

After the Bubble: Ireland Works to Rebound

An Interview with Ruairi Quinn, Irish Minister for Education and Skills

RUAIRI QUINN, A VETERAN IRISH LABOUR PARTY POLITICIAN, was appointed minister for education and skills in March 2011. Quinn has faced the challenge of maintaining Irish higher education's dramatic expansion in scope and quality achieved during its Celtic Tiger years in the face of the subsequent collapse of the Irish housing and banking sectors which have caused across the board cuts in all government sectors, including support for higher education.

Previously as minister for enterprise and employment and then minister for finance, Quinn has stressed the need for Ireland's integration into the European Union and, in his new post, Irish higher education's need to continue to reach a larger cohort of students, including retraining for those who have lost their jobs, and to synch its output with the demands of Irish industry.

International Educator correspondent David Tobenkin discussed with Quinn how the Irish government is navigating economic and reputational challenges to the Irish higher education system. (See also "Weathering the Storm" on page 54 which details the effects of the current economic crisis in several European nations.)

IE: Ireland has had considerable success in attracting international students, including more lucrative non-EU students, in particular. My understanding is there's now a Higher Education Authority goal of increasing the number of international students at universities by 50 percent over the next five years.

QUINN: That's right, in fact, to increase it, to double it basically. The American students are the biggest single cohort in the Irish university system, which is understandable. American, by that I mean Canadian and the United States, and the next biggest single group are the Chinese.

IE: How important are those international students to higher education in Ireland and why?

QUINN: They're very important. First and foremost, they tend to be very bright people, so they raise the level of intellectual discourse and performance amongst students themselves. Secondly, Ireland is self-

evidently a very homogenous society, so having people with different backgrounds and coming from different cultures is a positive in terms of the student mix. Also, we have a large number now of foreign academics on the staff of our universities which is equally good.

We've quite an increase in the number, small in quantum terms but very big in percentage terms, of Chinese students doing Ph.D. courses here. We have recognition, a degree qualification recognition agreement—formal agreement—between China and the Republic of Ireland and that is a driver as far as Chinese parents are concerned. Ireland recently, Dublin to be precise, surfaced as one of the 10 most popular and safe cities of destinations for foreign students. That's a big sell.

IE: EU students are charged the same amount as Irish students but other international students are not. There are estimates international students could bring in another €1.3 billion a year to Irish



Ruairi Quinn, Irish Minister for Education and Skills

higher education system. Are these students an important source of funds for the higher education system in Ireland?

QUINN: Yes, we believe they are. They're not going to solve our problem, and we can't use them as just a cash cow, excuse the phrase. That's because they're coming for quality and they're discerning consumers of higher education. But, we have a lot to offer, and that's recognized; the fact that we're an English speaking country and the quality of our universities and institutes of technology are generally well-recognized. There are 126 individual educational bilateral agreements between the Irish institutions and the Chinese educational institutions.

This spring I'm going to China for an extended visit. It will all be focused on confirming those relationships, enlarging them, consolidating them. We're talking about Irish degrees being delivered to Chinese students, part of which will be delivered in China and part of which will be delivered in Ireland.

IE: The 2009 ECOFIN report painted a very flattering picture of Irish higher education by

per capita education, efficiency, and reputation among employers and academics. How much effect has the financial crisis in Ireland and Europe had upon Ireland's higher education standards and achievements since then, and how much pain has the system endured?

QUINN: The system at higher level has seen a reduction in core funding and, by and large, to their credit, it has absorbed an awful lot of that reduction without diminution in quality or, indeed, in quantity. But there is general recognition of a developing crisis in the funding of the third level sector. Currently, the outcomes are still very positive. We did drop in the international rankings, but when I got in behind the statistics, the critical factor in the drop was not the ratio of academic staff to pupil or funding per pupil or those types of objectives or measurements, because they hadn't dropped as dramatically as the rankings had. The key factor, we are told by academics who study this in Ireland, was the great damage done to our international reputation due to the banking bust and the housing bubble that led to the country going into receivership with the European Union.

We have seven universities in the Republic of Ireland—we don't need any more traditional universities in a country of this size. There is, however, given the nature of the way the Irish economy is developing, a role for a technological university.

IE: Aside from the actual reputational damage, do you think the damage to the system itself has been fairly limited to-date?

QUINN: Yes, I do but I'm not kidding myself. We can't go on like this. We're looking for symmetries and for collaboration across different institutions so that we can eliminate a lot of the duplication that's already there. That will give us some time. I'd say about two years, but not much more.

IE: The HEA's recent Landscape reports stated that since the collapse of Irish public finances, the perception of the quality of Irish higher education internationally

has suffered. In addition, a number of Irish institutions have suffered dramatic falls as measured by some third-party rankings. How accurate are such perceptions and how concerned are you by them?

QUINN: Well, first of all, the rankings exist. You cannot ignore them even though they measure those things that they want to measure themselves. They are, like any ranking system, biased in a certain degree by those people who designed the ranking system to begin with. The major factor that caused the drop in our rankings was related to Ireland's international reputation, which went from a boom economy that seemed

to be able to do an awful lot of things very well to a bust economy very quickly. We are now recovering from that.

At one stage, Ireland was in the middle of the financial crisis discourse. In the media, the print media and online, we were seen as one of a group of economies in very serious difficulty. That's no longer the case. There's no longer a linkage between Ireland, Portugal, and Greece, as was the case before. And the regular visits by the troika representing the institutions of the IME, the European Central Bank, and the European Commission has been reporting positive progress in the recovery of the Irish economy. The weak end in our economy is employment creation. Strengthening employment creation will generate extra tax revenue which in turn will, in turn, be good news for the third-level education sector.

IE: Is 2012 an important year in terms of determining the future and if so, can you elaborate why?

QUINN: In the third-level sector, there are some major reforms now being implemented across a number of sectors. First and foremost, we had a report known as the Hunt Report which sketched out a profile of change as far out as 2030. They made a number of recommendations which are now in the course of implementation.

The first item was defining the criteria that would constitute the definition and the image, if you like, of a technological university. As the report noted, we have seven universities in the Republic of Ireland—we don't need any more traditional universities in a country of this size. There is, however, given the nature of the way the Irish economy is developing, a role for a technological university.

We then proceeded to get the criteria, and the shape, and the definition of what that would actually constitute. That was signed off by the Higher Education Author-

CYA
STUDY IN GREECE
 SEMESTER • YEAR • SUMMER



- COURSES TAUGHT IN ENGLISH
- GROUPS ARE WELCOME

COLLEGE YEAR IN ATHENS
www.cyathens.org

Arizona State University

one of the
top 100
universities
in the world

Academic Ranking of World Universities 2011

The New American University

Arizona State University offers more than 450 top-quality graduate and undergraduate degrees, including business, engineering, fine arts and design programs ranked among the best by U.S. News and World Report.

ASU is one of the top institutions hosting international students, according to the Institute of International Education.

ASU's world-renowned faculty includes 3 Nobel laureates, 11 National Academy of Sciences members and 87 Fulbright American Scholars.

- More than **160 nations** are represented at ASU.
- **Scholarships** available for outstanding international freshmen students.
- **Intensive ESL** training at ASU through the **American English and Culture Program**.
- **Conditional undergraduate admission** available for applicants who meet academic requirements but do not meet the English language proficiency requirement.



more information: asu.edu/studyatasu





Direct Study Abroad



CSA International, Inc.®
Center for Study Abroad

Low Cost Programs Worldwide

Register Direct With CSA

Open to All - Low Prices

Confirmations Sent Quickly

Early Registration Advised

Universities and Institutes

Academic Quality - Since 1990

- High quality - Low prices.
- Easy to register - Open to all.
- Admission guaranteed.
- Confirmations sent quickly.
- Flexibility (independence).
- Earn academic credit.
- Financial Aid assistance.
- Visa documents assistance.
- Housing assistance.
- CSA counselor support.
- Location on-site support.
- Credit cards accepted online.
- Balance payment options.
- Accountable - Since 1990.

Go Direct With CSA

CONTACT:

Program Manager
Center For Study Abroad (CSA)
325 Washington Ave. S. # 93
Kent, WA 98032 USA
Tel # 206 583 8191 USA
info@centerforstudyabroad.com
License # 602 292 407

www.centerforstudyabroad.com

ity just over five weeks ago. We have now informed the institutes of technology—which we have 14—that they have to look at each other and look at the landscape of higher education and start to see how they can form new alliances, new collaborations, and new forms of working together. They were set up in the mid-1970s, so it's time for a major review of how they function.

That call for collaboration is not confined to the institutes of technology. We're also saying the same to the universities as well.

IE: A technological university may be a foreign concept for some of our readers. Can you briefly explain it?

QUINN: In a classic Irish way, I'll give you the reverse definition. It's as far away from a liberal arts college as you could get. It's really in the STEM area. By STEM I mean science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and aligned very closely to the needs of industry on the ground in that particular area.

You can look at those in different ways, but if it has any kind of historical connection, it would be closer to some of the research institutes that characterized Germany before the Second World War, where the research and application of research to industrial development was coming from research institutes that weren't your traditional universities.

IE: In recent years, the number of Irish undergraduate students has increased substantially while state allocations to fund these students have steadily declined. These trends were expected to continue. That has led some Irish educators to conclude that, assuming student fees are not dramatically increased, the two divergent trends are not sustainable. Do you agree and can you summarize the government's approach to addressing this so-called sustainability challenge?

QUINN: We certainly recognize there is a financing problem in the third-level sector. We also recognize that if there isn't a change, then the continued increase in the third-level participation by Irish high school students—

to use the American phrase—coming to third-level education may not continue—it is currently at 65 percent. The target was by 2020 to have it up to 72 percent. It will be difficult really to meet that target. The commentary of presidents of universities and other colleges have said that there may have to be a cap or a limit on the number of students that will be accepted for certain kinds of courses.

That's pretty much the space where we are at the moment, and it's a space that we'll be exploring. We may need to be selective about the types of courses that people do. There is already de facto rationing of some of the high tech courses like medicine and physiotherapy and other similar types of courses. This means that Irish students, if they can't get into an Irish university, may go across to Britain where from now on they're going to be paying fees of £9,000 sterling to participate in those courses.

IE: My understanding is that further cuts in the Irish higher education system are expected through 2015. Upon what factors will that depend, and are there still significant inefficiencies and duplication to be cut out of the system or are you now cutting into muscle and bone?

QUINN: I think there's still room on the duplication. People on the other side of the table would say we're already into muscle and bone and that's part and parcel of the normal process of negotiation. Certainly, the Higher Education Authority believes, from what I've been informed, that there's greater room for collaboration and for saving. But it is still only marginal I have to admit. I do recognize that in two years' time, we'll be looking at having to increase the funding for third-level in some shape, size, or form. That could very well include some form of student contribution that would go directly to the college.

IE: The Hunt Report said that annual funding must increase to support higher education. How will Irish higher education achieve that funding?

QUINN: Yes, funding has to increase. I think the universities themselves will have to find

***Before** your students pack their bags ...*

***Before** they step onto an airplane ...*



Is their medical insurance as ready to travel as they are?

Student travelers (and their parents) too often assume the medical insurance they have at home will travel seamlessly on study-abroad or international adventures.

Unfortunately, many times that's NOT the case ... leaving students with dangerous gaps in coverage ... and thousands of dollars in medical bills if they develop a sudden illness or fall victim to an accident.

But you can help your students set up a solid safety net with Gateway WorldMed. This dependable program covers your study-abroad and international students with solid protection in more than 130 countries. Benefits include:

- Comprehensive Medical
- Property & Liability Coverage
- Accidents & Illness Protection
- Emergency Evacuation & Repatriation Services
- Trip Cost & Baggage Protection
- Around-the-clock, Worldwide Assistance
- Participation in hazardous sports
- And much more

Paying for unexpected medical bills should be the last concern for study-abroad and international students. With Gateway WorldMed, you can rest assured they'll be focusing on building memories to last a lifetime.



Ready to find out more? See how easy setting up this reliable safety net can be!

Go to **www.GatewayWorldMed.com** or

Call (toll-free) **1-877-722-4443**

AR Ins. Lic. #245544, CA Ins. Lic. #0633005 d/b/a in CA Seabury & Smith Insurance Program Management

Gateway WorldMed is a service of Seabury & Smith, Inc., a Marsh Inc. affiliate. Marsh is part of the MMC family of companies, including Guy Carpenter, Mercer and Oliver Wyman Group (including Lippincott and NERA Economic Consulting). Coverage may vary or may not be available in all states. The information contained in this publication provides only a general overview of subjects covered, is not intended to be taken as advice regarding any individual situation and should not be relied upon as such. Insureds should consult their insurance and legal advisors regarding specific coverage issues. Coverage not available everywhere. Marsh Risk and Insurance Services (Marsh USA Inc.).

The reality is that the present funding is not sustainable if we want to maintain both the expansion of third-level education and the maintenance of its quality.

or generate more money. They have demonstrated considerable skill in generating and attracting additional funds, both philanthropic and others earning their own way. If we can develop the intellectual property side of universities so that they can commercialize some of the research that they're doing it would help—there are some positive signs in relation to that. Inevitably, there's going to have to be a contribution from the public domain either through a tax transfer of revenue from the central government or an increase in fees by the participants.

That's all in the mixing bowl at the moment. The reality is that the present funding is not sustainable if we want to maintain

both the expansion of third-level education and the maintenance of its quality.

IE: Recently, the Higher Education Authority told Irish media that student contribution charges would increase by €250 for each of the next three years, bringing it to €3,000 by 2015. Is that correct?

QUINN: You are. It's not a formal decision, but that's the thrust of where we're going. That was indicated so people could get a sense of what it was. The higher education market, if you want to call it that, of the two islands of Britain and Ireland has been transformed by the introduction in

the United Kingdom of a top fee of £9,000. And when the Tory government brought that in, there was a suggestion not every university would necessarily charge that amount but only those thought of as being part of the first division, which was a very naïve assumption because which university is going to want to say "we're not a top university; we charge lower fees."

So the expectation now is that every university in the United Kingdom and certainly within Britain and Wales is going to go up to that figure. In Northern Ireland, where there are two universities, the Northern Irish Minister of Education [John O'Dowd] has talked in terms of a fee there of approximately £3,500, which will be considerably higher than what is the case here in the Republic.

There's a very good article recently in *The Guardian* newspaper by Will Hutton. He has written, in my view, a very perceptive analysis of the impact of the change in the funding for third-level education of Britain. One of his conclusions is that British graduates will emerge as the most indebted graduates in the world as a consequence of the changes that the Tory government are bringing in. We are not yet sure what displacement effect this might have toward students from the United Kingdom coming to study in Ireland.

IE: Can you accommodate as many as who might want to come?

QUINN: We simply don't know because we don't know what sectors they're going to apply for yet. But we'll know in and around next August what the displacement or the change in the landscape is. It'll be an interesting story to follow.

IE: A recent European Universities Association report was not very optimistic about the possibility of universities in

The next step you take matters

Master of Arts in Intercultural Relations (MAIR)

*In collaboration with the University of the Pacific, Stockton, Calif.
Apply now for January and July enrollment*

Designed for seasoned and aspiring professionals, this limited residency program in Portland, Oregon, allows you to earn an M.A. that supports your career development in the field of international education.

Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication

*July 11-27, 2012 • Portland, Oregon
Over 40 workshops in 1-day, 3-day, and 5-day sessions*

Designed for professionals in diverse, interculturally related fields ranging from business to study abroad, from healthcare to international student advising, the Institute's stimulating and supportive environment helps you gain knowledge and skill, gather resources, and build networks.



The Intercultural Communication Institute
ici@intercultural.org • 503-297-4622 • intercultural.org



COVERAGE

that can make a difference.

Service That Makes It Possible

As one of the nation's leading providers of health insurance solutions for students, we work together with our clients to help build better programs, provide best-in-class service and deliver innovative administrative support.

We can do the same for you.

For more information on student health or study abroad plans, call or email us today:

800.220.1123

educationalmarkets@chartisinsurance.com

CHARTIS 
Your world, insured

All products are written by insurance company subsidiaries or affiliates of Chartis Inc. Coverage may not be available in all jurisdictions and is subject to actual policy language. For additional information, please visit our website at www.chartisinsurance.com. 1254_004 02/28/12



INTENSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM

WE BELIEVE THAT STUDENTS COME FIRST AND WILL WORK HARD TO MEET YOUR NEEDS.

- Classes are offered in 15-week semesters and a 12-week summer session.
- Core courses in Reading/Writing, Grammar and Listening/Speaking and support classes in Vocabulary Development, Pronunciation and Conversation Practice provide intensive instruction.
- Four levels are available from high elementary to advanced
- Students at the IELP will have a university ID for some student services and can use the library, gym, and computer labs on the Cleveland State University campus.
- Our experienced and qualified instructors have advanced degrees in ESL or a related field.
- We can also design special programs for groups during the regular semesters or the summer.

Visit our website at www.csuohio.edu/cehs/departments/TE/ielp/index.html

Contact esl@csuohio.edu for more information.

Cleveland State University
engaged learning



Europe developing alternate sources of higher education funding beyond state and student contributions. With respect to Irish higher education, in addition to revenues from foreign students, how optimistic are you that other nongovernmental financial resources can be found to help fund Irish higher education?

QUINN: In the present climate, I would be cautiously optimistic, not wildly optimistic. There isn't the same tradition of endowments in universities in the European sector as there is in the United States. Of course, the level of endowments in the United States varies dramatically across the spectrum of your universities.

IE: Several Irish university students I spoke to said that when they graduated, they plan to seek work abroad. They had no plans to return to Ireland, and they said the same was true of their Irish student friends and Irish educators said they had heard that from students. What is the role of Irish higher education in retaining these students in the country, and is there anything that can be done to keep more of those graduating from leaving permanently from Ireland?

QUINN: We're a small island off another island off the West Coast of Europe. There's a natural wanderlust in Irish people to go and see the big world. The people who now go with the university qualification will be working in offices rather than working on their own, and they'll do that. I've done it in my own time. It's a natural part of the experience and you see it with Australia as well. However, two factors begin to kick in. They start working for multinational companies with the object of possibly finding themselves back in Ireland eventually. It'll be of value to Ireland and a value to themselves no matter where they're working. And, it is often the case, the minute their kids start speaking with an American accent, they start making plans to come home to Ireland.

IE: The cover feature article in this issue of *International Educator* is taking

a particular look at the impact of financial crisis in higher education in Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Greece. You mentioned that many are now excluding Ireland from that group. One thing the educators I've spoken to have said is that the Irish higher education sector has had greater success in containing the damage caused by the crisis. Actually, they've said Irish Higher Education Authority has done a relatively good job. Would you agree and why has Ireland been better able to address the financial crisis?

QUINN: First of all, all of the salaries of the lecturers and the staff who were on permanent contract have been protected, so there hasn't been the decimation in terms of salary. Sadly, short-term contracts have not been renewed. Because we have a social partnership agreement with the trade unions and academic staff would be largely unionized, the public service salaries would be protected in return for increase of productivity.

The agreement was negotiated in the Croke Park Stadium in Dublin and it's known as the Croke Park Agreement. It has another year to run. It's producing some of that productivity that is contained within it, but it's also providing salary stability, which is not the case obviously in some other countries at the moment. That in turn has helped maintain morale within our system.

IE: Should the EU expand its role in ensuring the quality of higher education research, which they've done to an extent, but in particular also the cost of instruction? If so, how should their role be expanded in your opinion?

QUINN: I think that's something that we'll be discussing at the Council of European Education Ministers. Ireland is to take the presidency next year in the first semester and it's something that I will certainly be talking about as well as the whole question of European ratings of universities. **IE**

DAVID TOBENKIN is a freelance reporter based in Chevy Chase, Maryland.