

A PROFILE OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

BY
BARBARA L. KRUGER

Throughout the centuries, the maintenance and proliferation of education in Ireland, despite repeated conquest and continual religious pressure, has underscored the value which the Irish have always placed on education and learning.

Formal education in Ireland had its beginnings in Celtic monasticism which took root and developed from the early sixth century. The monks established many centers of learning which continued to flourish well after the coming of the Normans in the 12th century.

The Tudor invasions and plantations, as well as the dissolution of the monasteries, dismantled and destroyed the educational system of the country.

In the 17th century, after the Cromwellian invasions, a series of penal laws forbade Catholics to send their children abroad to be educated, to set up schools in Ireland or to teach their children. This system was maintained for the next 300 years, but was never well-received by the Irish masses, who did all in their power to circumvent the Penal Laws against Catholic education, often at great personal risk.

Out of these "subversive" efforts on the part of the Irish grew the system of hedge-schools, which derive their name from the fact of the instruction having to be held outdoors, so as not to endanger anyone who might provide space in his home or barn for the master and his pupils. The hedge-schools first cropped up during the 17th century and proliferated especially in the late 18th century, when the Penal Laws were finally relaxed and the hedge-schools were officially acknowledged, although not given state funding. They co-existed with the mostly Protestant-run state-endowed schools until 1831, when a new system of national education was introduced.

For centuries, bitter conflict existed between church and state over education, but this largely disappeared following independence from the British in 1922. After the new state assumed responsibility for educational services, it agreed to the church's ownership and control of most educational institutions, and to church power in matters such as the appointment of teachers. On their part, church authorities yielded to the State the responsibility for regulating cur-

ricula and examinations, and for determining grants and paying teachers.

Statewide responsibility for the administration of all public education in Ireland now rests with the Department of Education, headed by the Secretary of Education. The Secretary reports to the Minister of Education, who is a member of government. Under the Secretary of Education are six Assistant Secretaries, each of whom heads one of the Department's major administrative divisions.

The Department of Education provides for free education at the primary and secondary levels, and gives substantial subsidies to universities and other institutions of higher education.

The stages of education are referred to as first-level, second-level and third-level. First-level education covers the six primary grades. Second-level refers to intermediate education (also called 'junior post-primary cycle'), as well as to upper secondary education (also known as 'senior cycle'). Third-level education refers to all higher (i.e., post-secondary) education.

PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

As of 1972, formal education in Ireland is compulsory for all children between 6-15 years of age.

Most children at the primary level attend one of the 3500 state-supported "national" schools, which are almost all owned by church authorities, with over 95 percent under Catholic control.

Although education is compulsory from age six, provision is made in the

public national schools for all children from the age of four. As a result, 62% of all four-year-olds and nearly all five-year-olds attend pre-school, referred to as infant classes. The majority of six-year-olds attend the first class of the primary school (comparable to first grade in the United States); those who are not yet ready are recommended for the second class of the infant school.

Primary education consists of six grades. Students are generally about 12 years old at completion of this level.

The Department of Education determines school curricula, which directly reflect the basic philosophy, values, ethics and elements of nationalism of Irish society.

From 1944 through the 1960's, students who completed the standard six-

year primary cycle were required to sit for the Primary Certificate Examination, which tested their knowledge of Irish, English and arithmetic. After 1967, no formal leaving examination was required. Stu-

dents are now issued a cumulative record card called a Standard 6 Certificate, furnished by the principal teacher of the school, which attests to the student's having completed primary education and provides

a record, based on continuous assessment, of the student's progress. An official copy of this certificate is sent to the secondary school which the child subsequently attends.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education normally lasts five years. The curriculum for secondary education is set by the Department of Education, which sends inspectors to the schools to ensure standardized education.

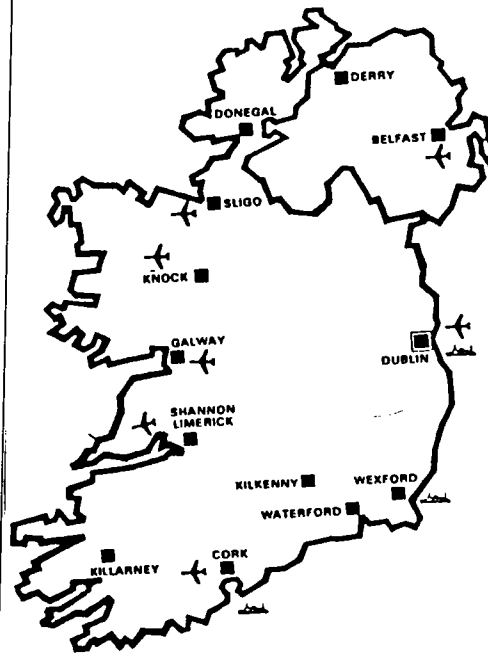
There are four main classifications of second-level schools in Ireland: secondary schools, vocational schools, comprehensive, and community schools. These distinctions developed as a direct result of the government's efforts to provide secondary education appropriate to the varying needs, abilities and aptitudes of all individuals.

About 65%-75% of all students at this level attend the secondary schools, at which the syllabus is set along classical lines. These schools are all privately owned, almost all denominational and operated mostly by religious groups. They are, however, funded by the government and are therefore subject to state supervision. Consequently, they all offer a fairly uniform, state-approved curriculum designed to prepare students for the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations.

Secondary education is divided into a lower cycle and an upper cycle. The lower ("junior post-primary") cycle consists of three years of junior secondary education, after which time students sit for the Intermediate Certificate Examinations. This certificate attests to the completion of a balanced program of general education appropriate to the needs of those students who opt to leave school at the end of their compulsory education (normally nine years of study). It also attests to the preparedness of those students who intend to pursue further study.

On the Intermediate Certificate Examination, students receive a letter grade for each subject in which they are examined. Each letter grade corresponds to a percentage of marks. To qualify for the Intermediate Certificate, a grade of

'D' or above must be obtained in a minimum of five subjects. In practice, most students sit the examinations in about eight subjects. They normally take Irish, English and mathematics (all at either lower level or higher level), as well as history, geography and civics. They also choose two additional subjects from the following: classical studies, foreign language (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, German, Spanish, Italian), science, home economics, music and musicianship, art, woodwork, metalwork, mechanical drawing and commerce. Students may not sit these examinations before completing at



least three years of an approved secondary educational program and attaining the age of at least 14.

The senior cycle consists of two years of upper secondary education, after which time students sit for the Leaving Certificate Examinations. The curricula leading to these examinations are designed to prepare the student for immediate entry into the labor market or, alternatively, for

advanced study at the post-secondary level. Curricular choice in these examinations was expanded in the 1970's to include subjects of a more work-related nature such as building construction, engineering workshop, mechanics, technical drawing, economics, accounting and business organization, in addition to the more academic science, social studies and language subjects.

Through 1974, the award of the Leaving Certificate required a grade of 'D' or above in a minimum of five subjects (including Irish) at either the Ordinary or Honours level. From 1975 onwards, the Leaving Certificate has been issued on the basis of success in single-subject examinations. There are 34 subjects to choose from. On average, students take between six to nine subjects, plus religious instruction, civics and physical education. Irish is still compulsory at either the Intermediate or Leaving Certificate level, although no longer required for an award of the Certificate. Unlike past practice, a failure in the Irish examination at either level no longer means failure in the overall examinations.

Students have a choice of taking both the leaving examinations and matriculation examinations administered by the National University of Ireland, or only the latter. Most who intend to pursue higher education do take both, and both represent the same level of educational attainment. To qualify for the Matriculation Certificate, students must pass in English composition, either Latin or mathematics, and four other subjects of their own choosing, for a total of six subjects. A grade of at least 'P2' must be attained in a minimum of three of these subjects.

The minimum requirement for admission to higher education institutions is six subjects (two at Honours and four at Ordinary level) in the Leaving

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Certificate. The matriculation examination is not required of those students wishing to pursue higher education if they have passed in six Leaving Certificate subjects, two of these being Honours level subjects passed with a grade of at least 'C', and including English, mathematics and a science subject.

Vocational Education

Vocational schools in Ireland trace their roots to the organization of technical and craft education in the country, which began in the mid-1800's. Over time, they developed into post-primary level establishments offering full-time pre-employment programs with an emphasis on practical subjects. Their original aim was to provide an alternative type of education for those youths who might otherwise leave school upon completing their compulsory education, but who were not sufficiently prepared for the adult world of work. At present, they also offer programs leading to the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate Examinations, as well as a wide variety of evening programs for adults.

The vocational schools are main-

tained and operated by local Vocational Education Committees (VEC) as legislated for by the State. The State provides approximately 90% of the funding for vocational schools; the balance is met by local authorities.

Students at the vocational schools follow a two-year program leading to the Day Vocational Certificate Examination. The program covers four main areas: manual instruction, commerce, home economics and rural science. The curriculum is designed so as to enable those who remain in school for an additional year to sit for the Intermediate Certificate. In many vocational schools, students may now also undertake a two-year program leading to the Leaving Certificate. Not surprisingly, this latter program places emphasis on practical and applied subjects designed to meet the needs of local business and industry. Students who pursue the Leaving Certificate program at a vocational school normally intend to continue on at a technical or technological college.

Most of the comprehensive schools were started in the late 1960's and early 1970's in areas which had inadequate facilities for post-primary education. They combine secondary academic

and secondary vocational education in one curriculum. Through the practice of early selection and rigid streaming and the existence of a systematized career guidance service in all such schools, students are able to pursue that program which best meets their aptitudes and abilities.

Comprehensive schools are funded by the central government and operated cooperatively by the Department of Education, the local religious authority and Boards of Management set up by the local Vocational Education Committee.

Comprehensive schools in turn gave rise to community schools, the aim of which has been to encourage community involvement in local educational activities and expand opportunities for adult and part-time education. The community schools have been formed as a joint venture of existing second-level schools formerly run by either religious orders or Vocational Education Committees. As at the comprehensive schools and in accordance with the national aim of establishing a unified system of second-level education, students at the community schools can choose from a full range of programs leading to the Day Vocational Certificate, Intermediate and Leaving Certificate qualifications.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education in Ireland has developed along two distinct lines: (a) the traditional universities, mainly offering a classical academic education; and (b) non-university institutions, at which more career-oriented programs generally are offered.

Education at this level is not free. All students are charged fees for tuition, registration, capitation (i.e., student organization membership), examinations and degree/diploma/certificate conferral. Many students, however, receive grants to pursue third-level education.

University Education

Until early 1989, Ireland had two government-funded universities: the National University of Ireland (NUI) and the University of Dublin (also referred to

as Dublin University). There is also The Pontifical University, which is not government-funded.

In January 1989, the government bestowed University status on Ireland's two National Institutes for Higher Education (NIHE) Dublin and Limerick, the first universities to be established since Irish independence, and now to be known, respectively, as Dublin City University and the University of Limerick. Prior to 1989, degrees for studies completed at the NIHEs were awarded by the National Council for Education Awards (NCEA). Since being granted university status, the NIHEs have the power to award their own degrees. The University of Limerick offers programs in technology, applied science and business practice. Dublin City University offers programs in computer studies, practical business methods, com-

munications, electronics and analytical science.

The largest of the universities is the National University of Ireland, which consists of three constituent colleges which are University College, Dublin; University College, Cork; and University College, Galway, and five recognized colleges including St. Patrick's College of Education, Dublin; the Royal College of Surgeons; St. Patrick's College, Maynooth; Mary Immaculate College of Education and St. Angela's College. The constituent colleges enjoy a large measure of autonomy, so much so in fact that the government is currently considering a proposal to dissolve the National University of Ireland and set up each constituent college as an independent university in its own right. The National University of Ireland is the degree-awarding body for

each.

The University of Dublin has only one constituent college--Trinity College, Dublin--and four associated colleges, The Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines; St. Mary's College of Education, Marino; the Froebel College of Education, Sion Hill; and St. Catherine's College of Home Economics, Sion Hill, Blackrock. The University of Dublin is the degree-awarding body at each of these colleges; it also confers awards for several degree-level programs offered by the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The Pontifical University is located on the same campus as St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. It awards degrees in theology, canon law and philosophy, as well as a combined degree in theology and (liberal) arts offered in association with St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

The academic year at higher level institutions normally runs from October to July, although a few colleges begin classes in September. The academic year is divided into three terms of approximately ten weeks each; these are sometimes referred to as the Michaelmas (Autumn) term, the Hilary (Winter) term and the Trinity (Spring) term.

The programs at each university are generally offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Undergraduate Programs

Admission to higher education is related to the Leaving Certificate curriculum. As stated previously, the minimum matriculation requirement is two Honours and four Ordinary level subjects on the Leaving Certificate Examination. However, competition for places is extremely keen, and attainment of the minimum academic requirements would make admission to any of the university colleges or national institutes unlikely. In practice, therefore, the actual academic requirements are much higher; they vary according to the college, field of study and year for which admission is being sought. Medicine is normally the most competitive faculty, followed by electronic engineering, veterinary medicine, dentistry, other engineering, law, architecture, commerce/business studies, sci-

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ence, agriculture and humanities.

Applications for entry to almost all undergraduate degree and diploma programs offered by any of the university colleges, the National Institutes for Higher Education, or Thomond College of Education, as well as the degree programs offered at the Dublin Institute of Technology are processed by the Central Applications Office. Located in Galway, this office came into being in 1976 in response to the soaring number of applications being made to higher level education. Its aim is to streamline applications to the above-named institutions by ranking applicants and offering them the highest program of preference for which they are qualified.

Bachelor's degree programs, whether in arts and humanities, social sciences, law or commerce/business studies, generally require three years of study.

All first degree programs in engineering, agriculture and science normally require four years of study; the first qualifications in architecture and veterinary medicine require five years of study; the first qualification in dentistry requires five to six years of study; six years of study

are required for a first qualification in medicine.

At Trinity College, Dublin, four years of study are normally required to obtain the bachelor's degree--this applies to both Pass degree and Honours degree programs.

First (i.e., bachelor's) degrees awarded by the National University of Ireland are of two types: the Honours degree and the Pass degree. Honours degrees are classified as follows:

- Honours Grade 1 (First-Class Honours)
- Honours Grade 2.1 (Upper Second-Class Honours)
- Honours Grade 2.2 (Lower Second-Class Honours)
- Honours Grade 3 (Third Class Honours) Some colleges only award Pass degrees (also referred to as General degrees), which are not classified.

There is no uniform policy regarding the admission of overseas applicants to higher level education in Ireland, either at university or non-university institutions. Foreign students are generally accepted on the basis of appropriate academic credentials from their home country, subject to the entry requirements of the institution/program in question. Generally speaking, an overseas applicant is not likely to be accepted to a program in natural science, agriculture, law or commerce/business studies, for which competition among domestic Irish applicants is strongest.

Graduate Programs

Overall, the number of students pursuing graduate study is relatively small, and there is insufficient financial support for study at this level.

Most graduate-level programs require a bachelor's degree with first- or upper second-class honours. Students with a lower-second class honours degree may also be accepted, although they are often required to pass a qualifying examination prior to their acceptance. Students intending to pursue graduate-level education at the National University of Ireland must secure a recommendation from a professor in the proposed area of study and submit this to the relevant faculty for

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approval. Students wishing to pursue graduate studies at Trinity College (University of Dublin) must apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies and are subsequently considered for acceptance by the Graduate Studies Committee.

The Master's degree is the first graduate degree. It should be noted that Trinity College, Dublin, confers a M.A. on the holder of a Trinity College Bachelor's degree (Pass or Honours) after three years and the payment of a fee. This award is honorary. A Master of Science degree generally requires one to two years of study.

Bachelor's and master's degrees are normally awarded on the basis of written and/or oral examinations, a final project, a thesis, or any combination thereof.

At both the National University of Ireland and the University of Dublin, a doctoral degree (Ph.D.) normally requires the completion of at least four years of original research and a dissertation after a bachelor's degree.

Teacher Training

Prior to 1974, elementary school teachers completed a two-year certificate program. Admission to the program required the Leaving Certificate. In 1974, three of the Colleges of Education for the training of elementary school teachers became recognized colleges of the National University of Ireland. The remaining three became associated colleges of the University of Dublin. Their programs were extended to three years and upgraded to degree level. The qualification now awarded upon completion of the program is the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.).

Holders of other university first degrees may qualify as elementary school teachers upon completion of a one-year diploma program at one of the Colleges of Education.

To qualify as a secondary school teacher in Ireland, one must hold a university first degree as well as the Higher Diploma in Education (H.Dip.E.). The Higher Diploma in Education is awarded upon completion of a one-year program at a university. Both teacher training programs require practice teaching and both

are referred to in Ireland as "postgraduate" programs, meaning that they require a university first degree for admission.

Non-University Education

Non-university higher education is provided at colleges operated by Vocational Education Committees (VEC) and nine regional colleges located throughout Ireland. The VEC-operated institutions in Dublin are grouped under the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The programs of study offered at non-university institutions of higher education vary in length as well as in the amount of practical training required for the respective degrees, diplomas and certificates. Many of these programs have a specific career orientation and include a period of on-the-job training. Nearly all are taught at the undergraduate level.

Certificate programs generally last for two years, while diploma programs are generally of three years' duration. Degree programs normally require four years.

The great majority of programs (both degree and non-degree level) offered at these institutions are validated by the National Council for Education Awards. This body was established in 1972 to grant formal recognition to and confer awards upon completion of the programs offered outside the traditional university system (in much the same way as does the British Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), on which the NCEA is patterned).

In the case of the Dublin Institute of Technology, some programs are validated by the NCEA, while others are validated by the University of Dublin. Still others lead solely to Dublin Institute of Technology awards, since the Institute itself is empowered to offer its own diplomas and certificates.

Regional Technical Colleges

There are nine regional technical colleges in Ireland which have been established with a view towards providing career-oriented training covering a wide variety of occupations ranging from craft

to professional level. Most of the programs offered at the regional technical colleges are in engineering, science and commerce, although one may also pursue programs in other fields. The curricula offered at the regional technical colleges are constantly updated as appropriate to meet the ever-changing educational and operational needs of local trade and industry.

At present, the regional technical colleges provide four main types of programs: (1) craft apprenticeship and craft-based technician programs; (2) middle- and higher-level technician programs; (3) professional (degree-level) programs; and (4) part-time programs for adults.

The craft apprenticeship and craft-based technician programs are secondary-level programs in which apprentices in certain trades and technical grades are permitted to attend a local college on a part-time basis to pursue education related to their on-the-job training.

Admission to the middle- and higher-level technician programs generally requires the Leaving Certificate (or the equivalent). Fields of study include engineering technology (civil, electrical, electronic and mechanical), applied sciences, applied business, architectural and construction technology, hotel and catering studies and art and design. The qualification awarded after a two-year program of study is the **National Certificate**. A further year of study (or three years directly from the Leaving Certificate) leads to the **National Diploma**. The National Diploma programs are generally more specialized, including as they do more of a theoretical component than the National Certificate programs. Both programs are normally offered on a full-time basis, although arrangements can be made for part-time study to accommodate employed individuals.

Professional (degree-level) programs are offered mainly at the Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin City University and the University of Limerick. Regional Technical College, Galway offers a degree-level program in hotel and catering management.

A great variety of part-time programs for adults is offered at the regional technical colleges on an evening, day-re-

lease or intensive short-term basis. Most of these programs are vocational or job-related in nature.

The programs offered at the regional technical colleges, too, are assessed and certificates and diplomas awarded by the NCEA. It is possible for holders of the

National Certificate/National Diploma to continue on in some degree-level programs at the Dublin Institute of Technology, as well as in some university programs, with some advanced standing granted for subjects completed in the certificate/diploma program. Students

who complete a certificate program in one college may transfer to another to pursue diploma-level studies if their area of specialty is not offered in the original college, and articulation agreements allow for this type of transfer.

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USEFUL ADDRESSES

Dept. of Education Marlborough St. Dublin 1 Higher Education Authority 21 Fitzwilliam Square Dublin 2 Central Applications Office Tower House Eglinton St. Galway Irish Council for Overseas Students 41, Morehampton Rd. Dublin 4 Union of Students in Ireland 16 N. Great George's St. Dublin 1 USIT 19-21 Aston Quay Dublin 2 Dublin Tourism 14 Upper O'Connell St. Dublin 1	UNIVERSITIES & UNIVERSITY COLLEGES	Regional Tech. College Athlone Co. Westmeath Regional Tech. College Carlow Regional Tech. College Bishopstown Cork Regional Tech. College Dundalk Co. Louth Regional Tech. College Galway Donogh O'Malley Regional Tech. College Letterkenny Co. Donegal Regional Tech. College Sligo Regional Tech. College Clash Tralee Co. Kerry Regional Tech. College Waterford	College of Technology Bolton St. Dublin 1 College of Technology Kevin St. Dublin 8 Limerick Tech. College Moylish Limerick
	Trinity College Dublin 2 National U of Ireland 49 Merrion Sq. Dublin 2 University College Cork University College Dublin 4 University College Galway St. Patrick's College Maynooth Co. Kildare Dublin City University Glasnevin Dublin 9 University of Limerick Plassey House Limerick		COLLEGES OF EDUCATION Thomond College of Education Castletroy Limerick St. Patrick's College Drumcondra Dublin 9 Mary Immaculate College Mount Prospect Limerick Church of Ireland Clg. of Ed. 96 Upper Rathmines Rd. Dublin 6 St. Mary's Training College Marino
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION	TECHNOLOGY COLLEGES		

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ADDRESSES <i>continued</i>			
Dublin 9 St. Catherine's Clg. of Ed (Domestic science) Sion Hill Blackrock Co. Dublin Maria Assumpta Training Clg. (Froebel) Sion Hill Blackrock Co. Dublin St. Angela's Training Clg. Clogherevagh Sligo Colaiste Charman Gory Co. Wexford Mater Dei Inst. of Ed. Clonliffe Rd. Dublin 3 Inst. of Religious Ed. Mount Oliver Dundalk Co. Louth School of Social Education Sion Road Kilkenny	School of Pharmacy Trinity College 18 Shrewsbury Rd. Dublin 4 Royal Clg. of Physicians of Ireland 6 Kildare St. Dublin 2 School of Remedial Linguistics Trinity College Dublin 2 (Each of the university colleges, with the exception of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, has a medical school).	Municipal School of Music Mulgrave St. Limerick School of Music Chatham Row Dublin 2 Army School of Music Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin 6 Municipal School of Music Union Quay Cork	St. Kieran's College Kilkenny St. Peter's College Wexford St. John's College Waterford All Hallows College Drumcondra Dublin 9 St. Columban's College Dalgan Park Nvan Co. Meath St. Patrick's College Kiltegan Co. Wicklow Holy Ghost Missionary College Kimmage Manor Dublin 12 St. Mary's College Tallagh Co. Dublin Church of Ireland Divinity Hostel Braemor Park Dublin 14 Irish School of Ecumenics Milltown Park Dublin 6 Mount St. Anne's Portarlinton Co. Laois
	PROFESSIONAL LAW SCHOOLS	HOTEL SCHOOLS	AGRICULTURAL AND RELATED COLLEGES
	The Honourable Society of King's Inns Henrietta St. Dublin 1 The Incorporated Law Society of Ireland Blackhall Place Dublin 7	Dublin Clg. of Catering Cathal Brugha St. Dublin 1 College of Hotel Mgt. Shannon Free Airport Co. Clare Hotel Training School Killybegs Co. Donegal	
	ART SCHOOLS	COLLEGES OF THEOLOGY AND DIVINITY	
	National Clg. of Art and Design Kildare St. Dublin 1 School of Art 17 Cumberland St. Dun Laoghaire Co. Dublin Crawford Municipal School of Art Emmett Place Cork School of Art Mulgrave St. Limerick	Pontifical University St. Patrick's College Maynooth Co. Kildare Divinity School Trinity College Dublin 2 Milltown Inst. of Theology and Philosophy Milltown Park Dublin 6 Holy Cross College Clonliffe Rd. Dublin 3 St. Patrick's College Carlow St. Patrick's College Thurles Co. Tipperary	
COLLEGES OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	MUSIC SCHOOLS		Munster Institute Bishopstown Cork Mellows Agricultural College Athenry Co. Galway Kildalton Agric. & Horticultural Clg. Piltown Co. Kilkenny
College of Commerce Rathmines Dublin 6 College of Marketing 18 Parnell Sq. Dublin 1 College of Industrial Relations Sandford Rd. Dublin 6	Royal Irish Academy of Music 86 Westland Row Dublin 2		
MEDICAL AND PARA- MEDICAL SCHOOLS			
Royal Clg. of Surgeons in Ireland 123 St. Stephen's Green Dublin 2			

Source: *Higher Education in the European Community: Student Handbook* (Fifth Edition). Bonn: Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), 1988

IRISH GRADING SCALES AND THE U.S. EQUIVALENTS

Secondary Education

Until 1968: Percentage scale 10-100%; minimum pass mark on Pass/Standard paper of leaving certificate = 40%, minimum pass mark on Honours paper of leaving certificate = 30%; those who obtained 60% or over were considered to have earned honours passes.

Since 1969:

Intermediate and Leaving Certificates:

Irish Grading
(Honours & Ordinary Levels)

WES U.S. Equivalent
(Ordinary Level)

WES U.S. Equivalent
(Honours Level)

85-100% = A
70-84% = B
55-69% = C
40-54% = D
25-39% = E
10-24% = F

A
A-
B
C
D
F

A
A
A
A
F
F

A grade 'D' on an Honours paper at the leaving certificate is generally equated with a grade 'A' at the Ordinary level in Ireland, though in some cases it is taken to be even better than this. Prior to 1975, each candidate had to achieve grade 'D' to secure a pass in a subject, and had to achieve this grade in at least five subjects to qualify for the award of the Leaving Certificate. Since 1975, each candidate is issued a certificate showing the grades awarded to him/her at the examination.

Higher Level Education

National University of Ireland:

Irish grading (pre-1986)

Irish grading (since 1986)

WES U.S. equivalent

grade 1 = 75-100%
grade 2 = 60-74%

A = 75-100%
B = 60-74%

A
A-

Limerick University

Dublin City University

Limerick grading:

WES U.S. equivalent

Dublin grading

WES U.S. equivalent

A = A
B (3.50) = A
B (3.00) = B
C+ (2.50) = B
C = C
D+ = F
E = F
F = F

A 70% - 100%
B+ 63% - 69%
B 55% - 62%
B- 51% - 54%
C+ 47% - 50%
C 43% - 46%
C- 40% - 42%
D+ 35% - 39%
F 0% - 34%

A
A-
B
B
B
C
C
C
C
F

IRISH GRADING *continued*

Non-university institutions of higher education:

Irish grading

75-100%

65-74%

55-64%

40-54%

or

46-54%

40-45%

WES U.S. equivalent

A

B

B-/C+

C

C

C-

SUMMARY: EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

INSTITUTION	DIPLOMA/ CERTIFICATE	ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS	PROGRAM LENGTH	WES U.S. EQUIVALENCY
Primary School	Standard 6 Certificate		6 years	
Secondary School (academic)	Intermediate Certificate		3 years	
Junior Post-primary	Leaving Certificate	Inter. Cert.	2 years	Grade 10 Graduation from High School
Upper cycle				
(vocational/ technical)	Day Vocational Certificate	Inter. Cert.	2 years	Graduation from a vocational High School program
Higher Education Universities	B.A./B.Sc.	Leaving Cert.	3 years at Nat. U of Ireland	} Equivalent to corresponding U.S. degree
	B.A./B.Sc.	Leaving Cert.	4 years at Universities of Dublin, Dublin City or Limerick	
	M.A.,* M.S.	B.A./B.Sc.	1-2 years	
	H.Dip.E.	B.A./B.Sc.	1 year	
Non-university	Ph.D.	B.A./B.Sc.	4 years plus dissertation	
	NCEA One-year Certificate	Leaving Cert.	1 year	1 year of undergraduate study
	NCEA National Certificate	Leaving Cert.	2 years	2 years of undergraduate study
	NCEA National Diploma	Leaving Cert.	3 years	3 years of undergraduate study
	NCEA Graduate Diploma	B.A./B.Sc.	1 year	graduate credit

*The M.A. from the University of Dublin is an honorary degree.