

**A survey analysis into the reasons for Irish expatriate children
matriculating into Irish higher education institutions**

A Report to the Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore)

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Preface

In recent years the Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore) identified a growing number of Irish expatriate families based in Asia whose children are now applying to international universities. At the same time we have seen greater engagement by the Irish government with the diaspora and by Irish universities with their Asia-based alumni.

Unlike expatriate families of other nationalities, who naturally apply to universities in their home countries, there has been no effort by the Irish government or Irish universities to appeal to children of the Irish diaspora. Indeed there was no data about the number of potential Irish diaspora students or about their attitude to attending Irish universities.

The aim of this study was to gain an insight into the attitudes of the Irish diaspora towards sending their children to Irish higher education institutions and to formulate policy suggestions for Irish universities and policymakers.

This study was conducted using a survey instrument. Trinity College Dublin was contracted to do the survey design and analysis. The Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore) distributed the survey, with the assistance of regional embassies, chambers of commerce, and Irish cultural groups over the months of September and October. The study was funded by the Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore) with assistance from private donors and the Irish Chamber of Commerce of Hong Kong.

The study is the first of its kind and we hope it will encourage a debate among the Irish public, the diaspora, policymakers and Irish universities about the opportunities and benefits of attracting Irish diaspora children to attend Irish universities as international students.

Conor McCooile
President, Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore)
May 2017

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Executive Summary

Members of the School of Business of Trinity College Dublin were contracted to conduct and analysis of the Irish expatriate community in Asia with respect to the reasons for matriculating their children into Irish higher education institutions.

As part of our research we conducted an online survey which was targeted towards Irish nationals residing in Asia with children nearing the traditional age for higher education matriculation. This study is one of the first to directly look at Irish emigrants in Asia. The online survey was run from the beginning of October 2016 to end of November 2016.

To reach out to as many Irish emigrants as possible, the survey instrument was shared with members of the Irish Chambers of Commerce and business associations, social organisations such as St Patrick's Society and databases of the Irish Embassies in the region.

As there has been no similar survey to reference, there is no accurate data on the population of Irish parents or potential students in Asia. After the closure of the online survey, a total of 172 responses were obtained from 11 countries, of which 111 responses were from Singapore. Our survey provides an accurate picture of preferences of Irish emigrants with non-adult children in Singapore given the disproportionate number of responses to the survey from that expatriate community. The results for other Asian countries, though informative, would require a larger sample size to be robust.

The main findings:

- Irish parents in Asia have mixed views about the desirability of sending their children return to Ireland for higher education with only 40% interested in having their attend Irish universities.
- University quality is very important to parents; university rankings and personal perceptions influence this assessment.
- Cost is not the main issue as Irish expatriates expect to pay international university fees.
- Though Irish expatriates are happy to pay fees, they seek value for money, which they perceive as an issue in the Irish university system.
- Irish expatriates feel cut off from “Official Ireland” because in most cases they are treated as non-EU internationals with respect to higher education.

We recommend the following policy actions:

- Incorporate into the Higher Education (Reform) Bill and Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill (both currently at heads of bill stage) provisions to ensure the special status for first generation diaspora children within the Irish higher education system which either puts them in the same category as EU Citizens, or in a newly created special category. Diaspora groups should lobby the Education and Skills Committee to make a presentation to Oireachtas members.
- Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should publish equivalency tables for A-Level and International Baccalaureate secondary school qualifications. A-Level equivalency tables should be re-evaluated to be less UK/Northern Ireland-centric and have a more global orientation, reflecting the importance of alternative qualifications.

- Irish universities should collectively act in major Asian cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore to recruit students, develop relationships with schools, and improve communication with Irish Expatriates. The Irish Universities Association can be part of that process.
- Irish universities need to find a solution with the Higher Education Authority to employment control limitations imposed by the Department of Public Expenditure in order to expand academic staff numbers and reduce the staff-student ratio, which is currently undermining Ireland's international rankings.

Part I

The Irish Expatriate Community in Asia

The aim of this study was to gain an insight into the attitudes of the Irish diaspora towards sending their children to Irish higher education institutions and to formulate policy suggestions for Irish universities and policymakers.

A series of interesting results were found, indicating that Irish living abroad in Asia had similar reasons for institutional choice to traditional overseas students from the Asian region. Primarily, these parents and their children are looking for a higher education system that offers a combination of:

1. superior career prospects,
2. rich variety of academic programmes and
3. a high ranking internationally on one of the recognized international league tables, such as the *Times Higher Education* or QS rankings.

This study was conducted using a survey instrument. Trinity College Dublin was contracted to do the survey design and analysis. The Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore) distributed the survey, with the assistance of regional embassies, chambers of commerce, and Irish cultural groups over the months of September and October. The study was funded by the Irish Chamber of Commerce (Singapore) with assistance from private donors in Singapore and the Irish Chamber of Commerce of Hong Kong.

This survey was focused on a small subset of potential overseas students. Ireland, traditionally, has been a country of net emigration. Since the 1980s that outward flow of migration has been characterized by a high proportion of people with advanced educational qualifications, this is otherwise known as a “brain drain”. Recent work by University College Cork on the current wave of outward migration highlights how well educated emigrants were in the eighties. In 1988 76% had some post-secondary qualification during a period when tertiary education was still an elite qualification in Ireland. Within the current 25-34 year-old emigrant cohort, 62% have a degree qualification, compared to 47% of the general 25-34 Irish population. This 25-34-year-old emigrant cohort also intends to return to Ireland, with 72% expressing a desire to return to Ireland at some stage.¹

The emigrants in the UCC study contrast somewhat with those found in our study, since they still have a strong desire to return to Ireland. The community surveyed have spent a significant part of their lives outside of Ireland and expect to continue living outside the State. It is also important to note that Irish outward migration has been driven by economic circumstances and opportunities. As highlighted in the results of this study, Irish expatriate parents place a high value on career opportunities for their children. Their own personal histories and that of the current graduating cohort highlight the difficulties of the Irish labour market, complicated only further by the unknown consequences of Brexit on mobility prospects.

¹ Glynn, Irial, Tomás Kelly and Piaras MacÉinrí. *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*. Cork: Emige, 2013. http://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/emigre/Emigration_in_an_Age_of_Austerity_Final.pdf

Policy Recommendations and Findings

Main Findings:

This survey, the first of its kind, has attempted to look at small subset of the diaspora – expatriates with children in Asia. While sample size was limited, the results provide an interesting, and at times worrying, picture.

- Irish parents in Asia have mixed views about the desirability of sending their children return to Ireland for higher education with only 40% interested in having their attend Irish universities.
- University quality is very important to parents; university rankings and personal perceptions influence this assessment.
- Cost is not the main issue as Irish expatriates expect to pay international university fees.
- Though Irish expatriates are happy to pay fees, they seek value for money, which they perceive as an issue in the Irish university system.
- Irish expatriates feel cut off from “Official Ireland” because in most cases they are treated as non-EU internationals with respect to higher education.

Recommendations:

- The need to consider some special status for the children of longer term Irish expatriates other than non-EU categories.
- Increase transparency about equivalency between CAO points and alternative secondary school qualifications.
- Re-evaluate the equivalency between CAO points and A-Levels.
- Increase direct university engagement with potential “feeder schools” in Asia.
- Outline a national plan to arrest the decline in university rankings.

Policy Actions:

- Incorporate into the Higher Education (Reform) Bill and Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill (both currently at heads of bill stage) provisions to ensure the special status for first generation diaspora children within the Irish higher education system which either puts them in the same category as EU Citizens, or in a newly created special category. Diaspora groups should lobby the Education and Skills Committee to make a presentation to Oireachtas members.
- Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should publish equivalency tables for A-Level and International Baccalaureate secondary school qualifications. A-Level equivalency tables should be re-evaluated to be less UK/Northern Ireland-centric and have a more global orientation, reflecting the importance of alternative qualifications.
- Irish universities should collectively act in major Asian cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore to recruit students, develop relationships with schools, and improve communication with Irish Expatriates. The Irish Universities Association can be part of that process.
- Irish universities need to find a solution with the Higher Education Authority to employment control limitations imposed by the Department of Public Expenditure in

order to expand academic staff numbers and reduce the staff-student ratio, which is currently undermining Ireland's international rankings.

A Diaspora Strategy

“As a small, open trading economy we must continue to diversify our economy. International students, once they graduate, have a very strong role to play in helping Irish exporting companies to internationalise further and reach new markets through their links to their home countries.

...

Our Plan will also help to attract talent from around the world to our education institutions, equipping Irish learners with the skills and experience they need to compete internationally, to engage in world-class research and international collaborations, and to address global challenges.”

- Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton, T.D. on the launch of *Irish Educated Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy 2016-2020*.

<http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2016-Press-Releases/PR16-07-10.html>. 7 October 2016.

The Irish Diaspora constitute a unique pool of potential students for the Irish higher education system. The special role of the diaspora, especially in the United States, has enabled Ireland to maintain important and enviable access to the policymaking process, as demonstrated by Ireland's long standing St. Patrick's Day reception at the White House and the long involvement in the Northern Ireland Peace Process since the time of President Clinton. The appointment of Billy Lawless as the member of Seanad Éireann for the diaspora and with Minister of State Joe McHugh as the Junior Minister for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid within the Departments of Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs & Trade has indicated that the current Government sees engagement with the diaspora as a key priority.

Currently policy has related to communication and engagement with the diaspora, the defence and support of the conditions and treatment of the “undocumented Irish” in the United States, modest political rights (i.e. a vote in the presidential election currently under debate at the Citizen's Assembly) and the development of a more diaspora-friendly education policy. At present, most efforts have been directed at places with large Irish diaspora populations and a long history of connections, such as the UK, US, Canada and Australia. This study will focus on the small but growing diaspora located in East Asia. This group is made up of more recent emigrants who wish to maintain their links to Ireland, perhaps by matriculating their children in Irish higher education institutions. The survey instrument has highlighted the main reasons why Irish parents may want their children to study in Ireland, and some of the impediments to this.

Higher education institutions are embedded in national systems of education, migration and employability. Ireland's role in the world economy has been placed under extreme stress due to the announced economic policies of President Trump and the indication from Prime Minister May that a “Hard Brexit” is the most likely outcome of EU-UK negotiations. The United Kingdom's exit from the EU Single Market is certain, with exit from the Customs Union still unclear as of April 2017 and the future of the “Common Travel Area” in doubt. These external conditions for the Irish higher education sector are already impacting international student flows and Ireland can become a more favoured location for students looking for English medium instruction. In addition, there are nearly 12,000 Irish nationals currently studying at UK higher education institutions. While these student numbers will be maintained in the immediate future, Irish students will likely have to re-evaluate the UK as a study destination during and after the

Brexit transition period, most especially at institutions outside of England. Brexit negotiations will not be completed within the allotted 24 months and the UK's request for reciprocity of economic, social and political rights with former EU partners for nationals will slow an agreement on the treatment of currently EU-status students. The former head of the European Commission, Catherine Day, places the time horizon at a minimum of 10 years before matters of borders and trade are resolved. The Bratislava Statement on EU borders and the ongoing concern about the UK-Ireland Common Travel Area and the treatment of the 300 official border points with Northern Ireland all add an aspect of uncertainty with respect to the treatment of Irish nationals in the UK and vice versa.

The demographic growth that the Department of Education has estimated up to 2030 will place student numbers attending Third Level (i.e. the universities, institutes of technology and teacher-training colleges) at 227,000 even without the impact of Brexit. This suggests that the engagement with the Irish diaspora community is done with sensitivity to the pressures that this internal demographic and external geopolitical shock will place upon the higher education system.

Findings

As stated previously, Irish nationals residing in Asia have similar concerns to the average parent expecting to send their child abroad for higher education. What is different is that these parents have highlighted three concerns: admissions, status and quality, with quality being the essential consideration.

Admissions

Irish nationals in Asia feel that the admissions process with Irish universities needs to be addressed, with the approach taken by Irish institutions to A-Levels and the International Baccalaureate of primary concern. Parents feel that the entry criteria applied to students sitting A-Levels are too stringent, in particular when compared to criteria applied by high quality universities elsewhere. Additionally, market engagement by Irish universities is poor relative to top universities in the US and the UK.

Status

The children of Irish nationals are considered non-EU students, even when holding Irish passports. This treatment is inconsistent with the treatment offered to Irish nationals and UK expatriates when making applications to UK higher education institutions, as one example. The high fees associated with non-EU status places families in a cost-benefit quandary about sending their children to Irish universities: do they pay very high “non-EU” student fees for relatively low ranked Irish universities, or similar fees for more highly ranked international universities? Parents indicated that a special status for the children of expatriates with an associated reduced fee level would be a welcome development.

Quality

Irish nationals in Asia are concerned about the perceived decline in quality of Irish higher education institutions. We can conjecture that this is informed in part from their own perceptions, perhaps benchmarked against their own time in Irish higher education, and using international university rankings. The decline of Irish higher education institutions in the QS and *Times Higher Education* rankings highlights the ongoing challenges to quality the of Irish higher education with consistent declines in Ireland's leading universities. The quality of Irish higher education is the most important concern of parents. The three decision making criteria: career prospects, academic programme offerings and ranking are all directly linked to the quality question. These rankings can be seen in figures 1.1 and 1.2. The Irish higher education has experienced a difficult eight years with increasing student numbers, decreasing staff numbers and an overall reduction in the State contribution on a per student basis as highlighted in figures 1.3 and 1.4.

Figure 1.1: Times Higher Rankings 2017

Rank	Name	No. of FTE Students	Student:Staff Ratio	International Students	Female:Male Ratio
=131	Trinity College Dublin	15,805	23.4	25%	58 : 42
201-250	University College Dublin	21,438	22.7	25%	n/a
201-250	National University of Ireland, Galway	13,911	26.1	16%	56 : 44
201-250	Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	2,184	18.2	62%	n/a
351-400	University College Cork	15,877	22.4	16%	56 : 44

351-400	<u>National University of Ireland, Maynooth</u>	7,850	28.8	12%	55 : 45
401-500	<u>Dublin City University</u>	8,856	24.9	18%	50 : 50
501-600	<u>University of Limerick</u>	13,250	20.8	17%	47 : 53
601-800	<u>Dublin Institute of Technology</u>	14,215	19.6	25%	40 : 60

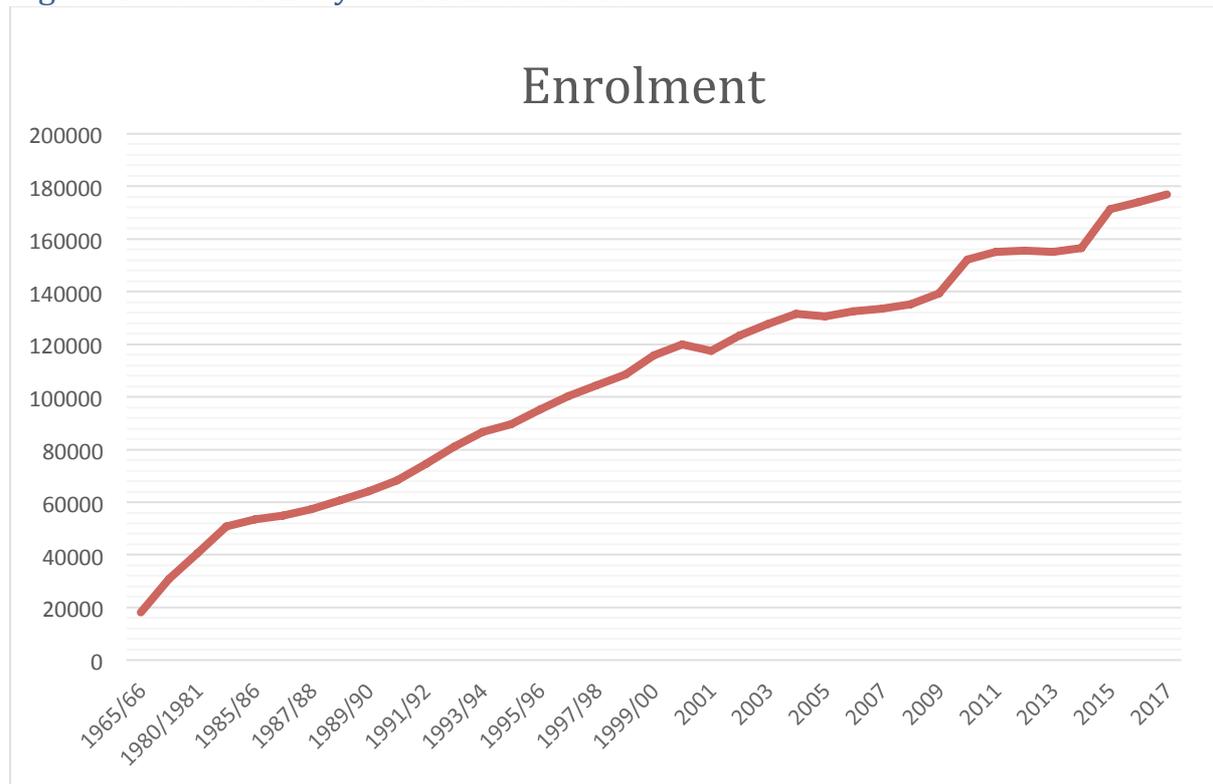
Source: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2017/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/locations/IE/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats

Figure 1.2: QS World University Rankings 2016

# RANK	UNIVERSITY	LOCATION	COMPARE	QS STARS™
2016 ▾	University search <input type="text"/>	Ireland <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Rated only
=98	 Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin		<input type="checkbox"/>	
176	 University College Dublin		<input type="checkbox"/>	
=249	 National University of Ireland Galway		<input type="checkbox"/>	5★ RATING
=283	 University College Cork		<input type="checkbox"/>	5★ RATING
=380	 Dublin City University		<input type="checkbox"/>	
501-550	 University of Limerick		<input type="checkbox"/>	5★ RATING
651-700	 Dublin Institute of Technology		<input type="checkbox"/>	
651-700	 Maynooth University		<input type="checkbox"/>	

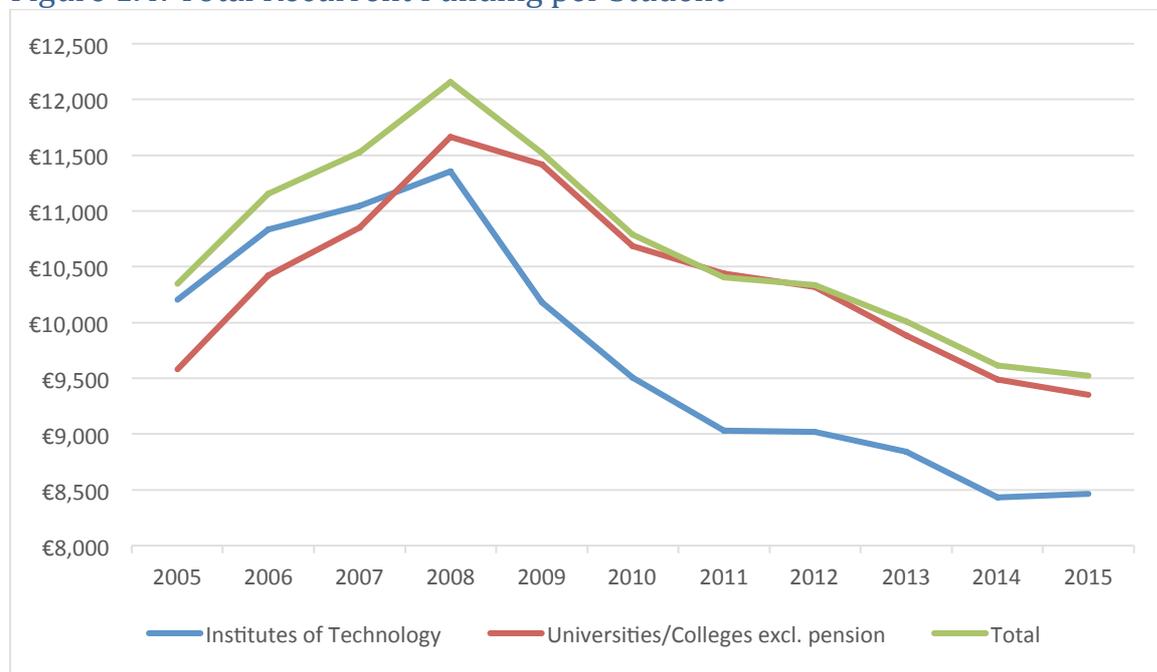
Source: <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2016>

Figure 1.3: Irish HEI System Enrolment Rates



Source: HEA.

Figure 1.4: Total Recurrent Funding per Student



Source: HEA.

At present the Irish State contributes less on a per student per annum basis for higher education than it does for a secondary school student. In terms of resources per student, Ireland is now at the bottom of the OECD. Maintaining the quality of the Irish higher education system is the primary priority of the sector given resource constraints. The survey data and international

evidence is clear that quality is also the principal criterion for international students.² The improvement and maintenance of quality is a nexus point between the policy objectives of the Irish universities and Irish diaspora parents.

The Present Strategy for Irish Global Higher Education and Internationalisation

The financial health of higher education in Ireland is dependent upon a combination of public funding and fee income generated from the recruitment of non-EU students. While the higher education sector wants to garner additional revenues, it must still work within the requirements of national policy. That means that international students, who are “ex quota”, must be accommodated within the existing resources of the sector. This can create bottlenecks for institutions due to the lack of capital investment over the last eight years and prevent internationalisation ambitions a reality.

The Department of Education and Skills states that the 2015 value of international education was €1.58bn. This was made up of €819m from the higher education sector and €762m from the English Language Training sector. This figure is more than the original target of €1.2bn set by the 2010-2015 strategy document. The newly launched 2016-2020 strategy aims to increase education exports to €2.1bn by 2020 with a total of 176,000 international students.³

The subgroup of expatriates with children does feature in the strategies formulated by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation but is a minor consideration. Primarily, the diaspora, a wider and less directly connected grouping is the focus of policymakers in the new strategy and is seen in the markets chosen for development.

The Department of Education and Skills has highlighted several markets for further development, principally:

- The United States
- China
- India
- Brazil
- Malaysia
- The Gulf Region

A further grouping of nations was highlighted as “high potential”:

- Canada
- South Korea
- Vietnam

² Hobsons. 2014. *Beyond the Data: Influencing International Student Decision Making*. p. 23.

https://www.hobsons.com/res/Whitepapers/23_Beyond_The_Data_Influencing_International_Student_Decision_Making.pdf

³ Department of Education & Skills. *Irish Educated Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy 2016-2020*. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/International-Education-Strategy-For-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf>. p. 37-8 & 47

- Indonesia
- Mexico
- Chile
- Argentina
- Nigeria

The Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation have repeatedly highlighted the importance of the Irish expatriate community as forming part of the solution to national skills gaps as understood by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and outlined in the *ICT Skills Action Plan 2014-2018* and the *Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*.

The new *Irish Educated Globally Connected* strategy document looks at higher education as a globally traded service and as a technique of extending Irish “soft power” around the globe.

It is clear from the latest strategy document that engagement with the diaspora is more concerned with those persons who are not the children of recent emigrants or temporary expatriates from Ireland. The objectives of the strategy are twofold: to draw back those with “diaspora” connections to address certain skill mix requirements and to develop a soft power base via the “Global Irish” community.

The main policy instrument for implementing the internationalisation policy has been Education Ireland, a branch of Enterprise Ireland, an agency of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. This sub-agency was responsible for achieving the 2010-2015 Strategy’s goals and to continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills and other agencies to create a framework for promotion, quality assurance and co-ordination.

Policy towards potential diaspora students was punctuated by a brief statement in 2014 by the then Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairí Quinn T.D., on a special status for the children of Irish emigrants with respect to fees. This statement was in keeping with the reflections of the expatriates surveyed in Asia and clearly links to their desire to be treated not as foreign nationals. This policy announcement made no further progress since 2014 due to the fact it violated the principles of the *Universities Act 1997*, which governs the behaviour of universities in Ireland and grants them considerable autonomy with respect to fees.

Box 1: A Ministerial Statement Without Effect

17 March, 2014 - Minister Quinn announces lower higher education fees available to children of Irish emigrants

Children of Irish migrants and other qualifying European citizens who spend 5 years in primary or post primary school in Ireland will now pay lower fees for third level

The Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., is moving to lower the fees applicable to certain Irish emigrants and European nationals whose children wish to study in Irish universities and Institutes of Technology.

Through the new initiative, the Minister is ensuring that children who move out of the Irish education system and subsequently return to study at third level should not be penalised by charging them the non-EU rate of fee. This fee is significantly higher than that which applies to students who come from the European Union.

The new fee structure will apply to children of Irish families who may have moved abroad for economic or social reasons and therefore were taken out of the Irish education system. It will also apply to other qualifying European citizens who have schooled their children in Ireland or the EU.

Under the new system, any Irish, EU, EEA or Swiss student who has spent five years in primary school or second level in Ireland will be charged the same rate as other EU nationals to study at undergraduate level.

Arrangements are being put in place for the new fee scheme to be introduced for the coming academic year.

“The economic upheaval that this country has been through has seen many of our citizens move abroad in search of work. But, as our situation improves, we are already seeing more families moving home and this is very welcome.

“As Minister for Education and Skills, I want to ensure that the children of these migrants are not penalised when it comes to attending third level. From this September, once they meet the criteria of having spent five years in the primary or secondary school here they can avail of the EU rate of third level fees.”

“I have informed my Ministerial colleagues and our embassies of this good news and as we celebrate St Patrick’s Day with the Irish diaspora in every part of the world, it is fitting that I can make this announcement,” said Minister Quinn.

ENDS

Note for Editors

In the Higher Education Sector the status of undergraduate students is assessed by higher education institutions in order to determine if they qualify for free fees or are liable for the payment of tuition fees:

- Free Fees - the Exchequer meets the cost of undergraduate tuition fees for first-time students who hold EU/EEA/Swiss nationality who have been resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for three of the five years preceding their

entry to their course of study. Such students pay a student contribution to their institution (currently €2,500 p.a.).

- EU fees – this fee level is historically linked to fee levels prior to the introduction of free fees and is mainly charged by Higher Education Institution's (HEIs) to EU/EEA/Swiss students who do not qualify under the free fees schemes e.g. students who are repeating a year of study for which they already got free fees, students who already hold an undergraduate qualification.
- Non-EU fee – this higher fee is mainly charged by higher education institutions to non EU/EEA/Swiss nationals and is linked to the full economic cost of courses. This fee is also charged to certain EU/EEA/Swiss nationals who have not been resident in the EU/EEA/Switzerland.

Source: <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2014-Press-Releases/PR14-03-17.html>

And the legal countermeasure highlighted by the Irish universities in response to the Minister's statement:

40.— (1) A university may determine and charge fees of such amounts for student registration, courses, lectures, examinations, exhibitions or any other event, service or publication held or provided at or by, or produced by, the university.

(2) An tÚdarás may review with the universities the fees charged or proposed to be charged by the universities for student registration and courses, and for lectures and examinations relating to those courses.

(3) Arising from a review under *subsection (2)*, An tÚdarás may, without prejudice to *subsection (1)* and after consultation with the Minister, advise the universities on the fees which in its opinion should be charged.

Source: *Universities Act 1997, Section 40.*

Part II – The Survey Analysis

Data

As part of our research we conducted an online survey which was targeted towards Irish nationals residing in Asia with children nearing the traditional age for higher education matriculation. This study is one of the first to directly look at Irish emigrants in Asia. The online survey was run from the beginning of October 2016 to end of November 2016. To reach out to as many Irish emigrants as possible, the survey instrument was shared with members of the Irish Chambers of Commerce and business associations, social organisations such as St Patrick’s Society and databases of the Irish Embassies in the region.

As there has been no similar survey to reference, there is no accurate data on the population of Irish parents or potential students in Asia. Partly it is because there is no overarching view from the Irish government, and because individual HEIs are at best pursuing disparate strategies. After the closure of the online survey, a total of 172 responses were obtained from 11 countries, of which 111 responses were from Singapore. With a sizeable number of responses, our survey provides an accurate picture of preferences of Irish emigrants with non-adult children in Singapore. The results for other Asian countries, though informative, would require a larger sample size to be robust.

Table 2.1: Demographics of the respondents

Indicator	Sub-indicator	% of respondents
Gender	Male	61.0
	Female	39.0
Age	<30	1.7
	30-39	22.1
	40-49	51.2
	50-59	22.1
	60-69	2.3
	>70	0.6
Irish citizen	Yes	90.1
	No	9.9

Source: Authors’ calculation.

Table 2.1 above shows some demographics of the respondents. Of the 172 respondents, 61% were male and 39% were female. In terms of age, 95% of the demographic was between 30 and 59 years old, with the majority between 40 and 49. Irish citizens constituted more than 90% of respondents. Additionally, seven out of every ten respondents graduated from an Irish university, with University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin being the primary institutions (52% of respondents were graduates of these two institutions). As mentioned earlier, the majority of the respondents – 65% – were based in Singapore, 7.6% in Malaysia, 7% in China, 6.4% in Thailand and 5.8% in Hong Kong.

With regard to the family information, the respondents tend to have more than one child: over 40% of them reported that they have two children and another 24.4% said that they have three children. The survey also asked about the highest level of education obtained by both the respondents and their partners, and the results were clear that both parents have high educational attainment levels. For instance, almost 87% of respondents reported to hold at least a Bachelor’s Degree, while more than 70% of the total number surveyed indicated that their

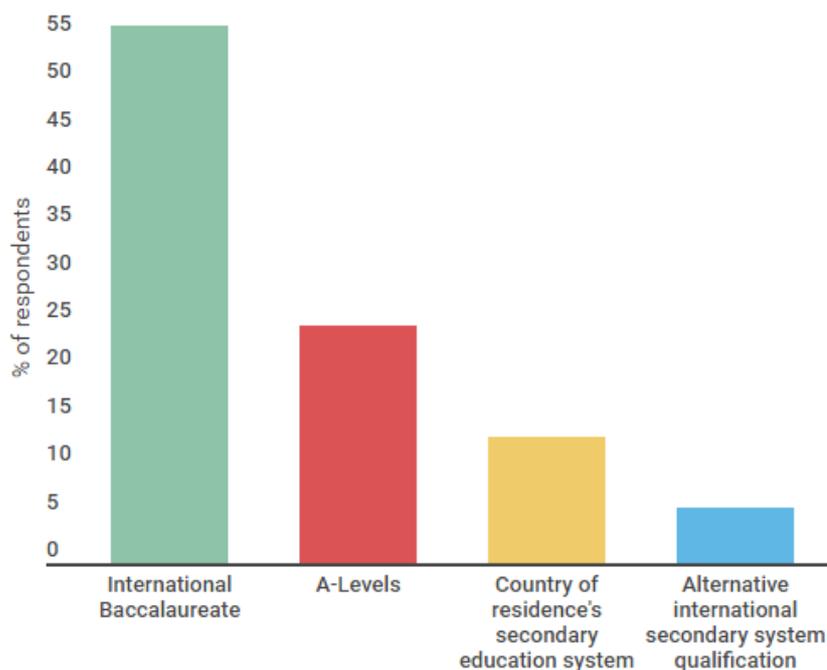
partners had a Bachelor's Degree or higher qualification. The respondents' household income tends to be high, with 54% earning over 180,000 USD per annum.

Results

Educational Background of Respondent's Children

The following figures provide information on the educational background of the respondents' children.

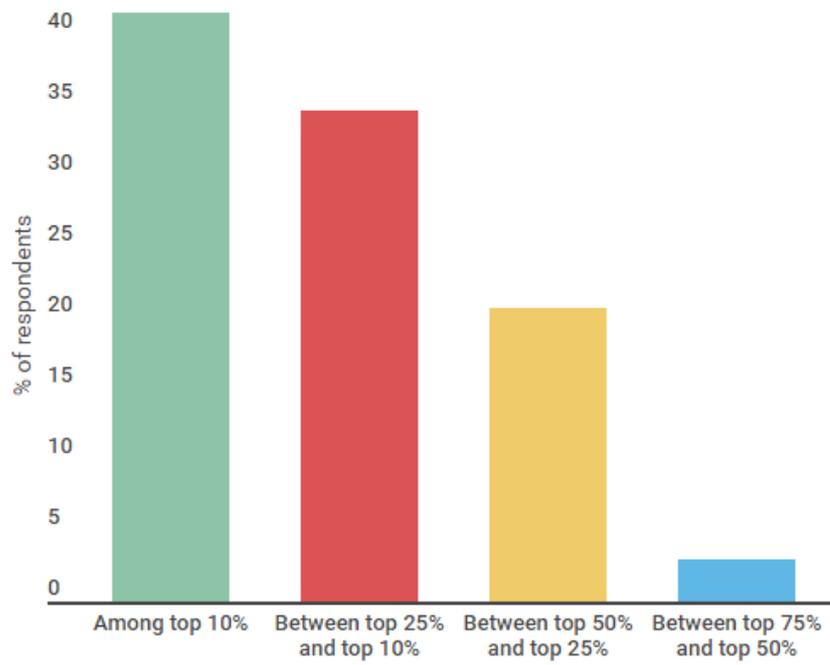
Figure 2.1: Child's educational background in Asia



Source: Authors' calculation.

In Figure 2.2, it is clear that the children tend to be high performing students within their cohorts. More than 40% of respondents said that their children were ranked among top 10% in their classes, while another 34.7% indicated that their children were ranked between top 25% and top 10%. That Irish emigrant children excel at school is possibly expected from their socio-economic status and parental education levels. Additionally, a small number of respondents – 14 and 11 respectively – reported that their children have done A Levels or sat SAT. These children performed above average in both tests.

Figure 2.2: Academic Performance



Source: Authors' calculation.

Choice of country

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 show how likely the children are to attend university, either in the country in which they now reside or in Ireland, on a four point scale.

As shown in Figure 2.3, 62% of respondents said that their children were unlikely to attend university in their current country of residence, while 17% indicated that their children were only somewhat likely to do so. These two groups combined, it is clear that more than 83% of respondents were almost sure that their children would choose another country for higher education.

Despite this, respondents were not convinced that they wanted their children to come “home” for tertiary education. When asked if they intended that their eldest pre-university children study in Ireland, around 58% of respondents said no (Figure 2.4). When parents do send their children to Irish HEIs, it is primarily for reasons of family and links to “home” brought about by a personal knowledge of the Irish education system (Figure 2.5), as the following respondents explained in detail:-

“His siblings are Irish graduates. He would have family support network even if we remained abroad...I have been impressed with access arrangements in the third level system [in Ireland].”

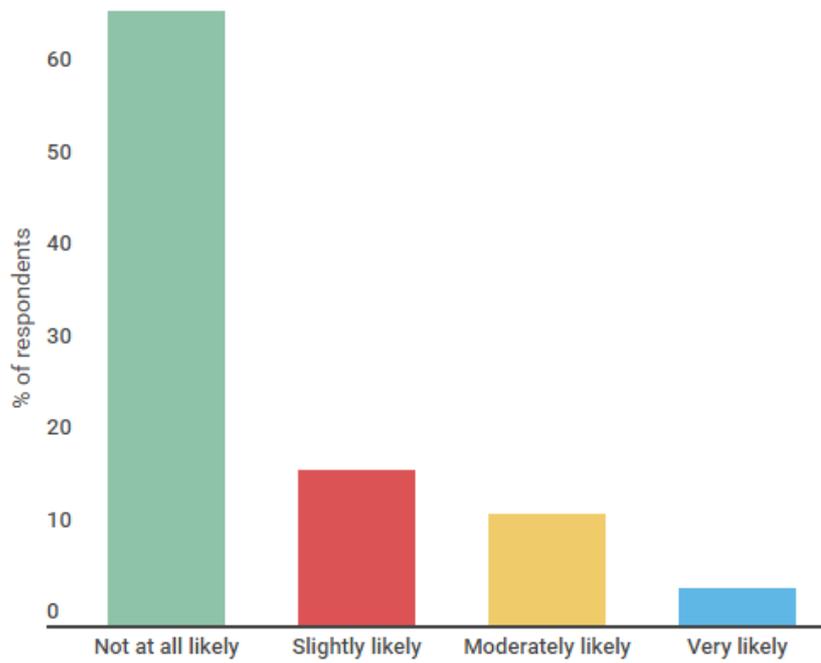
“Brexit in the UK has put us off studying there. My husband is from Scotland, I’m an Irish mother with relatives [support system for our child].”

For Irish expat parents, the UK and the US remain the primary locations to send their children, as indicated clearly by the following comments:-

“UK. Most of her friends will study there. She found a few universities in the UK that offer a Liberal Arts Science degree.”

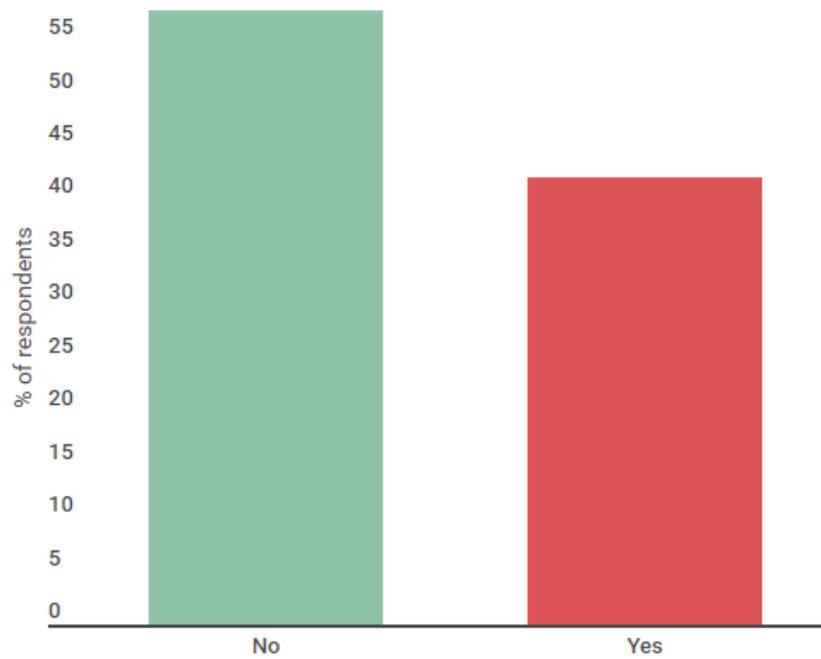
“UK or US. [Universities in these countries offer] greater range of courses and better value for money.”

Figure 2.3: Attending university in the country of residence



Source: Authors' calculation.

Figure 2.4: Interest in attending university in Ireland



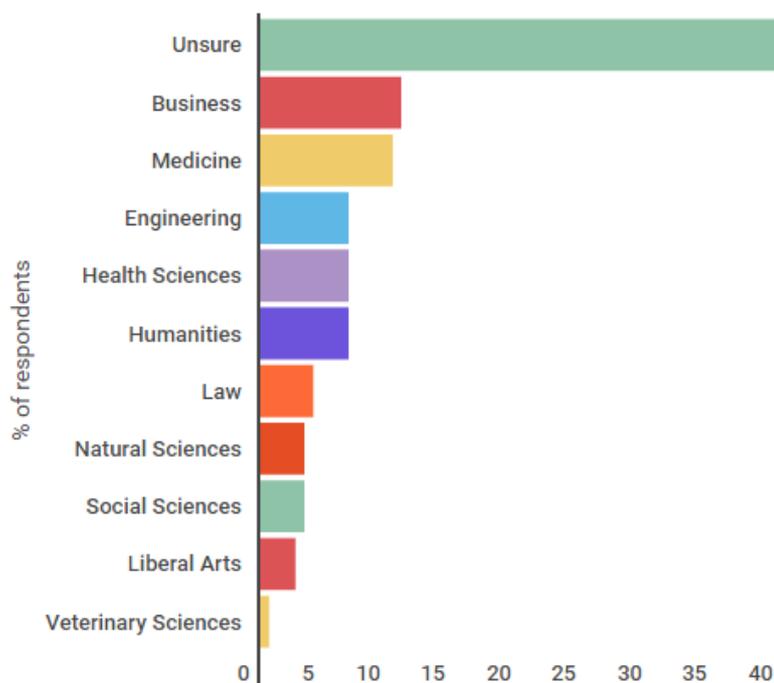
Source: Authors' calculation.

Choice of subject

Figure 2.5 shows the percentage of respondents indicating the subjects which their children will study at university.

A large proportion of potential students and their parents – nearly 44% – are unsure about what they will study. Around 10% of respondents indicated their children intended to study business and medicine each. Engineering, health sciences and humanities were chosen by around 7% of respondents each. As already stated, the majority of respondents indicated that their eldest pre-university children would not study in Ireland; the share significantly decreases if we focus on those who intend to study medicine. For those respondents who indicated their children intended to study medicine, over 80% would consider Ireland. This suggests that compared with other subjects taken as a collective group, medicine in Ireland is relatively more attractive to potential students and their parents.

Figure 2.5: Subjects to study



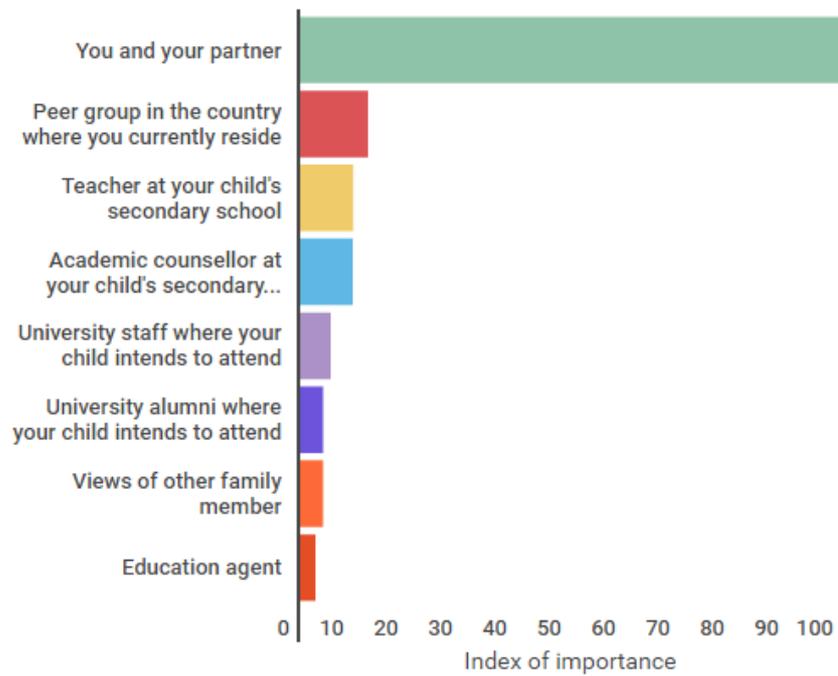
Source: Authors' calculation.

Decision-making process

The survey asked respondents to identify how influential different groups of people were on their children's decision to attend university outside of their country of residence. For each group, respondents were asked to choose on a five-point scale, with 1 referring to 'Not at all important' and 5 referring to 'Very important'. An index of importance was created based on the percentage of respondents selecting the value of 5, as shown in Figure 2.6 below. It is clear that parents remain the primary decision maker on the likely HEI a child would matriculate into, followed by peer group in the country where they currently reside and teachers at their eldest pre-university child's secondary school.

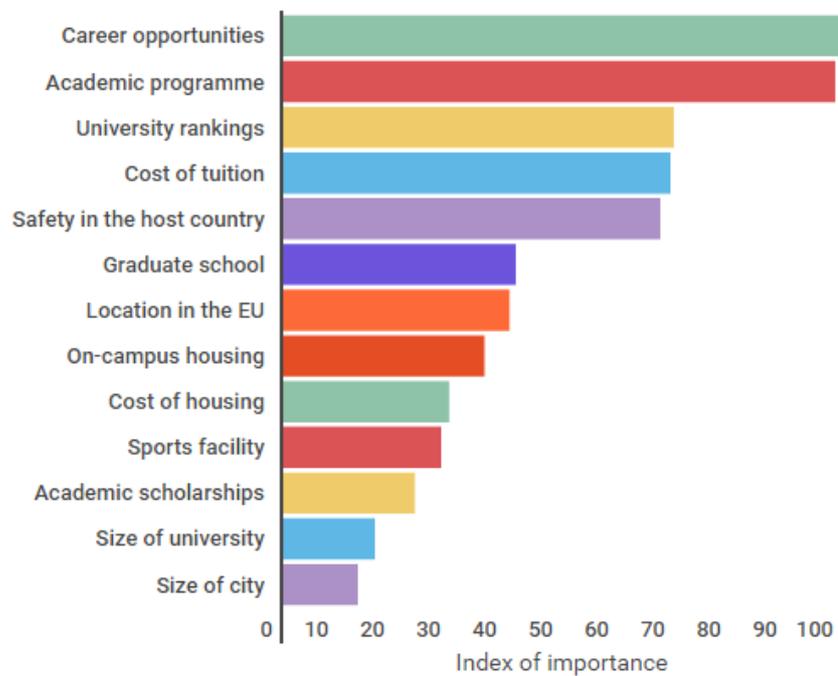
Using the same method, Figure 2.7 further reveals the importance of different factors when parents decide on where their children would go for higher education. Career opportunities, academic programme choices and university rankings were key decision points for parents, followed by factors such as cost of tuition and safety in the host country. Least important factors identified by respondents included the size of university and the size of city where university is located, suggesting that respondents were more concerned about the quality of education provided.

Figure 2.6: Primary decision makers in the choice of university



Source: Authors' calculation.

Figure 2.7: Main factors in the choice of university

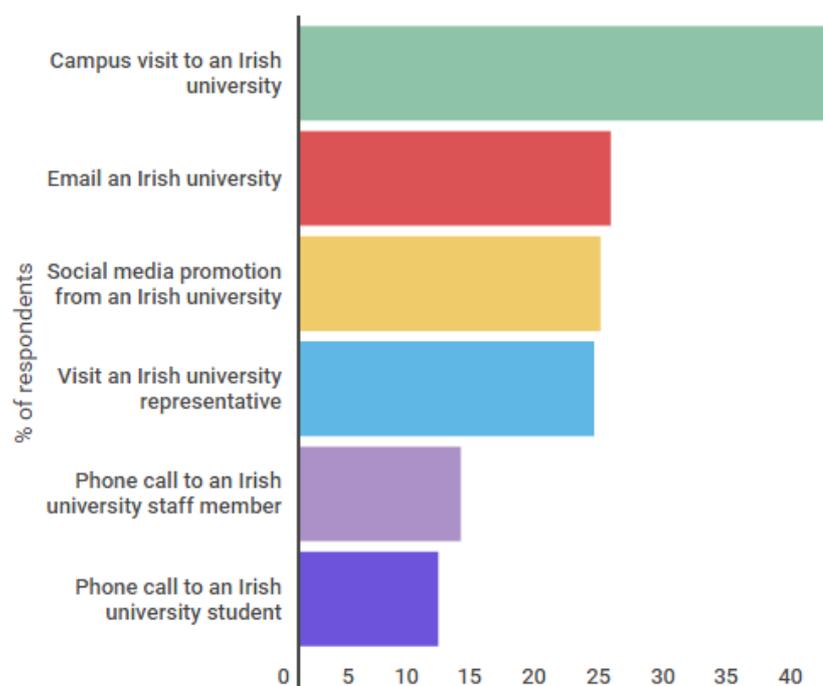


Source: Authors' calculation.

Further considerations on Irish HEIs

While our respondents are unlikely to send their children to Ireland to attend university, the survey still attempted to collect information on their engagement with Irish HEIs, the potential effect of an ‘expat discount’, and their specific comments on the Irish higher education system. As Figure 8 shows, more than 40% of respondents made campus visits to an Irish university, while 24% emailed an Irish university and 23% received social media promotion from an Irish university. Overall, the level of engagement between respondents and Irish HEIs is low, possibly suggesting that there is room for improvement and that Irish HEIs could do more to market their academic programmes and opportunities to Irish emigrants in Asia. In addition, the survey asked whether a special ‘expatriate rate’ for the children of Irish citizens would encourage them to send their child to study in Ireland. Around 90% of respondents answered yes to this question.

Figure 2.8: Engagement with Irish HEIs



Source: Authors’ calculation.

When asked in an open question about the reasons not to send a child to study in Ireland, parents highlighted several additional matters. Among the most frequently mentioned issues was the perceived low and declining quality of Irish HEIs relative to the top US and UK institutions. Another frequently mentioned issue was engagement by organisations of the Irish State and Irish State funded bodies with the expatriate community. These two and other key reasons are represented by the following comments from respondents.

“Wish Irish universities representatives would spend more time in Asia for students to meet them and schools to be more familiar with what they have to offer.”

“Underfunding of Irish universities is a major concern as is the recent fall in the global rankings of our universities. We are losing our previously hard won reputation in what is an increasingly competitive education market.”

“Irish expatriate kids should receive or qualify for same benefits as Irish resident kids.”

“Multi-Culture, size, safety, and reputation of city are key along with university global ranking in QS etc”

“Yes. We will likely return to Ireland in time for our children to benefit from resident fees at university. If for any reason, we can't make that happen, they will not go to university in Ireland as there is NO WAY we can pay the international fees at universities. If we are going to spend that money we will send them to a top university in a different country (Irish universities are great in many ways but do not compare with the Ivy League in the US or Oxbridge in the UK). We want our children to reconnect with Ireland, and we want to return home, but the economy pushed us out and now university fees will prevent us from returning. This is a huge issue for Irish people abroad - no Irish person I know will pay international fees for an Irish university. Thank you for running this survey; it is really good work to try to understand this issue for Irish emigrants. I wish you luck with next steps.”

“Our intention is to return to Ireland in 3-4 yrs so my eldest can start secondary school to meet pre-qualifications requirements so [as] to avail of normal university fees.”

“Being treated as an international student means my kids will pay very high fees in Ireland - I may as well send them to US or UK. If local fees applied to my kids - I would be much more interested in encouraging them to go to TCD as my wife and I did.”

“My child does 3 A levels that can get him into TOP Unis in UK. The Irish point systems are unforgiving and not taking into account the fact that 3 A levels are studied in great depth. To have a shot at entering Irish system you would need at least 4 A levels. At least 3 must be A-A. I would have loved my boys to have gone to Ireland as they have Irish passports and go home every summer and winter but system does not a lot it plus the fees are horrendous. It's cheaper for us to send them to the UK and we managed to European home status as well whereas Ireland see us as international. I have a house and all in Ireland. The British accept us based on that but the Irish Unis won't. So sad as you are missing out on a lot of talented expatriate kids who want to touch base with their roots!!”*

“We will be leaving Hong Kong so our eldest can start high school in New Zealand. We will consider sending him to Ireland for his final years of high school but it depends on family support and his own desire to go.”

“When it comes to sending my kids to Dublin for Uni my main concern is the violence and drinking culture.”

“My children would love to attend University if as Irish citizens they could attend without having to pay International Fees.”

“Ireland should welcome expat kids home with reasonable fees instead of charging them with the international fee which is likely to discourage people returning home.”

“Already have two children at English universities. Never saw Ireland as an option.”

"I graduated from UK university. Naturally we would like the children to attend the best university possible based on global ranking."

"Availability of home status for Irish citizens, with proven ties to Ireland is a HUGE factor. Can get this from UK universities."

"It would be very useful if children of university alumni get special rates and/or special admission privileges."

"Irish Universities compete with one another for the same students, rather than focusing on competing with other countries, which they should be doing."

"Medicine in UK is more attractive with better funding and reduced fees for 1st two (non-clinical) years"

"As an Irish citizen, and expatriate, I personally would like my children to attend university in Ireland, as part of providing them with a greater sense of their own identity, and family history. A common question for expat kids is what is their identity? Where do they identify themselves as from? Where do they belong? Your survey does not address this point, which is quite relevant. However from my child's perspective, given his well above average grades, if he is moving across the world to study (USA, UK, Australia, Ireland, Europe) why would he chose an Irish University over a higher ranked (And possibly more glamorous / reputation) Irish one??? From my personal context, there not being a financial incentive to do so, where as an Irish passport holder/citizen he still must pay full fees, puzzles me?? In essence it comes down to my own personal wish that he identifies himself as Irish. I think Government policy could be a lot stronger to attract Irish citizens [especially those of obvious merit and talent] back home to contribute positively to the next 50 years of the economy. This in itself should have a rub off effect with their non-Irish peers of the students in the Asian schools generating an interest amongst them to also pursue their studies in Ireland."

"Underfunding of Irish Universities is a major concern as is the recent fall in the global rankings of our universities. We are losing our previously hard won reputation in what is an increasingly competitive education market. As an Irish citizen, I feel the university fees for expatriate children should be lowered to a level closer to those paid by students who are resident in Ireland. I currently have no advantage (financial or otherwise) as an Irish citizen living abroad compared to any other nationality when it comes to sending my children, who are all Irish citizens, home for their University education."

"Shocked at the fees charged to my son when he studied B.E at UCD. He is an Irish citizen and I had paid Irish taxes for 15 years before going overseas"

"My eldest son is hoping to attend a University that is top twenty in the UK and 119 in the world. Trinity College Dublin is 138th."

"Since my child will possibly remain in the country she studies in I feel the Irish department of Education should incentivise Irish children to return. My daughter is giving equal consideration to UK universities which financially is nice for me since tuition fees are lower being an EU citizen".

"I understand that it is govt policy but for the amount made vs impact, I find non-EU fees for children of Irish living abroad unfair."

"Eldest child currently in university in UK. Approached a couple of Irish universities but received little encouragement."

“We would like to strongly urge some form of dialogue with the government to facilitate returning expats who are not returning to Ireland as their children are priced out of the university market by this ridiculous rule. We have skills and experience we can bring back from Asia to Ireland and are very keen to do so if only our children had the opportunity to study at home. This rule is stopping returning talent, fracturing families, forcing children to be without a network of family during a seminal time in their development.”

“My wife and I graduated from Trinity, and I would strongly recommend it. But if my kids are able, I would like them to attend a top US or top UK university (top 5). Trinity's fall in the rankings is a negative, as is the high cost I would have to pay for them as international students. If fees were at the local level that would be a major incentive for me. I only have to pay a bit above TCD international fees to send them to the best uni anywhere in the World.”

“Access to Irish universities for Irish expat kids who hold an Irish passport appear inaccessible. This is down to fees and being charged foreign student rates. Official policy on this is vague, adding to the frustration we feel about sending our kids home for Uni. These kids are in no-man's land. It's easier and less expensive to look at non-Irish options which is a shame. The universities and the gov need to get their combined acts together, and find a way to allow non-resident Irish children like-for-like access with the rest of their family members who are in Ireland. If this was an option, we believe that thousands of expat kids would return to Ireland for third level.”

“It is a serious frustration to see Irish universities overlook the children of Irish citizens overseas. Anecdotal evidence suggests there is no interest in children with Irish links; why is this? Many other countries offer favourable arrangements to children of overseas citizens to attend university in their home country. France, New Zealand come to mind. Is there not a case to try and attract the children of Irish diaspora, to build strong bonds with friends and family? It seems like a missed opportunity. My children tell me that other expatriate students have a very positive view of USA, UK, Canada, Australia and part of it comes from how their universities market themselves. Students from other countries are proud to apply to universities in their home country and this pride spreads through the student body. Where are the Irish universities in international schools in Singapore? Almost invisible”

Conclusion

Irish expatriate parents consider Irish universities but do so without illusions. They will not pay high fees for what they see an education product in decline. They see an unengaged and bureaucratic system of education. They view engagement with Irish universities as part of a wider reconnection to their families and cultural heritage.

Given the evidence highlighted earlier we would consider policy actions, such as incorporating into the Higher Education (Reform) Bill and Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill (both currently at heads of bill stage) provisions to ensure the special status for first generation diaspora children within the Irish higher education system. The aim would be to place these children within the same category as EU Citizens, or in a newly created special category that confers the same matriculation status. This could be considered as part of the wider preparations for dealing with the impact of Brexit of student mobility and the treatment of Irish nationals located in the UK.

Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should aim for greater transparency with respect to matriculation requirements. The publication of equivalency tables for A-Level and International Baccalaureate secondary school qualifications would aid parents and teachers in preparing students for applying to Irish universities. A-Level equivalency tables should be re-evaluated to be less UK/Northern Ireland-centric and have a more global orientation, reflecting the growing importance of alternative qualifications and the more diverse student population that the universities are seeking to recruit.

Irish universities should co-ordinate more effectively when conducting recruitment drives in major Asian cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore. Relationship development with schools, and improved communication with the Irish community abroad are key objectives. The Irish Universities Association can be part of that process.

Irish universities need to ensure that quality is maintained and the decline in the international rankings is halted. This will begin with addressing the staff-student ratios and ensuring that the Brexit event is taken as an opportunity to relocate talent from the UK to Ireland given the continued access Ireland will have to EU funding programmes. Quality, as found in our survey, drives a large part of the decision-making processes of parents.

It is our considered opinion that the most important priority is to ensure the continued engagement of the expatriate community with Irish universities and to close the quality deficit, placing Irish institutions on a level footing with the top 25 American and top 10 UK universities. Parents seek excellence for their children.

We would also note that this is only an initial study. Further data collection would be beneficial to gain further insights into created more precise tools for recruitment and relationship management.

Supporting Documentation from the Irish Policymaking Community:

On the matter of the diaspora *Irish Educated Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy 2016-2020* states:

Building on Ireland's alumni and diaspora links

A core goal of this Strategy will be to contribute to creating long-term networks of influence for Ireland. Building more effective engagement with alumni and diaspora is therefore crucial to success.

At the Global Irish Economic Forum held in Dublin Castle in November 2015, a number of suggestions were made by the participants, which included Global Irish Network members, representatives of Irish HEIs and the Diplomatic service, on how best to engage with our alumni.

It is clear from the views at the forum that the relationship of institutions with their alumni is central but there is potential for greater national efforts in alumni engagement which can add value, while respecting the primacy of the institutional relationship.

The forum participants also felt that:

- *Rankings of Irish Institutions and the quality of their education provision are very important to the perception of our HEIs by potential students, parents, academics,*
- *researchers and investors abroad. This is also a crucial factor when trying to build alumni engagement with their institutions and in supporting the Education in Ireland brand in their location.*
- *Facilitating networking among local alumni as well as re-establishing active connection between alumni and their institutions still has strong potential and can still be enhanced through existing networks (such as Irish Network USA.)*
- *There is a strong need for HEIs to maintain data on their Alumni, which maps their specialities and location in order to create a framework for international alumni to serve as a source of undergrad/graduate internships, jobs, or other living/ learning opportunities.*
- *Engagement with students at all stages, starting when they enter a HEI, is paramount to building the alumni relationship and can be a very powerful tool in gaining their future assistance in promoting the overall visibility and “presence” of their institution overseas.*
- *There is a need to find better ways to listen to existing students and recent graduates to build the alumni concept and to take advantage of their ideas and contributions.*
- *There is a need to examine how other countries deal with alumni and internationalisation of education policies. There may be some valuable knowledge and lessons to be harvested from a specific study of this area.*

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Ireland's diplomatic missions overseas, have a particularly vital role to play in this agenda, working in partnership with the institutions and Enterprise Ireland.

Consideration should also be given to developing a tailored marketing effort to international alumni to scope out their interest in returning to Ireland to establish new businesses and a platform to enable networking in this area would be a useful tool. This would align with Enterprise Ireland's efforts to attract overseas entrepreneurs to develop start-ups in Ireland.

More can be done to showcase Ireland's offering to the diaspora. It was recommended at the Global Irish Economic Forum that groups of Irish or Study abroad institutions and Global Irish Network members should be invited to work in partnership to develop innovative summer schools offering Irish cultural and education experiences to members of the Irish diaspora to encourage more young people with Irish heritage to study in Ireland. To this end, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in collaboration with the Institute of Study Abroad Ireland and the UCD Clinton Institute, held the inaugural Global Irish Summer Camp in 2016 which welcomed 20 US high-school students from across 15 states to Ireland for the first time. The students had two weeks educational and cultural immersion in order to learn more about their heritage and what it means to be Irish today. This pilot programme will now be evaluated to assess the feasibility of a more extensive roll out of the programme.

...

Alumni

Building and deepening relations with the alumni of Irish third-level institutions is important in terms of connecting with Irish graduates overseas and connecting with non- Irish students who may retain some affinity with Ireland. Such links have enormous potential, for Irish third-level institutions and for the country as a whole.

The Government's Diaspora Policy, 'Global Irish', recognises the importance and benefits of connecting with Irish graduates overseas as well as non-Irish graduates who may retain some affinity with Ireland. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will therefore launch an Alumni Challenge Fund to provide seed-funding to new collaborative initiatives by Irish institutions to target their Irish and non-Irish graduates working internationally. This fund will also be developed in line with the objectives of the International Education Strategy.⁴

⁴ Department of Education & Skills. *Irish Educated Globally Connected: An International Education Strategy 2016-2020*. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/International-Education-Strategy-For-Ireland-2016-2020.pdf>. p. 37-8 & 47

5. ACTIVATING IRELAND'S ALUMNI AND DIASPORA

A central ambition of Ireland's strategy is the creation of a new global network comprising Irish-educated international alumni. Education is also recognised as a crucial means of maintaining and developing links with our global diaspora. Tens of thousands of people around the world have had some experience of the Irish education system. They are perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in promoting Ireland as a centre of international education. The review will examine what more needs to be done to develop mutually beneficial relationships with Ireland's international alumni and to examine how our alumni can be activated to promote Education in Ireland. The potential to attract more members of the Irish diaspora to study in Ireland will also be considered.

Questions for consultation:

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

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Public-Consultation-Review-of-the-International-Education-Strategy.pdf>

Typical Irish HEI definition of what is the difference between and EU and Non-EU Applicant?

An EU applicant is a person:

who is ordinarily resident in the EU

AND

who will have received full-time post primary education

AND/OR

who has worked full-time in the EU for three of the five years immediately preceding admission to Trinity College

OR

who holds a passport from an EU state and has received all full-time post primary education in the EU

OR

who has official refugee status

OR

been granted humanitarian leave to remain in the State and who has been ordinarily resident in the EU for three of the five years immediately preceding admission

Notes:

Where an applicant can show that they have been in receipt of social welfare payments this may be taken in lieu of full-time employment.

Applicants who have written confirmation that they have been allowed to come to Ireland as part of the family re-unification scheme may also be eligible.

HEI admissions authorities may contact some applicants in order to seek supporting documentation regarding their status (EU/non-EU).

N.B.

For students aged under 23, the student's parent(s) must also ordinarily resident (that is - principal residence for the purpose of taxation) in an EU Member State for three of the five years prior to student's entry.

EU = EU or EEA countries (Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein) or Switzerland.

All other applications are considered to be Non-EU applications.

Stylized facts about the costs for Non-EU Students

- Traditional Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, Science, Engineering and Mathematics (AHSS/STEM) university courses are between €18,000 and €39,000 per annum.
- Medical, veterinary and dentistry courses are between €39,000 and €52,000 per annum.
- The estimated cost of living for an undergraduate student is €13,000 per year.
- There is a limited university supplied accommodation.
- Dublin-based universities face a student housing crisis which has spilled over from the general accommodation problem in Dublin (minimum 13% year-on-year rent increases).

Charles Larkin has a B.A.(Mod.) and Ph.D. in economics from Trinity College Dublin and is part of the Trinity School of Business. He lectures on Global Political Economy for the Global Security Studies MA at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Larkin is a researcher, academic and policy adviser in Ireland. He was previously Parliamentary Assistant to Senator Sean Barrett (I) of the Irish Senate as well as an adjunct lecturer and research fellow at Trinity College Dublin (where he directs an Irish Research Council project) with visiting posts at the Institute of Public Administration (Dublin), NUI Maynooth, Cardiff Metropolitan University and ESC Toulouse. Dr. Larkin has authored several items of Irish legislation and scholarly articles in international finance and the economics of education. Dr. Larkin principal research focus is on public policy and the impact of multilateral bailouts on European countries.

Qiantao Zhang has a PhD in Economic Geography from the School of Planning and Geography at Cardiff University (UK). His PhD dissertation, set in the context of divergent economic performance of UK regions, examines the role of universities in local, regional, and national economies, and maps diverse university-industry interaction patterns across regions. An economic geographer by training, he has broad interests in entrepreneurship, knowledge economy, and regional growth. Prior to joining the Innovation Policy Lab, he has worked as an IRC Postdoc Research Fellow at the School of Business at Trinity College Dublin (Ireland), where he is now a Visiting Research Assistant. Currently, he is working on the Entrepreneurship Hub project which examines the entrepreneurial activities within the University of Toronto, and the Alumni Impact project which analyses the economic, innovation, and social impact of University of Toronto's alumni.