...as a centre within the ENIC-NARIC network, we are a very active centre eh in terms of a lot of projects and that. And I think we need to communicate that a lot more, because I don't think there is a big awareness of that out there. But there are em two things in particular that might be of interest and that might...there is obviously a lot of documentation on the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and actually during the summer the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee em adopted a paper...subsidiary text on the use of Frameworks in recognition and I can send you the link to that...

Participant 7: OK.

[Interview abandoned at this point as conversation continued in terms of how the ENIC-NARIC network and QR could possibly benefit this participant in her work]

Participant 8

Researcher: OK. That recording is on there now, Participant 8.

Participant 8: OK.

Researcher: Thanks very much for agreeing to the interview. It really is appreciated. I suppose, Participant 8, I had sent you the participant information sheet so you have an idea of what I am looking for or looking at but basically em...I am looking at the perspectives of individuals in higher education institutions eh that are working I suppose in the area of credential evaluation, or recognition for the purposes of access to...of the holder to postgraduate study...

Participant 8: Yeah.

Researcher:...and I'm going to loosely base the conversation around the four areas there, which are roles, values, processes and policy em if I can...

Participant 8: Yeah.

Researcher:...and I suppose to get started. It's just really eh to start maybe with a description of what you do in this area, or how it relates to you in your role.

Participant 8: OK. Well, we run postgraduate training programmes in systemic psychotherapy, family therapy. They are at level 9 on the framework of qualifications...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 8:...so they are matched with level 9, and they are also matched with the professional recognition system...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8:...which is informal at the moment. So we have...the requirements come from two different places then – the academic and from the professional.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: So, em we also...most of the people that we get are mature students. Well they would all be mature students. Most of them would be, you know, older than the general cohort of students because they have to be in professional practice for a while. So eh we get people from I suppose from a range of systems em...Up until, I was

looking at it in work a few days ago. Up until about two or three years ago, we had a lot of people coming from both the EU countries and from outside the EU, but actually in the last two to three years, we haven't had anyone. And I think that's to do with the economic situation you know. We would have had a lot of people who would you know immigrated to Ireland, and would be working in the health sector and wanted to you increase their qualifications. But there are no jobs available in the health sector anymore. So people aren't coming to fill those jobs who might be interested in family therapy training, so that has been a big shift for us.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: Prior to that, we would have had quite a number of people coming from em the EU, mainly northern European countries...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8:...and from...actually we had a large number of people from New Zealand and Australia. Large...we have a small course, but proportionately large.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 8: So we would have been looking at where their qualifications sit on the Framework [NFQ]. They might be both foreign qualifications and older qualifications – pre-Framework type qualifications.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 8: So, I mean one of the things...we actually spoke with HETAC about it at the time, and with our professional body to make sure you know that we were going along the right track. So we really had two systems in place and we often operated them together. One was the Qualifications Recognition [QR] where we used the website em and, eh with older qualifications where there would appear to be a match; we would send them to yourselves a lot of the time, or we would look to see you know if the website could match the different qualifications.

Researcher: So you are talking about our website are you?

Participant 8: Yeah. Not the ENIC-NARIC one. You know the one that pre-dated that – Qualifications Recognition? [Participant not aware that QR is the Irish ENIC-NARIC centre].

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 8: Em...so the way it worked. Again, because we had mature students who were out of the education sector for quite a while, we found that they needed a lot of support in doing any kind of qualifications...you know, in looking at their qualifications. It is difficult to understand for mature students.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: So we would provide them with a support person which was part of our recognition of prior learning policy. They get a support person from the time they were interested in applying, and that would usually be me. And then I'd help them to look at where their qualifications might fit.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: So we would start off with the website. If they were foreign qualifications or if they were older qualifications, and see if we could do a match there. If not, then they would be referred to you, to your organisation.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: Eh, it was HETAC at the time and now its QQI em. And sometimes, I would assist them with that depending on how close it was to entry time. That was the big factor or, eh whether they felt capable of doing it themselves.

Researcher: OK. So there was actually a lot of support there given to individuals in trying to find out their qualifications.

Participant 8: That also matched...it might be slightly outside your research, but it was also because we had to ensure that they had the professional qualification entry requirements. So they had to have two sets of checks if you like for the entrance requirements.

Researcher: OK and for the...you mention the academic and professional side so for em...was that difficult? Was the professional side more difficult perhaps for these international qualifications particularly if they were older maybe?

Participant 8: Yeah. Yes it was. Partly because they didn't have systems in place.

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 8: So they had a sort of a naming of equivalent em, but no processes for actually determining what equivalence might be. So they tended to err on the side of caution and if you couldn't demonstrate on the face of it that you had the entrance requirements, then they didn't really want us to allow students in. Now we worked with the professional body here. With our own professional body – the family therapists em FTI – Family Therapists Association of Ireland, and with the Irish Council for Psychotherapy around our recognition of prior learning procedures which included foreign qualifications. And we got an agreement for our policy. So we got agreement for the same policy with HETAC, so we could go ahead using one policy document that would allow us to do professional and academic qualification recognition together.

Researcher: OK. OK. So it was very integrated I suppose. How in terms of the older qualifications...did that have a bearing?

Participant 8: Yes it did - particularly within the health sector em so sometimes it was fairly easy in that you had a database. I'm going back a few years now, but there was a database which matched older qualifications with newer qualifications and you could...you know, sometimes you could just go to the qualifications and see that there was a match to a certain level.

Researcher: And what database was that?

Participant 8: I'm trying to think what it was. It was one actually em oh gosh it's not there at the moment but it was. It used to match older qualifications. So, if you had a diploma from Cork University, there was a match to whether it was level 7 or level 8.

Researcher: Yeah. I know what you're talking about for the older Irish ones.

Participant 8: Yeah. This was for the older Irish ones but older foreign ones – no, there was nothing.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: So if you had an older person with foreign national qualifications, or anyone who didn't fit within that database or where we couldn't find an answer, we would go to recognition of prior learning procedure.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: And again, it had to be pretty thorough - the recognition of prior learning. Again, we are different to other colleges because we have older people, professional qualifications, often work-based training you know...a whole plethora of educational experience, a lot of which is unaccredited because it's professional training.

Researcher: And Participant 8, that's quite interesting in terms of recognition em. So it seems to be a very holistic view of recognising what the person has so am I right in thinking then that the...when a person presented their qualification. Well, I suppose I should ask you. When a person came along with an application form or evidence of their qualification em you know, was everything considered or was their qualification considered first? How did the processing...

Participant 8: OK. The first stage was qualifications to see if you had the entry qualifications to be considered for entry into the programme. So it was split into two. The first was: do you actually have the required entry and that was level 8 in the human sciences generally...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 8:...and you also had to have certain professional experience before you could gain entry...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 8:...so the first stage was always around eh do you have the level 8 but because, you see...we have very few students because we work very intensely with all of our students, so we would have a maximum of maybe ten in a year.

Researcher: Yeah OK.

Participant 8: So the first stage...there is a kind of an ethical piece. We didn't want anybody going ahead with this very complex process unless they actually were suitable for the programme. So usually, the first stage was I would work with the head of training. If somebody came along with non-standard entry requirements, myself and the head of training would speak with the person and we would look at whether going through this process might be useful.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: Suppose somebody has a level 6, I mean we would be saying 'No', but we would be saying to the person you know if this is a career you are interested in, this is what you do. So there would always be an interview and a conversation. If somebody had what looked like level 7, level 8. Nursing is a good example. Older nurses have a level 7.

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 8: Some of them upgraded to level 8; some of them did work-based training.

Researcher: The apprenticeship training, yeah.

Participant 8: Yes...and there was something similar in foreign qualifications and they tended to be a bit more...just easier so what we would do then is eh have a look at their undergraduate training to see where it might fit; to see if it could be fitted on the Framework. Am I making sense here?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. No. Absolutely.

Participant 8: Say if somebody came from New Zealand with an older qualification. The database you know would be very useful in seeing where they might fit.

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 8: But there was also professional qualifications that didn't fit on any national framework.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 8: So what we would do with those is we would get the person to get details of the course. That would include...I mean down to the handbook. It wasn't just their results, but down to the handbook as to what the learning outcomes might be...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 8:...and maybe statements from their supervisors or their lecturers. So, I mean generally what we would do then is we would use various databases to see if a match was made, and if it wasn't, we would be going into looking at what the qualifications might be.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 8: It was very complex I'm just thinking. It has become much more simple but certainly, those initial stages were very complex.

Researcher: And why do you think it has become more simple than Participant 8?

Participant 8: OK, I think we inherited a legacy situation where there were a lot of people who had professional qualifications and wanted them recognised for the purposes of further academic training.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: The whole of the informal, non-formal learning had got people kind of stuck in the system where they couldn't progress academically, and suddenly professional qualifications were academic qualifications as well as professional qualifications.

Researcher: Hmm,.

Participant 8: Does that make sense?

Researcher: Yes. Yeah.

Participant 8: So, say with myself. I did family therapy training at a time before it had an academic qualification associated with it so I have to use my X Masters, not my family therapy training if I am going anywhere...and the same with X. I did the X training. That was no academic...you know, at the time, it wasn't an academic training, so it didn't progress me academically.

Researcher: Hmm. Yeah, yeah. I understand.

Participant 8: OK, so the system that we used – certainly up to about three years ago involved intense work. It involved meeting with the person from the time they might want to enter and that was partly because of the professional legacy. We use databases and then we would go into the details of their qualifications. It would become really a recognition of prior learning type process at that stage.

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah. Would you do the same for undergraduate then Participant 8?

Participant 8: You see we only take...we are a level 9 only.

Researcher: You are a level 9 only. Yeah. Sorry. I knew that. OK, so you mentioned a few policy issues there that impact on your work.

Participant 8: Yes.

Researcher: Is it mainly national or do you feel that there are other ones also?

Participant 8: Well the thing...we tended to look to recognition of prior learning policies because they were the most developed in a way, and one of the issues that we had...HETAC had an old policy which we used initially and then they were updating their policy. But there was a while when there was no real HETAC policy so we used your previous organisation...

Researcher: NQAI.

Participant 8:...yeah and we would use your policy, but it was quite generic whereas HETAC was quite specific. So we used the generic principles, but what we found was because our situation was so complex...first of all we needed to look at good practice documents, a lot of which came from Europe. But also we'd need to work it out with people on the ground, so actually I met with people in HETAC around developing a specific policy.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 8: So we would look to...yeah, there was NQAI, the old HETAC policy. We also had some connections with DIT to draw on European policy. I did some training there actually which was really useful and they have a whole plethora of information.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 8: So then we kind of brought that together with our professional ideas around equivalence em. We developed first of all a position paper which was passed through our Academic Council and then we gave it to HETAC. And then from the position paper, we developed an actual policy with the procedure associated with it, which allowed people from many different backgrounds to go through something similar...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8:...and within that we had a number of checks, like, our own trainers were the assessors and the head of training. Initially, the head of training was always involved in any kind of assessment em of any information that was put in, so if we got you know their details of training, the head of training and another assessor would be involved in assessing and the extern was involved in any complex cases.

Researcher: OK and would it be mainly people that are maybe resident in Ireland with international qualifications that might be you know looking for access, or would you actively promote say to purposeful international students?

Participant 8: OK, there is a requirement on our training that comes from the professional body that you have to be in a working environment where you can implement the training.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 8: So the people needed to be actually situated in the country, and situated in some kind of work environment which could be a voluntary workplace.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8: A lot are actually voluntary workplaces. It could be places like Childline or Parentline you know, Samaritans, something like that.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 8: So they needed to be situated in a work environment. Now, some people...I mean there was such movement of people you know across Europe and from New Zealand and Australia that would come here and begin working, particularly within the care professions. And then would want to train upwards, particularly people who worked with children, family therapy you know is very useful.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: So we would have a lot of people working in the voluntary sector or the health sector and would want to upskill, and there was a fair amount of money around to support students at that stage.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: We would have had...in each cohort, if we had maybe between five and ten students in a year - usually one or two would be foreign national.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 8: Oh we have an English language...we have quite a strict English language requirement and that was an issue because you know obviously, if you want to do psychotherapy you need proficiency in English.

Researcher: Yes. Yeah, that's very important. Yeah, yeah, that's very clear Participant 8 to be honest. It's quite interesting you know, the relationship between the professional and the academic and em you know. Obviously, a huge amount of work has been done eh in terms of you know looking at the policies that are out there to em try and relate them to your unique situation at the institution.

Participant 8: Yeah. I think that's what we had to do because it was such a complex undeveloped area em and we had to very very careful and ensure that you know...getting an extern involved which was HETAC's suggestion – was really useful...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 8:...particularly for people with foreign qualifications that we didn't really...you know, even coming from the field. You don't really understand the language the way you might understand the other college in Dublin.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: So we have tended to have English or Northern Ireland externs who would have another perspective on international training programmes.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. OK. OK. So, I suppose you are building up your knowledge all the time you know?

Participant 8: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: OK. I think that's it. I know we are practically on the half-hour.

Participant 8: Well, I can go on as long as you want.

Researcher: No, that's fine. I think we actually covered what I wanted to cover unless there is something else that you feel might be relevant in terms of practices or procedures there?

Participant 8: OK, just two things on what worked. One thing that worked I think for students and I think it's really really important, is having a mentor in from the word go, otherwise people will drop out. It just looks incomprehensible, no matter how simple you try to write your policies and procedures. And having somebody whose able to be a contact and who works with them is very important. The second things is for mature learners typically women who came through the education system you know in the Seventies or Eighties. They have no sense of their own achievements in the education sphere so again, having somebody who can say 'well actually, that's an achievement, maybe you should put it down' is em quite important.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: And I think the other thing that was really useful for us is linking with DIT and you know linking with HETAC; all that linkages which you see I don't think happens very much in that whole area, so that you know what practices others are using. It's a very different perspective to reading policies, and reading what good practice is.

Researcher: Absolutely.

Participant 8: So they were the three things we found particularly useful.

Researcher: Yeah. No, that's very interesting. So, I suppose the other thing that struck me is...I know that you had em kindly done the survey for me as well. Em, in terms of the LRC, does that impact on your work or?

Participant 8: Eh, It's more background to be honest...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 8:...it's a responsibility that we have, so we do acknowledge it but I think in some ways, it fits...I think it fits with our own ethos which is around access as a right and our responsibility to facilitate that right.

Researcher: Yeah. Well certainly, when i hear you describing the processes, it certainly does alright. Yeah, yeah. I think Participant 8, that's it. We have actually covered em everything because I don't want to keep you. I promised 30 minutes so em because we

had gone through the practices, processes, policy em. You had talked about some of the tools. You really I suppose in a way, to clarify as well. Although the Qualifications Recognition website could have been used em but it really...you went ahead and got the policies and developed them for your particular situation as well.

Participant 8: Yes. I suppose we would have seen the website as another tool...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8:...and we tried to bring together a number of tools. But we saw that the main work was actually us. We had to take responsibility for what we were accepting and what we weren't. And we had to ensure that the student could benefit from the course otherwise ethically you know, it would be wrong to take them on.

Researcher: Absolutely. Just one thing that actually struck me now was the em. I suppose credential evaluation being a part of you say recognition of the person for access to the programme. Credential evaluation is part of that em so would that have been used as an initial...you mentioned maybe a person with level 6; I suppose I am just trying to clarify. Even if somebody had submitted a level 6 and you say 'well we need a level 8', you would still have spoken to that person to explain etc etc.

Participant 8: Absolutely and again, it's mainly older people or em people who maybe haven't had a straight line through education. Its meaningless to them what a level 6 is and what a Level 8 is.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: You actually need to sit down and say you know 'level 6 is pretty good'. We're not saying you failed you know, but what we're saying is 'you've achieved this and these are the steps you need to take.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. The focus on the learner is very strong you know.

Participant 8: In the psychotherapy field you have to do that. People come to the training for various reasons and you know, I suppose you don't want them disheartened.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 8: I suppose there was another element. We would be quite careful and quite careful in knowing the motivation for psychotherapy training, and we would be looking

out for you know - 'does this person actually want psychotherapy rather than do psychotherapy training'. You know, it would just be part of our way.

Researcher: Yeah, you mentioned that in terms of you know rather than putting the person through the whole process, you would be looking at 'are they the right person at the start' to maybe participate. OK. It's quite interesting. It's a very different view to recognition from some of the other institutions by virtue of just the ethos of your organisation you know.

Participant 8: You know, I think a small number of students makes a big difference. You couldn't do this with any more and we have...its labour intensive and so expensive too you know because it does take time. That has been an issue for us but like I said, it has actually changed a bit in the last while. We are just not getting the complex applications we used to get.

Researcher: OK. OK. But you obviously do it free of charge then – you know they mightn't even enrol then.

Participant 8: Yeah, well the first stage is free of charge. The charge comes in at the time of assessment, you know, when we are employing assessors to assess portfolios.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 8: That's when we would have a charge. It's always related to what the cost of the assessment is.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. OK. It's really interesting. It's a different perspective on it. As you said, there's a small number and its more hands-on em sort of approach you know.

Participant 8: Yeah.

Researcher: Unless there is something else that you would like to ask me about the study?

Participant 8: I mean I would be very interested. I have said in a number of places, that actually we need some sort of a national approach where we can...I mean I wouldn't even know mine is different unless I talk to other people.

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 8: So you know, there is something about trying to get the most effective and efficient system. Our system is...it's very good but it's not financially efficient. I mean that is an issue for us particularly in these times where we are a charity and stuff like that, and we sort of see it as a professional good. So I suppose there is a certain unsustainability about it.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 8: I do think some sort of national forum...it's interesting for me to hear you say different. I mean you know so people wouldn't tend to give that level of individual support?

Researcher: Well, it can vary Participant 8 because...will I turn this off?

Participant 8: Yeah, I'm finished.

Participant 9

The recording was started by the researcher having introduced the study and her role at QR. The researcher asked Participant 9 about relevant research she had been involved in.

Participant 9: When they [migrant students] came to us, they weren't getting proper recognition.

Researcher: OK. What strikes me though is that, I wonder if the issue is credential evaluation, or subsequent selection and admission, which is completely different.

Participant 9: Yeah. I think it's both.

Researcher: OK. Yeah.

Participant 9: Now, we took a very...that was completely student centric that to be honest.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9: We didn't talk to any users. We just said, these are the recorded experiences of these people...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 9:...so obviously then it was kind of amusing then to come in and actually be the person responsible for it, having critiqued it...

Researcher: Exactly. Yes.

Participant 9:...from the outside so em I would say...again I don't know how long it is or since when, accreditation actually was kind of built in formally into NARIC...if its reviewed all the time, but there were certainly some African countries and African universities that got...they weren't properly recognised. Again, I wouldn't be in any way in touch with the debate around that.

Researcher: I think it is interesting because em you had mentioned that work was completely from one point of view, but I just think that em it's not...I mean we do get queries you know 'I don't feel my qualification is recognised properly', this sort of thing in addition the European Commission...I was at one of the annual...

Participant 9: I should have asked...do you want a cup of coffee?

Researcher: No, not at all. Thanks very much....and they were talking about the issues in recognition. Now, I use the word recognition in its broadest sense because credential evaluation is obviously one thing and recognition is quite another thing...

Participant 9: Hmmm.

Researcher:...because recognition is a broader word that brings in the purpose for which the recognition is sought. So we provide academic recognition [QR], you know, you might provide other recognition, in that it is recognition for access to a particular programme. A professional body offers a different sort of recognition, but there are very few, or at least I am not aware of them, instances where people in institutions are actually asked for their views about you know, what they find the difficulties are or even what they are doing in the first place, so that's why I am doing this because I feel...

Participant 9: Well, it's really worthwhile and really necessary.

Researcher: Thank you.

Participant 9: It's excellent. Number one as I said, the stuff we did before was just student centric. It was just giving a voice to migrating communities really; that's how we felt about that. Since I've come in here, I'm actually sitting with the staff members, and we're trying to do recognition and we're talking it through with them, and the amount of work that they have to do. And then, the misconceptions that are there and the background research, research, research that they have to do to actually be sure, that when they translate a grade from another country, that they are getting close to being accurate with it you know...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...and they would have...I suppose a bit of discomfort with doing that..eh they would, in my view now, at this stage have a sense that the system has...is too rough to make an adequate judgement and that you're ending up somehow working in the margins as to whether you would say this person has a first class or a 2.1 and of course for us, we are giving out scholarships. That's the basis on which we would be looking in...it's not quite...well the admissions office would be looking and departments will actually be looking at the qualifications coming in and the transcripts.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: They'll only be checked then by records kinda later on in date, but we actually come and check if this is a student that's going to be awarded a scholarship. To be awarded a scholarship, they have to have a first class so we're actually trying to work out the grade transfer very precisely...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...while we have maybe you know five students sitting in front of us coming from an international context, and we're about to give them four years funding on the basis of decisions that end up you know being made. Also, if you make them purely on numerical values, you are worried that you are doing the wrong thing and then if you don't, you are worried you are doing the wrong thing. Do you understand?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: So it's really complicated. It's not as straightforward as it appears, and people on the front line do feel you know the pressure of doing it.

Researcher: Where does that discomfort come from? Is it that there is no...they feel there is little support or...

Participant 9: They are just trying to do the right thing by the student. They are trying to be fair.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. It's not a black and white thing.

Participant 9: It's not a black and white thing. They are trying to work out who gets this money. It's a bit tough. Also, I think the cultural values...well I would be aware that the cultural values have come into it quite a bit....like that there are kind of...that USA colleges are kinda getting better recognition in Ireland sometimes. You would have more verbal recognition in the culture of academia, than for example an African college that could have been established 200 years and genuinely at university level, as opposed to college level and...there are those kind of if you like global unevenness's reflected...

Researcher: OK. Yeah.

Participant 9:...in the qualifications system in NARIC.

Researcher: Yeah I would agree with you. I think em, I'm just going to come back to your point about the em what we do ourselves [QR], and if we are not you know providing a service to some of the actors in recognition [Before the recording started, the researcher introduced the study and gave details on her professional work]. But what we would have found is that we tend to believe that UK NARIC undervalue em a lot of qualifications, which is based on our own research. And then obviously because we are within the Network, and we are trying to be consistent across the board, we would have felt that they undervalue qualifications.

Participant 9: Now, I am sitting here as X [position] and I can say to you, you know because you won't be naming X [institution] or anything like that...

Researcher: No.

Participant 9: We have to actually...we can check whether we go straight to UK NARIC or whether we go through you at all with our staff.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. I think what this exercise has done or what it is doing is that; it's giving me experience that I don't have...

Participant 9: Yeah.

Researcher:...em plus it's making me wonder – recognition is such a broad area. I suppose to date really what we have been dealing with are people that are coming in, and they want their qualifications recognised for the purposes of accessing unregulated work. So not in the regulated professions and those are...now we do ask for the purpose of recognition on our application form...

Participant 9: Yeah.

Researcher:...and a huge amount of them...I mean some people never put the information on, but that's who we have really been helping I suppose to date. Now, whether we have the resources or anything else to...not even compete is the right word, but to act as a UK NARIC to institutions here is completely you know, I think that would be hard to do.

Participant 9: Yeah.

Researcher: UK NARIC as you know, you subscribe and it's run as a commercial operation in the UK...

Participant 9: Hmmm.

Researcher:...so I do kind of feel when you said there, that are you doing anything in terms of recognition at the institutions, and obviously you have a view on that.

Participant 9: I think you're not that I know of, but then as I say, front-line staff, maybe they know more than I do at this point...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9:...because here the work is kinda delegated. While I sign off on it, these are the people that try to get the results – X [colleague] next door and X [colleague], they are both em...they have both been looking and trying to assess qualifications coming in.

Researcher: OK and do you feel there is any increasing pressure to do this, or is it an area that there is increasing talk about or...

Participant 9: Well the strategy in most universities today is to double the number of international students. So that means there is going to be more work in this area, so I suppose there is just a pressure with numbers. We are dealing with more of it. I suppose there is a downward trend in that the national funding bodies used to fund international students and now don't. So with the latest cutbacks you have things like IRC [Irish Research Council] will not fund an international student; will not give a national scholarship so...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 9:...in a way our downturn has meant that there is kinda less pressure to some degree for the internationalisation agenda, or at least there is definitely less financial support for the internationalisation agenda so maybe it reached a peak. But still in order for universities who are hard strapped for cash, to not grow but just to maintain themselves as non-profit organisations, they have to increase the numbers of international students.

Researcher: Maybe there is a tension there in itself what you are talking about because Education Ireland are going out you know promoting Ireland and international students, and the revenue they are generating is mentioned in the economic recovery strategy and everything so...

Participant 9: Absolutely. They are not funding international students in our national funding awards...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...so if we wanted to you know give...if IRC funding...if an international student applies and is the highest in that, we have to waive their international fee or come up with it ourselves.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 9: They are definitely putting the institutions in two places at once.

Researcher: Yeah. I was just reading your research on X [name of research paper] and em I suppose, in your view, is there...well actually you have alluded to it already. The attitudes of credential evaluators – is that a huge important aspect of this work, or do you feel it's kind of...that there needs to be more support put in place, or you know, what are the supports there for them already, or are there any?

Participant 9: Well the credential evaluation now...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...when our office staff have to engage in credential evaluation, we simply have to pay a fee into UK NARIC, and that's what the university does, and that's the support that it has. It kinda gets us some part of the information right and then the answers we download, you know a 3.2 or a 3.3 you know, we kinda get a numerical understanding from those figures, so there is technical support if you like in the area that we pay for...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9:...and that we get, so there is a system we go by but like you say, maybe UK NARIC is a little bit hard on the qualifications or whatever. It's nice to have a national one. If you had that now, that's what we would be calling for. For my staff to find out something more specific about how to evaluate a credential, they are told something to the effect of 'there's somebody in X [university] that might be able to help you on that' or something like that. OK? (laughs).

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9: So there isn't...(laughs).

Researcher: I think I know the person you are talking about (laughs).

Participant 9: So there isn't that kind of personnel support here because we are just working a system, so maybe your office's news hasn't got out to the users...

Researcher: Well maybe it's that...

Participant 9:...or maybe that's not your brief.

Researcher: Well I mean, it is. I suppose there is...at the moment we wouldn't be really...we would provide information on you know if it is a recognised institution, try and provide an academic recognition for it in terms of level and award-type like honours Bachelor degree, but at the moment we wouldn't be giving information on grading or anything like that. The best that we can provide is you know sources of information on grading...

Participant 9: Yeah. This office you know works a few scholarship programmes and needs grading, so that would be I suppose the weakest point of support nationally that there is.

Researcher: You are building up your knowledge though of these as you go along?

Participant 9: Yes. But, I'm not fully answering your question. You're kinda asking me is there anything culturally happening as well. Is it just the support...

Researcher: Yeah. I suppose what I've come across is that you know there is a kind of a thing 'well we have always done it like this'. I mean recognition is dynamic I suppose you know...

Participant 9: Yes, yeah.

Researcher:...things change.

Participant 9: I haven't encountered that so much as 'we have always done it like this'. I would be more familiar with 'will someone tell us how to do it better', or how to do it correctly.

Researcher: Yeah. And you know, that's difficult as well because is there something like that...you know what I mean it's really difficult.

Participant 9: (laughs) or can somebody with more knowledge on this take the responsibility you know.

Researcher: That's true as well.

Participant 9: That would be another sense around the place, and then I suppose just being a X [discipline], and being into development studies and all that kind of thing. I would just like to go in and do a proper assessment of how they are doing that, and if there is global inequality kind of built into it.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: That would be of key interest to me.

Researcher: Yeah. In terms of your study with the students when you were saying that the African students were saying they [qualifications] were being undervalued. I mean - was there evidence of that?

Participant 9: I would say on a daily basis now I would encounter...they felt there was evidence of it, that they had to go back, and even when they were clearly in exile and everything like that, and it wasn't possible that they could get transcripts from the universities probably under military control and things like this; that there wasn't enough flexibility here at all to do anything about a global situation, where I suppose they didn't have access to their qualifications anymore.

Researcher: Being on the other side of that now, in your position now, I suppose, you know it's difficult for people in institutions obviously as well so...

Participant 9: Absolutely. So, I would say that em administrators in institutions don't necessarily get any form of a quality training or anything like that. OK. So they're using lay people's speech and lay people's approach when they are actually looking at these things. We would have found now that we would have to...I am speaking for myself as well (laughs), that we would have to take applications and transcripts with a pinch of salt. We usen't to check them before too much. Sorry I should say, we check them because they had to be given to us by hand. When somebody was coming in here and enrolling and registering, we had to have a transcript...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9:...now all of the universities use IT systems wherein the student uploads their transcript and their qualifications and we used to think that that system was secure...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 9:...and in the last two years, we would now be coming to recognise that we have to do pretty strong checks on those transcripts still because they will be messed with.

Researcher: You mean for authenticity?

Participant 9: Yes – grades changed in them etc because people can manipulate. You know, if you are uploading something, we're not seeing a hard copy stamped and signed. So in general, administrators would be getting more of a sense of fraud than ever before and they are more alert to fraud you know. I'm now saying the exact opposite to a few seconds ago where we were talking about students' point of view and how they are there. We eased off surveillance of transcripts because we were dealing with thousands of people coming in and registering and we had to go online for stuff. So now we have gone online.

Researcher: That's the PAC [Postgraduate Applications Centre]?

Participant 9: For us, it's PAC. So they are supposed to bring their actual transcript to registration, but now with online registration, we can't register 10,000 students physically (laughs).

Researcher: But that difficulty with checking prints and you mentioned surveillance is that obviously...there is a distrust...

Participant 9: There is more of an opportunity for fraud. There is more occurrence of fraud in producing qualifications.

Researcher: There is an uneasiness then.

Participant 9: Internally. Absolutely. This then often reflects other prejudices that are there in the society. They might watch one type of application a lot more and check...they might say 'I'm going to check all the African transcripts' for example.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9: The U.S. ones can just slip in looking good but they could be equally likely be the wrong ones and what we do is, again, we used to check every one. Now, we have just one person working and she might spot check.

Researcher: OK. I understand. Yeah. I suppose once you have had one experience, you kind of think 'oh well, I'm going to zone in on this country' or whatever it is.

Participant 9: Yes, yeah. And in terms of any you know online hacking in or whatever, breaking into accounts and things like that. The general kind of knowledge I suppose around ICT would be you know, that hackers and people breaking in come from Nigerian you know, groups of criminality and that's the kind of thing you get all of the time, which may or may not go against real African students on the ground.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. OK. So you had mentioned the scholarships. For those that you mentioned that are involved in the evaluation, how is it organised? Are they looking at research applications?

Participant 9: No, we assess people for research scholarships. These are research scholarships.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: Actually, we also have Masters scholarships, but we assess those on the basis of undergraduate degree and / or their latest degree which could be a taught masters...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9:...so we are going through - sometimes we are trying to distinguish between two people you know. Both have firsts on their Masters. So then we would be going back to their undergraduate to see there, so we would be looking at their full record.

Researcher: They just...if somebody is making an application for postgraduate study in X, do they go – I know you just talked about the scholarship going through your two colleagues here, but outside of the scholarships, if they want to...

Participant 9: Just to get into a Masters programme or something like that?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: Who assesses them is the international office here...

Researcher: Oh right. OK.

Participant 9:...so there will be a set of people you need to talk to in the international office...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9:...who are if you like...they are the access. They take or don't take if you have the qualification.

Researcher: So, it's quite centralised in X if they go through...?

Participant 9: They go through the international office and they must...the international office on PAC, must put a rating in. In other words, the department can't offer them a place unless they tick that the qualifications are what they say they are.

Researcher: Ah. So that would be an initial...

Participant 9: It's a check.

Researcher: So would the international office be acting as a first step in terms of whittling down the...

Participant 9: No because the applications come in on PAC from everybody.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9: The international office in the administration has the job of looking at the international credentials as they come in, and evaluate those and they say 'yes' or 'no'.

Researcher: If they give them an 'X'. If they said 'No'...

Participant 9: The department cannot give them an offer. They block.

Researcher: They block...the reason I am asking that is that, say in terms of autonomy, that somebody else could say 'well I think this person will be fine', or you know like they have a huge amount of work experience. You know what I mean. 'I'm going to give it to them on that basis rather than the credential'.

Participant 9: For international students, that type of flexibility isn't allowed, whereas for national students, for example, in business and law, if you want to come and do a

Masters in conflict or whatever, there are non-traditional forms of access i.e. there could be a case where ten years' experience in industry would be recognised...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9:...and the department move that through faculty right?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...but there probably is not the same level of access for international students, because they come through an international office. I should just check this. I'm not sure. You would have to talk to the international office where the international office rating will be a 'No' if they haven't got the specific whatever it is - if it's a 2.1 let's say in a BA degree in a third level institution.

Researcher: So, it wouldn't go any further then?

Participant 9: The departments can look at it. In each department that runs the programmes that the students are trying to access, they make an application. There is a departmental administrator or academic that is taking in those applications looking at them and offering places – it's rolling, so they are always looking every week...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...and seeing what's in there, but without a rating from the international office, they can't press the button that offers a place...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9:...so they can look at it and there can be a discussion between the international office and them, and they can definitely liaise between them.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9: I don't know what happens in those discussions. Again, it would be lovely for you to interview these people in the international office and talk to them about what they do and what are the trends.

Researcher: So you wouldn't think there is as much flexibility then?

Participant 9: For international students? Yeah – I wouldn't think there is as much. That would be a guess. I am surmising.

Researcher: And should there be if there is not?

Participant 9: Em. I think there should be to be fair across the board, regardless of where you come from.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. I think that's all.

Participant 9: You can come back to me if I haven't answered anything.

Researcher: In terms of people acting as credential evaluators, I will be focusing the interviews, well loosely structuring them on four areas.

Participant 9: What are the four areas again?

Researcher: Roles, values, processes and policy.

Participant 9: Yeah, and are you looking at a few institutions because...

Researcher: Yeah, well what I have been doing to date was that...I initially sent out a survey, well for two purposes. It was to provide a background for the study. I had questions on you know awareness of the Lisbon Recognition Convention etc, and there was also a section at the end where you could self-identify because one of the I suppose issues in terms of those in higher education institutions that are making em decisions for access to postgraduate programmes is – they are not immediately identifiable. It's kinda different to undergrad you know. You go to the admissions office, people are there. It is more standardised etc. In a lot of cases, people would view them as the professionals in that area if you know what I mean – looking at qualifications but...so they weren't immediately identifiable, so what I actually did first was a website review of the relevant higher education institutions that had postgraduate programmes...

Participant 9: Yeah.

Researcher:...and I just looked at what they had on the website, whether it was clear the different interactions between the offices. So, I just did a review of the website for the purpose of looking what is on there, but also to see if I could identify the people that are actually doing the work in a sense. After that, I did up my survey and I sent it off. I tried to get maybe...obviously I know some of the people, but tried to get maybe an individual in the institution that could forward it on for me, because they'd know better internally. So, from that, and from really trying hard, I've identified people that are I

suppose willing to talk to me. Really what I've found is that there is a real hesitancy to talk about it, and it might be this discomfort you're talking about.

Participant 9: I don't think they have been trained or know. They are uncomfortable with where they are sitting. It's probably more informal than it should be I suppose, in the sense that for each programme, there is a person who is the coordinator of that programme and they are the person that goes on PAC. I can't remember. We have 56 or something like that Masters programmes here. Each of those has – sometimes it's an administrator, sometimes it's an academic and they are responsible for reviewing the applications...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...and for making the offers. Right?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: This office here – it doesn't make the offers or anything like that. The departments here, and we have 26 of them make the offers...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: So that's if you like a transitioning group too, because the coordinator for that programme mightn't be the coordinator the next year or the next year. Sometimes an academic taking on the job...lots of the time, an academic taking on the job of coordinating a programme not really knowing what to do with this PAC. We've trained them on PAC, the IT end of it. You go on to it and this is what you do...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...but looking at qualifications. Sometimes they come back and look at NARIC or whatever. The international office will look at international, by definition non-European and non-Irish, so there are all these European applications that they have to look at as well by themselves with very little support...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...and I don't think that they would be confident that they had the adequate training on it, or that even if you gave them training - because we give them training - that they would even have the time to do it properly, you know what I mean? To

actually look at these qualifications, and actually go into them in some depth. When we do spot checks, we have often found things not as well done as we would like them to be.

Researcher: So what do you mean by spot checks?

Participant 9: We look into the system and we say 'OK there's these offers on PAC. Let's see if everything is in order in terms of what the departments have been doing etc, So, there has been a case when we looked where the department made an offer without the transcript of the student being uploaded on PAC. So how could you make an offer if you haven't got a transcript....?'

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9:...now, that is the degree of disorder that is in place.

Researcher: And when you mentioned the training there, what sort of training?

Participant 9: So it's how you work this system PAC; what code do you put in, so they're probably about you know zero to twenty-five possible codes you can put in in response to an application. So you can give it an 08 rating, an 01 all of these different codes so that training; really identifying the code, so you saying to a coordinator, if you are not happy that the transcript is up and want to send them a reminder to get a transcript up, that's a 1.2 . So it's a technical thing. It's not what you are referring to.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 9: So, I don't know if anybody trains all of the academics on how to go onto NARIC or anything like that. They tend to learn because it's important and they do it, but where is the responsibility for that? It kind of lies with this office but then departments are independent of this office.

Researcher: So from what you've just said then training is obviously very important then?

Participant 9: That's what I said. The support. They probably do not feel that they have that sort of professional support. And we say you know, or someone says, 'well go on NARIC', and then we will have somebody who is more familiar with the United States. They say 'what are you talking about? – a 3.0 average is brilliant in the States'. Well actually it's not.

Researcher: That is usually someone's perception...

Participant 9: Usually from the States themselves, yeah.

Researcher:...of what's good or not. It's very...

Participant 9: Values do come in...all of the above. You do need to be researching in those four areas and the processes you know. The processes in each university, so I don't know which institutions you are looking at...do this kinda differently. In this university em, the departments have more autonomy than in other universities.

Researcher: And do you think – I mean do you think that the situation could be made easier by centralising?

Participant 9: Yes – but that debate has gone on for three or four years here...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...whether we centralise or don't, but the departments won't let administrators to assess academic qualifications.

Researcher: The EUA publication 'Trends' calls for a centralisation of these functions, yeah.

Participant 9: Yes. I would join my voice in calling for that. I actually see the necessity in doing that.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. That's very interesting. I suppose then that explains why there was so much hesitancy around it [referring to indications of interest by credential evaluators in an interview].

Participant 9: I would say they are not happy with the practices and processes as currently applied. See, you need different knowledges. We have X [colleague] now so if you want to continue, she will talk to you, but she would have had - I don't know where it was, whether it was ye or UK NARIC. She would have had transcripts translated and the translation being incorrect to the degree...she is X [nationality], so she can tell Eastern European wording a good bit better. So she could actually show me the difference what...that was actually the first, but the translator had somehow used the term they use; the translation meant very good, and not excellent.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: So this is...you can't be sure that the translations are correct. It is really problematic if you like in this intercultural space. There are language translations and everything...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9:...getting mixed up so it's an unworked out space.

Researcher: Have any of the...say Bologna impacted on this do you feel?

Participant 9: See I've only have been here with Bologna do you know what I mean, so I wouldn't know what pre-Bologna was like. I think we are all moving towards, it but you are worried when it doesn't all line up.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: Things like international conferences and stuff like that. I have been approached by people again from Eastern Europe and they just say 'can you tell me when an Irish application comes in to me for a research degree in my country, could it be possible - I was told this - could it be possible to get in without an undergraduate degree? Without an undergraduate degree being there someplace, and I have to say, it is possible here.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 9: There's no way it would be possible over there. Right?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9: So I suppose Bologna is working in that they are getting to know what is happening in other countries...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 9:...but not everybody is accepting of the non-traditional kind of routes to the same degree as we are in Ireland.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 9: I find UK NARIC a bit harder on things than we are.

Researcher: OK.OK. I suppose even where people are using UK NARIC, it is very much a first step though in terms of what people have to do in institutions because they are looking at grading; they are looking at the suit for a particular programme.

Participant 9: Exactly. That's why the academics...that's why they often don't want to hand it over to any other body other than themselves.

Researcher: But maybe there is something else that could be done to...

Participant 9: Yes, yes. Definitely. Someone has to do something (laughs). It is a bit of a disorderly space at the minute. [Three sentences deleted]. I suppose when you say you are working for QQI that people don't respond well to an interview query I suppose.

Researcher: Yeah – well I had to clearly identify myself though as well.

Participant 9: Yes – but I suppose people have a fear.

Researcher: I suppose they do have a fear.

Participant 9: Universities will think...

Researcher:...that I'm coming in as a spy or something?

Participant 9: Well no. Universities think that they are the highest body in terms of academic credentials; you know, that somehow this knowledge will be someplace in the university, and not out there externally in QQI - do you know what I mean? That's another thing you are up against.

Researcher: Yeah. I think there does need to be...I mean there is more standardisation... there are more opportunities to liaise at undergraduate rather than postgraduate, and I think that possibly needs to change as well seeing the discomfort and everything that is surrounding it because...

Participant 9: Yes, yes. If you think about it, everything is done nationally for undergraduate stuff. CAO are there and they do everything. It's ordered and the general feeling that we would have in terms of...well that I would have, and that others would have is that something has to be done at postgraduate level of an equivalent to the CAO. And I think that's going to become policy, so that all of you know these kinds of things, the credentials and so on would be done by some central group.

Researcher: Right. OK. All together?

Participant 9: Altogether some of us would think. Come on now, the competition between the universities kinda has to stop and there has to be some oversight over what is happening.

Researcher: It seems that kinda on an individual basis say..say an individual in X [university] or whatever, you know they might ring someone in X [university]. It's much more...

Participant 9: Much more informal.

Researcher: It's very much informal?

Participant 9: Yeah, yeah, but what if they had a bad experience of that country? Do you know, that's not an objective system (laughs).

Researcher: That's the way it appears to be working.

Participant 9: That is the way it's working. We have to do a bit better.

Researcher: Thanks very much Participant 9.

Participant 10

Researcher: Participant 10 – for the tape. Thank you very much for speaking to me this morning. I have explained the purpose of the study so as a means to get started, I was just wondering if you could explain your role at X as it relates to credential evaluation please.

Participant 10: OK, so one of the things I do at X is I do an initial evaluation of applications for scholarships that we have so that is to ensure that...usually with a scholarship, there is a minimum grade requirement. It might be a 'first' for example and so in order to help departments make final decisions about other criteria, we initially do a sift. So I would use NARIC , go on and perhaps look at Germany for example, and just ensure that eh the grade of a first that they have eh is equivalent to the Irish first so the 'Sehr Gut' or whatever it might be.

Researcher: Hmmm

Participant 10: So that might be how I use it.

Researcher: OK. So you use...that's UK NARIC you are referring to is it?

Participant 10: Yes

Researcher: OK. And they give all that information on grading?

Participant 10: Yes. So they have a country by country analysis where you can at least see what their higher education system is, and what their grading system would be at higher education level. Now I must say that this is to allow us do an initial sift. The actual formal confirmation is done by international office and I don't work there so I don't know exactly what they do...

Researcher: Yeah

Participant 10:...but this is just to give us an initial sift so that we can indicate to a department that these are the students that we believe have a first. It will have to be double-checked by international office but these are the students that we believe do not have a first and therefore cannot be considered, but obviously all of that has to be double-checked.

Researcher: OK

Participant 10: Another way I would use it is em, I check grades em...there might be a specific funding opportunity em so there is a particular programme that I work on eh which is about taking Brazilian students into Ireland to do research. It is a funded programme but one of the things that I find challenging is the whole thing about trying to check where is that Brazilian university on. I mean how well does it rank? Not only as a university, but also in that specific area. So whether it be genomics or climate change or whatever, so we work with our partners in the library here who would have the access to the likes of Insight etc. They would at least be able to tell us in relation to that university - how does it score? How does it rank in terms of the citations?...the articles that are coming out of that university? So we can at least see is it an equivalent university to X [university]. What kind of standard you know is it and it helps us to get eh...not only does it help us to kinda figure out well how good is that degree, but also it helps to work out you know what maybe future collaboration might be possible with that university. Would it make a good partner?

Researcher: Yeah. OK. Very interesting.

Participant 10: So that is how we use it.

Researcher: OK. And are there particular tools that you use?

Participant 10: Yeah. There is a programme that's owned by 'Web of Science' OK? And then there is another thing called 'Insights' and 'Cite' and basically those are...they record you know article citations by particular academics. Then they are able to tell you where would the concentration in that particular area be, whether it be genomics. Where are universities that are doing a lot on that...therefore, you would have thought if they are doing a lot on that subject, then there must be a hope for that research. So it is linking those together and also looking at em individual students and where they are coming from, and what knowledge have they come from? What is the team that surround them when they done their undergrad or their taught Masters? Again, it's only really a first step, it's not that you would necessarily rule out somebody immediately because of that. You would still interview that student. You would still look at their writing skills, you know, get a sample of their writing. You would take academic references for that student, but part of the process would be to look at the university if you weren't familiar with it – say in South America or wherever...

Researcher: Yes

Participant 10:...it might be Asia and to look at the university the student is coming from to try and understand - to get a meaningful understanding of em the quality of their degree.

Researcher: OK. OK. And you are looking at people making applications just for scholarships?

Participant 10: Yeah. These would not be unfunded. I mean unfunded people would be more dealt with by international office. We get involved because we deal with the Irish resident based and EU let's say scholarships, so it just kinda makes sense that we also get involved in the international ones too you know, just because it's kinda a crossing of responsibilities between international office and ourselves.

Researcher: Yes. OK. And how do those applications come into you?

Participant 10: Eh, a variety of ways. Obviously some people; most likely people for research PhDs, most likely students know themselves that in order to do a PhD, you need to do your research, and identify someone who is an expert in that area that you want to study in. So, if you want to study software engineering, whatever it might be, you're going to go and find who are the people that do that well. So normally what happens is, you might get a contact from a department saying 'I have been approached by a student'. They are talking about a particular funding scheme, or the department itself might have their own funding you know. They might be looking for a student, so one way is you are approached by the department if they identified somebody; another way the student will contact the international office, and another way is that we would launch our own scholarship scheme. There is a closing date...

Researcher: yeah

Participant 10:...and eh you know once the closing date has passed, we can't consider the person until the following year. But it gives a reason to promote that scholarship opportunity and then you get responses to it.

Researcher: OK. OK. And so who makes the final decision then because you were talking about a department?

Participant 10: Well I mean, it's quite straightforward. Obviously with every scholarship there are different criteria, but usually what is involved for research – because obviously you know, you are taking somebody on for four years. They need to

have good writing standard, good English language standard etc but there are certain things like their English language ability that can be demonstrated you know because obviously, there are qualifications they can get online for that so...

Researcher: Yeah

Participant 10:...the international office normally handle that aspect of things. And as I say, we would do a preliminary check that the person has the necessary minimum grade required but then beyond that, the student would have to have produced some written material around the research question that they want to be involved in. Like you know why would they want to be involved in this project; an idea of why they are interested, what they hope to get from it, that sort of thing. They basically write their research plan you know and that is submitted to the academic in the department, and then they will grade those you know according to certain criteria. So it's a mix, it's a mix of us assessing certain things and the department assessing other things and then it is a combination.

Researcher: And who makes the final call?

Participant 10: Well again, I suppose the only subjective element...I mean obviously either you have a first or you don't; you have English language skills or you don't eh so it's not so much a call, it's just – you either do or you don't you know, but in terms of then you know the academic ability, the written skills, the research plan, that is the department that would decide because they are the experts in that particular research field...

Researcher: Of course

Participant 10:...I wouldn't be able to make that kind of decision

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. That's fine. So, would you ever liaise with other universities around or other education institutions in Ireland?

Participant 10: Not really. Not really. I mean you do in a sense that you might be in a network of different university partners for other reasons. And then through that networking you might say you know 'is anyone else working on this particular funding' or whatever. It's more anecdotal. It's not specific as such...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 10:...a useful source of information for us is the IUA [Irish Universities Association] so if we are in any doubt, maybe it's a country we haven't dealt with before or maybe it's a qualification we haven't seen before and we're not sure exactly is this a degree or is it not a degree or what is it – we would go to the IUA.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 10: And I suppose I would say it's more like that they would be the touchpoint, and they would be gathering information from the different universities and sharing information because we're not...obviously we are competing with each other so you know...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 10: It's more likely that we would go to the IUA to get their advice if we needed it.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 10: Again, I must stress something. I'm no expert. This is just my feeling on how things work you know.

Researcher: Absolutely.

Participant 10: There may well be groups through the international office but because I don't work in international office, I don't...I don't do that myself.

Researcher: OK. So the IUA do give some assistance.

Participant 10: Yes – they give you advice or they might say 'oh this came up last year with another university' you know...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 10:...maybe they will put you in touch with someone, or they might say 'well no, this is our official line when it comes to that country or that place or whatever.

Researcher: OK, that's interesting.

Participant 10: As far as I know, I don't know of an Irish equivalence to NARIC?

Researcher: Well formally, QQI acts as the Irish ENIC-NARIC centre. Now, it's very different to UK NARIC and I can talk to you about this again if you'd like.

Participant 10: Sure.

Researcher: UK NARIC is obviously subscription and everything. We are not and anecdotally we deal mainly with people wanting to access unregulated work. So our resources are significantly smaller than UK NARIC but we do em have a website where we're trying to get more information on academic recognition, you know on levels. We're trying to increase that on our website all the time so our website em qualrec.ie for the moment, so that used to be under NQAI; now it's under QQI.

Participant 10: OK. Qualrec.ie [QR website].

Researcher: Yes and you mentioned Participant 10 that you are looking at these also in terms of possible future collaboration with certain universities in certain areas, or that was the way I took it up. Em, in terms of the applications that might be coming through for scholarships you know, would they maybe be part of a collaboration already? Would they come from people maybe that you have established links with?

Participant 10: I would say 'yes'. That happens. I mean the thing is that you know, and I presume that my colleague would have explained this to you - there are two types of scholarship generally. There's one where a body is giving a scholarship to a student so it's a personal scholarship.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 10: The student is the one who applies and of course they would get the support of the future supervisor but it would...the onus is on the student. But there are other types of scholarships which would be kind of project based scholarships so therefore, the department or the individual academic, or maybe a collaboration of academics within Ireland would have put in for EU or different funding at a bigger level. And as part of that funding to do that particular research, they will have funding there as part of that for one or two research students...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 10:...and so I think a really important thing is; they will go to the international office in the university for help in you know assessing those students and

who to take and all that stuff. But I still think that there is a lot to be done at that level to support those individuals...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 10:...you know, in terms of the access that they have. I mean the awareness for example that they have of Qualrec or whatever it might be. Of course, the international office would be the central body but I think that it would be good if individual academics would have some awareness of the kind of assessment, grading opportunities that are out there to help them you know.

Researcher: OK. Right. Just to – it kinda links back to my next question as well when you are describing yourself as not an expert in the area you know, but obviously you are working in it and you're increasing your experience. Are you advocating training then?

Participant 10: Em, I suppose in my opinion you know, there's no harm in people being more aware of things...

Researcher: Yeah, OK.

Participant 10:...and some people would be more aware than others purely because they have more funding application experience...

Researcher: Yes. OK.

Participant 10:...and I just think that making some sort of information session available where people can understand...because one of the things of course is if it is very time consuming and difficult to assess a student, then it makes you less likely to assess the student...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 10:...or maybe that's an oversimplification, and it isn't as simple as that. But eh I just think that information sessions for academic communities around how to assess students em, grades I mean of course I don't mean written; they would be perfectly capable of that...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 10:...but assessment of grades and a better understanding of how those grades are assessed I think would be beneficial for everybody, even if it still means that there is a central place that does it for them.

Researcher: OK. OK. Would you eh get people coming back appealing decisions or...you know not happy with decisions?

Participant 10: Eh, yes you would.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 10: I mean I had that situation, and what I said was 'I can only tell you what the position is based on the evidence you provided.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 10: If you feel that we have misinterpreted something, then perhaps can you get more evidence...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 10:...to demonstrate that in actual fact you do have a first'. A lot of the time, what is confusing for people is that they might have a first in a particular subject, but they don't have a first overall for example.

Researcher: Yes. Right.

Participant 10: So that would be where further clarification would be needed for the student to explain that having a first in a particular subject area...of course, it depends on what the scholarship requires. You know, if the scholarship is open to that, then that's fine...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 10:...but normally its...in a case where if anything has been appealed and eh where something has changed, it's usually because a student has been able to provide additional evidence that they didn't provide in the first place...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 10:...where maybe there's em a letter from an academic who worked with the student and the academic is willing to talk to us...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 10:...or else maybe there's another piece of the registration – graduation puzzle that the student just didn't give us. And if they do, then a different decision can be made you know; that's normally how it would work.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 10: But if the student can't produce evidence of something then there is nothing that we can do.

Researcher: Of course. Of course and em, the...what was I thinking there? There is another question that I had there and it seems to be gone completely out of my head but in terms of...eh, I might think of it! In terms of policy, are there any policies in particular that impact on your work do you feel?

Participant 10: I'm sorry – how do you mean?

Researcher: Em, you know, they could be institutional policies or national ones...international ones.

Participant 10: Eh, I don't really know what you mean.

Researcher: Eh, say for example, ATP, Access Transfer and Progression or you know the National Strategy on International Education.

Participant 10: I mean, to be honest I suppose that I would see things like that as our more local policies...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 10:...that would have been integrated into our internal policy here...eh so obviously I am familiar with what national policy is and what our internal policy is in line with that...

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 10:...but I don't think I can think of a specific example. Probably because only a very small part of my role involves this kind of activity.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 10: In fact, my colleague, X who you have spoken to...she has now taken on most of the scholarships. I have now moved into more of the taught Masters area rather than the research area, so that's why she would certainly be more familiar now whereas I might have been more familiar a couple of years ago.

Researcher: OK, so you have moved into the admission for taught Masters?

Participant 10: Yeah. As in, I have moved further away from research students and research student scholarships. In terms of the scholarships anyway and admissions, that would be less me now than it would have been a couple of years ago.

Researcher: OK and in terms of the recognition of international qualifications for the purpose of access to taught Masters...

Participant 10: It is done through the international office. I don't go near it.

Researcher: OK. The thing I was trying to think of there. The question was actually going back to what we were talking about...when you were talking about grades and the possible training on grades. It just struck me – is it...how might the conversion of grades be done or...how complex is that process?

Participant 10: Em, it obviously depends on what country you are talking about. What I would say in terms of training; what I mean is, if for example, Qualrec [QR] was a resource that was being you know encouraged to be used across Ireland or whatever.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 10: I think an introduction to that and an explanation of how to use it, and the advantages of using it would be the kind of thing I have in mind.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 10: Anybody, anybody who was interested in that. Obviously it would be people like international office of course, but beyond that then there might be specific people who are involved in admissions in different departments...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 10:...purely because a lot of the applications come across their desk. I think that you know, to have it open, so that others could attend so at least their awareness is raised...

Researcher: Absolutely, absolutely.

Participant 10:...even if the final decision in terms of the assessment of grades would be made through international office.

Researcher: Absolutely, absolutely. One of the last questions Participant 10 is concerning the grades. You had mentioned that you know the conversion of grades is not a subjective element of the evaluation. Could you elaborate further on that or the process that is involved?

Participant 10: Well what I mean is; everything is subjective of course, because all you can do is read the information that you are given, and read the information that might be online about that particular country and how their higher education system works. You then can double check with the international office – ‘Do I have this right?’ What I mean is either you have shown evidence that you have a sufficient grade or you haven’t shown enough evidence. And you [applicant] are informed as early as we can do that according to what we seen - it wouldn’t be sufficient or it would be. And that way, it gives the student an opportunity that if there is something additional, then so be it, and that would be great. But if there is nothing additional, at least they are warned as soon as possible.

Researcher: Yes, yes and the timeline for taking in an application and turning around a decision Participant 10?

Participant 10: Yes. Absolutely. I mean, in terms of a scholarship, eh the closing date is May and it usually takes about six weeks because of the amount of them.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 10: And then they would normally...most of them would start the following September but not always. You could start a PhD anytime you want really, but most of them would be registering the following September so they would be notified in July and then they’d start in September. Usually that’s how it works. Alright?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. That’s brilliant.

Participant 10: As I say, you probably think I’m being overly cautious but these are only my experiences. These are not necessarily representative of what the international office...

Researcher: That's fine.

Participant 10: These are just kind of anecdotal; how I think it has worked or whatever, but if you want the official way it is supposed to be done, then it is the international office that you would go to.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 10: I do check what I am doing with them. They would be the gatekeepers of the information.

Researcher: Yes. Absolutely. I really appreciate your input. It's a very good insight so thanks for your input. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Participant 10: I suppose what will you do with the research? I mean, will it have a bearing on the kind of service is provided in Ireland or...?

Researcher: Good question. Will I turn off the recorder as in that's the end, and then we will have a chat?

Participant 10: Yeah, Yeah.

Researcher: OK so I'll just turn this off.

Participant 11

Researcher: I'm here with participant 11 from X. Participant 11, thanks very much for agreeing to speak with me. I've just given you a very quick overview of the research but em in terms of...so I have explained the research. I suppose to get started, I am just going to ask you what is your role or what do you do at X?

Participant 11: OK. Thanks very much for having me. Delighted to participate in your em research so as you know, my name is participant 11. I work in the international office as an international relations manager. So my responsibilities would be in relation to em establishing relationships with European universities and institutions that fit the profile of X [institution] in relation to semester abroad programmes; students coming into the final year of our internationally recognised degree programmes to get the HETAC award. I would also do em be responsible for those type of articulation agreements in North America as well. And I would also be responsible for the direct recruitment of students coming from Europe and North America onto full-time degree programmes at undergraduate level and at postgraduate level...

Researcher: Hm. OK.

Participant 11:...and what I'm currently going to be going into...I'm going to be focusing on our digital marketing strategy for all international students.

Researcher: OK. OK

Participant 11: That sounds a lot but at the moment that is what my main focus is.

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah. It's very interesting actually. That's a big job.

Participant 11: Yes. It's massive. Yeah. Yeah . So, my role is evolving.

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah

Participant 11: I have been working at X for six years.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: I started off with creating you know or fostering relationships with the universities and institutions in Europe – all over and you know, to create articulation agreements in terms of semester abroad and top-up degrees. Now, I'm you know responsible for North America in terms of those types of articulation agreements. But

I'm also in charge of direct recruitment for those particular areas of the world and my other interest is cos I'm actually doing a Masters as well part-time for my sins.

Researcher: Good for you!

Participant 11: Yeah! and the area of specialisation would be digital marketing and digital story-telling.

Researcher: OK. That's interesting. That's great...

Participant 11: [Laughs]

Researcher:...and when you talk about em you know the articulation agreements – how do you go about that?

Participant 11: Yeah. So basically, what I would do em in relation to articulation agreements is that a lot of the people that I meet would be at conferences eh in relation to international education. I meet a lot of these people at sessions and workshops you know regarding strategy, leadership. You know, em I would attend conferences to see what the trends are you know in international education. But it is also an opportunity for networking with directors of international relations and a lot of what I've found at these conferences em particularly in Europe - it was part of their international strategy to eh establish articulation agreements you know, particularly in English-speaking countries, and giving their students the opportunity to study abroad. So what was happening was that they were embedding an obligatory semester or one year into their programme in Business Studies em for example. So what I would do is eh, we would meet with these people and I would ask them like you know a series of questions in terms of you know are they part of the Bologna system? Cos you know, I have been working you know in higher education for a while now, probably about eight years now. And Ireland you know is one of the first countries to you know complete the first and second cycle of the Bologna system so when I would be meeting people, you know, the learning outcomes, ECTS credits, the objectives, everything would be laid out perfectly and in some countries em...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11:...you know in France and in Germany due to internal politics, you know lecturers not wanting to put their courses, or Diplom system in Germany was very different. Normally you would have to study maybe seven or eight years. For them, that

was completely normal. Students would graduate when they were maybe 26 or 27 whereas in Ireland, it's more or less 22 or 23 so anyway...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...there was a shift in Europe to send more students abroad so again, I'd be asking; are you part of the Bologna system? Do you use ECTS credits? Who is your national you know accreditation body?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: because you know, we'd have, we'd be working with institutions or universities, but we would also be working with you know private institutions. So some have you know maybe regional accreditation...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11:...national accreditation depending on you know what country you are looking at. So then, what would happen is I would chat to them. As I said, I would have my checklist you know, how big is the institution? I would be asking them for their detailed curriculum as well and generally if they were part of the Bologna system, which the majority of them are in Europe anyway, I would ask them to send me the curriculum. And I would come back to X [institution] and then I would chat with the heads of faculty, and I would say, listen I have met X, Y and Z. I would give a presentation basically of who I've met, what their roles were, where they were coming from, what their international strategy was...

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah.

Participant 11:...in terms of you know, do they have an international programme with many international students cos technically that is an international programme. Or do they want to internationalise a different way through sending students abroad, or what are the opportunities for X for our lecturers to go over there and maybe teach on some programmes and for our students as well? So yeah, and I would say listen we'd be interested in semester abroad or top-up which is kinda like the slang word for APL agreements which is accredited prior learning agreements and em essentially I would hand over the key information in terms of yes – do they follow the Bologna system? Do they use ECTS? Who their national accreditation body is and hand them over the curriculum. In some specialised programmes, for example in interior design or fashion

design, there is another step that you need to take where you can't just you know automatically see from a curriculum whether you know that the institution is suitable to work with. Cos with fashion design and interior architecture, it is very much...you need to look at the facilities of the institution you are working with. You need to look at a group of students' work, the quality of it. You know, we'd also be looking at the teachers' qualifications. We'd also be looking at how many hours the students would be in the classroom, the assessment you know – is it an examination? Is it you know 50 per cent examination, 50 per cent practical? You know, all of these type of things you know you take into consideration. Then, what we do in that case is that the course director would actually visit the institution and meet with the director and meet with the students...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11:...you know, have a tour of the institution and generally you know, at the beginning I would be there from the international office side of things. So really, the internal relationships are extremely important to me and that's how we have been so successful in terms of setting up systems and procedures by making sure that the academics are involved in the academic side of things and they're involved in meeting the people that I meet...

Researcher: Yes, Yes.

Participant 11:...visiting institutions or also...we'd have a lot of visitors you know coming to Dublin. And you know typically what we would do as well to build the relationship – we generally have a set itinerary you know where they would have a tour of X, they would meet the President of X – he is very interested in international relations...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 11:...but just as a welcome and what we would do is they would visit the international office you know where they would have an in-depth meeting about our systems and procedures in terms of the criteria you know that we expect from semester abroad students or APL students eh you know, our systems, how we deal with applications, offer letters, all of that type of thing.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 11: Practical information like on campus accommodation etc and then we have the academic side of things where they would meet the Head of the Faculty and you know... actually the Head of the Faculty would have the curriculum normally beforehand. The institution that is interested in working with us – they would have a copy of ours and have a detailed in-depth conversation...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11:...about the academic side you know of the programme and I am in the meeting as an observer, listening to the questions and sort of taking the minutes...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...of the meeting so it's quite a detailed process...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 11:...but once we have...once I get the approval of the academics...yes, we are happy that the institution is a suitable match for X based on the research that I have done, that they have met the people...you know the academics at the same level as themselves and that they have carried out a detailed mapping exercise of the curriculum, that's when we go on to the finalising stage.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: That's when we would have articulation agreements. You know we have templates now...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...for semester abroad students, an articulation agreement for our APL students as well. When you are dealing with institutions, you know it's the institution that nominates the students. We are not dealing directly with the students themselves so the institutions that we work with generally, it is student coordinators that would organise the application process from our partner institution.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: Em but yeah eh we are on that kinda high level.

Researcher: OK, and Participant 11, would...you mentioned ECTS credits. Would some of these people also have full qualifications sometimes in their home systems, or does that come into it because you don't...

Participant 11: OK, so the process is – generally they have completed their high school, you know, Diploma or Bacc or whatever...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...it is and they would be in the middle of their programme in their university or institution...

Researcher: Right.

Participant 11:...that fits that criteria. So its semester abroad students, they normally have completed at least two if not three semesters when they are coming to study at X.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: When it's an APL undergraduate agreement, they have completed at least two years if not three years of an undergraduate level 8 equivalent.

Researcher: So would they potentially have a qualification? Say for example, if I relate it to the Irish system you know, somebody could have the Higher Certificate after two years. Could it be that they have a qualification or...

Participant 11: It's part of the qualification so we have a lot of... Actually you are right. OK. It's quite complex in Europe. Yes and No – that's my answer to you.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: So say for example, in Norway, we would have students that would have diploma equivalent to level 7.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: And they would be able to enter on to the final year of our level 7 programme. So yes but in a lot of cases, we would have students, because it's part of the international strategy of the institution that wants to send their students abroad to Australia, to China, to Beijing...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...it's embedded in their programmes so what they will do is...they will have spent maybe two years at a BA in business studies. They come to X em you know em for the third year...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...and then they'll return to eh their home institution and complete their Bachelor in Business Studies. Do you understand?

Researcher: OK. I understand.

Participant 11: And sometimes, we have students that have completed three years of a BA in business studies. The most important thing is that they have the underpinning knowledge to be able to enter into the final year of a Bachelor degree programme and em that they have completed at least 120 ECTS credits.

Researcher: OK. And do you get involved in – so as you said, there is a course coordinator on the other side. So they basically send the students as such. So is there some sort of assessment on your side as to yes, we will take that student or no, we won't?

Participant 11: Yes, so that is all part of the articulation agreement. The articulation agreement for a semester you know...we might have two or three pages basically kinda giving a blurb or a paragraph about the partner institution and their accreditation, and then a blurb about X and our accreditation and that we agree more or less to...we agree to have a semester abroad agreement.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: And then what we have you know is the application process. They have to fill in an online application form. They have to have a certain level of English. We have to have translated copies of their transcripts, and we have a student coordinator or student services officer at X, but the process is that they would have the equivalent of a student coordinator that processes that. I would deal with the Directors of International Relations, so once the academic and faculty agree 'yes' you know, this is a suitable partnership, I deal with the articulation agreement, and writing that up. And then the other person would be the Dean of the Business Faculty from our partner in France, for example and then we have the equivalent Dean in X.

Researcher: Yeah. I understand your role. Are you aware then of...or has there been any issues with maybe course coordinators from other countries sending over students that were perhaps not suitable? I know the articulation agreement is there and you obviously look for a certain level of English and...

Participant 11: Yeah, yeah. Basically how we do that - not really...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11:...because the research is done at the very beginning from my side.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: So this is the institution. This is their accreditation. This is their reputation. This is their ranking. So all of that sort of research is done prior to following through the steps, because at X we have a lot...35 per cent of the students are international. We have a lot of European students – now at X, they are not all Erasmus students.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: Most of the students are you know fee-paying.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11: We don't have any funding as you know.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: So anyway, it is so important to get that research done before any of the next steps take place. If you know I am meeting people at a conference, I have my checklist of questions that I ask and then I have to verify that you know by looking at their website. You know, getting in contact with the national accreditation body and writing up a report...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...and then you know...I go and speak to the academics and say right this is what they are interested in. I will have you know the curriculum. I'll have all my information and then the academic has to assess whether he wants to take this forward or not. Now with semester abroad agreements you know...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: ...it's a little bit easier you know because there is not an award involved. But when it's an APL [Accredited Prior Learning], you know, the academics are you know...It's very important obviously that they have to approve it and generally what will happen once they say 'yes, this is good', we'll either invite an institution to come over to X or we'll go over to them you know.

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 11: That's how it works in Europe. Now in North America, the market there is semester abroad and Masters students. So with Masters students, it is direct entry and for Europeans as well. I'd look after direct entry as well so they follow the procedures, you know, they have to have...we use NARIC. We go through the admissions office there you know.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: Europeans if they are applying you know are applying for a CAO [Central Applications Office] course.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11: The international side of things is that we have people in the international office that will deal with general queries em you know, and if they want to speak to one academic or they need information, we can facilitate that.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: People that find us through the website or if a colleague of mine is at a study abroad fair.

Researcher: Who would that be organised through?

Participant 11: The international office. They decide if we do a certain study abroad programme.

Researcher: Would it just be X [institution] on its own doing these - when you talk about these articulation agreements and going to different conferences?

Participant 11: Yeah, that's all X yeah but...

Researcher: That's all X itself?

Participant 11: It's just X, yes and no, again because there are conferences that I go to on my own but then in terms of you know particular markets, we would do conferences with Education in Ireland. So you know we are representing Ireland. So we are there with the universities and the IoTs so certainly like in India and China the trade missions and the States, we are all part of that, all part of that. It is really, really important for our branding.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: You know, that X is not kind of stand-alone, that we are Education in Ireland. It is a symbol of quality you know. So it is very important for recognition and for students that wish to study in Ireland and for institutions that are interested in having a partner in Ireland.

Researcher: So for that direct access, both undergraduate and postgraduate then. If I understand correctly, are they mainly just individuals seeking you out or are there arrangements maybe with institutions in that sphere as well?

Participant 11: It's both. So as I said, 35 per cent of the students are international from over 80 different countries, so it's massive you know the international students. They are a very important cohort in X. Yes, we have articulation agreements where a student would go onto a Masters programme, and it's a similar process you know in terms of articulation agreement – doing the basic research first, making sure they tick all of the boxes that it is a good fit for X. And then we go onto the next step which is basically talking to the academic then. Talking to them about why we think this would be of benefit to have a partnership. Now of course, we have a lot of students that are interested or universities and institutions that want to have a partner in Ireland because we are in Dublin. This is the capital. It is the European Silicon Valley. X is attractive as it is a small campus. Pastoral care is a massive thing at X. One of the selling points of X if you like is the – you know you won't have maybe 500 students in a class or 300. You are going to have say maybe 40 to 50 students in your class. There is a kind of a closeness between the students and the lecturers. We have an open door policy from the academic side of things and from the international office and that's,...the strategy is to build long standing or long term relationships with universities and institutions that we work with, and you know following the systems and procedures. And it's great you

know because everybody is happy. It's a win-win you know. Academics are satisfied because you know we have the articulation agreement. It clearly states what both parties have agreed to...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...what the entry requirements are.

Researcher: Hmm. And for outside of those articulation agreements, say individuals that just happen to seek you out?

Participant 11: Yeah.

Researcher: What does that look like from the time a person maybe makes a request?

Participant 11: In my experience is if you have students that are coming you know like, direct entry is what we would call it, for the full time degree programme at undergraduate and postgraduate...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...we would get students coming you know through the website and find us, or you know through study abroad, not study abroad but fairs, Masters fairs, that sort of thing. So what they would have to...if they were applying for a programme you know. Again they would come through em ...we would do follow-up. If I am going to be at a study abroad fair or an academic is going to be at a study abroad fair, not a study abroad fair, Masters or you know direct entry fair, whatever you would like to call it...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...they would do follow-up and keep contact with the students. The international office and the academics actually. It's great.

Researcher: Do you now?

Participant 11: Yeah, yeah. And then in terms of when the student is applying. They apply online and then they have to you know meet the admission requirements that we would have for every international student, which is they have to have the correct English language level. They have to have you know a high school diploma which is recognised on the NARIC.

Researcher: When you say that, do you mean UK NARIC?

Participant 11: Yeah, UK NARIC. If there is something that is an anomaly then, that's when we would get in contact with you guys. You know, maybe not so much with the high schools, but say if we had a student that had a Bachelor degree and we don't see that it is government accreditation.

Researcher: And who does that particular research then or is it a variety of people?

Participant 11: It is a variety of people you know.

Researcher: OK. Does everything go through the international office?

Participant 11: It goes through both. If the international office has had no contact you know...if a student hasn't had any contact with the international office, generally we would meet them at fairs, then they would go directly to admissions first and then if there are any...I suppose we have a database system that we would be looking up regularly to see where these different students are coming from. I can only speak for Europe and North America.

Researcher: That's fine. When you say database, do you mean an internal database or?

Participant 11: Yeah. Scholar is what we use.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 11: Are you familiar?

Researcher: No – not particularly.

Participant 11: So that's basically...when they are applying online, you know we have a system, so when applicants and students with different fees....so basically we can run a test on how many students...I would be looking specifically at Europe and North America.

Researcher: Did you see them before maybe, is it?

Participant 11: Well anybody that has applied for a direct entry programme that I wouldn't have met or might have met at a fair. They all have to apply online and then that information is automatically then going onto our database system, so their contact details, the programme they have applied for so that is what they do OK? They

obviously have to have their English language level, they have to have their Bachelor parchment...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Participant 11:...and em what I would do and the team in the international office would do is...the admissions office are waiting. They have to tick English language. They have to have their Bachelor parchment, and then they have to make sure that its internationally recognised. And what the international team would do is follow-up on that.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: If you know, an offer letter hasn't been given you know to an international student. I'm talking now about Europe and North America, you'd have to talk to X maybe on the other markets, but you know if an offer letter hasn't been given say in a week or two weeks, it would be our responsibility then to follow up on that.

Researcher: So it's very quick then that process – turnaround time?

Participant 11: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: So it seems like from what you're saying, admissions are kind of doing the tick boxes and ultimately offering...

Participant 11: It's the follow-up of them if there is a delay with say you know 'OK why has this applicant not received an offer letter?' on the database system...

Researcher: It'll show?

Participant 11: Show the reasons why, so it's the same when the international office comes in, the international officers' and they follow-up with the student. 'I believe you're interested in such and such a course em you know. We've received your English language certificate but we are still waiting for your Bachelor parchment' and that might be because they haven't graduated yet. They are waiting to graduate and just if they have any questions...

Researcher: And would...

Participant 11: ...in order to keep them. You know some students - they'd apply maybe in November or December or September for the following year, so you want to keep the relationship there with the student.

Researcher: Going...

Participant 11: Yeah. So a lot of work would be kinda you know keeping in touch with the student. You know, basically making sure that they're happy with the process. It's like kinda walking into a shop you know.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11: The customer service you know is very important and say if there's a sale. If I could use this kind of example. If there is a sale going on in Brown Thomas in the shoe department and there's loads of women looking for loads of shoes, and then you see a customer there waiting for five minutes and if you don't tell that...you might be looking for that particular shoe, but if you don't tell them that, they are looking at their watch and getting annoyed. They get frustrated, but if you go over to the person and say to them 'Bear with me for a few minutes. I have about ten pairs of shoes I have to get for ten other ladies, but I haven't forgotten you'...

Researcher: I know.

Participant 11: ...then that customer is, well I shouldn't be referring to customer, but students. Do you know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: The process is looking after the student even though they mightn't have all of the particular documents that we're looking for.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: We are there to support you know and they might even have – you know the international office as well would help with say...we have ten places you know... FAQs, they might be asking about practical information or say visa information for non-EU students, so we would send all that information out to them beforehand and then the orientation then...

Researcher: Yeah, you mentioned pastoral care a few times so the impression I get is that it's at all stages of your relationship with them...

Participant 11: Yeah.

Researcher: Is there anything in particular around pastoral care that you think is over and above other places?

Participant 11: Well, you know it's different because of the structure of the organisation that we have.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: I mean I don't think you can really compare a private institution say to a university in Ireland.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: It's just totally different. I mean even from a physical point of view. You've been to X before have you?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: Yeah, so even in terms of easy access to academics. I literally can walk down a corridor and within a minute or two minutes, I can get to the person very easily. In a university of 30,000 students, you can forget it. If its pouring rain or trying to get them on the phone, so it's easier to get things done..

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 11:...and particularly when em you know the student is paying to come you know to X. X you know isn't funded by the Irish government, so it's really important you know yeah that the pastoral care is really really important, and helping them get through the steps and being there for that student.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: And that's, that's the difference you know?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: That's what I would say and afterwards as well. It's not just with international students. The pastoral care doesn't stop at the application process.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: It continues on!...you know you can have a student. This is their first time away from home you know, maybe from Malaysia you know, or even from Norway is a good example. Some of these students are coming from little villages you know and they are coming to the big smoke which is Dublin, and it's a totally different culture. For Europeans, it's not so bad, but for a Malaysian or a Chinese student, it's just totally alien and even the culture. The Irish people are very chatty. We're very social creatures and we love sports and we like going to the pub. We like having the craic you know. For some like a Chinese student...some issues we have is with integrating the student you know because Chinese students don't like going to the pub you know or the sports and shoutin' and roarin'. They like going to their friends house, and they like cooking a meal and that's what's important. And then let's say the American students love it when they come over here. Brilliant. You know going and watching sport cos they are a big sport nation you know...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...and they love you know the idea of you know having the real kind of pubs and things. And there's just em so much to do, and they're so enthusiastic and everything's awesome and all that type of thing you know.

Researcher: [laughs]

Participant 11: So you know the thing is that, if there's a student...also as well we are very quick to react, and I think that's also as well the type of organisation that we have. In X in Dublin, we have about X [Number] students full-time and part-time so you know if there is an issue with [Section of sentence deleted] or somebody has lost their luggage, you know we're quick to react or...

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11:...say you know if there was a serious issue, I would be informed you know of it. And then in terms of articulation agreements, I can contact the institution immediately. You know the type of agreements we have, we have built them over...like I have been building them for six years.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: So you know, there is a really strong partnership and we're working on research projects. We have you know faculty going for international weeks to our partners and they love that, and then vice versa so it's not just student exchange. It has become much more global. [Two sentences deleted]

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: So it is really a massive thing, but I think a lot of that has to do in my opinion with the structure of the organisation.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: You know that the...and the relationships as well. The internal relationships that I would have with the academics, and with the admissions office and yeah...understanding the different complex you know em procedures or problems or issues. Understanding that and coming up with solutions, and creating a win-win situation for everybody.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. OK. Absolutely. I wanted to ask you a few things. Gosh – we have actually gone through an awful lot there. In terms of international recruitment there, are there agents involved in what you do?

Participant 11: Yes, there is and that is depending on the market. OK – so with Europe for example, eh you know, we would have a lot of the students coming through our partnerships but we do work with some agents ...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 11:...in Europe, not lots but we do. Trusted relationships again and we would learn from that with the type of students that they would send us; their efficiency, professionalism and generally in Europe, they are very good to be honest with you. But in certain markets, like say maybe China, it is an agent based market or say India, agents are used a lot and they are trusted by the parents of the student, and also say in the States, we would use what they call 'Study Abroad Providers'.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: They don't like the word 'agent' because as a third party, they kinda feel a little bit uneasy about it, but it really depends on the market so X would use agents, study abroad providers and they would work with universities and different institutions. So X has a tremendous amount of experience working in international education.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: We work with the em University of X and we have students studying the Bachelor in Business Studies; our programme running out there so HETAC have been out checking out the University of X, you know like transnational programmes and all of this type of thing, so we have a lot of experience.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: I hope that answers your question?

Researcher: No, No, it does. Absolutely. You mentioned their internationalisation strategies as well. Yeah, its em, so for those agreements, what might you be looking for in particular in terms of their strategies?

Participant 11: Em.

Researcher: Maybe you touched on it before actually.

Participant 11: Yeah, I suppose. What do you mean now? What are you looking for?

Researcher: Well like you mentioned a match between the two strategies, so you know I mean if you have a strategy here, is that...

Participant 11: Yeah, yeah. Part of our international strategy is to build relationships with universities and institutions that meet the profile of X in relation to study abroad, to APL agreements, to students coming onto the full year Masters programmes...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...and a lot of it is creating a checklist you know and doing your basic research beforehand, and actually talking to you know Education in Ireland em you know. Getting the reports em you know on statistics, looking at the market and understanding... what is a liberal college in you know the US? A lot of it is as well is the em language that we use for international education. A lot of the times, in Europe it's great because we talk about models, we talk about ECTS credit systems, but in the US

for example, you know em everything is decentralised which makes it completely...I mean super difficult you know, and if you build a relationship with a university, they have their own systems and procedures so you have to...it's understanding that and going into seminars and workshops at international conferences you know and speaking to the national government agencies like the IIE [Institute of International Education], and asking questions and talking to your colleagues in Ireland as well, and saying 'hey ya, how have you found this', or you know 'how would you approach this?' or..

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11:...you know what particular research have you done? Could you make some recommendations? So helping each other. I mean, well in Ireland it's great because it's a small...It's small so everybody knows everybody.

Researcher: Would there be a lot of that now? Are you talking about HEIs?

Participant 11: Well to be honest with ya, it wouldn't be everybody. It absolutely wouldn't be. Some people that have been working in international education in Ireland have been working in the sector for years and so have I, so you build up a certain rapport and there's certain things like you know like, if we have a student that approaches us and wants to study engineering, I would certainly recommend one of our universities in Ireland as opposed to saying 'Well I think you should talk to Australia or England'. So the whole goal is when we are out with Education in Ireland, 'we don't teach engineering but this is who we think you should speak to'. And you know some colleagues. You are very good friends with them and they are willing to help you out. They are very open and helping. There is a piece of pie you know for everybody. I would not be recruiting you know the same type of students as say you know say the more prestigious universities. You know it's different and I would also say that in America, I wouldn't be targeting Harvard or Stanford or MIT but I would be you know...University of California, Davis or University of South Carolina so do you know, universities you know who fit the profile of...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...X and then you know in terms of articulation agreements as well. You know, looking at the research, getting talking to students, doing focus groups. Why did you decide to come to Ireland? What are the factors for you? Who is the decision-maker? Is it the parent? Is it the student?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: That's very important in Europe. In Scandinavia, it's the student that decides. In the US, it's the parent that decides cos you know in the U.S. Like you know, studying in a university, you are talking at least 30,000 dollars per year. So studying abroad for a Masters programme you know is going to be very expensive or...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...if they are going on a 'Study Abroad' programme through a study provider, you know you're talking about 15,000 dollars which is massive you know.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11: So, em so yeah, so I think a lot of it has to do with you know, the research is key...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 11:...you know in terms of forming our international strategy and where we want to go, talking to different stakeholders, talking to the students, talking to people in Ireland, in education in Ireland, talking to my colleagues that work in the institutes of technology, in the universities you know, and getting their opinion...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11:...whether they want to help me or not, but obviously I have a fairly good working relationship with most of them...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: Some are very friendly, but in terms of maybe helping you know - No

Researcher: No?

Participant 11: No and that's fine. That's absolutely fine, so starting from there and then you know Education in Ireland are great in terms of recommending you know conferences...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11:...you know, where to get your research papers or different seminars or workshops you know that you can attend. Enterprise Ireland put on different workshops at Eastpoint and trades missions. There's loads of things and talking to people so going to the sessions and workshops. They are really important and that's how you build the relationships and the trust - participating in you know sessions where you would be giving papers.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: And you know working with your colleagues that way is very enjoyable and is another way of building trust and you know working together.

Researcher: OK. I've taken a lot of your time now to be honest. You did mention a few bits of policy, but are there policies or initiatives that impact on your work in particular?

Participant 11: For example?

Researcher: You mentioned Bologna which would be policy – Bologna Process so is there anything...are there other policies?

Participant 11: Yeah, there would be. Say in the States for example, one of the prohibiting factors you know a policy in the United States in terms of...there is a difference between working in a private college and a state university in Ireland when students are applying directly for undergraduate in particular - direct entry.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: Students would have access to funding. They are all getting their scholarships so that's massive in the States and they are entitled to FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] funding to study abroad...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11:...on an international undergraduate degree. But they only get this funding if they are going to you know a university, so X doesn't have that status. Therefore, unfortunately, they're not entitled to that particular funding here.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 11: So that's kind of one disadvantage.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11: That affects us negatively but we're...we would look to you know...a very important factor in our international strategy, we would be looking at say Brazil for example, that's a massive thing with 'The Science Without Borders'.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant: So you know, we don't do engineering or technology kinda subjects, but computer science, for example, you know, that's massive for us so you know governments such as Saudi Arabia UAE. You know, a lot of the students coming over from there are funded on you know government scholarships so things like that. Does that answer your question?

Researcher: Yeah. It does absolutely. I suppose really, I suppose this is the last question that I have for yourself unless you have questions for me, or maybe two last questions! I'll combine it maybe! In terms of your role then in both direct access students and in different articulation agreements em , does the recognition of their prior qualifications where applicable, is that kind of written into such an agreement?

Participant 11: Yes. Absolutely.

Researcher: Yeah. It's established before so if it's not part of an articulation agreement, then you use UK NARIC or as you said, if it is not altogether clear, you contact us?

Participant 11: Yeah, not interested. It has to be of a certain standard.

Researcher: It's part of your research?

Participant 11: Yeah. It's all part of the research phase because once you get that part right - the research - then it's a win-win. You have a happy student, happy university partner and X lecturers are happy, admissions are happy, international office is happy. So that is really really really important so when I'm talking...you know in the articulation agreement, we're talking about a paragraph on the institution, the national accreditation and the type of qualification they get. That is the most fundamental thing, so if we did have an audit, the criteria that we have to fulfil, everything comes from the articulation agreement you know, and then if it's a direct entry student, then it's the same process you know in terms of if the student was applying to a university. But the

difference is that pastoral care part would maybe have more emphasis, and that's due to I think the structure of the organisation.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 11: So with a university that's dealing with thousands and thousands and thousands. They have massive teams. X is small...you know so it's just different.

Researcher: Yeah, fair enough and related to that is an English language requirement that would be set down?

Participant 11: Like IELTS equivalent – that's what we would use so absolute minimum would be 6 for an undergraduate programme and that's to do with our articulation agreements as well and for our Masters programmes, 6.5.

Researcher: OK, OK.

Participant 11: And you know if they did have say 6 OK on a masters level, and they really want to do it or we have a university partner who says 'listen, this student is brilliant academically but is just falling a little bit from English language', then that's not our call. It has to go to the academic, the Dean to decide. We don't have that many cases. Sometimes, we have the odd person. Sometimes, you will have the person who just won't, we can't...The reason why we have those minimums for English language is because you know we don't want the quality of the class...it's not fair for the other students.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 11: So really, it's only in exceptional cases where that would happen.

Researcher: Actually, it's just interesting talking to you so if you have to go, I'll end it.

Participant 11: No, I got into the flow of things!

Researcher: Next question was em, for direct entry – would you get people appealing against a decision that you made on the recognition of a qualification?

Participant 11: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah? There is obviously a procedure?

Participant 11: Yeah, there is obviously a procedure. I suppose I haven't had maybe too much experience of it because Europe, it's really like everything pretty much is above board, same with North America. But say let's say Indian students, there's lots of forgery, you know, having to double and triple check applications and of course, the qualification that they might have going onto a Masters might only be...the Bachelor may only be equivalent to level 6 or something like that you know on the Irish Qualifications Framework. It's not my experience, but I definitely think that we would have students like that, and we definitely have a procedure in place. I can get you that maybe if you'd like?

Researcher: I'm hopefully going to be talking to more people anyway but no, I'd appreciate that. When I'm writing this [transcript of interview] up, I might remind you then.

Participant 11: You can, yeah.

Researcher: The only other thing that you did mention and I'm looking at it now [looking at notes made during the interview] is the whole digital marketing side.

Participant 11: Yeah.

Researcher: We hadn't covered that.

Participant 11: What would you like to ask me about that?

Researcher: Em, just I suppose, its increasing role in this area?

Participant 11: Yeah, it's a massive thing. In terms of international recruitment, particularly direct entry, your website is the first point of marketing.

Researcher: Yeah, and what are the people looking for do you think?

Participant 11: Em, basically what you need to do when you're with the website, is to have a really good website and the information is easy to find for what they're looking for. So what they're looking for is; they are looking at prices. They are looking at how to apply, what the criteria is and if they have more questions, who do I contact? Who's the person? They are looking at student testimonials. They could be looking...you know we have samples of classes, maybe five minutes of law or whatever. So there can be a range of things, but generally it's how to apply, fees – that type of thing, so digital marketing is a really important part of the digital strategy.

[Phone rings]

Researcher: We'll finish up now.

Participant 11: No, you're grand. So it has massive potential. There's not a lot of people in the higher education sector that would be very savvy, I think, in my opinion and using digital marketing as an effective tool for recruitment.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 11: A key thing for the website for me now is really to...and this is global now for looking at again our strategy in terms of where our key markets are.

Researcher: Do you mean the national strategy or the individual X strategy or a combination?

Participant 11: A combination. A combination. Yeah. Absolutely. A combination. That's why, like Education in Ireland are working in conjunction with us, the higher education sector so yeah. A lot of the markets that they are going after, X is there. Basically, my main goal is to make sure the website is being found by the right type of student that we are looking for, if that makes sense?

Researcher: Yeah. Of course.

Participant 11: And making sure that if they find our website, that they are finding the relevant information to them. So what's going to happen then is focus groups. Getting international students coming in and finding out what their experiences of the website are. Did they find information easily? And you know, we will also be talking to our partner institutions, also agents, you know. Is it difficult to find stuff? I have had feedback to say that it has been difficult to find information, so that's very strong on the relationships as I said and the pastoral care, and all of that type of thing. But one of the weaknesses I would say between myself and yourself is the digital marketing strategy so that's as I said...a specialisation in digital marketing so really to drive that.

Researcher: Great. Great. Thank you very much.

Participant 12

Researcher: Thanks very much for agreeing to speak with me. So Participant 12, I've just given you a very brief outline of what I'm looking at for my research study. Just to get started, I was wondering if you could I suppose explain your role at X?

Participant 12: Hmm. So I would be programme director of I suppose the MA, postgraduate programmes really in the faculty of X so when I started in X [year], sorry X [date] I should say, I was appointed Programme Director of the MA in X which is a postgraduate programme. It's the first MA to be validated in the X [faculty] in X...

Researcher: OK

Participant 12: ...but since then last year, we've had two new validations so I look after I suppose three programmes essentially although two of them are getting their first intake in September. So my role as Programme Director – I em...we have I suppose I think a good support structure in X or certainly an organisational structure in that every programme would have a year head so students...that year head is the first port of call and then they'd also have a Programme Director, and we'd also have a Head of Faculty within the faculty so em as Programme Director, I suppose in many respects, I look after the paperwork if you like...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12: ...making sure em the course is delivered to a good academic standard. I can answer queries that perhaps the Year Head might have...mightn't be able to answer and might direct back to me. But I'd work very closely with the Year Head and we don't really have...I don't see myself as his boss so we more work together. So I suppose that's the structure we have.

Researcher: OK, OK. Thanks Participant 12. And does the, I suppose for...in terms of international students at X that may be accessing those programmes. Do you have any input or any oversight into the qualifications that they might bring for access to that programme?

Participant 12: I suppose that's an interesting question because when I was appointed, I was appointed in the January so we already had the students.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12: But I suppose I have more understanding now of how people apply through working with the admissions office em. I think we are somewhat protected from the complexities I see from my colleagues working with undergraduate students. It seemed to be a little bit more straightforward for us at postgraduate level; perhaps also because of the nature of the programme. It's an MA - the one we offer currently is the MA in Journalism so the majority of our students are Irish...

Researcher: OK

Participant 12:...and that then is very straightforward in terms of how they get on to the course.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: And our admissions procedure is a 2.2 eh honours degree – level 8 degree and if they have a pass, then we call them in for interview. When I say the majority are – I think we have about 40 per cent would still be international students.

Researcher: OK, that's high yeah.

Participant 12: But the majority of them – I'm trying to think over the last four years. It would still be more European based. We haven't had an American yet. We're about to get one in September but mainly German, French students, some further afield. We have one from Vietnam so that would be the kind of cohort we would get. And for the MA in Journalism, they require you just to have a level 8 degree in any subject.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: So you don't have to have a media degree although I do notice that a lot of our international students will actually have a media degree and are very anxious to get a Masters in that subject, whereas it's more common for I think our Irish students to be coming completely with a different background. We have had law students for example...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12: ...English literature students and we've had some Journalism students as well which is interesting cos it wasn't designed as an MA for Journalism students but we have had them as well.

Researcher: OK, OK and you mentioned the admissions office there. Are they responsible for making the admission decision?

Participant 12: They are to a certain extent em I really rely on our admissions officer here, X eh to make a judgement call on the applications that he receives. And it was a very interesting process for me because my background was not..you know, I've never really thought about the admissions procedure before. It was always quite separate from what I did here and in other colleges and I suppose quite interesting – what does the admissions department do? In many respects, I probably thought they were more advertising about the course or talking about the course, so seeing the complexities. So I work closely with X and eh there is an interesting pattern of work in that he would very rarely...we would very rarely make telephone calls to each other. We tend to communicate through writing so we each have a record – gosh that sounds very formal as if it's going to be investigated! But, it can be handy when I'm looking back and particularly when I was starting out, and trying to make sense of why maybe some students weren't doing as well as others, and was it linked to where they came from or the institution they came from.

Researcher: OK, OK. Yeah.

Participant 12: So I did find that quite helpful and also a plus, it's just good practice I think to have a record of it. He would only contact me if there was a difficulty. If there was...

Researcher: If there was a difficulty with?

Participant 12: Difficulty with the application process. If it wasn't clear if this is a level 7 or level 8 em and then em I would get an email to say – could you have a look at this application and what do you think of it?

Researcher: OK, so a person would make an application to the admissions office. The admissions office would look at it and make a decision if they could...

Participant 12: Yeah.

Researcher:...and if they felt it was too complex or if there was a problem, they'd send it on to you?

Participant 12: Yeah.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 12: And then I would make a decision on it. It hasn't happened so far, but if I felt it was really complicated, I know I'd have the support of colleagues in the faculty.

Researcher: And what would you be looking at there Participant 12 in the application? Are you looking at just the access qualification there or are you looking at other things?

Participant 12: Well I suppose it would depend on the specifics of it. Just this morning, I looked at you know previous quals that X had sent and X had...he sent me an application for a student. He had put on the email – it seems to be a level 7 degree that this student had completed in..I can't remember the country. I think it was Malawi but they had done a lot of media work – would this qualify for the MA?

Researcher: OK

Participant 12: For that instance, a level 7...we have a level 7 here in X and they are not admitted to an MA programme. They have to do the third year of our level 8. So I'd kinda look at that but the fact that they had done media work, maybe I would look a little bit further. So, one of the first things I look at is well what is the age of the person? If the person is over 27 and have done a lot of work in the media. I think 'OK – that might qualify' cos they might have done the equivalent of the third year but in that case, it was fairly straightforward. The student was like our own level 7 graduates – 21, who had an interesting application. So I wrote back and said you know, unfortunately they wouldn't qualify for the MA but I do try – I suppose I try to give a lot of information why they wouldn't qualify...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 12:...but I also said then, would they like to come onto our level 8? Cos I think the particular student - it was quite interesting what they were attempting to do. Like, they were working in the area which I thought took a good bit of initiative really...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12:...and what else they had done and they deserved...they would definitely get into the level 7 and if they had to have been a bit older with a bit more experience, I think they would have had an opportunity to go through the APL process to get into the

Masters. So, we offered the level 8 so that would be kind of one I would look for so it would be age, what they had done.

Researcher: So you are looking at other things, other than the qualification really?

Participant 12: Yeah. I had another student which I think was Pakistan or India and on paper – X had sent it to me and I remember looking at it and thinking, why has he sent this one? Cos on paper, she had an MA, she had a BA and MA. I thought that's interesting because we only require an honours degree but I rang X cos I was...I was wondering what was the story, but he explained that in that particular country, an MA is the equivalent of the level 8 and that was totally new to me and he was saying the reason he had sent it on was she wasn't quite a 2.2, and she had seemed to do extra courses as well.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12: So in that case, I try to be fair to the student and what we would do for our own Irish students if they didn't have an honours degree; they just got a Pass degree at level 8 but didn't do too well. We would bring them in for interview. Now, normally there is a period of time between when they have done their degree and they come in for interview. And we just give them an opportunity to maybe talk about their motivations for doing the course. Ask them about do they think their undergrad is a fair reflection of their mark, and we have had some really terrific students who have got a pass degree cos they ended up doing an undergrad they had no interest in and kinda approaching the Masters wanting to do something completely different. So we would offer an interview to that particular student. It is difficult because she was abroad, but she did come in and she was very interested in doing it, and she was very good and she was offered a place.

Researcher: Great and when...is the process documented Participant 12 in terms of what you might do or how you might look at an application or is that institution-wide?

Participant 12: I'm not sure if it is institution-wide. I suppose, we would always give information back to the admissions office here in writing. From our faculty perspective, definitely we could stand over that and our interviews are documented, so we have an interview guide that we use which is helpful. I suppose I feel that interviews, they can't sometimes call it exactly right. I feel it's a bit like going into an interview for a job. Sometimes, you get the perfect person, sometimes you don't, you know.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12: It's a bit of luck sometimes. I know they're not a perfect method but we have tried to approach the interview process...I suppose we always have two members of the faculty. Generally I would meet them for the MA. I would be there so we try and get two people's views on it.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 12: We do try for the interview is to get them to talk about what they've done, and we invite them if they want to bring in some work. So whatever they had done in the past – if they didn't get a great degree but if they want to bring in newspaper articles they'd written or something they have contributed to so it's more...I'd like to think it was a positive experience for them but we do document those interviews and we score them.

Researcher: OK, OK.

Participant 12: We write a comment on it in case they want to ask for feedback on it, because I think that is good practice. I don't think we have ever had anyone actually ask although the admissions office may...but I do feel it's their right to ask...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12:...but in most cases, I think they're just glad that they are offered a place and don't take it any further.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. OK. You mentioned something else there. You said it has been useful looking back at maybe emails and correspondence maybe between yourself and X you know in relation to maybe how some students did. Could you maybe elaborate on that - what you found useful or what you mean by that?

Participant 12: Yeah. I was looking back this morning because you are dealing with so many applications. I still think the majority are Irish students but still, it's a lot of applications that come in em and there was one that caught my eye. I was looking through records this morning and X had sent me one to look over this application. It was from a French college which I think was a private college and it seemed to be more em difficult to classify what level...not quite sure of the French system or exactly how it

worked but it seemed quite difficult to classify what level exactly their undergrad was from...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12:...so he asked me to have a look at it...

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 12:...and I had written back. I could see the chain of events and I had written back with some queries and he had written back - we had accepted another student before and I of course then checked up then you know cos obviously that shows...I thought then that maybe indicated that we had done something wrong or we hadn't done something right...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 12:...but when I looked back, I was able to see 'OK - those two French students were from the same college in France...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12:...but they both had completely different backgrounds. One had done two years in some other college that we have more connection with, and the other one hadn't. And one had much more experience in media work, so it wasn't quite as clear-cut. So that was useful to go back and see, but I was also re-assured because I know that X keeps good records and I thought, the fact that he was able to say that, it shows that he can see a pattern even though if I'm kinda lost in the day-to-day. He is on top of why we are taking some from some colleges and not from others, so it was interesting for me.

Researcher: Yeah. When you mention connection there with another institution - what did you mean by that?

Participant 12: Em, one of our faculty members has visited a lot of the colleges in France, and some of our French students might come for a semester say or for a year...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12:...but they would have asked a series of questions about the institution...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12:...involving you know, who accredits them? What's the nature of the assignments? Are they academic assignments? Are they practical assignments?

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: Just more...I suppose a little bit of quality assurance but from an academic perspective. So some institutions, we'd definitely feel very confident that the graduates coming from there are well able for the programme.

Researcher: OK, OK. Thank you. So do applications come directly ever to you

Participant 12?

Participant 12: No.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: They always go to the admissions office. You can apply online so it goes through them, and then normally I would get an email with just a link. I'm able to link into their application so their application form...the admissions office would keep em the correspondence they had with students. They would be looking for the transcripts from their undergrad and sometimes translated transcripts depending on what country they're from, and any additional material so when I get the link, I'm able to access everything they have sent in.

Researcher: Yes, yeah.

Participant 12: So, their English language requirements. I mean that's a crucial issue for the MA. Their English language just has to be so good. Probably a reason as well why we don't have more international students really.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: So that would be one thing I would definitely look for as well - what is their English language, but that would all be available to me which is good. It's helpful. It cuts down a lot of time and then I know when I'm looking back over a chain of emails from the admissions office, I can actually go back in and can still access their file now even though it might be three years later.

Researcher: OK. OK. You mentioned to me when I came in that some of these rooms are used for language support so is there...would that be for all students or how does that work?

Participant 12: Yeah, there's an English language school here so some students might be over just to learn English em so these rooms are nice cos you can move the tables, but then some of our students at undergrad and MA level - they would have passed the minimum requirement to be admitted into the course...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12:...for English language but they still might be judged as needing some help.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: So we do offer that. This room would tend to be used for more a class – the English language class, but for students who are offered English language support, they get kind of an individual person to work with them really to help them do assignments.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: So they are working through why this sentence worked so that it is much more succinct so it's not really class based.

Researcher: OK and em in looking at you know at applications that X might send through - are there any specific policies that you might have in the back of your head when you are looking at those?

Participant 12: I suppose my own philosophy really of learning. I mean I was very influenced personally by the White Paper on Lifelong Learning and em I suppose that whole concept of lifelong learning so I'm coming at it with that in mind. That I'm trying to facilitate students, learners who want to learn, who are highly motivated and generally, I feel that I need a good reason to say 'No' - someone can't come on this course. I think there are powerful reasons why someone couldn't come on so if they haven't the academic ability, I don't think you are being fair to them em or if they don't have the English language skills and they have the academic ability, I still don't think you are being fair to them...

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 12:...letting them enrol on the course, but in general I suppose that would be my own philosophy. I mean I've listened to X and she was at the HECA [The Higher Education Colleges Association] conference we had...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12:...last year I think it was or the year before? And I liked her material and what she produced. I know it's more for undergrad and admissions from school if you like to college. But I thought she raised some kind of interesting points about the nature of how we admit students and em I suppose in many respects, I feel in a privileged position in the way that our criteria is kinda so broad so definitely for the MA in X, it's a 2.2 level 8 degree and once you have that, that's fine, you know. You are admitted to the course and our two new MAs that we have coming onboard now, there is also an interview process with that and that's...that might make that a little bit more competitive, because there is a cap on the number for the Masters, and also because they are specialised Masters so they are designed for people who have media experience.

Researcher: And what are these in particular Participant 12?

Participant 12: They are an MA in X and an MA in X.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: So, it was supposed to be for...because our original MA was never designed for journalism students although we have five journalism students...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 12:...who did their journalism degrees at the moment, so it's hopeful that maybe people who have journalism will go more for these new Masters.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 12: So it will be interesting to see I suppose what the cohort will be like for those. You know, will it have the same mix in terms of national or international students.

Researcher: OK. I think we have covered a lot there. Thanks for your input. It is very appreciated. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Participant 12: I suppose why did you come up with postgraduate?

Researcher: OK, maybe I will turn this off? (recorder)

Participant 12: Yeah.

Researcher: OK, thanks Participant 12.

Participant 13

Researcher: Just for the tape, I'm here with X. To get started X, I might just ask you about your role at X and how it relates to this study?

Participant 13: Sure, yeah.

Researcher: So, basically, I suppose for postgraduate access then, do all applications go through yourself?

Participant 13: Well they'd go through myself and my team but yeah, I would be involved in the assessment of postgraduate applications.

Researcher: OK. So it goes through the admissions office then?

Participant 13: It does yeah.

Researcher: OK X, and what might be the procedure for dealing with these applications even from how they come in to you to you know, do you actually relate the decision back to the individual etc?

Participant 13: Sure, well applications come in through agents, direct applicants and we would receive the application, put it up on our system. Then sometimes obviously documentation wouldn't be all there, so we'd have to request documentation. Usually, we get complete applications and that would involve obviously ID, passport – stuff like that. See, depending on the course they are applying to, sometimes they want CV, statement of purpose, references, and obviously the undergraduate transcripts and award.

Researcher: Hmmm. OK.

Participant 13: When we receive the transcripts and award, then we would refer to I suppose, our bible is UK NARIC. There are different levels of membership with UK NARIC. We probably have a big one so we refer to their database, but we also refer to them when we are unsure about certain cases, certain applications or qualifications. So, we go to UK NARIC and we find where – I don't know if you are familiar with UK NARIC?

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 13: You are. So, we'd find where it falls in the English system which obviously we're fairly familiar with. Then, we make a call based on that.

Researcher: OK, and I suppose have you ever found a situation where you mightn't have agreed with what was on there?

Participant 13: Yes and No. We also use the QQI one.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 13: Sometimes we find that they differ. Sometimes, the thing that would happen there is that UK NARIC would say it's a level 7 degree and QQI would tell us it's a level 8.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: So, that's where the two of them tend to differ but it's very rare. A lot of our postgraduate programmes as well – the programme director would be involved in the assessment of the application as well.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: For example, our MSc in Accounting and Finance Management. The programme director for that would be involved in assessment of applications for that, looking at what sort of accounting background they have I suppose.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: Sorry – just one second [Interruption].

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: Sorry yeah so they'd be involved in that as well, and they'd also make a call if there's a difference between NARIC and QQI.

Researcher: OK. So regardless of what the level would be on UK NARIC, it's always kind of assessed in conjunction with the programme director then would it?

Participant 13: Well, yeah if there is a difference between what QQI say and what NARIC says.

Researcher: OK. Only in that instance?

Participant 13: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: If UK NARIC says it's a level 8, then there's no problem. We just make sure that they meet the overall requirements in terms of overall GPA.

Researcher: OK. Do you relate that decision to the individual? Does the admissions office relate that?

Participant 13: We do, yeah.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: When we process it and assess it and issue an offer or not, we communicate that directly to the applicant.

Researcher: OK and have you ever had a situation where they came back appealing or..?

Participant 13: Yeah yeah. We have an appeals procedure.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: A perfect example is – I suppose it happens a lot in our graduate business school. When people apply and they don't have a business qualification. We may not issue them an offer based on that, but we may offer them a kind of a pre-Masters programme.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: And they'd often dispute that if they feel, I suppose, it's a cognate area, but we would say it isn't so does it happen a lot? – it would happen quite often I suppose.

Researcher: OK and would you ever get an appeal against a recognition decision, X – just in terms of their previous qualification?

Participant 13: No. We wouldn't actually.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: No, we wouldn't. Not on a recognition issue. No.

Researcher: Oh right. OK. Would you have an appeals procedure or would it go through...

Participant 13: Yeah, the same appeals procedure.

Researcher: OK and when you were talking about your Bible being UK NARIC and your procedure there. Is that all documented within X [institution]?

Participant 13: Yeah well, we would have certain countries that we receive a lot of applications from so we'd document that ourselves. Very rarely we'd get – I'm trying to think of a country now. Let me think. The odd time there isn't a country up there and it's the same on the QQI website as well that the countries aren't listed.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 13: But yeah, we would always go to UK NARIC. For me – I think it's absolutely brilliant. I think it's really comprehensive. The information rarely isn't there.

Researcher: Yeah. I understand. I understand and X in terms of your role, what would you say are the main I suppose policies impacting on you in this area?

Participant 13: Main policies? I suppose the recognition of a level of a qualification. I'm trying to think of something recently. We don't have delegated authority, so a lot of the policies would be external in terms of entry requirements and stuff like that.

Researcher: Yeah, that's fine.

Participant 13: I'm trying to think of something recently in terms of English language. I don't know if you recall or saw this Panorama programme?

Researcher: No?

Participant 13: There's just an issue about English language and I think concerns are raised across the sector about the levels of English that international students arriving are getting onto programmes with.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 13: I think QQI discerned recently that it has to be 6.5 IELTS to get onto postgraduate programmes so instances like this would affect. We are 6.5 anyway but if they came back and said 7, that would obviously affect us.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. OK. So applications come in from agents and direct applicants as well. In terms of the direct applicants, is the process very similar for these two types or are there...

Participant 13: Yeah. No. It's extremely similar. They are the exact same except we obviously – agents do more paperwork for us, on our behalf.

Researcher: OK. OK.

Participant 13: The procedure is the exact same you know, verifying the qualification. Even though it comes from an agent, we still have to do that...

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 13:...and for us that's the time consuming part of it I suppose. That still has to be done regardless of where the application comes from.

Researcher: Do you mean you are authenticating the documentation?

Participant 13: Yeah so regardless of where the application comes from, we have to do that you know.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah. OK. That's sometimes difficult depending on the country I'm presuming.

Participant 13: This is it. Yeah. At this stage, I suppose the way we are set up is say we have an office overseas and that office receives applications from agents.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: And at this stage, we kind of know the institutes. You know a country like India. It would be very rare that we wouldn't recognise transcripts or awards from certain institutes you know.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: There would be I suppose a relationship there already.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 13: The time consuming ones are where there isn't a relationship set up. Quite often – I know this has nothing to do with international, but the time consuming

ones are often Irish ones trying to verify the – you know whether its UCD or Trinity, trying to verify the overall GPA is often time consuming.

Researcher: OK. That's interesting now. So you find that even more difficult?

Participant 13: Yeah. Sometimes you are waiting for a matter of months.

Researcher: For information on their grading is it X?

Participant 13: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 13: It's not something you would have heard of before?

Researcher: Well, I suppose what I often find is...I suppose for my role, the older ones would be a particular problem; ones that were not placed on the Framework, and people want a level. And a kind of an indication of the volume of these programmes is quite difficult as well, especially for the universities because they are the only ones that actually hold that information. And obviously you know it's hugely time consuming for somebody to be going back and looking through all the archives. I suppose that is a reason why there's not more information on different awards you know prior to 2004 when the actual university awards were actually placed....I won't actually ask you any further questions now.

Participant 14

Researcher: Just for the tape. I am speaking to Participant 14 of X [institution].

Participant 14 – I've just given you a quick overview of the research but maybe to start, I'd ask you to explain to me your own role at X?

Participant 14: OK, my own role is – I'm the MBA [Master of Business Administration] and MSc programme director within the graduate X school here in X. I have been in this role since 2008. I joined the college in X and joined the graduate business school in X so I do have one member of staff that is above me, X. He is head of faculty [Sentence partially deleted] but on a faculty management side, I manage the faculty on a daily basis.

Researcher: OK. Thank you. Participant 14, are you presented with foreign qualifications for access to your programmes?

Participant 14: Yes, we would. We would have students from European and non-European countries. Traditionally within this programme as such because it's a Masters, we would have seen more Chinese, Indian, Pakistani – that definitely has reduced, and we have more European and South American; a lot of South American, Brazilian, Nepalese. I had a good few Americans coming through and we have a lot of French, German, a couple more Spanish this year and the odd Italian, Hungary, Sarajevo, Kazachkstan, Russia - basically all over the world to be honest with you.

Researcher: OK. There is a huge diversity there. Do you receive in the applications directly and if so, how do you proceed in order to look at these?

Participant 14: If a student wants to apply to this programme in the postgraduate school, basically what they would do is...First of all if they come from India or Pakistan, they usually come through an agent as such so they will come through an agency. That agency would ask them to fill in an application form online. It would come through to the admissions office. Whether they are going through an agent or not, the student has the option to directly apply or if they are European students, they may come from their schools but basically they all come to the end point of admissions where they fill in an online application form.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14: That application form used to be a paper form as such up to...probably about two years ago. I'm not too sure how long that is. You'd have to question that, but it's an online form now. But students would be tagged with a student code or student number and then that student number would be forwarded to every faculty as such... where that student is applying so basically my students...I would get something on the 'I' drive which is the shared drive from the admissions office saying an admission has come in, can you look at this Participant 14? So, in admissions they make no decisions. They basically only forward the file. They have to basically collect the information. They have to make sure there is an IELTS form. They have to make sure that full transcripts are given so if they are looking for a level 9, they have to make sure they have all their level 8 there as such on file - to save me time because if I get a file sent forward to me and there is an IELTS missing, it has to go back and forth, back and forth. It's out of the question so they have their criteria that they search for.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: The application form is filled in. The source from where the form is from. If it is a direct applicant school as such in France or is it an agent. It could be an agent in Brazil or it could be one of our own agents in India or Pakistan or wherever. I would assess them. First of all, I would look at their IELTS. I'd make sure they are at level 6.5. If they are not at 6.5, you know there are certain criteria that set down the options we have within the faculty. Then I would look at, obviously along with that, their transcripts and where they came from. There are two different types of students, mature student and of course there is the direct undergrad student. Or if they have them let's say from France, a Masters student in France and they are looking to APEL [Accredited Prior Experiential Learning] across, so there is a rainbow of students. When we see a student number, there are lots of different categories so it depends on what type of student you want to ask about.

Researcher: OK. OK. And when you said the admissions office don't make any decisions, they actually...if I understand you correctly, they actually make the decision on whether a person has the equivalent of a level 8 or not?

Participant 14: No, they don't.

Researcher: Oh.

Participant 14: They just check that the form is there.

Researcher: Oh, they check that...

Participant 14: They would check basically that the form is there. That there is an IELTS form, whether it's a TOEIC [Test of English for International Communication] or a TOEFL attached. Whether it's a TOEFL or TOEIC, if it's 680, it means nothing to them. They don't...on my side coming in. Let's say it said 5.5 on IELTS, they don't particularly go looking into the file. They send it to me directly and when I respond back to them, I might say IELTS is too low. With all the information on file, IELTS is too low, student is too weak, it doesn't meet the standard. Unfortunately, I can't offer the student a place. I would advise them to maybe apply to the English department for a semester of English and see how they get on. Basically, the admissions office is there to collect the information for us to assess.

Researcher: Yeah. Did you mention – maybe I didn't understand correctly. When you said the admissions office makes sure all the information is there, they would also make sure there was information there from their previous qualification?

Participant 14: We would have met with admissions every so often. Let's say we had a new school that joined us in France in a partnership or whatever, they have a checklist for the graduate business school – they have to have their English attached, they have to have their transcripts attached. Now sometimes a student might send three years or three semesters instead of four and they are missing one. That's usually something that the admissions file may not notice as such so when it comes to me, I will check it...

[Phone crackling]

Participant 14: Do you hear that crackling on the phone?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: If that continues, I'll hang up and ring you again. It stopped there now.

Researcher: Yeah, it stopped.

Participant 14: Transcripts - because they come from so many different countries, they can look to admissions as if 'oh, they are all there'. There are transcripts there but often we would send back to admissions office saying incomplete transcripts – you need to track them down...they are a go-getter for us more so than not, and they keep everything

localised on an I drive. We don't have to copy and paste, copy and paste. They have a read, write and execute on the file whereas we would only read the file.

Researcher: OK, so when you get that, if it is a complete file, you are actually making the access decision as such but prior to that, you are actually making the decision on whether you regard their previous qualification as being equivalent to an honours Bachelor degree or something?

Participant 14: Exactly.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14: We would have lots of different things you know like the BComm in India, the three year BComm – is that equivalent to our level 8 you know? There's lot of these queries where we'd say 'no – it's not'.

Researcher: What resources do you use there Participant 14 or how would you go about assessing in that situation?

Participant 14: There's a big difference between European standards, you know yourself really when you look at your research. European standards let's say [crackling on phone]. Some countries have fantastic information on their course constituents and will have translated them into English so I would always look at a college's course constituents, I mean the full course constituents, the modules, learning outcomes, how have they been assessed? Was it an examination and an assignment or was it just a full examination? Was it five credits, ten credits and the odd college might have 16 credits. You are kinda like, 16 credits? That's a bit odd as such. Most of ours would be five or ten credit modules.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: Then, you have to work out what was the workload, how many student hours, contact hours. There is a lot of profile building up with a college because you rarely have a random student from the middle of let's say X randomly apply from a school that we don't know

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14: There are, let's say, agents out there. They would be going to certain schools - 10, 12, 13 schools. So, there are certain schools that we deal with and we have

built up a great relationship with their schools because we have been out to their schools, visited them. We have spoken to their course directors, their programme directors. We have viewed their programme documents. We get an annual review of their course documents because let's say we went through a programmatic review this year, they might go through a programmatic review next year. So we have to make sure that their modules and their credits change with any type of transcripts we might get from those students. As well as that, sometimes you might have a student saying – 'oh I've done strategy before' and you look at their module content and the learning outcomes and of course you look at it and say – ok the module is a bit misleading. It says strategy and in France, strategy is very different to what we call strategy here in Ireland. If you look at the module, it's completely different. To be honest with you, for our programme, I wouldn't say you're eligible for APEL because I know you've done a level 9, but it's not done at level 9 within our programme. It's a different type of module'.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14: There's an awful lot of work in a direct applicant who just wants to come and do the whole programme. We look at their level 8, we look at their learning outcomes, their assessment etc but then if there is a student looking for APEL for one or two modules saying, 'I've done that before at a Masters level', that's a completely different story and that's a very lengthy process of basically looking at the modules they have done. And if they have done the modules through APEL, or let's say they want be talking about RPL, or they might be still talking about APL. So there are different forms that we complete and if it is a mature student who said 'Ok - leadership and management development is a module I see on your programme here in Dublin. I've managed my own business for 30 years'. So we kind of say well can you tell us about...I would show them the learning outcomes of LMD [Leadership and Management Development], so I would show them the learning outcomes and I'd ask them for every learning outcome, can you tell me when you achieved this?

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah.

Participant 14: Some students would fall through the cracks and we'd say well no, he didn't. I know you think from running your own business, but you asked for an accountant to do this you know what I mean. There is outside help then. I want to see that you achieved this learning outcome on an individual basis.

Researcher: OK and you mentioned a couple of tools there, credit and that. Do you look for other resources to help you do this work?

Participant 14: Well, we would look at college ratings. We would look at the level and standard of the college, look at their pass rates. To be honest with you, the Head of Faculty also would know an awful lot of these colleges and how they are rated within their own country.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: We would have some universities who are highly ranked, but that's not to say that they are highly ranked because of the outcomes of their students. They might be highly ranked because of research. There are different types of ways you would look at the college. So, there are some colleges though they are very small colleges, but an excellent standard of students coming from those colleges, because we have met the lecturers that teach on the programme in France or we have met them in Germany. We have met the course directors and we feel their programme is of a very high quality. We would look at coursework that has been submitted to their courses. We would look at their previous work. So, there is an awful lot of again, a lot of different types of students and admissions literally would send the file. That is about ten per cent of the admissions process for complicated type students as I would call them - coming from another college, another faculty. We have transcripts that are not even in English. We have to translate them. You know, some transcripts are very light. It might just say the module name and the credits – so what do we decide? It is very hard to decide what level the student is at. As well as that, you'd have students at the pass rate. The pass rate in their college could be 40 and ours is 50. They've got 46, 47, 45, 42, 43 in their undergrad the whole way along, and we're kind of saying, 'well, you're not going to pass our programme' so protecting the learner. I'd often pull back a student saying, I know they've passed and maybe their 2.2 or 2.1 is different grading to ours, but looking at their transcripts and looking at their pass rates and looking at the modules they have done, I don't think the student will be able for this programme. We protect the learner by offering them no place on the programme.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: Should they challenge it, then I'll look at it again. I might Skype them, I might ring them. I might interview them and actually see you know do they know really

what is on the transcript here. Also you would have those students who have been out in the working place who may not have done as well in their exams as such where they might have had bad exams, good assignments. Then, you might interview them and you'd say, 'well what did you learn while you were working for the last five years out in the workplace?'

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14:...so there is you know that kind of you know RPL that you take into... you know you kind of recognise that basically they have been out in the workforce as well, and that they have improved on their grade since coming from undergrad obviously.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Participant 14: When I think of it, when I'm talking to you, I'm kinda going - there are a lot of different types of applications. I probably don't think about it because it is a routine job as such as in, I had two students from Turkey recently. Excellent students but they very much...when you look into Turkey - when you talk to the agents, they will tell us the ranked schools, colleges that are the best. I would have two students here and there is a big difference as to the strength of one student and the strength of the other. Not that their degrees are any different...

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14:...we'd have honours degrees coming in to a Masters programme but definitely, you would know that they come from different ranked schools.

Researcher: Right.

Participant 14: It's funny. I suppose in higher education here in Ireland as well, there's kind of academic snobbery as in one was a public school and one was a private and it's the other way around. It's funny. When you talk to the student, I would have thought that one was better than the other, but when they spoke about the contact they had with the lecturers and one to one feedback etc, they were actually getting this in the private whereas the public was the top university in Turkey. And I would have thought that that student was going to do better but the other student was actually doing better - the private student.

Researcher: Right. OK.

Participant 14: They came in with the same qualifications.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 14: It's interesting when you look at all the graduates and look at their backgrounds. Did they come from private? Did they have work experience? Have they APEL'd two modules? Did they APEL 30 credits? You know, there's a lot of processing in students coming through from different countries definitely. If you look at it, 90 per cent of our students come from different countries than Ireland. We'd have an increased Irish number. It's not groundbreaking or anything at postgraduate but it certainly is increasing in Irish numbers.

Researcher: OK and why do you think that is?

Participant 14: I think there's a barrier broken down. I definitely think that. It's funny. It's probably because I went obviously to a State university. I didn't go to private and in private you had your four year degree fees as such at the time. Now people are kind of looking twice. They are kinda going, there are fees to register. Well, why not look at your other options. And now people are looking for where they are actually going to get the best quality, I suppose in a word attention, one-to-one feedback. They are actually going to get contact with the lecturer, as in every student here on the programme I know their first name.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: I have met them multiple times. I probably know their parents names at this stage.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: It's not just because we are small numbers. It's not because we are not the UCD or Trinity. We basically have an interest in trying to compete with these colleges. To be honest with you, students are going out there and getting jobs with us. Definitely.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: And I think the employers would say as well, 'God, they can write reports. They really know how to write a report. They really know how to write a dissertation. They really know what methodology means'. Not that you are going to be asked that in the workplace you know but if you said epistemology, phenomenology. I guarantee you they would give a run for their money for the other colleges where they just took it out of a book. There is an awful lot of contact. When you look at their timetable, they're very much in here with us 24-7 for the week. So there is a barrier broken down between private and I know that because when I talk to the Irish students about why did they come here over the DITs or UCDS, it's because their friends had come here before and I suppose it is increased word of mouth. You know you are very contactable and you gave great feedback or the lecturer is really good, because they are consultants and they are in the workplace constantly. They are not sitting there just doing research. All our part-time staff, which is the truth. All our part-time staff are consultants. They are in the real world so when it comes to business, it's important because they have live cases as such.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. You mentioned also that maybe some of the Pakistani students and those areas are reducing. Is there a trend there?

Participant 14: I think there is a trend with basically...well, on my own side in the postgraduate business school since I started in X [year]. I don't know what was before or what was after, but there is a very strict process of looking at transcripts and things. If a student has done Engineering, we're looking at every single case and it trickles down. When students start getting rejected from this department as such, it trickles down into the agents. Then the agent loses interest in sending them here as such. You know what I mean. So, basically they will find another college to send these students. So, it's probably because we have been more elite in choosing our students. We have I suppose in a horrible way burnt our bridges probably with some of the agents as in X postgraduate MBA, they're not accepting students with a low 2.2 cos we're not, because they don't qualify. Do you know what I mean?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: We have become very very strict. If our numbers are to grow, they are only to grow for the better students. We are not going to take them. I'd say an awful lot of them are going to the UK because of work to be honest with you. There's more work. They will go where they're allowed - OK, they are allowed 20 hours work but do I

believe it – No. They will go where they can get as much work as possible, and I do believe the UK have taken some of them. To be honest with you - I don't mind because if a student wants to work more than 20 hours, they are not going to pass the programme anyway.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

Participant 14: I do believe that they are probably going to where the work is.

Researcher: OK. That's interesting Participant 14. And just in terms of policies that are impacting on your role there – I know you made reference to some of them, but what might be the ones that are uppermost in your consciousness maybe?

Participant 14: The policy on accepting a student?

Researcher: Yes, just in your role. It could be institutional, national or international policies in that area.

Participant 14: It's hard to answer that because I have so many different...well, let's say, if an application came through, my highest priority if an application comes through, whether it's national or international – can the student complete the programme?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: And how long it took them first of all. It's terrible to have a gap on your CV or have something. Let's say our Masters is one year – if it takes you three years. Why?

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 14: I'd look at every application [muffled]...this is a four year degree but took another year. It would shout out something to me. Is this student dedicated or was there an issue? So I would follow up with the student saying, 'can you tell me why your programme took longer than it should?' because when you design a programme, you design it for the learner to complete it in that period of time. So I'm not going to have someone on my programme that really can't complete it in a year.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant 14: I often send an email back to admissions - In order to protect the learner, I am offering no place. Basically, they can go somewhere else if they want, but I'm not

going to give them a place because I'm not going to waste my time. I'm not going to waste their time and being really truthful, because we are private, I'm not going to waste their money.

Researcher: Yes, yes.

Participant 14: I'd feel really bad if I had a Nepalese student literally selling up a farm to come here [muffled] student who wanted to do the pre-Masters course as a route to the MBA. And I was like you are not going to really do it. You're better off staying in your own field...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14:...and maybe doing a Masters in engineering or computer science or something linked. I might have built up a relationship with the student over two or three emails and this will feed back to the agent. They don't think you have any strengths in order to complete the programme. They have offered you no place on the programme. I'd often say do you want to challenge this? Do you want me to look at the application again? I will.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: I think that's why I'm saying Researcher – it comes from a motherly kind of thing.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: I'm being motherly to them in a way as I'm kinda saying – if this was my child, they'd thank me in the end for not giving them a place because it's expensive to do postgraduate. It's not just the fee, its accommodation, living expenses, its Dublin, the rent. I have students constantly coming into me saying I can't afford the rent, or I can't afford food and then I'm like oh God, what am I going to do? The fees are on top of this. If you fail a module, now you have a repeat fee so I want to make it as easy – this is terrible in a way – I want to make it as easy for myself to look at a student who is probably coming from a bigger city in Nepal and may be financially supported. Like, when they apply for their visa, they have to say how they are supported...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14:...family, bank draft or whatever...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: ...and I worry when it says family, and often the family...this is fed back, people have told me before. They send them over here to complete their programme in a year, get work and send money back. This is in their head.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: It's not going to work in Ireland. The Irish can't get jobs, so why do you think by sending a student over here on a one-year MBA, they're going to get a job?

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah.

Participant 14: You try and talk to the student as in, come here for the education. Focus on the work afterwards. That's a next step. Definitely I'd be a bit of a mammy when it comes to it. I would look at the student and say 'look, can you finish this really in a year?' If the transcripts are weak, then sorry, No.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. From what you've said, it appears to me that you obviously have this well documented and your decisions because you said before that you know, when you look at graduates and look back to see you know what they came in with and whatever so it's very much analysis.

Participant 14: Exactly. We look at statistics after every single exam board. We look at the module, let's say, LMD is a module with five credits – Leadership and Management Development, you look at the student. Let's say 47 students sat the exam. We would look at the average of the student. We look at the standard deviation. We would look at whether he answered questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. There are five options on the paper. They have to answer three. We look at trends. OK, question 1 is compulsory let's say and they all answered Question 2 and 5. We ask the lecturer can you look at the students that answered poorly in question 2 and answered well in question 2. As for our exam board, our exam boards take hours and hours because every single student is discussed and we take notes at our exams. This is also a build up for admissions. There is a conversation at exam boards where you would note that this group of students came from Nepal with very good degrees did well in semester one but didn't do well in semester two. Why is that? There would be minutes of all.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14: And we would have course committee meetings where constantly the issue of admissions or student progress...and at that course committee meeting, you would have a student representative. And we make sure there is a mix of student representatives - Irish, Vietnamese, Brazilian, Pakistani, Chinese, American. We'd have them all selected as a sample and they would give us feedback on how they are doing on assignments, how they are doing in exams. And we would find that the French for example, year in, year out are very focused and they do well in exams.

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant 14: And it's funny. This only came up recently. We find that let's say Chinese in Accounting and Finance are meticulous in exams. They are fantastic in them, but when you see an assignment where there is an depth and a kind of discursive type question asked, they don't see the bigger picture. As in, I'm asking for a description, a kind of detailed account. They very much feel – I gave you the point. Is that not the point?

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: You'd find with different students their strengths and weaknesses. I always know different types of students that would come from France. In exams and assignments, there is no difference. They are as good at assignments as they are at exams. But let's say, I might find that a certain area of Nepal. Certain students come from that area, certainly universities, again, exams and assignments are just as good. But then there is a different area in Nepal, it's a rural part where students don't get the exams, but get the assignment. Most of their coursework may have been assignment based. You know, you have to look back into what they've done in order to assess what they are going to be able for in the programme.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 14: I would try and look into a student's transcripts. Look, you were assessed pretty much through CA [continuous assessment]. There is 50 per exams on this programme. Are you able first of all sit an exam? It's time, its pressure and it's a different style of writing.

Researcher: Yes.

Participant 14: I've done research myself before in teaching and learning so I'd often start a lecture. Like, I lecture as well on the programme. I'd often lecture students, describing the difference between academically being able to answer an exam question, as opposed to an assignment and how to prepare for exams. You hear everyone saying – how to prepare for exams. They don't tell people how to prepare for an assignment.

Researcher: No.

Participant 14: You do, but it's done once and they go off. We reiterate how to prepare for an exam. That's because it's time, pressure environment for students. Stress. They think they are answering right. Sometimes they need up put up their hand and iterate a question to a lecturer, which we do because all lecturers have to be in their exams in case a student has a question. Because we feel that...In my own experience, my lecturers were never at the exams.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: It's comforting for a foreign student who is doing something through a second language, their understanding is the same as what the question is being asked. I hate to see a student with a dictionary reading the question.

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14: I'd often say that. If I see you taking out a dictionary, put your hand up. Don't use a dictionary – you will get a different meaning to the question.

Researcher: OK.

Participant 14: Obviously when they are writing their exams – that is something we watch as well. Our externs – they would often use language that is universal as such so that basically all students will be able to understand it.

Researcher: Yeah, Yeah. OK.

Participant 14: I'm probably going off the point there, but there's an awful lot of as I would say love and care for students here because when you're a private, you're very much wanted upon I think, and I think we forget about that then. I think it's natural for us to look after the student to be honest with you.

Researcher: Yes. Yes. That's definitely coming across. I think that's...Participant 14, you have covered a huge amount of ground there. Thanks very much for your insights because they are very valuable. I'm just wondering if there is anything that you'd like to ask me about the study?

Participant 14: Well, the only thing I suppose - when we went through the programmatic reviews, the hardest thing to discuss with I suppose QQI – anyone that's in awards and standards is group assessment. We have our own group policy here in the faculty but it's very difficult to get...I don't know what your view on group work is – is it essential? Of course, it's essential because employers want it and they request it. It's very hard to control group-work when a student doesn't partake. I suppose how do you assess the student? Do you remove them from the group? Do you assess them individually? There are lots of different views in the faculty as to how to assess group-work. Now we have our own that you may or may not have read before...

Researcher: Yeah.

Participant 14:...but it's actually quite a good document and we have been complemented on it. But I don't know, from your own knowledge Researcher and from all the other colleges you have spoken to, have you come across issues with group-work?

Researcher: OK. I might actually turn off the recording if that's alright with yourself?

Participant 14: Yeah.

Researcher: Just bear with me. Thank you.

Focus Group 1 (Three participants – 1A, 1B and 1C)

Researcher: That's recording there. So, I would ask initially when you talk you might introduce yourself so I can figure out your voice on the tape. So em I suppose to get started, I was wondering if I could em get a quick overview em of your role maybe that might relate to the study.

FG1A: OK, I'll start off.

Researcher: Thanks FG1A.

FG1A: My role is to assess non-EU undergraduate applications and I admit them. I make the admission decision and I also assess non-EU postgraduate applications. Some of those I can admit directly onto the programme but the majority I would em be advising the department on their qualifications.

Researcher: Thank you very much.

FG1B: OK. So, I'm FG1B, I'm the X [title] here at X. I oversee anything international at the university so...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B:...previously I had lots of training in this area and was very active myself. So, I work very closely with FG1A and other colleagues in that process and help with any kind of gaps in knowledge and eh difficult cases so...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: [Sentence deleted]

Researcher: So is that undergrad and postgrad FG1B?

FG1B: Yeah. I was mainly doing postgrad, non-EU mainly, but often we get requests from departments eh for EU qualification assessment as well. So we occasionally help with that but it's not strictly part of our remit.

Researcher: OK, so when you say it is non-EU mainly, is that just because they have maybe more issues with those or...?

FG1A: No, that's just our role.

FG1B: So, we are kind of responsible for non-EU international students...

Researcher: Ah right.

FG1B:...EU students are supposed to be treated the same as domestic students...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B:...but there is a gap there that we need to fill where if you're German and applying for a Masters degree here at X, it's kind of reliant on the individual academic assessing that qualification in the department to piece together to assess the German qualification. There isn't really any staff to assist much in that process, so there is a weakness there.

Researcher: OK so that whole big international side is not necessarily centralised then?

FG1B: No.

Researcher: OK. Interesting. Thank you.

FG1C: Yes. I'm FG1C from the Graduate Studies office and I would be involved with assessing, well understanding non-Irish qualifications when I'm dealing with applications for the university's research scholarships. So I would have I don't know, a dozen cases, really not a huge amount of cases that I would be looking at just once a year. So it's really an occasional situation and then I would tap into the experience of international office when there are international applicants in the sense of non-EU. And then if these are EU non-Irish applicants, then I would be referring to NARIC to try to make equivalences. The difficulty that we are encountering there is that the scheme requires not only that a certain degree be awarded, but a certain grade or marks was being achieved so a first class honours...

Researcher: Hmmm

FG1C:...or a 2.1 in some disciplines and that might be sometimes challenging to establish in different systems

FG1A: It is very challenging I think to establish because in a lot of the databases that we use, we can get the degree level – we can see if it's equivalent or higher or lower...

FG1B:...qualification equivalency but not the actual grade

FG1A:...but not the actual grading. Yeah, that's a real difficulty actually

Researcher: OK so when you are talking about the resources that you use, what are they?

FG1A: My number one would be UK NARIC because it's the most comprehensive and I have undertaken training with them as well...

Researcher: OK.

FG1A:...on various countries and identifying fraudulent documents – that kind of thing, so my number one resource would be UK NARIC. I also look at the Irish Qualifications Recognition em from time to time. We also use Australian NARIC – we have a subscription to them

Researcher: AEI-NOOSR [Australian Education International – National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition]?

FG1A: That's right and then if those three fail us, we generally would maybe go to some colleagues in other universities in the same role if they have any experience. But generally between the three of them, we are fairly well covered but as I said, they don't really give you any information on grading which is a problem.

FG1B: Well they kinda give a grading scale...

FG1A: Yeah, but they won't say...

FG1B: They won't say that 64% in this country is equivalent to what.

FG1A: a first or a 2.1 here. No, it's not exact. It's hazy.

Researcher: Yeah OK, so you would take that initial eh information as is and then work on that...if you know what I mean?

FG1B: Yeah, you know it's not an exact science just as FG1A said – what is this exactly equivalent to in the Irish system?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah...which a lot of people do say (laughs).

FG1B: Well OK, from what I know...it looks like it would kinda be in this range...we're quite lucky in the UK and Ireland that it's...for postgraduate it's easier. You know, for an undergraduate degree, it would be first class honours or upper or lower second so

there's kind of a range. So it's fairly good in that respect where we kinda say well 60 per cent in this country would be roughly equivalent to an upper second. We can kind of gauge from your experience what you are seeing usually but sometimes you do have to guess

FG1A: Yeah.

FG1B: You don't know otherwise.

FG1C: Maybe not often, but what also happens is especially with transcripts or degrees when they need to be translated - if the student doesn't get a really really good translator and the document is kind of translated in a way reasonably enough, but really not exact enough. And if it's let's say a degree from Russia, a Masters degree where they have a certain part or modules that you just have to pass, but there is no particular mark as such given to it. But based on the translation, it appears like there is a grade given to it and this distorts entirely the average or the percentage that one would actually get from the transcripts. So often it is only up to individual peoples' knowledge, and being able to read Russian or being able to actually know this system doesn't really work. Sometimes even NARIC isn't really accurate, or maybe it's ten years ago when NARIC started or five years ago you know [When qualifications from a particular country were added to the UK NARIC database]. There are a lot of gaps.

Researcher: That's interesting because it's a lot to do with your experience and your feeling about it really. But if you're using some of the websites or resources that were mentioned there, would you take that as maybe being the baseline information and then work from that? Are there instances where you question that based on experience or whatever?

FG1B: Yeah. My background is that I spent ten years in the UK in the educational sector, and certainly the view from a lot of those universities with UK NARIC was that it was a bit severe at times...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: so some said OK you don't have to be that strict. NARIC is being overly cautious for certain markets and that's kind of understood. Others said well, we don't know better so we are going to follow what NARIC says.

Researcher: Right.

FG1B: So it's kinda, unless you know otherwise, it's kinda like the gospel unless you have proof you know.

FG1A: We would have a lot of experience in certain markets and we would have determined our own entry requirements for those markets...

Researcher: OK.

FG1A:...so they're a lot easier really. You know what you're looking for. It's the odd case where you genuinely have seen maybe a handful of applications from that country and you kind of have to rely on NARIC – UK NARIC.

Researcher: What about other institutions in Ireland?

FG1A: Occasionally. It's only a case if you're very stuck and you need much more detailed information would you contact them and say 'have they experience of any applicants from this country'. But em for the most part, we would get...the majority of applications are from countries that are our main market, so it's a rare enough event that we would have to contact them.

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: With the grading as we said, NARIC doesn't help, but with our subscription we can ask NARIC for assistance – email assistance.

FG1A: It's always a little cagey...the responses are always quite cagey.

FG1B: like if you can't find this institution or this qualification seems to be a bit different than it was listed, something like that maybe – then they are quite good. They are thorough. I mean, they will actually check up and actually say no, this isn't the same institution. This is a recognised or non-recognised institution or actually this instance of this type of qualification, don't worry. So they can be helpful, but they wouldn't say you know yes, equivalent to a first class honours degree. Never.

FG1A: They never say that. Yeah.

FG1B: So, they are helpful.

Researcher: Yeah.

FG1A: That's where they are particularly good as well in that they do list all the institutions, well most of the institutions...

Researcher: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

FG1A:...which is important because as you know, in every country there are different levels of...so em it's important that we know it's a recognised institution as well.

FG1B: Often times, names of institutions change and they are not up on the website yet and things like that so...

Researcher: Yeah. It was interesting when you were saying about working in the UK that some institutions maybe anticipated that UK NARIC were somewhat more severe, and that others may be following it to the line. Did that lead to any issues then within the UK in the consistency of decisions?

FG1B: I'm trying to think. It was usually at the beginning of new markets.

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: I'm trying to think of an example but I can't. So where the knowledge base was quite low, people would be using it but as people gained experience, they said well actually...there was a growing group of universities that said 'No'. So UK NARIC were saying undergraduate degrees from a certain country were only equivalent to an ordinary degree so not an honours degree equivalent overall, but then actually looking at the details of what the students were studying - well actually this is like an honours degree. They are doing research with a dissertation and things like that so you know what NARIC is saying is generally not true, or it can be, but it depends on the dissertation. So just gaining that local knowledge em you know can give you the power to decide if that was actually equivalent or not.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. Very interesting. So in terms of the process at X, when...just to make sure I understand...so if it's an EU, regardless of if it is undergraduate or postgraduate, it goes through the admissions office?

FG1A: Yeah, I'll clarify that. Undergraduate EU go through CAO just like Irish students so that's dealt with by our admissions office...

Researcher: Yeah.

FG1A:...em non-EU students come...apply to us. Undergraduate apply to us via an online application form which we have devised. All postgraduate students apply through em a system called PAC and then em we differentiate between a Type 1 student which is an EU citizen, and a Type 2 which is a non-EU. And when I go to assess these students, I go to PAC and I eh filter the Type 2 students and I would look at their documents and their transcripts, that kind of thing. And either make a decision for those that I can admit or advise the departments via the PAC system.

Researcher: So who will ultimately make the decision then?

FG1C: Can I just clarify so basically, unlike an undergrad, postgrad admission is decentralised except for a few departments which have delegated admission decisions for international students to international office, but departments themselves make a decision and assess credentials and suitability of applicants to postgrad courses for both taught and research, so there is a decentralised process except for some postgrad

FG1B: For Type 2 students, it is our job to look at them first so departments can't make an offer until we've assessed the application, so they are held up in the application process until their qualifications are assessed by this office. So, once FG1A or one of the people here have assessed that - in that process, we go through you know, this qualification in that country is equivalent to this in Ireland, the grades are roughly equivalent to this, their English requirement is met or not. There is a kind of a section that's filled in for all Type 2 students...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B:...and then we make a recommendation. At that stage, if they don't meet the entry requirements, we know so we can actually reject at that stage.

Researcher: So it never goes to the person in the department?

FG1B: No, if we see clearly that the grades are really low...

FG1A: Yeah, if it's borderline.

FG1B: ...or if the qualification is not anywhere near the level they would need to be to get on the course, then it's just rejected at this stage and it doesn't go to the department. But if they do meet the entry requirements roughly for the standard of the degree...we are not looking at, if they are applying for engineering, well they need to have this in

there, you know not at that level, but roughly to do a Masters degree they need to have the equivalent to an undergraduate degree in Ireland. When that condition is met, there is actually a rating in PAC that says em a non-EU qualification has been assessed.

FG1A: Yeah and that releases it to the programme coordinator then in the department who logs on and they make a decision.

Researcher: And they make the decision.

FG1B: They make the admissions decision apart from business, economics, those areas

FG1A: Yeah, there are a few areas...

FG1B: They have given us the authority to make the offer if they have met the requirements they have set for us, then we just go ahead and offer a place.

Researcher: And what if someone had say extensive experience or something?

FG1A: Then we would have to contact the department then you know.

FG1B: So, it's straightforward so like the one year economics course for example, X has been very clear you know saying, if they have done an undergraduate degree in economics, which includes macro, micro, codometrics, these sorts of things...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B:...with roughly at least a 2.2, then admit them. I don't need to see that. Admit them. If there is something borderline or something we are not sure about, then X can take a look and we might consider a foundation programme or something else.

Researcher: Right. OK. OK. So then the weakness that you mentioned earlier maybe in terms of some, if I understood correctly, in terms of some departments obviously have this system in place and then others don't

FG1A: No. I think the weakness is that there is currently nobody assessing EU applications in the same way.

FG1B: Yeah, EU. So for a German. They are Type 1. They're treated the same as if they are Irish.

FG1A: So they are released directly to the department for them to make a decision without ever looking at them.

FG1B: So we don't do anything with them.

Researcher: And they don't necessarily ask you either?

FG1A: Sometimes yeah.

FG1C: Sometimes, they would contact us.

FG1B: Yeah, we don't know how much they know or...we don't actually know if they know anything about it or if they are just accepting everybody or (laughs)

FG1C: Some of the departments are quite good and they even state in the programme description in the prospectus that they are assessing non Irish European applicants, all non-Irish applicants on NARIC equivalency. So I'd say it is kind of individual, and it is one of the side effects of having a decentralised process.

FG1A: And we have allowed them access to UK NARIC themselves...

Researcher: OK.

FG1A: and they have received information on how to use it so...

Researcher: Oh right.

FG1A: For those who are charged with the responsibility of assessing it, they do have access to the tools.

Researcher: So are there any experiences in the departments for the Type 2 people that have given delegated responsibility to here versus not you know, has there been any comparison in the experiences?

FG1B: We have responsibility for all Type 2 students.

Researcher: For all Type 2 students...

FG1B: All.

FG1A: Processing all non-EU students.

FG1B: We assess everybody's qualification.

Researcher: Sorry.

FG1B: The admission decision?

Researcher: The admission decision. OK. Sorry. I did know that. I'm clear. OK. So, have there been differences in the two systems there – maybe someone in a department where you provided just advice to, came back. Do they question anything or...

FG1A: From time to time, they do.

FG1B: Sometimes they do.

FG1A: Generally they will take our advice.

FG1B: Occasionally they ignore it as well. I mean, I was dealing with a guy from Iraq. The qualification, clearly NARIC said, a Masters degree in Iraq is only equivalent to undergraduate degree level, but the department still wanted to make him an offer for a PhD programme and his English was really low as well. So, our recommendation was you know, do not make an offer. He needs to improve his English considerably before he is considered for anything at the university. His English was so low that he couldn't even be considered. We have a year-long English programme...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B:...for students who need to improve their English so if they have IELTS of about 5, they can start that course. He roughly had an IELTS of about 4 or weaker so very weak. So my recommendation was do not make an offer and then he turned around and made an offer; a conditional offer on English so I've said that he only has an undergraduate equivalent qualification and he's not really appropriate for a PhD programme and you know...

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: that's the department...occasionally it happens.

Researcher: OK and have you had people coming back maybe appealing against decisions made?

FG1C: You mean students?

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

FG1A: Very few, very few. If they do, well we just direct them to...you know we can give them a copy of what we have from UK NARIC regarding their qualification or Irish NARIC or wherever we got it, so we can obviously give them proof of...

FG1B: I suppose if it was like for a country for example Mozambique or somewhere, really we are flying in the dark. We have few experiences there. We make the best guess at the time so if they came back with evidence that we made a mistake, we would certainly consider it.

Researcher: Of course.

FG1A: We would consider it again, yeah.

FG1B: I've never known that to actually happen.

FG1A: No, I've had a few students come back querying decisions but they have been clearly not eligible. They just didn't realise themselves that their degrees didn't equate to our own which can happen.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. Thank you. And in terms of policy impacting on this area in terms of recognition work, are there any particular ones that stand out for people? They could be institutional, could be national, international...

FG1B: There is no policy (laughs).

FG1A: There is no real national policy bar what is written in our Irish version of ENIC-NARIC, their guidance. We don't really have anything else.

FG1C: It is just a requirement that the research programmes or PhDs; they should be at least 2.1 or exceptionally 2.2 under certain circumstances, and then when it comes to the scholarship scheme, there is a higher requirement. They are you know supposed to be high achievers really. You know, excellent students which as I mentioned has the implication of trying to get the grades comparable but other than that, there is no policy.

FG1A: Yeah, there is no national one but in the IUA group, for certain markets, we have met and decided you know our entry requirements as a group which is helpful.

Researcher: For the undergrad ones?

FG1A: Yeah and for postgraduate. We are able to pool our information and knowledge in that case and decide.

FG1B: For example, Oman had a scholarship programme and so suddenly that was new, an influx of potentially new students. So we got together you know with all the international directors and said, well my understanding you know of the Omani

secondary school is that it doesn't equate to the entry requirements for undergraduate courses. so they would need an international foundation year...

Researcher: Right. OK.

FG1B: And they are saying yeah, we agree but the IoTs were saying, no, we are fine. We can slot them directly onto the undergraduate programmes, so there was pressure then from the Omani government to say well the IoTs are doing it so why don't you so the universities agreed no. Universities - let's band together and agree that we all would require a foundation year...

Researcher: Yeah.

FG1B: And this seems inappropriate. We agree with information we are seeing that you know it's not equivalent, it does not meet entry requirements. We put pressure on the IoTs to reverse their decision as it would actually hurt Irish higher ed

Researcher: Right. Did they?

FG1B: No, they were seen as rogue but you know we were quite confident; the seven universities went back to the Omani government and said you know 'No. We agree that it's not equivalent'.

Researcher: Yeah.

FG1B: They would all need to take the foundation year if they want to enter a university in Ireland.

Researcher: And when you were talking about that hurting higher education. What do you mean by that?

FG1B: Just hurting the reputation of Irish higher education you know. Even though the IoTs are not a university, they are HE. They are running undergraduate courses so it kinda cheapens the qualification if even one institution is accepting students that don't meet the official entry requirements.

FG1C: But I think also there is an implication for those students. If the requirements that the course imposes on students are reliable, as we expect they are, and they are not good enough to actually achieve it, the decision to accept them actually hurts them.

FG1A: Absolutely because they are in a class of others.

FG1C: They are wasting money, maybe wasting a scholarship for somebody else.

FG1A: I totally agree.

FG1C: So sometimes, it is kind of a hard sell to a student but it is important to bear in mind that it is actually not doing any favours to a student to actually admit them if they are not good enough.

FG1A: Exactly. I totally agree. We tend to look at it from our point of view that you know we are protecting ourselves by imposing entry requirements. But it is also protecting the student because you don't want them coming in and wasting their time for a year if they are not able you know.

Researcher: OK and FG1A, a question I had for you in terms of the undergrad as you are involved in undergrad and postgrad - are there any differences there that you see in terms of difficulties with assessing applications?

FG1A: It is much easier at undergraduate because I make the decision myself in the sense that I don't have to involve a department unless it's a transfer student or it's an unusual case.

FG1B: What about assessing qualifications?

FG1A: Assessing the qualifications is I think easier because they are coming out of a high school situation. Like, they are not coming out of a random university somewhere. I think it is easier to come up with an idea of high school levels you know.

Researcher: Right. OK.

FG1A: I think it's just easier than assessing postgraduate students because they come from varying different universities of different levels, different types of degrees, things like that.

Researcher: OK.

FG1A: I find it a bit more standard. Yeah.

Researcher: Right. OK.

FG1A: I find it quite easy to assess the undergraduates now except when you get an odd case where you haven't dealt with that country before or whatever. And a lot of students

are taking an International Baccalaureate or international A levels and you kinda get used to them very quickly as well so...

Researcher: And have you got an international foundation year running at X?

FG1A: We have a number.

FG1B: We are putting one together under X.

Researcher: Under what?

FG1B: Under X so we are working together with [sentence truncated to protect anonymity of participants]

Researcher: I see X all around campus.

FG1A: That's what it is...yeah.

FG1B: So one of the initiatives is you know, we've got an international group and we are doing things on the international scene. And we have actually created our own company, language and pathway programmes and one of these is an international foundation programme.

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: So this will be launched just before Christmas for next September...English language programmes....possibly for pre-Masters, so have a pathway specifically designed for students who don't meet entry requirements and need a pathway programme to get to a level that meets entry requirements.

Researcher: So what do you feel are the big pushes towards impetus for that, you know towards introducing...

FG1B: I think the foundation, it's mainly funded Saudi students in Ireland so all of them; the education system in Saudi Arabia doesn't meet the entry requirements for undergraduate courses. They need a foundation programme. At the moment, we are saying to the government sponsor, similar to the Omanis – we don't have a bridging foundation course now so we are working with X College. X College is a new one, some other colleges, English language centres, things like that, that offer this type of course and they don't like it. They want the students' part of the university and want us to take care of them. They want them on campus. There is distrust about these rogue,

third party colleges, things like that. That is the main driving force for it. We are sending students to another organisation. They are paying fees there so you know. Let's make our own centre - they come to us and they pay our fees. We have complete control over what they're studying and we can rest assured that they are actually being prepared to enter our degrees.

Researcher: Yeah. So is that a general programme or are they specifically tailored towards moving on to particular programmes?

FG1B: There are different streams. A business stream, a science stream.

Researcher: So there are different streams?

FG1A: Yeah. Engineering.

Researcher: OK. One thing that did strike me is that in terms of people actually coming with international awards – would it be mainly people that are purposely recruited or are they coming from...you know they might be residents in Ireland then that are coming to you for...

FG1B: We get both. I suppose the majority of them would be coming from abroad but PAC can be a little bit difficult because it looks at their citizenship to determine if they are class I or class II. So for example, we might have an American student. Because an American is classed as Type II student but when we look at the qualifications, they have done their first qualification here in X or an Irish university so we can't assess the qualification as it's Irish so there is nothing for us to do...

Researcher: Yeah.

FG1B: ...but we do have maybe Nigerian students resident in Ireland. Their last qualification was in Nigeria so that is legitimate. We would need to assess that qualification even though they are resident here.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. There are difficulties around the statistics on international students because of the citizenship.

FG1B: So they kind of, the...I mean it's kind of expected that if you're a national, you are going to be applying from that country so people that are international citizens are moving around the systems, it's a bit messy.

FG1C: It's not as black and white as it used to be.

FG1B: It can be...an American student, again classed as Type II on PAC. His application can't be processed until we assess his qualification so that was a little...he was applying for a Masters degree in computing. He has done his first degree in computing at X you know so...! How do we actually get out of that so it can actually go to the department to be assessed...change his status?

Researcher: Yeah, so it is all electronic then the applications?

FG1A: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. And is there I suppose in terms of our organisation, FG1A, is there anything that you would like to see more of or...do you think it helps in any way?

FG1A: It does help. It certainly does help. It does definitely help. I do like to see it directly translated into the Irish system...

Researcher: OK.

FG1A:...onto the Framework. It is very helpful to do that. It's great to have that backup but there's a lot of information on UK NARIC and UK NARIC is a massive organisation. I can't imagine that you could replicate what they have there but things like having a recognised list of institutions. You don't seem to have that as far as I can recall and then obviously the number of countries that you cover. I know it's growing but it's still quite limited.

Researcher: Yeah and have you come across a difficulty where you seen a comparability on UK NARIC and it was different on our website.

FG1A: Yeah. That has happened a few times, yeah. I do tend to go with the Irish one because at the end of the day, it's the Irish one you know (laughs). I know you have done the work in translating it directly into our own system...

Researcher: Yeah.

FG1A:...and as close and all as we are to the British system, obviously there are going to be some differences.

Researcher: OK.

FG1B: I mean the one thing we mentioned that is missing is just that grade equivalency. UK NARIC have it for European countries.

FG1A: They have it for European but I guess...

FG1C: It is also limited because like the Bologna process and ECTS, it is still kind of being implemented.

FG1A: ...it is still in process.

FG1C: Maybe say a French student with French degrees that came before and it's not that long time ago even if there is...most of those I have seen mostly are outside of NARIC. So I think there is going to remain a lot of relying on experience and personal knowledge, because I can't envisage NARIC or anybody going and doing this legacy work because it's going to die out over time. There will always be mature students coming in, but they will remain exceptions and nobody is going to reasonably expect that the system would cover all legacy. So I guess maybe focus on continuing the equivalence between the standardised and national systems.

Researcher: OK. Unless somebody has something that they would like to ask me, I'll turn off the tape. Thank you very much for your help and the conversation.

Focus Group 2 (Four participants – 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D)

Researcher: OK, that's recording there now. Thank you very much – FG2D, FG2B, FG2A, and FG2C. Thanks very much for your time. Maybe as a start, if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself and giving just a brief outline of your role in terms of this area...in terms of credential evaluation, specifically international qualifications.

FG2B: I'll start it. My name is FG2B and I'm the academic administration manager with X, so I'm involved in undergraduate admissions and there's a separate department that deals with the postgraduate.

Researcher: OK

FG2B: Is that enough information?

Researcher: Thank you very much.

FG2A: My name is FG2A. I am the student enrolment manager/admissions officer at X. My role would be the assessment of both undergraduate and postgraduate international quals to include postgraduate taught and research.

FG2C: My name is FG2C from X. I'm the academic administration manager. I would be involved in undergraduate and postgraduate but not directly with the evaluation of the qualifications. The admissions officer does that.

Researcher: OK. Thank you.

FG2D: FG2D. I'm the director of student services here at X so I oversee the admissions process throughout the college amongst other things. But I suppose we do process all admissions from undergraduate to postgraduate but we have a separate international office in terms of the recruitment of international students. So currently that is being reviewed at the moment in terms of where that might sit. So we would be involved at the offer stage really. The process comes back through admissions at that stage.

Researcher: OK. OK. I might actually ask a question about that so em in terms of the actual credential evaluation of the qualification - that is not done by yourselves; it's done by the international office?

FG2D: Yes.

Researcher: And is that centrally or what is the process for receiving those applications?

FG2D: Centrally to them, so I suppose there is a review currently at the moment to centralise them back to admissions or as part of admissions.

Researcher: OK. Is there a particular reason that is being looked at or?

FG2D: I think there's been a lot of concerns around the standard of the students that are coming in and the process for example, things like agents and how that works, and that it needs to be more streamlined. The English language requirement needs to be looked at. We do I suppose on the part-time programmes in admissions look at you know students who have...that are not non-EU. We do look at that downstairs, but for non-EU students, there is a separate department at the moment.

Researcher: OK, so you look after EU students then?

FG2D: Exactly. Yeah.

Researcher: OK.

FG2B: Researcher, if I could just clarify further. At X, we also have an international department and they do the evaluation of international students rather than ourselves...

Researcher: OK.

FG2B: ...the offers go out from their office

Researcher: As well?

FG2B: As well. They register...when it comes back to actual registration, it comes back to my area. But now in saying that, we would do assessment of some international students - the students who apply through CAO but it would be a small percentage.

Researcher: OK.

FG2C: We would be similar to that as well in that we have an international agent who deals with all the admission procedures for the international students so we wouldn't check their qualifications, but we have some concerns over that as well, and we are looking at doing spot checks on some of the students coming in just to be sure that they have the right qualifications.

Researcher: So the agent is going through...

FG2C: The agent checks their qualification to see if they are eligible for the Masters or whatever it is they want to do.

Researcher: OK.

FG2B: That is external agents.

Researcher: OK

FG2D: They would be based in India or China. We have a lot of Indian students. They have specific requirements from the international office. And the international office then receive the applications and go and process them separately at the moment, including the English language requirement which is a concern...

Researcher: Of course.

FG2D:...as students are coming through at a certain level and then not getting out the other end. That's why we are looking at it.

FG2B: Well, if I could clarify – we have the international office and we have agents in China and India and so on. But my understanding is the assessment is actually undertaken by X [home institution] staff. I'll double check that but as far as I know, the agents actually secure students but the actual admit decision as far as I know – I'll clarify that in an email afterwards, but as far as I know, it is taken by X staff which would be different.

Researcher: OK.

FG2C: Yes, well the admit decision...the final decision probably is but we don't have sight of the assessment at all.

FG2D: I think there is a lot of concern in institutions around it.

Researcher: OK.

FG2D: ...and it would be one I suppose...

FG2C:...and it's kind of new for us, new enough over the past few years and...

FG2D:...it's getting bigger.

FG2C: ...we have specifically recruited from India, Brazil...

Researcher: So, you are a bit wary of it now?

FG2C: Probably because it is new.

FG2D: I think so. Yes – in X, what we're actually doing is getting our faculty to go out and interview the students now so it's evolving and numbers are growing. It's successful in getting the students.

FG2C: Yes.

FG2A: In X, I mean as part of our strategy, we have identified markets so we again have prescribed criteria from particular countries whether it be China, Brazil, India and we will actually have somebody who will be there on the ground. And they will be meeting with students, talking about our programmes and saying this is what you need to have in your qualification and actually directing them through to...if it's for postgrads, to PAC and that has been agreed within the university.

Researcher: So they would be doing it on the ground in another country so the decision is not being made...

FG2A: We then will verify documents and make sure everything is authentic and that but the offer is being given, so within the faculty within the university, there is an approval process and it says 'this is the admissions criteria, this is what you must present' and if you have it, the offer is yours. It's in an effort to get students. We are targeting particular countries and I think that's going to be the same...

FG2D: Yes, again we would have staff that we recruited in China and India that are X [home institution] staff doing that as well as agents so it's a big area.

Researcher: And would they have specific experience or would you look for certain skills in people doing that?

FG2A: Well, some of them may have been in situ. Would they have, no. Possibly not – no. They would be...maybe they worked as part of a recruitment team or marketing team but no, not necessarily. But then the argument might be well what skills do they need if you have already prescribed text around you must present X qualification?

Researcher: Oh, you're talking about a certain qualification in the home jurisdiction?

FG2A: Yeah. Absolutely.

Researcher: OK.

FG2A: So they have oversight of that, they understand it and that's what they're doing...

Researcher: OK.

FG2D: We do that in the EU as well. It's a growing area.

Researcher: OK. So they are actually prescribing qualifications. I can understand that when you are targeting particular countries.

FG2A: Yeah.

Researcher: What about people you know that might be in situ here that present with international qualifications?

FG2A: Well certainly in X for all undergraduates and all postgraduate research; that sits in the admissions officer office. There is a bit of an anomaly in that the international office will have sight of non-EU qualifications and make an assessment and it will only come to me where a decision has been made to regret somebody on a place. So I'll do an independent assessment.

Researcher: OK.

FG2A: That's the way it sits, yeah.

Researcher: OK.

FG2A: We have trained experts in certain areas within the international office and they will look at...but it's only for non-EU postgrad taught programmes.

Researcher: Everything else comes...

FG2A: Everything else comes in to the admissions office.

Researcher: OK, including the research postgrad?

FG2A: Yeah, the postgrad research, non-EU and EU.

Researcher: In terms of the research particularly at postgraduate level, I mean does the admissions office have the final say or how is...how are the schools involved?

FG2A: So what will happen is that they apply through PAC which is the postgraduate applications centre. They send in the documents. We have, like everywhere else I'm

sure, had approval for the requirement in terms of English language we are looking at. But the bit we are actually assessing is the qualification...

Researcher: Yes.

FG2A:...so where they are meeting it, we are then looking to see have they the equivalent of a 2.1 in whatever the area is and making that decision and then, that can be particularly problematic because very often, particularly in the area of research, a student has already made contact with a supervisor...

Researcher: Yeah.

FG2A:...or a convenor who has maybe even spoken to them on the phone and wants them in, and then the hard piece for us is to say 'no, they don't'.

Researcher: So you actually make the offer as well?

FG2A: Yeah, we do all of that yeah.

Researcher: So the school has little or no...

FG2A: The school will have spoken to the applicant and looked at their submission...

Researcher: OK.

FG2A:...but wouldn't be in a position to assess.

Researcher: so it's centralised really?

FG2A: Yeah, absolutely...

Researcher: OK.

FG2A:...and the offer goes from us as well.

Researcher: What if you came across a situation where perhaps they didn't have the qualification that was required but had extensive experience for example?

FG2A: OK. Well then, a special case submission would have to be made to a very high level committee in the university.

Researcher: And would that automatically happen if a person comes...

FG2A: No. An exception. Say for example, a programme like an MA in Journalism. There absolutely may be people who may not have an honours degree but would have 27 years experience. That would be a special case admission, but where somebody is looking to bring in somebody who perhaps 1. The university is not recognised, despite the fact that the person is saying 'oh, this is a highly prestigious university', or they are not...that's where we are saying 'No, sorry. You need to make a special case' and probably eight out of ten times, they don't make a special case.

Researcher: And do you receive say appeals against decisions made?

FG2A: Yes but again, the appeal then would go you know through the registrar to this higher committee for review. I suppose at all times, it is about ensuring that the standards are met and you know we have a duty of care to an applicant as well...

FG2B: Yeah.

FG2A:...it's not fair to take somebody in if we are concerned about a qualification or even English language.

Researcher: This is what FG2D was saying as well that it is causing problems.

FG2A: Yeah, yeah.

FG2D: I mean we have had situations where as I said, where faculty members for our Masters taught programmes are going out to India to actually interview the students that have been identified to see if they are appropriate.

Researcher: Is this for undergrad and postgrad?

FG2D: They were for the Masters in...yeah postgrad.

Researcher: OK. So tools used to assess qualifications – what would be the main ones there?

FG2A: Well, I suppose at undergraduate level, we all now are moving...the universities had started to look at a common policy to recognise qualifications outside of Ireland or the UK GCEs. And now the IoTs have come on board, so we all have a common document with a scoring system so that would be in place. In terms of the practice in X, this is where I see just the gap and it was only when you were talking Researcher, that I am actually aware of it...

Researcher: Hmmm.

FG2A: ...we actually pay a fee – it is quite significant, to NARIC in the UK.

Researcher: Yeah.

All: So do we.

FG2A: Yeah, we all use it so where would I link in with yourself or X [colleague of researcher] would be where I find something and I am not happy with what I'm getting back from NARIC in the UK. I would link in for advice with yourselves.

Researcher: OK, OK. Obviously I am aware that a huge amount but not all institutions in Ireland do subscribe to UK NARIC. It is interesting. Say for example, I have come across the situation where our advice is different to UK NARIC. What happens then?

FG2A: If your advice is different?

Researcher: Yeah.

FG2A: I would have had a situation once where that happened.

Researcher: Yeah.

FG2A: I had some just doubt in my mind, and when I looked at it with yourselves and got the advice, your advice was taken.

Researcher: Right. OK.

FG2A: Yeah.

FG2C: We would ask students you know...this is more for advanced entry that we would see that; for people who want to come into second, third or fourth year and we'd ask them to get a letter from QQI as it is now, saying what the level is if we are not sure.

Researcher: Yeah. OK.

FG2C: But sometimes we would find differences between NARIC and you.

FG2A: I had an example just very recently with somebody who was applying from DIT to come into X for advanced entry and DIT had used NARIC UK and they had you know...there was a form of wording around it basically saying no equivalent to something, but interestingly enough when I went through all of the documents, at the

very back there was one from NQAI where it clearly stated that the applicant had the equivalent of a level 7. So, he's in with us now but again if that wasn't there, based on maybe the NARIC piece in the UK, he wouldn't have been with us either so...just there was a difference.

Researcher: And is there internally...say for example, you do use UK NARIC, are there situations where maybe you mightn't agree with it or that issues have arose based on experience?

FG2A: Yeah. I would have gone back to query a number of countries, just things I wouldn't have been that happy on and they would very often be upfront and say actually that's a country we don't have a lot of information on, or we need to pass it elsewhere.

Researcher: Yeah. OK. That's interesting. And in terms of agents, I don't know a huge amount, but is there a conflict of interest there in how they are paid?

FG2D: I'm not too sure how it works Researcher to be honest. I just know they exist. I don't know how they're paid. I presume that they're paid [sentence truncated on request from participant].

Researcher: So it might be different to what FG2A is saying in that X [institution] are actually prescribing certain qualifications?

FG2D: No, I think again the agent is getting the applications together based on our requirements. Just to be clear – they are told what to get. But now what we are doing to build on that and to improve the standards is that we have identified people who actually go over to India and already have that information and interview the students as you would in a lot of postgraduate cases anyway. So they are screened at that stage...

Researcher: Hmmm.

FG2D:...and then we also would have sort of X employees who are local in the area as part of that...

Researcher: OK.

FG2D:...but the relationship – I'm not sure about. That's international office.

Researcher: That's fine. Are there any policies in particular that you feel impact on your work in this area?

FG2B: I am not aware of any.

FG2C: Do you mean external policies?

Researcher: They could be institutional, national, international.

FG2B: I suppose we are using the international standard, so we are using NARIC. The IoTs had been using the 'World of Access' which was an agreed document. We have now moved over to use the same process as the universities and that will only kick in for recruitment for next September.

Researcher: Were there differences there when you were looking at that?

FG2B: Well, I mean they were two different publications you know. I suppose we couldn't really sit down and say we know there was a disagreement in relation to how the IoTs assessed a particular country and how the universities did. We wouldn't have specific details about that.

FG2A: There certainly would have been some...

Researcher: I know. I am actually familiar with both documents.

FG2A: There would certainly have been, yeah but again there would have been a difference between our admission criteria in some cases anyway for certain programmes and difference between levels 6 and 8.

FG2B: Moving forward, it will bring more consistency anyway. It was a matter of maintaining two different sets of records, all for the one purpose if you like. So going forward, there will be more consistency in the third level system.

Researcher: OK. There is a lot more I suppose standardisation then?

FG2A: Yeah. Probably more review I suppose. One of the things certainly that having worked on the EU qual document is the requirement to actually review it annually. To kind of come together and say – well this is our experience. Perhaps we haven't been quite fair here or we need to review and keep going back. It's almost like a work in progress...

Researcher: Absolutely.

FG2A: It needs to be updated all the time.

Researcher: OK, how is that managed then? I mean who takes responsibility ultimately?

FG2A: At the moment, we have one person who let's just say holds the master document and has agreed for...certainly for this year and hopefully for the future - to call the meetings and get us all together...

Researcher: Hmmm.

FG2A:...but recently what we've been doing is we have been splitting up the document in terms of saying, you are to look at say Malta and somewhere else with a view to checking their education to see if there is any change or anything else so that's the way we work it you know.

Researcher: OK, so there's seems to be a lot more liaising together and sharing experiences then?

FG2A: Yes. The undergrad side, definitely.

Researcher: OK. OK and I know that some people are not involved in postgraduate but in terms of postgraduate, recognition of international qualifications for postgraduate admission, is that significantly different then?

FG2C: From undergraduate? Well, I suppose it is in that we all do our own.

FG2D: Also, there are different ways of entering into postgraduate. There is PAC. We don't use it. Some places do so...postgraduate is different I think in general, because I suppose everybody is going through the CAO for undergraduate, the majority...its relevant whereas postgraduate – as I just said, ours is different to yours. When are the deadlines? When are the start dates for example as well. They can be different across institutions.

Researcher: Do you think that liaising more together in terms of postgrad would be beneficial or no?

FG2A: I don't know that because it is an area we have had as I said, a number of us work through PAC so we have a national PAC user group. We meet three times a year. We have never in all the years we are meeting, certainly to my mind, ever once discussed EU qualifications. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong but you know, we have a pool of CAO applicants that are presenting, the majority Irish Leaving Cert and yes, there's some element of competition but there's huge competition on postgrad. And

each university has its own strategy and their own suite of programmes and their targets and even an international strategy around getting more international students in and that very often is to do with changing a dynamic. It's also to do with money as well, finance so I don't know that...

FG2B: There would be a huge sharing of...

FG2A: I don't know if there would be.

Researcher: So the competition kind of element is a barrier?

FG2A: I think at the moment it is because I think, this is just me personally, until such time as there is a national strategy as in Ireland Inc – this is how we are going to target students internationally. We are all going pretty much for the same markets so yes, we are competing.

Researcher: But is Education Ireland not doing that – I mean the Education in Ireland brand?

FG2B: Enterprise Ireland.

FG2A: Maybe Researcher what it is...maybe yes, at that level there is a recognition of the importance of targeting an international market but it hasn't actually gotten down to saying you know...We need to identify where the markets are and who is going to target. So instead of 12 of us all going out to the same market, we say, your area is going to be you know...I think that's where the competition comes.

FG2B: I think we have to totally separate the marketing and recruitment from the credential evaluation.

FG2A: Yeah.

FG2B: It's a totally separate exercise.

FG2A: It is.

FG2B: It is credential evaluation where we could have a common policy and consistency in the actual assessment and maybe that's the area that we should target for cooperation and consistency. I don't think there will ever be agreement on the marketing and recruitment.

Researcher: No. No. Exactly. Sorry. FG2B did take me up right.

FG2A: Yeah.

Researcher: For the purposes of what I am doing right now. I am asking about that in terms of the actual credential evaluation because I have been speaking to people, you know, they have expressed huge difficulties in...students are very mobile now, there's hugely different countries, these people are seeing qualifications for the first time...you know, they want to be able to reach out to colleagues in other institutions and say 'listen, what's the story here?'. It seems to be happening very informally. It just depends on who you know.

FG2C: That probably would be useful because that's where we would find...you are looking at a parchment from Bangladesh or somewhere you have never seen before and it's a photocopy, and you're wondering. So if I knew that some other institute always dealt with them and they were happy with them, that they had a track record or something. That would be useful...

FG2B: Yeah.

FG2C:...cos we are just looking at it by ourselves wondering...we are going through NARIC or QQI or whatever but if somebody else had experience.

FG2B: That's where you could share.

FG2A: I think the difficulty is going to be even – just around the table, there is only four of us. We all do things in such a different way so that in some organisations, you might have to have a mix of admissions and international and perhaps something else.

Researcher: The structure of...

FG2A: Yeah, so that's where the group becomes quite big.

FG2B: Researcher, I'm sorry. I have to call time.

Researcher: Thanks very much.

Appendix F: Coding Example

Appendix F gives an example of coding associated with the theme of time. This theme emerged as significant in analysis of the data, and is important for all of the five key issues identified in Chapters Six and Seven. As indicated in Chapter Four (p92), the CGT approach was modified to remain faithful to both credential evaluator voices and the aims of this research. Initial coding resulted in the emergence of themes. Themes were subsequently grouped to form the key issues identified. Taking the first of 13 examples of aspects of time below, the experience of the credential evaluator arose as an important factor in influencing practice. An illustrative quote is then provided.

What? (Code)	Implication? (Action)	Example Quote
Duration of experience - credential evaluator	Influence of past experiences in making recognition decisions	..then we will have somebody who is more familiar with the United States. They say ‘what are you talking about? – a 3.0 average is brilliant in the States’. Well actually it’s not (Participant 9)
Time for QQI to compile / maintain a database of recognition advice	Credential evaluation is a significant and time-consuming task / dynamic nature of credential evaluation	Sometimes of course, the comparabilities are not as up to date as maybe you would like them to be...because you obviously have your issues as well in relation to getting time to make all the relevant comparisons (Participant 1)
Time to use QQI advice	Expansion of different staff roles at HEIs	..if all the ground work has been done by ye guys and the other organisations...I feel that it is incumbent on me to use that...I don’t think I can use the ‘Oh I don’t have time to do this’ argument in that situation (Participant 1)

Processes are evolving over time	Dynamic nature of credential evaluation	I am only in this post for a year and a half so before that it was a bit hit'n'miss I suppose, but since I came into the post, I have tried to put some structure in it...In the old days, and I'm thinking back maybe 15 or 20 years ago, we used to have this big thick book that had all the qualifications across the world in it (Participant 1)
Need to prioritise time	Workload pressure / expansion of role	...there comes a point when you have to say - look, how much time do I spend on considering an application from wherever it might be...because it can take a lot of my time and you know I have to...I have to manage my time as well (Participant 1)
Familiarity with qualifications over time	Building up knowledge over time	...you wouldn't have to spend as much time dealing with the second or third Bangladeshi student (Participant 1)
Duration of foreign qualification	Should not necessarily be viewed as a substantial difference as per the LRC. No justification offered by credential evaluators	Some countries would have...a BComm qualification and it might even in some cases only be two years. Some are three years...the applicant may think that it is a direct route into a Masters of Business and in most cases, it's not (Participant 4)

<p>Access to UK NARIC advice anytime</p>	<p>Importance of easily accessible and immediate information – impacts on security/comfort of credential evaluator and ultimately the speed at which applications are assessed for potential students</p>	<p>What I like about the UK NARIC is that I can go in myself straight away and it's just there, and it comes up, and I just put it in and it comes up on a big list. You know – public institution. There is another listing of private and I have it straight away and I actually print that out and I send it to the postgraduate office. They like to have it as well and it's all kind of in a printable format under NARIC (Participant 4)</p>
<p>Opportunities for innovation / increasing efficiency explored</p>	<p>To help increase efficiency due to time pressures on HEI staff</p>	<p>...if the student fills the qualification, they're on the course, the Masters course, right? We tried that here one year because maybe we thought that we are putting more resources into this than we needed to, but in actual fact we now...if you are a 2.1 and above, you are not interviewed; if you're less than a 2.1, you are interviewed (Participant 5)</p>
<p>Application processing times</p>	<p>Time pressure to secure students</p>	<p>...all these things happen <i>mañana</i>...they have to be done quickly, because if you don't get the student, they can go somewhere else (Participant 2)</p>

<p>Visa processing times</p>	<p>Time pressure to secure students – outside of HEI control</p>	<p>...if the visa is going to take eight weeks, well then – no, you're not going to come to Ireland...so that can be a little bit disheartening (Participant 4)</p>
<p>Applicant - duration of work experience</p>	<p>May be taken into account for access or may not, depending on the HEI</p>	<p>...maybe the person has very relevant work experience and has worked like in a software company for a few years – that might be taken into account...where the GPA was under discussion, so let's say the Bachelor degree is deemed not equivalent to level 8, other factors would not be taken into account (Participant 4)</p>
<p>Not taking time to explain decisions to applicants - shifting responsibility / accountability</p>	<p>Ability to print off information directly from UK NARIC where decisions may be questioned by an applicant</p>	<p>You can just print them off pretty handy...in terms of an appeal, I think that once we provide them with the NARIC statement that usually ends it (Participant 4)</p>