



Exploring the relationship between Irish university websites and
international student enrolments

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the relationship between Irish university websites and international student enrolments

Brenda Meira de Azevedo, MSc Marketing, National College of Ireland

Irish Educated Globally Connected is an Irish government internationalisation strategy with the long-term intention to connect Irish-educated learners worldwide. Irish Educated Globally Connected makes Ireland globally competitive and internationalised (Gov.ie, 2020). Ireland's international student population grew significantly by 26.4% between 2016 and 2019 due to this strategy (HEA, 2019). International students in higher education are estimated to contribute directly to an output of €791m to the Irish economy (ibid). The importance of international students goes beyond monetary value too bringing intrinsic opportunities for mutual learning and collaboration among nations. Competing in a global environment exposes Ireland to a highly dynamic competitive environment.

According to Alsharari (2018), many factors influence international student decisions, including university rankings, programme quality, and internationalism. The primary source of information used by prospective students to learn about Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is firstly digital websites and forums and secondly traditional brochures and handbooks (Naidoo and Wu (2016); Sojkin et al., 2012). This finding demonstrates a shift in international consumer behaviour away from traditional brochures and handbooks. Prospective international students research, connect, and explore HEIs first through digital. Therefore, marketing collateral must appeal to the continually changing and tech-savvy global customer. Since Naidoo and Wu's study (2016), there has been a minimal study on HEIs websites and international student enrolment globally and in Ireland.

Using mono-method qualitative methodology, this dissertation proposes to investigate the relationship between HEI's websites with international enrolment in Ireland. The research compares three HEI website's content. The research also compares each HEIs success in enrolling their prospective international students. The Institution's enrolment success in 2016/2017 is compared to their success of 2020/2021 making two variables, a possible increase or a decrease of intake. Of the three HEIs one Institution is small, one is medium, and one is larger. This dissertation uses the ICTRT framework which has five Dimensions. The five dimensions of

ICTRT framework are made of Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship, and Technical Merit used for assessing website design.

This Dissertation developed 15 themed conceptual maps five for each of the HEIs analysed. The conceptual maps create five illustrated narrative themes throughout the research findings. These themed conceptual maps are titled Study, Service, People, Experience and Location. These themes served as foundations to analyse the research findings. According to the primary research analysis, HEIs in Ireland with high international student enrolment are service- focused. Service-focused HEIs offer assistance to prospective international students, both before and after they arrive in Ireland. However, according to the primary research analysis, HEIs in Ireland with low enrolment of international students are people-focused, which means they do not offer digital services, instead they provide contact information for faculty and staff.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMS	Destination Marketing Systems
EU	European Union
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
GDPR	General Data Privacy Regulation
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICTRT framework	Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical Merit Framework
UK	United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT AREA AND DISSERTATION

1.2 Background to the study

1.2.1 Globalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Globalisation is reshaping higher education due to open and connected free markets (Rust and Kim, 2012, Held et al., 1999). HEIs are global knowledge economies and work as conduits for a wide range of cross-border linkages. The cross-border linkages offer a continuous worldwide flow of people, information, knowledge, technologies, goods, and financial resources (Marginson and Wende, 2007). Globally, HEIs employ new ways to engage students from emerging markets attracting the students to study in other countries (Skinner and Blackey, 2010).

McLuhan (1964) predicted globalisation as an exchange between nations of economy and culture symbiosis towards a single world. However, Levitt (1993) defines globalisation as the homogenisation of the world. This trend emerged due to worldwide market channels, global brand strategies, technologically connected customers, and the Internet of things (Steenkamp, 2020). Information and knowledge are aided in exchanged across boundaries in the realm of higher education due to technological enhancements.

International business operations have become a dominant development model for specific HEIs, particularly in the English-speaking world (Marginson and Wende, 2007, Teichler, 2004). Governments and university leaders are deeply engaged in cross-border cooperation and competition strategies. The HEIs encounter dynamic competition from regional and international institutions. Most HEIs recognise the increasing role of marketing in the competitive and globalised world (Maslowsky, 2013).

1.2.2 Internationalisation of Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

The internationalisation of HEIs improves an institutions reputation, broadens offerings and allows for the development of more effective programs. International students gain a network of global learning communities, as well as a forthcoming career outlook in their own home or in the hosting HEIs country.

Ireland has been formally committed to facilitating and supporting its development as an international education centre for over two decades (Clark et al., 2017). Policies like International Education Strategy 2010-2015 and Irish Educated Globally Connected 2016-2020, are Irish government-level pioneer policies in developing and setting European internationalisation goals (Finn and Darmody, 2017). The government plans to establish Ireland as an open economy that relies on trade to generate long-term growth (Clarke, Yang and Harmon, 2018).

The international education sector in Ireland is currently worth approximately €1.58bn per annum (Gov.ie, 2020). Overall, international enrolments in Irish HEIs represent 10.6% of total enrolments in the higher education sector (ibid). Irish Educated Globally Connected strategy aims to increase the numbers of international students and researchers coming to Irish HEIs, and to increase outward mobility for Irish students, academics and researchers. This strategy facilitates internationalisation benefits for enterprises supporting national economic ambitions.

1.3 Dissertation Importance and Research Gap

The globalisation and internationalisation of Irish HEIs have contributed to the exponential growth of 26% of international students in Ireland since 2016 (HEA, 2019). International students contribute financially to the development of Irish HEIs and society (ibid). Therefore, allocating resources that potentiate returns in investment is essential for businesses to retain global competitiveness. Current digital marketing practices have been cheaper than traditional channels (Killeen, 2018). According to Statista (2022), in the United Kingdom (UK) websites are the second-highest digital marketing channel businesses will be expected to invest in. This dissertation discusses aspect of website design of interest to HEIs who are developing strong website attributes influencing international student-decision making around where to study.

This dissertation adds to the body of knowledge on international student recruitment (Stein and Andreotti, 2016; Jokila et al., 2019; Urbanovič, Wilkins and Huisman, 2016) by focusing on one marketing mediator: website. Websites are considered the primary source of information for prospective international students in choosing HEIs as a study destination (Mogaji, 2016). Despite the necessity for colleges and universities to understand how prospective students utilise the Internet to get information and navigate through websites, the literature indicates little data available in this area (Mogaji, 2016; Moogan, 2011).

Websites are essential to guide international student's choice of study at the HEIs (Mogaji, 2016). HEIs stimulate and facilitate a prospective student's search by making information available on the website. Although all students need information on the course and college, international students require additional support including creating a bank account in the host country, accommodation, visa and immigration. Websites also reduce overseas marketing cost promotions and offer a personalisation element.

This research intends to add to the body of knowledge on international student recruitment by comparing universities websites. Through website comparison highlighting some best managerial practices in developing a website design better facilitating prospective international students' decision making.

1.4 Dissertation Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

This dissertation explores website attributes of HEIs in Ireland and international student enrolment. Wilson (2014) claims that research objectives provide the foundation and clarity to improve and underpin the research question. This study is underpinned by the ICTRT framework (Li and Wang, 2011) discussed in Chapter 2. The ICTRT framework evaluates the website's effectiveness in student recruitment in five Dimensions (1) Information, (2) Communication, (3) Transactional, (4) Relationship, and (5) Technical Merit.

This research aims to assess three institutions, one small, one medium and one larger. The comparison includes student enrolment in Ireland for two of each HEIs. This metric of comparing two years in-take will allow for an increase or decrease of intake to become part of the discussion. Institutions with an increase of international student enrolments will show a positive percentage. Institutions with a decrease of international student enrolments will show a negative percentage.

This study limits its sample to the course level of full-time postgraduate non-European international students. According to Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), international students' tuition fees were €29.6 million in 2014–2015 (ibid). It has been argued the disparity in fees for international students impacts the longer-term effect on institutionalisation of internationalism in academia (Yeo, 2018).

This dissertation observes the Irish market demand and Irish internationalisation strategy to generate revenue under high-paying fees for non-European nationals (Gov.ie, 2020). The sample

focus on taught and research masters, as payments for these programmes are generally €15,000 to €30,000 per year, depending on the HEI or programme. This dissertation does not include international student enrolment in undergraduate or PhD programmes. There has been no limitation in the field of study for master's programme chosen, age, nor gender.

The question in the study is as follows, '*Is international student enrolment influenced by website design in Ireland?*' The websites considered in this study are public government-funded institutions with data on international student enrolments on the Higher Education Authority (HEA) database. HEA goal is to oversee the strategic development of the Irish higher education sector and research system. The HEA is mandated by law to administrate and control higher education institutions and the overall higher education system. The findings of this study will be used to look at similarities or differences of HEI website attributes, assessing the websites using the ICTRT framework. These findings will be discussed along with the corresponding positive and negative variance of the HEIs on international student enrolment numbers.

Li and Wang (2011) introduced the ICTRT methodology to evaluate Chinese tourism destination marketing websites. This framework was recently used by Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020) to evaluate Australian HEIs websites. Though Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace used ICTRT in a similar setting as this study proposed, the methodology has not been widely used, carrying a strong theoretical connotation.

This study is limited through the lenses of the website marketing collateral. It does not consider other marketing practices for international student recruitment, such as traditional events, brochures or digital, email marketing or social media, which could have influenced the number of international student enrolments. The data used to select universities with positive and negative international student enrolment is sourced from data distributed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA). This HEA data does not include private or non-affiliated HEIs. Another limitation of this study is that it does not evaluate HEIs website data such as the number of visits, most view pages, and duration of each session.

1.5 Research Aims, Methodology and Data Collection

As part of the ICTRT five Dimensions of assessing the user experience journey will be used. The initial Dimension of this research is to evaluate whether the Information on each of the three HEI's website is current and accurate. The second dimension looks at the Communication attributes on the website, if these enable and contribute to future relationships with prospective international students? The third dimension involves assessing Transaction components which generate revenue for internal and external stakeholders. The fourth dimension accounts for the Relationship between the user and the website. The fourth dimension allows accounting for attributes on the website that enable personalisation and customisation of user profiles, by the user. The fifth dimension, Technical Merit helps validate the preceding four dimensions as Technical Merit monitors the user experience journey through navigation, design, and site map. According to Charoula et al. (2014), Technical Merit is the most challenging part of the framework because websites serve two separate audiences, current students and prospective students. It requires constant work in all the dimensions to upgrade and increase the effectiveness in conversion and retention of customers.

This research explores the relationship between website design and international enrolment in Ireland. Due to the limited time and resources, this dissertation has concentrated on observing three Irish HEI websites. Two of three with positive variance in more recent enrolment compared to an earlier year and one with negative variance in more recent enrolment compared to an earlier year. These enrolment numbers reflect full-time postgraduate non-European international student enrolment from publicly funded HEIs.

This dissertation uses the ICTRT framework to assess the three HEIs effectiveness using a mono-method qualitative approach. The source data is gathered from three Irish institutions. To assess efficacy, the website content is gathered and reviewed using the ICTRT framework (Li and Wang, 2011). Jayawadena, Ross, and Grace (2020) have altered and adapted the present theoretical framework to fit the website analysis of Higher Education sectors (See Chapter 2, Table 1 for attributes breakdown). The study findings will analyse three HEIs, one small, one medium and one large, by the ICTRT framework through thematic analysis.

1.6 Dissertation Structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first Chapter of this dissertation begins with a brief contextual introduction to the research topic, followed by the importance of the study in the sector and the current literature gap on website attributes and international student recruitment. The first Chapter will also contain a brief introduction to research objectives, questions, and limitations. The research aims, methodology and data collection are also introduced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This dissertation explores the relationship between website attributes and international student recruitment. The second Chapter includes an in-depth overview of current relevant academic literature on the topic. The literature critically analysis marketing strategies, the role of websites, the theoretical framework and measuring website attributes in international student enrolment.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The third Chapter of this dissertation details the research objectives and the chosen method for collecting primary data, with the sample detail, selection process and conduction of primary research. This Chapter, using references, indicates the instruments employed for data collection.

Chapter 4: Findings

This findings Chapter presents the results gathered from the primary research through the ICTRT framework of three Irish HEIs. The analysis emerges Themes and salient points related to the research objective mentioned in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This dissertation' fifth Chapter is a critical comment on the study findings from Chapter 4. The discussion Chapter synthesises the main research findings by creating a theoretical understanding of the study and producing a compelling debate.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, this Chapter deploys a summary and critical review of the conclusions of the primary data and assesses if the research objectives are accomplished. Recommendations for further research and business practices are presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter introduction

The literature review in Chapter 2 gives a critical overview of current relevant academic literature on marketing strategies to recruit international students in the higher education sector. Areas of research include a website's role in international student recruitment and critically analyses relevant up-to-date studies in the area. Chapter 2 introduces the ICTRT framework evaluation to assess website effectiveness in marketing of destination businesses. International students face a similar experience when researching destinations to study abroad to those customers of destination businesses. The literature review observes existing knowledge gaps, which will be tackled by the research objectives in the dissertation methodology.

2.2 Marketing Strategies in International Student Recruitment

HEIs employ a diverse range of marketing practices to attract students. It differs from country to country (Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace 2020). Canadian HEIs utilise several marketing techniques to recruit international students, such as web-based content, brochures, and alumni (Isa et al., 2016). Contrastingly, web-based recruitment has been found to negatively impact student enrolments in Canada. This has been attributed to web-based recruitment actively depending on prospective international students researching the HEIs (Hossler, 2004).

Traditional marketing in Higher Education is often used to build brand awareness and developing a positive feeling about the brand (Keller, 1993, Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2016). However, digital marketing practices create an emotional attachment between prospective students and HEI, providing a sense of affiliation that motivates choice (Moogan, 2011, Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2016). Perceived marketing and the effectiveness of perceived marketing is considered to play a direct role in consumer psychology (Yoo et al., 2000). Perceived marketing or marketing perception is defined as the process by which consumers identify, arrange, interpret marketing collateral to produce meaning (Belk, 1988). The findings of Angulo-Ruiz et al. (2016) suggest that if prospective students have more positive ideas about a HEI activity, the prospective student may become motivated. This could mean a change in their behavioural responses to match, as a positive

experience may lead to a greater possibility of them selecting that HEI. Highly rated marketing efforts and perceptual placement of HEIs may lead to a behavioural outcome such as HEI selection (Hawkins et al., 1995).

HEI's global challenges increase with dynamic competition, technological enhancements, and a knowledge-based economy (Skinner and Blackey, 2010). Considering these factors, Brown et al. (2009) recommends HEI websites provide information to their prospective international students that are relatable and relevant. Bordbar (2016) recommends university recruiters maximise website information to attract potential students. However, no data indicates the effectiveness of enrolments of international students and website attributes.

Angulo-Ruiz et al. (2016) adapt Gupta and Zeithaml's (2006) consumer behaviour framework to assess various marketing activities influencing prospective student choices in the Higher Education context. The adapted framework reflects a younger, savvy customer. Some of the motivations that impact student decisions in selecting HEIs are reputation, student expectations, extracurricular activities, practical considerations, and social influences (ibid). When choosing a university, prospective students usually use Internet marketing or, digital marketing as an information source (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2016; Sojkin et al., 2012). HEIs are investing in business capabilities developing their digital communication with students as the Internet is regarded as the most important source of information for a younger generation of prospective students (Mogaji, 2016). Gaining understanding of students' motivation is essential to crafting website attributes that will ultimately aim to influence choice. This area of study can then be considered important to narrow the gap between perceived effectiveness of HEI website attributes and real effectiveness of website attributes to increase student enrolment.

Some information that influences prospective students is a HEI's reputation, providing service credibility, reducing uncertainty (Deephouse, 2000; Fischer and Reuber, 2007). In addition, Korean (Kim, 2011) and Polish (Veloutsou et al., 2004) prospective students consider university ranking and prestige in deciding where to study. Others argue, however that motivation behind a prospective student's decision is the value offered by the course (Simões and Soares 2010; Briggs 2006; Willis and Kennedy 2004). More recent studies demonstrate that prospective student choice is motivated by the prospect of employment after graduation (Mpinganjira, 2011). Student motivation is based on career outlook, occupation status, and learning quality. Middle-

class students, specifically, are directly concerned with the monetary value invested and the employment outcome return (Sojkin et al., 2012) when choosing a HEI.

Research noticed that certain nationalities were influenced by different information when choosing an HEI. Polish students found extracurricular activities necessary when deciding where to study (Ivy, 2007). On the other hand, Indian students were more motivated by university rankings (Sojkin et al., 2012). Evaluating practical students' considerations such as fees and scholarship, they demonstrated to have little or no impact on student choice when faced with HEIs' reputations (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2016). Another study from Simões and Soares (2010) indicates a statistical relationship between student choice and HEIs location.

Although many works of literature focus on information influencing international student recruitment, many do not address the website practices that generate effectiveness in gaining enrolment. Research in Australia found a significant gap between students' needs and current communications (Gatfield et al., 1999). This study intends to reduce some gap in the literature and contribute to managerial practices.

2.3 Website Role in International Student Recruitment

The importance of using the Internet for marketing and promotional reasons by universities and colleges is becoming increasingly apparent as technology develops (Mogaji, 2016). Both current and prospective students want basic easy-to-find information. According to Thorlacius (2007), websites are the key source of information on the Internet. Websites of HEIs are the primary source of information and selection of the University as a study destination (Gomes and Murphy, 2003; Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace, 2020). A study of website attributes and student enrolment gave evidence to a lack of engagement and a lack of relationship-building capabilities, resulting in low student enrolment levels (Klaseen, 2002).

The first investigations of website attributes and functionality were centrally developed by Nielsen (1999), Nielsen and Landauer (1993) and Nielsen and Molin (1990) and are still widely used today. The heuristic evaluation of user interfaces explores the website functionally in five areas. These five areas are learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors and satisfaction. Visual symbols have become a significant part of people's lives. Visual communication is expanded to all ways humans communicate, including web-based communication (Vejlgaard, 2004). Therefore,

website attributes should go beyond functionality and information. They can influence prospective students' decisions. Engholm (2002) complements that machinery functions have already reached people's expectations. Now, however, digital interfaces benefit from an aesthetically pleasing look that generates differentiation by image-related signals.

Combining appealing visual design and functionality is a challenge experimented with by businesses. Users average spend 3.42 seconds to assess and judge websites credibility (Alsudani and Casey, 2009). Consequently, choosing appropriate images can convey the right message while establishing an emotional connection with students (Bordbar, 2016). Southern Utah University (ibid) former website landing page targeted its message toward staff and students. In contrast, their new landing page design targeted toward prospective students uses large visuals and urgency triggers like apply now, college life, universities' scholarships, and student testimonials. The research suggests that easily accessible information and an aesthetically pleasing home landing page generate more students' interest (ibid). The studies mentioned evaluating website effectiveness use grounded theory due to the lack of an appropriate theoretical framework, which this study intends to capture through ICTRT.

Website design for international student enrolment found the university websites with positive trends in international student enrolment are people and future student orientated website. University websites with negative trends in international student enrolment are system and current student orientated (Jayawardena, Ross and Grace, 2020). Similar findings were observed in Mentis and Turan (2012), who state universities that wish to improve their image require people's focus on website attributes. Rahnemai et al (2015) assess the effectiveness of the Iranian government tourism website. The result of their assessment shows websites with a focus on Information and Communication Dimension are unsuccessful in outcomes. This research limitation is observed in the sector it investigates, not education rather than tourism.

Goodman's (2003) study on website design shows how user's make clear distinction between face-to-face and computer interface interactions because they happen in different spaces. The study shows that websites in the service industry give users only two options to accept or reject the offer. The potential number of customers is impacted by the options of customisation. In contrast, Lipnack and Stamps's (2008), study shows technology and system focused websites eventually reduce the human engagement amount.

The study above is the most recent and significant study in the area of website design and travel destination sectors. The clear limitation in the studies is that they are not specifically targeted towards HEIs, with expectation of Jayawardena, Ross and Grace, (2020). This study intends to reduce the literature gap of website design and international student enrolment.

2.4 Measuring Website Effectiveness Through Theoretical Framework

A company's website is critical to its marketing plan and to lure clients. A successful piece of communication has a clear and stated aim, understandable to both the creator and audience (Li and Wang, 2011). In addition, website digital marketing differs from conventional marketing practices because it relies on information technology to assist its communication. Li and Wang (2011) propose a concise framework to evaluate website features and the effectiveness of destination marketing systems (DMS) through the ICTRT framework (Figure 1). Brown (2001) argue, however, that using one marketing framework to measure results limits the finding and constringes results through one outcome.

The ICTRT model has been widely used in tourism and hospitality industry studies (Sun et al., 2017; Yannacopoulos, 2014), as well as destination marketing organisations (Charoula et al., 2014), travel agencies (Rahnemai et al., 2015) and more recently in the Higher Education industry (Jayawardena, Ross and Grace, 2020) because of the nature of international student recruitment. When choosing where to study abroad, prospective students often have a similar journey to destination business customers. Therefore, the framework was used in this study.

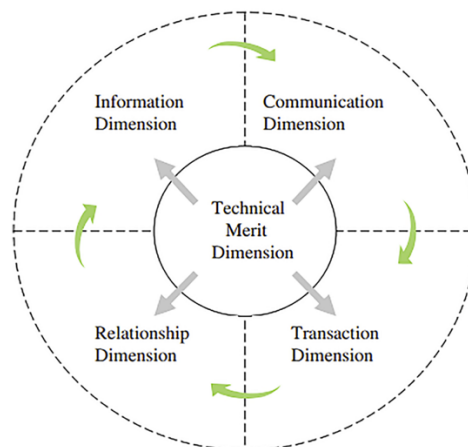


Figure 1: A conceptual model of destination marketing organisation's website evaluation (Li and Wang 2011)

A successful DMO's website, according to Wang and Russo (2007), depends on the execution of four elements: (1) current and relevant information, (2) ongoing customer communication, (3) secure and efficient transactions, and (4) long-term relationship-building activities. The elements discussed by Wang and Russo (2007) are dynamic and require technical interactivity to be implemented. Li and Wang (2011) find a commonality of interactions through the Technical Merit Dimension. This study selected this framework because it streamlines and gives HEI websites an assessment framework. This approach has also been used to evaluate the efficiency of Australian HEI websites by Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020).

2.5 Measuring Website Attributes Through ICTRT framework

This study utilised the attributes of the ICTRT framework applied in Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020) see **Table 1**. The attributes used in this study were retrieved and categorised (ibid) from university web links during the research data collection. Jayawadena, Ross, and Grace (2020) were the first to propose and use these attributes in the Higher Education sectors.

ICTRT framework evolves five levels of element analysis. The Information Dimension covers information from lifestyles such as health and safety, insurance, accommodation, or academics such as entry requirements and pathways, programmes, policies, and penalties. The Communication Dimension of the framework includes the search engine function, facility for student queries, and FAQ for international students. The Transaction Dimension evolves booking for airport pickup, accommodation, pre-arrival information sessions and agent database. The Relationship Dimension evolves auto and customised elements on the website, such as self-enrolment or filtering options. Technical Merit, involves holistic view of the website including navigation, user-friendly, functional links and video availability.

Table 1: Website attributes based on the ICTRT framework (Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace, 2020)

ICTRT framework	Website attributes
Information Dimension	Home page of international students Information is divided according to different regions Maps and directions Support services and resources information Sports and student societies information Health and safety, medical and insurance information Legal requirements Accommodation information Lifestyle information Academic dates or calendar Financial assistance/ living costs, travel, scholarships etc. Study abroad and exchange information Pre-entry and pathway programs Information from successful past students Information about programs and courses Policies and penalties Travel guides or brochures Telecommunication information
Communication Dimension	Online facilities for lodging complaints or academic appeals Search engine function Online glossary function Multi-language versions Facility for online student enquires Brochure request capabilities Website feedback columns Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)s for international students Contact information (email, phone, mailing address, etc.)
Transaction Dimension	Online booking facilities for free airport pickup Online accommodation booking Employment database Online booking facilities of pre-arrival information sessions Accommodation search via university database and portals Agent database
Relationship Dimension	Self-credit and admissions assessment facility Self-course fee calculator Self-offer acceptance and defer Self-enrolment facility Customised or filtering options Privacy policy
Technical merit Dimension	Navigation Relevant links (online budgeting tools, currency converter etc.) Link workability Webpage design and site map Availability of videos Links to social media (YouTube, blogs, etc.)

2.6 Chapter summary

The existing literature demonstrated limited data on the effectiveness of website attributes and enrolments of international students. Research on website characteristics and student enrolment revealed a lack of relationship-building and engagement capabilities leading to low student enrolment levels. This study intended to reduce the gap in the literature between perceived effectiveness and actual website attributes that increase student enrolment in HEIs in the Irish education sector context. The literature gap supported the identification of key research objectives addressed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, along with the research philosophy and the approach achieve the objectives.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter introduction

As identified in Chapter 1, this Chapter outlines the methodology used in this study. This dissertation employs a qualitative case study methodology. Creswel and Clark (2017) consider study cases to allow researchers to thoroughly investigate the research question phenomenon, which is the intention of this research question. Other literature has investigated website content through case studies (Rahnemai et al., 2015; Sabaruddin et al., 2012; Gosh et al., (2022)). Moreover, this study extensively examines the influence of the HEIs website's attributes and information on attracting non-European postgraduate international students to Ireland.

This study examines three Irish HEIs, two-thirds with positive and one-third with negative international student enrolment. The study focuses on website content assess with the ICTRT framework. Institutions with positive international student enrolments are HEIs with a positive percentage or high change of international students. Negative international student enrolment is HEIs with a low or negative percentage change of international students enrolled in the year compared to other HEIs.

3.2 Research Aims and Objectives

This study intends to investigate the relationship between HEIs' websites and successful international student enrolment in Ireland. The research methodology aims to direct the investigation by guiding the appropriate data-gathering method suitable for the study (Fisher and Buglear, 2010). The research intends to answer this following question, '*Is international student enrolment influenced by website design in Ireland?*'. Retrieved from the ICTRT framework and applied in Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020), the research objectives are:

Research Objective 1: To investigate the **Information Dimension** of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland.

Research Objective 2: To investigate the **Communication Dimension** of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland.

Research Objective 3: To investigate the **Transaction Dimension** of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland.

Research Objective 4: To investigate the **Relationship Dimension** of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland.

Research Objective 5: To investigate the **Technical Merit Dimension** of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland.

3.3 Research Philosophy and Design

Research is the systematic process of acquiring and discovering new information to contribute to a particular field (Saunders et al., (2015). The research philosophy supports the research strategy and the methodologies used to conduct research. The philosophical framework provides a foundation for all research, shaping it to reflect the views on which they are grounded (Quinlan, 2011). Moreover, the philosophy is determined by the research epistemological and ontological considerations.

Epistemology is the nature of knowledge (ibid). According to Saunders et al. (2015), ontology consideration is concerned with the research assumptions of the world views and reality, and they are summarised by two opposite alternatives, objectivism and subjectivism. In broad terms, there are two alternatives, positivism and interpretivism (Slevitch, 2011). The table below summarises the philosophical assumptions and the research strategies compared.

Table 2: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches Compared (Slevitch, 2014).

Qualitative and Quantitate Compared		
	Quantitative Approach	Quantitative Approach
Ontology	Positivism Single, objective and independent reality exist, and it can be known or described as it is.	Interpretivism Multiple social realities are mind-dependent and cannot be described free from people's points of view, particular interests, values, and purposes.
Epistemology	Objectivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is summarised in the form of time-, value-, and context-free generalisations. • Truth is some correspondence among the data and the independently existing reality • Validity corresponds to how reflective of reality and generalisable results are; matter of prescribed techniques properly applied 	Subjectivist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reality is only knowable through the human mind and through socially constructed meanings. • Truth is a matter of socially constructed agreement. Truth refers to how inquirers respond to how people out there really interpret or construct their realities. • Validity refers to credibility, description with which one agrees. Valid "makes sense," given one's purposes.

3.3.1 Positivist and Interpretivist approaches

Positivism entails natural scientists' perspectives that observe social reality to generate observations resembling laws (Saunders et al., (2015). A positivistic perspective is in line with objectivism. It argues that social actors have no impact and rely on physical reality for knowledge development (Bryman, 2014). Interpretivism, on the other hand, investigated subjective meaning and concentrated on social experiences (Saunders et al., (2015). Interpretivism-based epistemology argues that all perceptions of reality are social constructs which means that they are developed by social interaction and cannot be examined by quantity or scientific experimentation.

This thesis selects the interpretivism research philosophy based on a reflective research type and design approach. The research philosophy was guided by the research question, *'Is international student enrolment influenced by website design in Ireland?'* and the research objectives 3.1. The research question has an interpretivism research philosophy connotation because this philosophy is used to provide an in-depth perspective on social context and situations (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2011). Interpretivism contends that people and their social environments cannot be examined in the same way as physical phenomena (ibid). Others can argue that the ethical implications arise from the interpretivism philosophy as researchers input their values and beliefs into the research process due to the subjective nature of assumptions (Saunders et al., 2015).

3.3.2 Qualitative versus quantitative research strategies

This research is an exploratory study of the website attributes and international student recruitment in Ireland. Exploratory investigations help discover phenomena, formulate a new research question, and seek new perspectives on existing phenomena (Robson, 2002). Maylor and Blackmon (2005) indicate that the research strategy should be aligned with the research question. The consensus is that quantitative approaches are known to eliminate research bias from researchers by quantitatively describing large sample sizes to assure reliability and validation of results (Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012). However, qualitative methods emphasise human experiences and context, which is lacks in quantitative methods (Kahlke, 2014). An essential element of qualitative research is focused on understanding events and the meaning of these experiences in a

small sample size (Silverman, 2013). This research question and objectives intend to progress with qualitative data collection through website attributes to understand international student enrolment in Irish HEIs.

3.3.3 Deduction and Induction approaches

According to Saunders et al. (2015), deduction, and induction, are the methods by which theories are developed. In the first, called the deduction technique, conclusions are drawn based on presumptions to be true (Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010). The induction approach, in contrast, observes the situation to understand the problem (ibid). The research question and its objectives do not test a hypothesis but rather explore the context through situations. Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020) used the same research approach to explore the phenomenon of website attributes and international student recruitment in Australia through the framework of Li and Wang (2011). This methodology does not propose modifications to the approach but instead applies the same investigation in the Irish HEIS sector. The research findings differ from Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020) because this research is applied in a different social context.

3.4 Data Collection and Sampling Plan

An interpretive research methodology frequently requires a qualitative research strategy (Hiller, 2010). Qualitative data is represented by non-numeric data such as language, concepts, and emotions. This research collects primary data from HEIs website and secondary data from journals, books, and annual reports. This study focuses on the website attributes that attract overseas students by observing only specific HEI websites within three months. This data collection saves the researcher time due to the limited data analysis period. Consistency is guaranteed in the data collection procedure due to prior literature, which has provided comparable sources and data collection methods (Rahnemai et al., 2015) and pre-set attributes retrieved from Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace (2020).

The population of this study is 22 Irish HEIs that were available in the HEA statistics database for student enrolment demographic in Ireland see Appendix 1. The HEA is the government body with the objective to manage the sector's and system's strategic development in Ireland's higher education. The HEA is required by law to oversee and manage colleges and universities and the

entire higher education system. One of the limitations of the HEA database is that private higher education providers are not included, with exception of those private institutions under HEA statute.

This study uses heterogeneous, purposive non-probability sampling to investigate the relationship between website design and international student enrolment. The non-probability sampling technique is used due to the exploratory research question and research objectives. Neuman (2005) suggests that purposive sampling is beneficial to be used for small samples such as case studies. Moreover, Saunders et al. (2015) argue that heterogeneous purposive sampling enables research to collect data to describe and explain Themes. Even though sample sizes are small, their strength relies on contradictions that might appear (Patton, 2002).

The sample of this study observes three HEIs websites, one small, one medium and one large. Of these two-thirds have positive trends in international student enrolments and one-third of these sites have negative trends in international student enrolment. The prospective student group being observed are non-European, postgraduate, full-time, taught, and research masters students compared 2020/2021 to 2016/2017 in Ireland. Institutions with positive trends of international student enrolments are HEIs with a positive high percentage change of international students compared between the years above. Negative trends in international student enrolment in HEIs show a low or negative percentage change of international students enrolled in the year compared to other HEIs.

This study limits its sample to the course level of full-time postgraduate non-European international students. According to Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA), international students' tuition fees were €29.6 million in 2014–2015 (ibid). It has been argued the disparity in fees for international students impacts the longer-term effect on institutionalisation of internationalism in academia (Yeo, 2018).

This dissertation observes the Irish market demand and Irish internationalisation strategy to generate revenue under high-paying fees for non-European nationals (Gov.ie, 2020). The sample focus on taught and research masters, as payments for these programmes are generally €15,000 to €30,000 per year, depending on the HEI or programme.

The table below shows in the first column the HEIs name tags, and in the second column, the name of the institutions selected. The third column shows the total number of student enrolments in the academic year of 2020/2021 from the respective institutions. The fourth column shows the

number of international students' enrolment for the 2020/2021 year. The final column shows the percentage change of international postgraduate student enrolments in 2020/2021 compared to 2016/2017.

Table 3: Overview of the study sample (HEA, 2022)

		Total Number of Students 2020/2021	Total Number of International Students 2020/2021	Percentage change of international postgraduate student enrolments compared 2016/2017 to 2020/2021
University A	IT Sligo	7181	25	2400%
University B	Maynooth University	13,353	245	295%
University C	University of Limerick	16, 253	356	-1%

As observed in the table above, University A, a small HEI, despite having the lowest number of international student enrolment, has the highest positive change percentage compared to the other universities. University B, medium HEI, has the second highest positive number of International postgraduate enrolments. University C, a large HEI, has a negative percentage of international student enrolment. The constant percentage variance per year is ignored in this study for sample selection due to unavailability. The HEIs in this sample are from all institutes affiliated with HEA, on a full-time taught and research methods postgraduate level, in all fields of study and regions in the country. The student demographic is non-European from all genders and age groups.

The sample selected above is representative of the Irish HEI sector because it englobes a small, medium and large HEI across the country affiliated to HEA. To be included in the national statistical database, HEIs must either be publicly funded or work with HEA under the statute. One limitation to the sample, however, is some private colleges are not affiliated with the HEA, which excluded them from the database.

3.5 Data Analysis

According to Saunders et al., (2015), data analysis is the process in which the researcher examines the data collected by comparing the findings to the research question and objectives. The website attributes collected from the chosen Irish HEIs are thematically analysed (Creswell and

Clark, 2017; Tracy, 2019). The analysis evaluates the effectiveness of website attributes of three Irish HEI under the research objectives. Each university website is reviewed under 42 subcategories of the ICTRT framework Dimensions of Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship, and Technical Merit.

Due to data gathering consistency, the researcher transposed the information of each HEI website to the 42 subcategories of the ICTRT framework and transcribed the data into three excel documents, one small HEI, University A, one medium HEI, University B and one large, University C (Appendix 2). The transcripts of this data are then analysed to identify common Themes based on the sub-categories of each ICTRT framework Dimension (Appendix 3, 4, 5). Thematic analysis is an accepted qualitative method of data analysis (Namey et al., 2016), and it is advised in an interpretivist research approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The Theme analysis is drawn from the research question and research objectives. *'Is international student enrolment influenced by website design in Ireland?'*. 15 conceptual maps are created, five per university. Each map Dimension is analysed to investigate the relationship between the specified website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland. The Themes which emerged in the analysis are presented in Chapter 4 and are compared to the previous data in the literature in order to formulate conclusions and theories in Chapter 5.

3.6 Ethical consideration and Limitations

Saunders et al. (2015) indicate that ethical considerations are raised in the research process from the moment the research question is defined. Access and gaining access to data can cause multiple considerations. Due to the nature of this research question and objective, the primary data collected in this study was through a publicly available statistical database (HEA) and the HEI's website. The researcher is collecting and analysing information from marketing materials publicly available on the Internet. Prospective international students would be exposed to the same content while searching for postgraduate courses in Ireland. This study does not require participants' consent as a result. Another ethical implication of this study is the researcher's values and beliefs due to the nature of qualitative research data when collecting and analysing it. This limitation is being addressed by consistency and structure in collecting and analysing the data through the ICTRT framework.

Due to the rapid advancement of technology, specific theoretical frameworks, such as the one used in this dissertation, may be limited as they do not capture current market dynamics (McCole 2004). Additionally, limited studies have explored the website attributes and effectiveness of international student enrolment in HEIs through the ICTRT framework (Bordbar, 2016). In contrast, the ICTRT framework has been widely used to evaluate websites for Destination Marketing Systems (DMS) business like, hotels, and international destinations (Li and Wang, 2011, Sun et al., 2017). This research does not consider other marketing activities such as events, flyers or social media, which could have somewhat impacted international students' enrolments in HEIs. Finally, this study does not include website metrics like numbers of visits, click-through rate or bounce rate.

3.7 Chapter summary

Chapter 3 is the methodology justification for the chosen research methods of the dissertation. The research question and research objectives are outlined to consider the most appropriate methodology approach to take. Given the study's exploratory nature, an interpretivist, qualitative, and inductive methodology has been determined as the most appropriate. The case study method is beneficial in describing and explaining Themes (Saunders et al., 2015). The chosen data collection method of case studies allows samples to be analysed on small scale. The data collection, organisation and analysis have been discussed and are presented in the following Chapter, 4. The rationale for the three Irish HEIs selections is presented, and the relevance to fulfilling the research objectives. To conclude, the ethical considerations and limitations of this research methodology are acknowledged.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter introduction

The following section of this research detail the outcomes of the analysis of three Irish HEIs website attributes conducted from May to August of 2022. Universities A and B, small and medium HEIs, represent the sample of websites with positive international student enrolment. Institutions with positive international student enrolments are HEIs with a positive percentage change of international students in 2020/2021 compared to 2016/2017. On the other hand, University C, large HEI, represent the sample of negative international student enrolment. Negative international student enrolment is HEIs with a low or negative percentage change of international students enrolled in the year 2020/2021 compared to 2016/2017.

The outcome of this Chapter is a thematical illustrative narrative drawn from the research question, research objectives, and the author's investigation of the website attributes. The framework ICTRT, is the assessment tool and is made up of five Dimensions. The ICTRT Dimensions are the following, Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship, and Technical Merit. The ICTRT framework analysis is instituted not only for consistency in data collection but to avoid researcher biases. The author selected three website samples, which rationale is justified in Chapter 3, and collected the information in the respective subcategories of the framework to transform the illustrative narrative of the data set, keywords and concepts, into Themes. See Appendices 3, 4 and 5, which presents the author's investigative notes. The table below summarises the construction of the Themes and the keyword they derived from the data analysis.

Table 3: Illustrative Narrative of keywords and Themes from website samples of Universities A, B and C

Themes	Illustration Narrative of the dataset
Study	Find your course, how to apply, tuition fees, scholarships, cost of living, visa, immigration, medical, pre-entry pathway
Services	Student supports, international student support, accommodation
Experiences	Before you arrive, airport, pre-departure, after arriving, induction, orientation, clubs and society, student life, policies, COVID-19
People	Admission team, support team, appointment, contact, current and past students' testimonials, student ambassadors
Location	Campus tour, county location, why study at, virtual tour

4.2 University A

The first university selected in this analysis is IT Sligo, with positive international student enrolment in 2020/2021 compared to 2016/2017 (HEA, 2022). Founded in 1970, IT Sligo shortly became an Institute of Technology that today awards higher certificates, taught and research master's degrees, and PhDs (IT Sligo, 2022). The analysis below intends to answer the research question and research objectives in Chapter 3. The analysis thematically investigates the Dimensions of the ICTRT framework of the University A website design and international student enrolment in Ireland in conceptual maps (see researcher investigation notes in Appendix 3).

4.2.1 Information Dimension

Figure 2: University A: Information Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

Study	Services	Experiences	People	Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find your Course • How to apply • Fees and Scholarships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cost ○ Payment Options ○ Refund Policy • Cost of Living • Visa and Immigration according to region • Health and Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Medical Insurance • Pre-entry pathway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Airport Pick-up Service ○ Letter Registration ○ Information Guides • Student Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disability Support ○ Academic Support ○ Careers Support ○ Counselling Support ○ Health Service ○ Pastoral Care • Accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student Villages ○ Digs ○ Self-catering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before you Arrive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pre-Departure Session ○ Free Airport Collection • After Arriving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Induction ○ Meet University <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Covid-19 ○ Policies • Clubs and Society • Student Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions team • Student Support team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contact Us ○ Virtual Appointment • Student Ambassadors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student Quotes ○ Student Stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Location • Virtual Tour • Discover County

The core Themes extracted in the information Dimension of University A is Study, Services, Experiences, People and Location. The university website focuses on information for international student to find their preferred course of study, followed by how to apply as an international student. The Fees and Scholarship is a robust section with numerous information for international students, including course fees, payment options, and refund policy. International students generally are not living in the destination country hence some information was available on cost of living, entry and stay visas in the state. One of the requirements to apply for a residence permit in Ireland is medical insurance, the university website had a section of potential and trustworthy providers students can browse and choose from before arriving. There is no pre-entry pathway with English courses or foundations programmes. Pre-entry pathways are foundation programmes developed for

international students who do not meet the entry criteria requirement of their chosen institution programme. The foundation programme is an opportunity for student to develop the English, learning skills culture know-how to succeed at their studies when they progress to their chosen programme. University A does not offer pre-entry pathways for international students.

The second Theme which emerged in the Information Dimension analysis is Service. University A provides an extensive list of supports to international students ranging from free airport pick-up services, letter of registration support and information guides to settling in Ireland and University. Student Support Services offer assistance in student disability, academics, careers, counselling, health and pastoral care.

Accommodation services were available on-campus, as student villages and off campus as digs or self-catering. Digs, also known as host families, is where students can stay with family residents and integrate with the local community. Self-catering is where students find their own private rented accommodation in Sligo. The website shares information on current vacancies available in the neighbourhood of the college where students can directly contact the propriety owners.

Experience Theme presents the information into 'before' and 'after' international students arrive in Ireland. The information available for before international students arrive are pre-departure webinars and how to avail of free airport pickup service. After arriving in Ireland student information is provided on, induction, knowing the college, COVID-19 procedures and policies as well as student life and clubs and societies.

The People information section focuses on three departments, the international admission team, student support team and international student ambassadors. The first area, admissions, has information of how to contact them over telephone and by email. For the International Student Support, information is provided via telephone, email and embedded website forms. Students can arrange an online appointment with the team. Information Dimension provided on international student ambassador were in format of student quotes and stories living in Ireland and studying a University A.

The last Theme emerged is Information Dimension is Location, the website provides information on campus address at the footer of every website page together with contact details. As mentioned in the literature, international students experience similar processes as choosing a travel destination when choosing a HEIs to study (Li and Wang, 2011). Information on Ireland and

county as a study destination was available for prospective international students. International student could experience a campus tour virtually exploring the college business, science, engineering and library facilities.

4.2.2 Communication Dimension

Figure 3: University A: Communication Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

People	Services	Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaint Form • Student Query Form • FAQ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search engine function • Site maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate brochure

Three Themes emerged in the Communication Dimension of University A: People, Services and Study. The People Theme was highlighted by access to online complaint form, as well as general online facility for student query. International students have a designated area on the website for Frequently Asked Questions which covers many areas of the student journey. Some of this information covered how to apply, how to pay fees, what can international students' study, visa and immigration information, health insurance. Frequently asked questions also covered what supports are available and how to contact the international office. The Services Theme in the communication setting was website engine function on the top right-hand corner and site maps which contains information on the website pages at every page footer. The Study Theme in the Communication Dimension is presented by the ability of prospective students being able to easily download postgraduate brochure from University A website.

4.2.3 Transaction Dimension

Figure 4: University A: Transaction Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

Services	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Booking Airport Transfer • Online Booking Accommodation • Pre-Arrival Departure Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Database • Department Contact

Two Themes emerged in the transaction Dimension of University A: Services and People. In the Services Theme, certain online services are offer to international students such as booking

airport collection Service provided by the university to bring students from the airport to Sligo. International students received communication from the university on how to book the service thorough an online form. As mentioned in the information Dimension the University provided student with three options of booking online accommodation, they are student villages, digs and self-catering. For the first two options, student village and digs, the students can book their accommodation online. For self-accommodating students, they must be in the country to research their private accommodation. There are accommodation information databases, and online booking facilities. The additional service provided by the international office is pre-arrival departure information such as what to pack and what to expect on your first few days in the country. If students miss the webinar, they have the opportunity to schedule an online appointment to speak with one of the international support team representatives.

The second Theme emerged in the Transaction Dimension is People. International students have easy access to employee database, staff details are shared online including phone number and email address. This also includes a short bibliography around the faculty members research interest and current publications. Their professional experience and teaching departments are also included in the page. Students can also filter contact details by schools. Department contact is provided in the contact page together with a campus map, virtual tour, and 3D site map of the campus.

4.2.4 Relationship Dimension

Figure 5: University A: Relationship Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment



Two Themes emerged the relationship Dimensions in University A: Study and Experiences. Finding a course to study is stress-free as the website provides filtering options. The filtering options are course type, undergraduate or postgraduate, study areas such as school business and engineering. Other filters include duration, full-time or part-time, delivery, in-person or online and entry type, direct or CAO. There is no filtering option for applicants who are international. Prospective students then would have to know they can only study full-time courses.

Prospective international students can avail of online self-admission assessments and fee calculator when applying to University A. There are no facilities for students to accept the HEI's offer, the students must email international support with a receipt of their fee's payment.

The Experience Theme shows that international students like any other student can self-enrol by the online study portal after orientation day. Accepting their place and self-enrolment are two different administrative steps in the international student journey. The first is when they accept their offer by emailing international office which open their registration file and the second is when students online confirm their registration. The second layer of Experience Theme is emerged by the privacy policy statement available at every page of the website footer.

4.2.5 Technical Merit Dimension

Figure 6: University A: Technical Merit Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

Services	Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigation• Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Links

Two Themes emerged in University A regarding Technical Merit Dimension: Service and Experience. The navigation which is Service Themed is presented as easy to navigate back and forward. The site map is very intuitive, words in simple English facilitate navigation throughout the pages. Design is fresh and young with high quality images and videos through the page for courses and other internal pages. Images become responsive when the cursor passes by. In the Experience Theme there were no broken links and external social media links. Site mapping and design were clear and easy to identify international students.

4.3 University B

The second university selected in this analysis is Maynooth University, medium size HEI with positive international student enrolment in 2020/2021 compared to 2016/2017 (HEA, 2022). Founded only 25 years ago, today Maynooth University is dynamic and fast expanding academically in research. The University provides various programmes in humanities, science, business and more, with undergraduate, masters and PhD levels (Maynooth University, 2022). The analysis below intends to answer the research question and research objectives in Chapter 3. The analysis thematically investigates the Dimensions of the ICTRT framework of the University B website design and international student enrolment in Ireland in conceptual maps (see researcher investigation notes in Appendix 4).

4.3.1 Information Dimension

Figure 7: University B: Information Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

Study	Services	Experiences	People	Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What You Can Study • How to Apply • Go Abroad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Study with partner universities • Fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Financial Aid • Visas and Immigration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regions • Health and Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Medical Insurance • Pre-entry pathway <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ International Foundation Programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Letter Request Form • Student Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exam Support ○ Student Counselling ○ Student Health Centre ○ Budgeting and Advice ○ Student Support Hub ○ Daycare Facilities • Accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student Accommodation ○ Virtual Tour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before you arrive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pre-arrival Guide (broken link) • After you Arrive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Registration ○ Meet University ○ Covid-19 ○ Policies ○ Guides • Go Abroad with Maynooth • Clubs and Society • Student Lifestyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Admissions ○ Support • Student Testimonials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Videos ○ Blogs • Alumni stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blogs ○ Testimonials ○ Images and Quotes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Location • Virtual Tour • Why Study at University B?

The core Themes extracted in the Information Dimension of University B is Study, Services, Experiences, People and Location. The Study Theme presented on the website as information for international students on what international students can study and how they can apply. University B, provide opportunities to current students to go abroad with university partners in other countries. Information is also available regarding fees and scholarships for international students, how to pay their fees, how to apply for scholarships and who could benefit from financial aid. Information provided in this Study Theme also involved visas and immigration. University B had information divided according to 21 global locations for prospective international visas and how

to apply. Medical insurance is a mandatory requirement for international student, while University B provided information on potential medical insurance providers and clauses that should be fulfilled if student decide to use their own medical insurance provider.

There is a pre-entry pathway information on the website called the international foundation program. The program is designed to help students prepared for a full degree at University B. It covers English language development, academic subjects, and university study skills. This program is designed by streams. Students can select a foundation programme based on the stream, which is their final intended study area is such as, law, business, science and more. The benefits for students to avail of the advance pre-entry pathway is a supporting learning environment with a small class size and get familiar with what university can provide.

Another Theme emerged in the Information Dimension of University B which is Services. The International Support Services provide information on guides, information such as what to bring in your luggage, cost of living in Ireland, opening a bank account, working in Ireland, and healthcare. There is no visa international letter request assistance because letters are automatically generated when applicants become students at the student portal. Additional supports are presented in the Service Theme including exam support, student counselling, student Health Centre, budgeting and advice, student support hub, day care facilities, accommodation. Students can avail on campus accommodation; they can have a virtual tour and book it online.

The Experience Theme presented on the website was presented through before you arrive, after you arrive, going abroad, student clubs, societies and student life. 'Before' you arrive website section, has downloadable preparation guide information for international student before they arrive in Ireland. However, the guide had a broken link which was only found by the website search engine. 'After' you arrive there is information about registering with University B, as well as some COVID-19 procedures, and policies such as academic policies, human resources, data privacy, health, and safety and more. Students were re-directed to a second website where they can apply for more than 100 student clubs and societies, making friends, and creating their own society if they like.

The People Theme was presented by international office divided into two streams of admissions and supports with information on staff contact details to be reach out by email. People Theme involves current students sharing information in student testimonial format of videos and blogs. Alumni stories information was displayed in images and quotes.

The Location Theme provides information on campus location together with contact details from reception and departments. A virtual tour of the campus is given by a video format of students showing an overview of what student life looks like. The last emerging illustrative narrative in Location Theme is why study at the University B. This webpage contains videos testimonials of past students sharing why they chose University B as a study destination.

4.3.2 Communication Dimension

Figure 8: University B: Communication Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

People	Services	Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact (email) • FAQ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search engine function • Site maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate Interactive brochure

University B communication Dimension Themes are People, Service and Study. In the People Theme there is information on how to contact the college departments by e-mail. There are no facilities for students to lodge online complaints as most communication is dealt via email. FAQ for international students is very limited and content is not up to date. In the Service Theme, there is a search engine function where students can search for specific keywords such as postgraduates in business or a postgraduate in engineering. In the Services provided in the communication dimension is also available site maps which allows user to easily find information and how website hierarchy of the website works. Finally, in this Study Theme in the Communication Dimension there is an interactive postgraduate brochure in lieu of a download feature, students can engage online with the prospectus. Applicants can interact with the piece allowing them to filter as being an international student looking to study a postgraduate in a certain area.

4.3.3 Transaction Dimension

Figure 9: University B: Transaction Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment

Services	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Booking Accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Database • Department Contact

Two Themes emerged in the Transaction Dimension for University B Services and People. In the Service Theme in Transaction Dimension, students can book an online accommodation and visit the facilities virtually, However, students do not have the option to schedule an airport collection service or online booking for an information session. Information is provided to students only through orientation which happens when students are already in Ireland. The People Theme in the Transaction Dimension is presented in an employment database, student can search faculty and departments alphabetically.

4.3.4 Relationship Dimension

Figure 10: University B: Relationship Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment



Two Themes emerged in the Relationship Dimension of University B: Study and Experience. There is no customizable filtering function for international students looking for a postgraduate programme. Users must manually click on all study fields to find their preferred programme. In this Study Theme, students had self-admission options where they upload their details and documents to gain pre-approval for a course. Applicants also have their own fee calculator to estimate application cost and course fees. There are no online facilities for international students to accept their offer or defer. Applicants are required to email the International Office. In the Experience Theme in the Relationship Dimensions, students can self-enrol on the first day of orientation. One of the European regulations is that all websites have a clear and transparent privacy policy statement which is easily accessible by the footer at the bottom of the page.

4.3.5 Technical Merit Dimension

Figure 11: University B: Technical Merit Dimension of the university website with positive student enrolment



Two Themes emerged on the Technical Merit Dimension of University B Services and Experience. In the Services Theme, the illustrative narrative is given by navigation and design. Although the navigation of the University B is mostly user friendly and easy to find information because of the website site map, many of the relevant links were not working and information was not up to date on the website. For example, COVID-19 regulations which indicated student had to quarantine on arrival in the State. However, these rules are not in use anymore since in Ireland the pandemic restrictions are lifting. The website design is old fashion and Design is represented by the imagery. The images are very poor and low quality which potentially could influence lack of trust on prospective students (Mogaji, 2016).

The University B Experience in the Technical Merit Dimension does not have up to date information as some links bring users to a blank page. However, the external social media links were up to date. The University prospectus are interactive brochures which have videos, arrows and customising features where students are navigating. There are not many download options as information is displayed on the website itself.

4.4 University C

The third university selected in this analysis is University of Limerick, with negative international student enrolment in 2020/2021 compared to 2016/2017 (HEA, 2022). Located on in the South-West of Ireland, University C has over 16,500 students with a reputation for innovation in education (University of Limerick, 2022). University C offered undergraduate programmes and taught postgraduate programmes across study areas in arts, humanities, education, science and engineering. The analysis below intends to answer the research question and research objectives in Chapter 3. The analysis thematically investigates the Dimensions of the ICTRT framework of the University C website design and international student enrolment in Ireland in conceptual maps (see researcher investigation notes in Appendix 5).

4.4.1 Information Dimension

Figure 12: University C: Information Dimension of the university website with negative student enrolment

Study	Services	Experiences	People	Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What You Can Study • How to Apply • Fees and Scholarships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance assistance • Visas and Immigration • Health and Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Medical Insurance Providers ○ UL Student Health Centre • Pre-entry pathway <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Year-Round Programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic Support ○ Finance Support ○ Learning Centre ○ Writing Centre ○ Math Learning ○ Counselling services ○ Health Centre • Accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student Villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arriving in Ireland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation • Buddy Programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Peer Support • Clubs and Society • Student Lifestyle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport • Sport • Culture • History • Shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and Faculty • Student Ambassadors • Student Testimonials • Alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus Location • How to arrive • Virtual Tour • Why Study at University C?

The Themes retrieved in the Information Dimension from University C is Study, Service, Experienced, People and Location. The Study Theme presented from the illustrative narrative of courses available to international students and how they can apply. Fees and Scholarships information was presented in terms of how much are international fees and financial assistant for international students who may meet unforeseen circumstances. Visa and immigration are divided per country as protocols are unique for regions. Health and safety information on medical insurance is given to prospective students listing potential providers. Students can also avail of the University C medical insurance for an additional fee. The insurance offers the same services of

any private medical insurance, however the insurance is provided from the university and connected to their health centre facilities.

University C has a pre-entry pathway called Year-Round Programme. It is designed for learners from all backgrounds who wish to improve their general English communication skills as well as develop fluency in spoken English. The course allows students to develop their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The benefit of participating in this programme allows participants to expand their knowledge of Irish culture too by practising intercultural skills while developing their ability to learn languages.

The Service Theme shows there is no specific information on support services provided to international students. There are no guides or brochures on arriving to Ireland. However, there are supports available on campus to students, including international students. The supports cover academic advice, financial advice, learning centres for writing skills and maths learning, counselling, and a health centre. Accommodation services are also provided by the University C. Student villages are on campus so students can experience day-to-day life of going to university.

The Experience Theme is described from the illustrative narratives of arriving in Ireland, buddy programme, student clubs, societies and student lifestyle. Information on arriving in Ireland is provided by orientation, visa and immigration, medical, English language requirement, and accommodation. Some of the information presented in this section is for two separate audiences the first who are applying to the university and the second for current students. From a user perspective, the information on home page is confusing because the wording used indicates to be for current students, not for applicants.

The buddy programme acquaints current students with new incoming students. New students are matched with current international students in the university with similar interests. The programme starts before the new students even leave their home county. The assigned buddy contacts their future fellow student a few weeks before the student will arrive to. The buddy will introduce themselves and give them the opportunity to ask questions about student life on campus. During the first few weeks in the University, the buddy will help their student through advice on settling in life at the university and throughout the semester. The benefit of having a buddy is that they integrate incoming students with college life, participating in events and some other supports needed.

Another illustrative narrative in the Experience Theme is clubs and societies. There is a designated page on the website about the same however it is blank without any information. Students and prospective students as a result are misled to this page. Student life website page contains information on transport, sports, culture, history, shopping near University C, and information regarding Limerick and Ireland. The information available in the Experience Theme contributes to the correct expectation of studying at University C, for example arriving on campus and about life in Ireland.

The People Theme illustrative narrative is presented by staff and faculty, student ambassadors, student testimonials and alumni. The staff and faculty people information are presented through employee database. Prospective and current students can search for faculty members and search for department. The contact details are given for reaching out by email or telephone were available. Student ambassadors are international students who create blog posts, communicate with prospective students on social media and via email. They represent and promote University C. Information on international student ambassadors page is presented through blog posts and videos. The student testimonial page is a page with graduate quotes and discuss how University C supported their employability. The alumni page displays past student's photos, descriptions and contact details. Student or prospective students can then reach out to hear more about the alumni's experience.

The Location Theme is presented through information on campus location, how to arrive, virtual tour and why study at University C. The campus location is shown on the website at every page footer with address and contact details. How to arrive page information provide users how to reach University C by train, via plane, car, and cycling. The virtual campus tour is given using a 3D interactive technology which invite students to go through the areas on campus like street view in google maps. Applicants can explore the library, sport centre, student accommodation, schools and Plassey house. The reasons to choose University C were focused on People Theme meet the international students' ambassadors, hear student testimonials and what alumni have to say about studying in University C.

4.4.2 Communication Dimension

Figure 13: University C: Communication Dimension of the university website with negative student enrolment



Three Themes emerged in the Communication Dimension: People, Service and Study. The People Theme in the Communication Dimension is presented as student hub and FAQ. Students can lodge complaints and submit queries to a unified online service on student hub. The hub is a centralised data base where students can access tutorials, including these fundamentals, how to access Moodle or logging in to the university Wi-fi. University C has one of the most comprehensive FAQ for international students in the sample. Subjects covered in the FAQ include applications, entry requirements, admissions, fees, when to arrive, visa and immigration, accommodation, and working in Ireland.

The Service Theme in the Communication Dimension is provided by search engine function. As users are navigating the website it is presented in two separate domains. One modern looking and flashy design and the second domain with a classic, old fashion design. Having two separate domains, one with a consistent modern imagery and the second classic imagery, this can generate confusion as users may not recognised two different pages as from the same University. The effect of this is demonstrated in the search engine. When searching for specific key words the search shows results from the old page which is not up to date or is empty of information.

The Study Theme narrative is illustrated via download brochures for prospective students at every page. Prospective students must complete a form that collect their personal information to download the prospectus. This system generates leads. Once the form is submitted, the University C, can target interested applicants.

4.4.3 Transaction Dimension

Figure 14: University C: Transaction Dimension of the university website with negative student enrolment

Services	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Airport Collection Service• Online Booking Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A-Z Directory• Department Contact

Two Themes emerged in the Transaction Dimension, Service and People. The Service illustrative narrative is presented as airport collection service and accommodation booking. Even though University C provides an airport collection service there is no information how incoming international students can avail of the service, there is also no form on the website. University C does not provide pre-arrival webinar or communication service to support incoming students before they arrive in Ireland. Students can book on campus accommodation online, finding the accommodation section on the website is difficult. The search engine gives two results for accommodation, one from the modern looking website and the second from the older style of site both contain different information on their respective pages.

The People Theme is presented by A-Z Directory and Department contact. A-Z Directory works like a department database and site map combined. The directory presents information using series of key words such as academic calendar, brand guidelines for marketing, graduations, marketing and communications, fees office and the President's office. As is clear, this data search method of A-Z encompasses an aggregate and large amount of information. Department contact is presented on the faculties and departments webpage. This page is organised by the University study areas and schools. Once selected the selected school's information is arranged by department, programmes under the school, research, student resources, news events and contact details. The necessary contact detail is given with address, phone number and email.

4.4.4 Relationship Dimension

Figure 15: University C: Relationship Dimension of the university website with negative student enrolment

Study	Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self Admission Assessment• Self Acceptance Offer and Defer• Customise or filtering options	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self Enrolment• Privacy Policy

Two Themes emerged in their Relationship Dimension of University C Study and Experiences. The Study Theme is observed as self-assessment for admission, self-acceptance of offers or deferrals, using customise or filtering options. International students can apply to the University C using an online self-credit system. Applicants can upload their certificates and CV online. Once the application is accepted students can self-accept their offer or defer it through the online portal by paying their fees. Students must go through the whole admission process before they are aware of the total cost of the application and course fees as website does not provide the application fee information. Study options are available by customised fields. Prospective students can customise course search options by course type, taught or research, faculty, arts, education, business and science, course status, apply now, application closed or express interest, course delivery, part-time or full-time.

The Experience Theme illustrative narrative is given by self-enrolment and privacy policy. Students can self-enrol to their course via an online portal once they arrive in Ireland. Information is provided on how to enrol via orientation on the first two weeks before course starts. The privacy policy is made available in every page of the website on the footer. European Union instituted the General Data Protection Regulations where information should be available on how businesses avail of users' data to better market them.

4.4.5 Technical Merit Dimension

Figure 16: University C: Technical Merit Dimension of the university website with negative student enrolment



Two Themes emerged in the Technical Merit Dimension Services and Experience. The Service Theme is illustrated by navigation and design. University C navigation blends two different websites. One modern looking and a second domain classic old fashion look and feel (see Appendix 6). It is difficult to navigate through the website pages because both websites have interconnected information. An example of dual representation of data over two sites is accommodation information being available in two different domains and styles. Adding to this, the accommodation information pages contain different information. The two separate domains impact the user experience because the user would not know which is the correct information or potentially only view one of the pages. The design of the main University C website is modern. Imagery compliments the look and feel because they are high quality and dynamic with banners. The design is complemented with videos of current and past students. The second website on the other hand is old fashion with poor image quality and no videos.

The user experience on the website can only be described as chaotic because of two separate domains. The quality and assurance pages are poor which impact the user's experience. The common practice of the website is to direct students to external pdfs rather than writing the information on the website (see Appendix 7). As a result of this practice many links are unavailable or not accurate information. Social media links are available twice on the page on the header and footer.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 is a compilation of the Themes and research findings of Universities A, B and C. The universities are thematically analysed under the research objectives to find commonalities and discrepancies in the sample. The primary data analysis shows universities with positive international student enrolment provide international student support and information to students before arriving in Ireland. In contrast with universities with negative international student

enrolment, information focused on staff and faculty contacts details. The data shows that HEIs with positive trends in international student enrolment enabled site maps to users in the Communication Dimension, while negative international student enrolment HEIs requested users' details to download brochures on postgraduate courses.

The Transaction Dimension data revealed that HEIs with positive trends in international student enrolment have service website focus. Websites for HEIs with negative trends in international student enrolment had a broad staff, employee and broad department directory. The Relationship Dimension showed HEIs with positive trends in international student enrolment provide self-assessment admission facilities online and fee calculators. HEIs with negative international student enrolment, provided no facility on self-calculation tuition fees. The primary data collection under the Technical Merit indicated websites with positive international student enrolment are user-friendly and easy to navigate and have a modern website design. HEIs with negative international student enrolment had challenging and confusing navigation systems along with an older style website design. For HEIs with negative trends in international student enrolment many links were to external pages or PDFs or had broken links, impacting the overall user experience.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter introduction

Chapter 5 is constructed on a comparison of similarities and differences found on the chosen three HEI's websites under the ICTRT framework (Li and Wang, 2011) compared to the literature factoring enrolment trends. This Chapter intends to answer the research question, '*Is international student enrolment influenced by website design in Ireland?*'. The research objectives intended to answer this question under five Dimensions made of Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship, and Technical Merit. A summary of the overall findings of the University A, B and C against the research objectives are listed below:

Table 4: Summary of the overall research objectives and research findings of university websites with positive and negative international student enrolment

Research Objective	Website with positive international student enrolment		Website with negative international student enrolment
	University A (Small HEI)	University B (Medium HEI)	University C (Large HEI)
<i>1. To investigate the Information Dimension of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland</i>	International student support Before you arrive information		Staff and faculty information
<i>2. To investigate the Communication Dimension of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland</i>	Site maps		Provide contact details from downloader
<i>3. To investigate the Transaction Dimension of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland</i>	Service focus websites		Broad directory for staff, employees, and department
<i>4. To investigate the Relationship Dimension of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland</i>	Self-admission assessment facilities and self-fee calculators		No facility of self-fee calculators
<i>5. To investigate the Technical Merit Dimension of website attributes and international student enrolment in Ireland</i>	User-friendly and easy to navigate Modern Design		Challenging and confusing navigation Classic Design Broken links

5.2 Information Dimension

5.2.1 Comparison between HEI's website design and Information Dimension

Comparing the Study Theme between universities A, B and C showed that the information provided on the website is almost the same among the institutions. All universities provided information on finding a course, how to apply, fees and scholarship, cost of living, visa and immigration, and health and safety as an international student. Another differentiator in the Study Theme was pre-entry pathways and the opportunity to travel abroad found in both universities B and C.

The Service Theme in the Information Dimension provided a significant differentiator between universities with positive trends, and universities with negative trends in international student enrolment. Universities A and B provided international student support, while university C lacked the international student support. A common Theme between the three institutions was general student support and general information on student accommodation on campus.

Under the Experience Theme, universities A and B, with positive international student enrolment, provide information and guides including what to pack and what to do when arriving at the final airport. On the other hand, University C Information Dimension in the Experience Theme focused on international students arriving on campus. A common Experience Theme emerged between all universities were found in the Information Dimensions between students after arriving in Ireland, such as induction, policies, clubs and societies and what to expect from student life.

The People Theme outcomes varied significantly between universities. University A and B provide contact details for the international support team and admissions. On the other hand, University C emphasises information detail from staff and faculty. Universities B and C provide information from successful past students. All universities show current student testimonials in blogs and quotes on their websites.

The Location Theme is predominantly similar between universities. University A, B and C provide information on the website, on-campus location, virtual tour, and why choose the

specific university. An outlier between the HEI's Location Themes was University C which provided extensive information on how to arrive on campus through different means of transport.

5.2.2 Correlation between HEI's website design and Information Dimension

The significant finding between HEIs website Information Dimension is that universities with positive international student enrolment have support services for international students before arriving in Ireland. In contrast, websites with negative international student recruitment focus on staff and faculty contact information. The findings in the higher education sector in Australia by Jayawardena, Ross and Grace (2020) found that websites with positive international student enrolment, focus on staff and faculty.

The Study Theme information among universities is almost the same across the three HEIs. Angulo-Ruiz et al. (2016) show HEIs information regarding study options, how to apply, visas and immigration have little impact on student choice. The websites in the Information Dimension section did not provide enough parity for students to choose one university over the other.

Another significant overall finding is information overload. HEIs website users form a diverse range staff member, prospective students, new and current students. Due to the different demographics, university websites require extensive amount of information to satisfy each user type (Mogaji, 2016). The extensive amount of information with no clear pathways impedes users finding the information they are looking for (Nielsen, 1999). An example of the complexity of finding information as an international student on Irish HEI's websites is presented below through an example to find information on airport collection service in the websites:

University A: International > Offer Holder > Preparing to Arrive > At the Airport > Airport Collection

University B: International > Before You Arrive > Frequently Asked Questions > No Airport Collection

University C: International > Incoming Students > Non - EU Exchange Students > Pre-Arrival information > Arriving in Ireland > Airport Collection

Note universities with positive international student enrolment has less clicks to reach the user intended destination. Users on average can find a piece of specific information between 4 to 5 clicks in comparison to the website with negative international student enrolment which took 7 clicks to arrive at the information searched. The example above illustrates the complexity to find information on the university's websites.

5. 3 Communication Dimension

5.3.1 Comparison between HEI's websites design and Communication Dimension

Comparing the HEIs findings in the People Theme in Communication Dimension, it was observed that University A, and B, both with positive international student enrolment, have online capabilities for online student queries and complaints. On the other hand, University C, negative international student enrolment, offers email contact details for student queries and complaints. All universities provide international FAQs. University C, with negative international student enrolment, has one of the most extensive and up to date FAQs for international students. University B's FAQs was very limited and with information not up to date.

The Service Theme in the Communication Dimension showed that universities' website with positive international student enrolment. A and B, have search engine and site maps facilities, while University C only provides search engine facilities.

The Study Theme, the last Communication Dimension, showed that all HEIs provide opportunities for prospective students to download postgraduate brochures. A significant difference between University A and B, with positive international student enrolment and University C, is that the latter requests user information and student contact details for file access.

5.3.2 Correlation between HEI's website design and Communication Dimension

The significant finding in this dissertation between website design and Communication Dimensions is that universities with positive international student enrolment are systems focused and universities with negative international student enrolment lack online capabilities for student

queries and complaints. This finding goes against Jayawardena, Ross and Grace (2020), who state universities with negative international student enrolment are system focused. This finding indicates website systems designed to enable seamless transactions, are in the positive trend for international student enrolment rate.

Another significant finding in this study between HEIs' website communication Dimensions is that universities with positive international student enrolment have clear and structured website pages with website site maps supporting navigation. This is the opposite of universities with negative international student enrolment websites that provide one overall A-Z directory. The directory pulls from a database combining website keywords, staff and department contacts.

5.4 Transaction Dimension

5.4.1 Comparison between HEI's website design and Transaction Dimension

University A with positive international student enrolment has before you arrive webinars and services information. The People Theme in the Transaction Dimension is that universities A and B, with positive international student enrolment, provided opportunities for students to contact employees through employee and department databases. On the other hand, university C had an overall directory including keywords, departments and staff. All websites provide facilities for online booking accommodation.

5.4.2 Correlation between HEI's website design and Transaction Dimension

The Transaction Dimension of HEI's website design showed that service focused websites had positive international student enrolment. This is the opposite of the findings in the higher education sector in Australia by Jayawardena, Ross and Grace (2020). The research found that websites with positive international student enrolment were people focused. University C, with a negative international student enrolment, is people focused. The webpage provides an A-Z Directory with information for staff and department details, as well as keywords on the website.

One salient point to notice in the Transaction Dimension is the online capabilities of student booking accommodations. Universities A, B and C provide on-campus accommodation. Ireland is

currently living a housing crisis (Kitchin, Hearne, and O’Callaghan, 2015). Irish house prices have grown 50% and rent 60% over the past seven years (Bryne, 2020). Global corporate landlords see the crisis as an opportunity to build student accommodation in an undersupplied rental market and make a profit (Reynold, 2021). The sampled universities in this dissertation are often exception in the Irish Higher Education sector. The housing crisis in Ireland has significantly impacted student lives (Reynold, 2021). International students, when moving abroad, are in a vulnerable position and no support systems. It is indispensable that universities enables support or the results would mean students may not come to Ireland as a study destination due to unaffordable homes. Websites with positive international student enrolment are service focused. Providing international student support before student arrive in Ireland.

5.5 Relationship Dimension

5.5.1 Comparison between HEI’s website design and Relationship Dimension

HEI’s website design in the Relationship Dimension Theme of Study findings shows universities with positive international student enrolments have self-admission assessment and self-fee calculator facilities. Universities A and C provide filtering options for students when searching for a course to study, while university B does not have one. Universities with negative international student enrolment, in contrast, provided self-acceptance and deferred services, which other institutions in this sample did not. In the Experience Theme at the Transaction Dimension, a common Theme emerged that all universities had a self-enrolment service option and a privacy policy.

5.5.2 Correlation between HEI’s website design and Relationship Dimension

The comparison and difference above between HEI’s website design and the Relationship Dimension demonstrate a clear differentiator between universities with positive international student enrolment and universities with negative international student enrolment. Universities A and B, positive international student enrolment, both distinctively offer international students the capabilities to self-admission apply and self-fee calculator for their post-graduate course. On the other hand, universities with negative international student enrolment did not offer the same capability. This finding opposes Isa et al. (2016) web recruitment in Canadian HEIs. The previous

study shows web recruitment negatively impacted international student enrolment in Canada because it depended actively on users to search the specific HEI. This study found universities with positive international student enrolment all provide self-admission apply and self-fee calculator.

A common practice which emerged from all universities was the self-enrolment facilities for students in the first two weeks to confirm they will be starting their course and data privacy policy. Liden et al. (2018) findings demonstrated that GDPR had become a catalyst for revisions of privacy laws both inside the European Union (EU). Since its implementation in 2018, GDPR propelled a significant percentage of websites to set detailed bespoke data privacy to increase readability and clarity of the same. All EU countries, including Ireland, must comply with the new European regulation, which generated change in all business policies, including the education sector, hence the commonality between all institution's websites in the relationship Dimension.

5.6 Technical Merit Dimension

5.6.1 Comparison between HEI's website design and Relationship Dimension

Two Themes emerged in the Technical Merit Dimension Service and Experience. University A website design navigation was easy and straightforward. The site map was intuitive and simple words were used to facilitate navigation. University B was mostly user-friendly and easy to navigate, but many links were not functioning. University C navigation was proven to be the most challenging website in the Technical Merit Dimension. The website had two different leading websites with contradicting information. Design of Universities with positive international student enrolment proven modern and young, while University with negative international student enrolment website is classic and old-fashioned.

The Experience Dimension in a University A had no broken links. A mutual similarity between with positive and negative international student enrolment is that they all provided external working social media links and applied the use of video and banner content. For University B and C, medium to larger HEIs respectively, the Quality Assurance challenges were broken links and not up to date information on the webpages.

5.6.2 Correlation between HEI's website design and Technical Merit Dimension

Universities with positive international student enrolment website's design are user-friendly and easy to navigate under the Technical Merit Dimension. The design and imagery are modern and young. On the other hand, the website with negative international student enrolment has challenging and non-intuitive navigation. The design is old fashion and has broken links. Prior research on website attributes demonstrates navigation, information, and design to be crucial for capturing users' attention (Ozturan and Roney, 2004). Another challenge universities experience is that site trustworthiness is evaluated by new users in, on average, 3.42 seconds (Alsudani and Casey, 2009). It is valuable to generate differentiation via an aesthetically pleasing website and generating interest (Bordbar, 2016). Engholm (2002) indicates technology evolved to a certain degree of expectation and functionality is anticipated by the users.

5.7 Chapter Summary

A number of significant findings have been identified in Chapter 4 and presented in the Chapter 5 in accordance with the research objectives, Chapter 3. Each of the five ICTRT framework Dimensions findings were compared against current literature discussed in Chapter 2 to answer the research question. *'Is international student enrolment influenced by website design in Ireland?'* The findings have results on an exploration of five Themes Study, Service, Experience, People and Location. The Themes serve as anchors to compare universities with positive and negative international student enrolment. The discussion above illustrates there are some differences, similarities and peculiarities in the Irish HEI sector compared to other countries.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion of the study

The goal of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between Irish university websites and international student enrolment. The dissertation observed the university's websites within a five dimension criteria: Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship and Technical Merit. Considering the research objectives, findings and discussion, it is believed that website design could influence international student enrolment in Ireland. The dissertation objectives have been satisfied. Through an interpretivism philosophy, induction research approach and mono-qualitative method, the researcher has gained an in-depth understanding of the relationship between Irish HEI websites and prospective international student enrolment.

Based on the primary research analysis, it was derived that universities with positive international student enrolment in Ireland are service focused. Service focused means the HEIs provide international student support before and after prospective international students arrive in Ireland. Universities with positive international student enrolment in Ireland have their respective websites well-structured, intuitive, and user-friendly. This can indicate modern-looking website design helps build trust and differentiation from other sites. The same finding was observed in a study by Bordbar (2016). Websites with positive international student enrolment enable digital relationships and services between prospective students and staff. Admission cost calculators and tuition fees calculators are on these successful sites too.

Universities with negative trends in international student enrolment are people focused websites. People focused websites provides information about faculty and staff contact details, rather than enabling digital services. The opposite finding was concluded from previous literature, where people focused website design belonged to Australian HEIs with positive trends in international student recruitment (Jayawardena, Ross, and Grace, 2020). Websites with negative international student enrolment have challenging and confusing navigation due to a lack of unclear and structured name conventions. The website design of negative international student enrolment is old fashion looking and contains broken links.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendations for future research

Even though this dissertation has achieved its aims to investigate the relationship between websites and international student enrolment in Irish HEIs under the ICTRT framework, it superficially covers the complexity of the international student journey to select an HEI to study abroad. Further investigation is required to evaluate which marketing collateral motivates and influences more international students' decision-making to study abroad and select a HEI. Websites are considered the primary source of information for prospective international students when choosing HEIs as a study destination (Mogaji, 2016). However, what other marketing collateral influence international student decision? Further investigation on website navigation and service capabilities should be considered due to the potential impact of differentiation and competitive advantage between university websites to improve international student enrolment.

The sample of this dissertation has been narrowed to public universities available in the HEA database. Future qualitative research should explore the same website dimensions in private Irish colleges because they still contribute significantly to the Irish higher education market. This dissertation observed only postgraduate-level course information. Additional studies should examine website design and international student enrolment on an undergraduate level. International undergraduate students are required to pay international fees over three to four years of their studies. They are expected to contribute financially more to their tuition fees over the years of study than postgraduate students who contribute for a one-off year.

6.2.2 Recommendations for professionals

Based on the dissertation finding and discussion, the researcher has some recommendations for digital marketers in the higher education sector to have an effective website which aims to increase international student enrolment. The study reviewed that websites with positive international student enrolment have user-friendly and easy-to-find navigation. Site maps are a useful tool to support users' navigation, avoiding ambiguity. Have all the relevant information in

one place rather than multiple channels. The wording used should be simple and clear to assist in reaching a global audience where English may not be the first language. From the results of this research dissertation, websites with modern and young imagery have positive international student enrolment. Additionally, from this research, mindfulness around regularly checking website links and PDFs ensures links function correctly.

Websites assessed in this paper with positive enrolment trends are service focused. Service focused refers to websites that contain online capabilities for supporting and facilitating prospective international students during the application process. Examples of service focused HEI website design include self-credit assessment and tuition fee calculators. Though this finding could be beneficial to businesses and managers to use technology to generate competitive advantage, the international student will need support before and during arrival in Ireland. The above practices should be used as reference and guidelines to professionals in the education section to increase the number of international students in their HEI.

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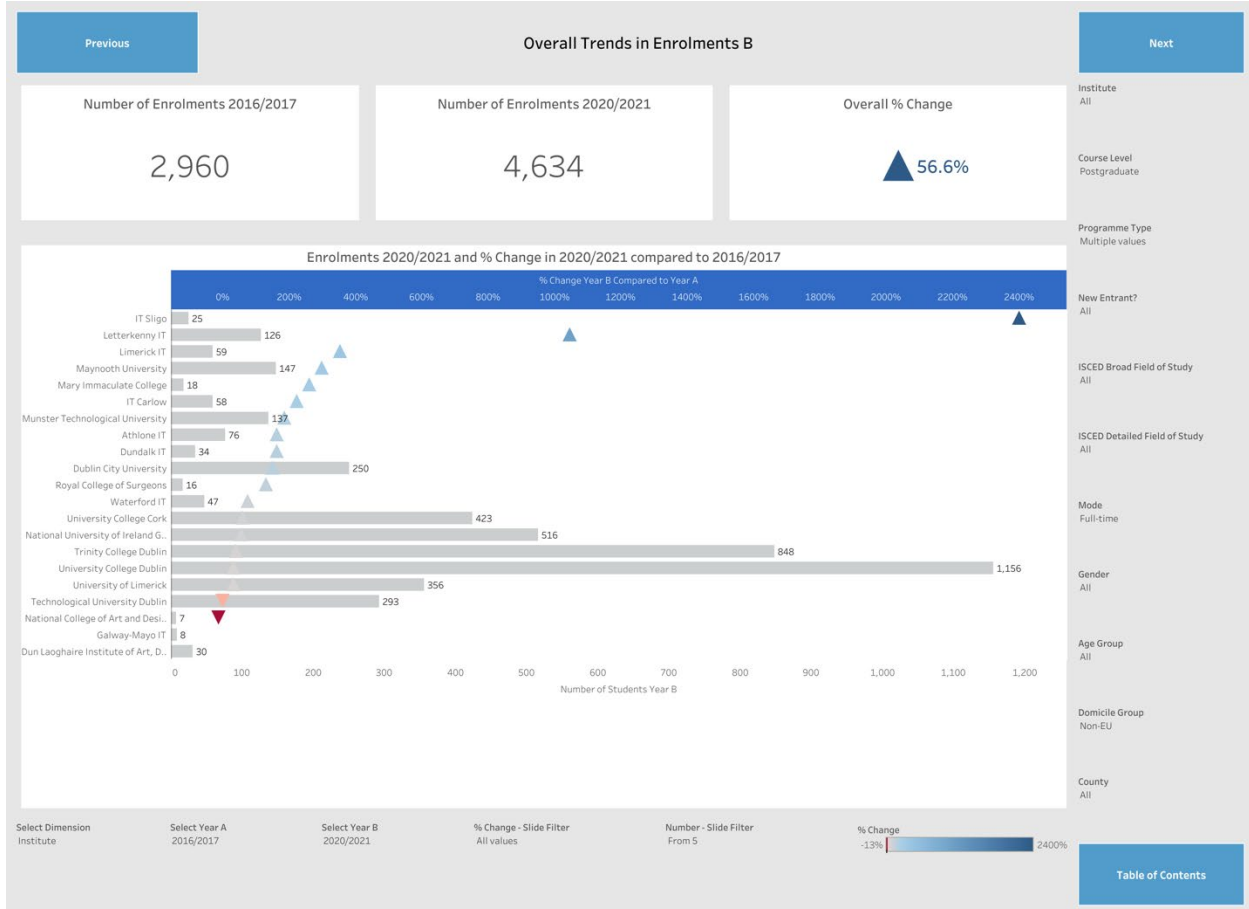
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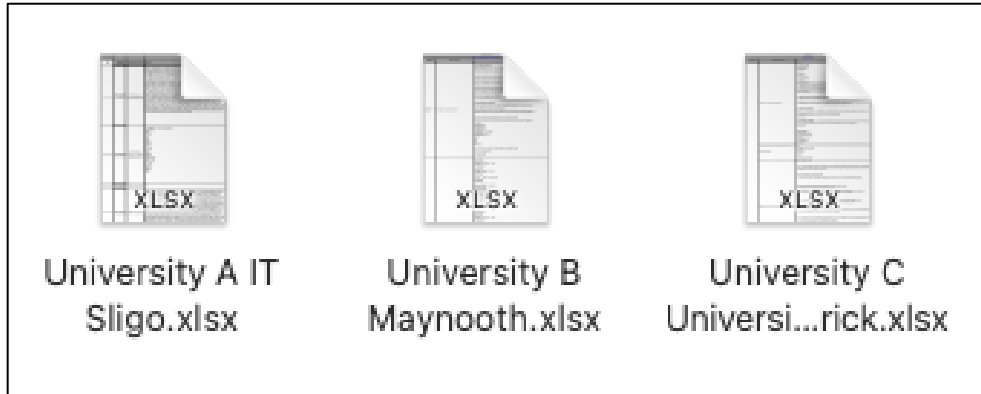
Appendix

Appendix 1: University websites and student enrolments (HEA, 2022)



Appendix 2: Excel data transcripts of sampled universities' websites

Website's sample excel file



Sample of university A website transcript

The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the following data:

University A		
https://www.itsligo.ie/international/		
ICTRT framework	Website attributes	Data
	Navigation	always easy to go back to where you want and go to where you would like to go
Technical merit dimension	Relevant links (online budgeting tools, currency converter etc.) Link workability	no currency or budinging tools. Not noticed broken links, quality great, quick links
	Webpage design and site map	design and site map great
	Availability of videos	lots of videos throught
	Links to social media (YouTube, blogs, etc.)	yes and works

Sample of university B website transcript

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet titled "University B Maynooth". The spreadsheet contains a table with the following data:

University B		
https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/international		
ICTRT framework	Website attributes	Data
Technical merit dimension	Navigation	user friendly, easy to find content, use the search option which does not otomies for spelling mistakes
	Relevant links (online budgeting tools, currency converter etc.) Link workability	links working
	Webpage design and site map	design ver
	Availability of videos	brings you to many new different sites. As the website one does not do the whole work. Prospectus, application. Etc
	Links to social media (YouTube, blogs, etc.)	yes

The spreadsheet also shows a navigation pane at the bottom with tabs for Information, Communication, Transaction, Relationship, and Technical. The status bar at the bottom indicates "Ready" and a zoom level of 110%.

Sample of university C website transcript

University C		
https://www.ul.ie/global		
ICTRT framework	Website attributes	Data
Technical merit dimension	Navigation	many different websites/ confusing to get information as there many / site links are not avialalbe easily try to find trough clicks, click fatigue. duplicated and hard to finds too long image blocks doesn't seem uptoday the second website was crap files and images not named with the appropriate information hard to find pages are numbered rather than written
	Relevant links (online budgeting tools, currency converter etc.) Link workability	many links to pdf and word document/ links not working
	Webpage design and site map	design not as professional as otheers. Image poor quality, which can dighlute credibility, images rather than text
	Availability of videos	Course pages.
	Links to social media (YouTube, blogs, etc.)	working

Appendix 3: Thematic analysis of University A ICTRT framework

Notes - A → Information

Homepage for Int Sto

International office role

→ Admissions

→ Student Support



Home page

→ How to Apply → Study

→ Offer holders

→ Campus location + Virtual Tour → Location

→ Find your course → Study

→ Fees And Scholarship → Study

→ Accommodation → Service

→ Student life → Experience

→ Discover Sligo → Student Union } Experience

→ Cost of living }

→ International Student

People

→ Ambassador

→ Meet our Students

→ Student Support → Service

Inf according to Regions → Study

→ EU/Non-EU

→ Country Breakdown

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

→ LOCATION
Maps and Directions



N/A

Contact Details and Address Available
At the website footer

Support Services → Services

Ⓢ Disability / Special Learning Needs
→ Learning Support
→ Disability Support

Academic Support → Services
→ Math Support
→ Academic Writing
→ English Language

Others → Services
→ Careers Office
→ Counselling Service
→ Health Service
→ Pastoral Care
→ Admission Support

Before you arrive
During study
After study

→ Experience

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Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

↳ Experience

Sports And Student Societies

Fun And Friendship

Join At least one society

Choose from 70

You can start your own



Health and safety → Study

Medical insurance for Non-EU
mandatory for visa and immigration
Some insurance recommendation
Careful to meet Gov.ie requirements

Legal Requirements → Study

→ How can I apply for a visa

Registering with immigration within
30 days

→ How can I renew my visa

Book appointment local office

→ What Document I need to
apply for my visa?

Medical insurance Non-EU

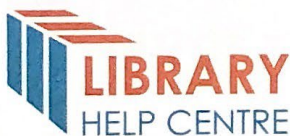
→ What are the working arrangements?
casual work

20h per week during term

40h per week summer hol

→ Third level Graduate Scheme (1G)

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Tel: 01 4498645 / 01 4498733
Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Accommodation - Services



Sligo = Sense Community
Safe, friendly and fun place

Sligo City Bus → EASY ACCESS
public transport every 30min daily

Affordability

€57 per week shared

€03 per week single

Student UNION free bus on campus
for accommodation. Student Villagers
offer free return shuttle buses to
train or bus stations

Student Village

Laundry Service

broadband

Smart TV

Free streaming (Netflix)

2000 bed Available

Digs -

Local family homes

Meals are provided

Private Landlords.

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



Library Help Centre

Tel: 01 4498645 / 01 4498733

Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie

Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre

Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Self-catering
own self search

ATUSSU

daft.ie

Rent.ie

Looking for accommodation?

Contact Student UNION

Mobile or email

↳ Experience

Student Life information

Accommodation

Student Support

Student Union

Cost of leaving

Clubs and Societies

Campuses Virtual tour

Discover Sligo



Financial Assistance / living cost / travel Scholarships → study

Tuition fees depend on course of study and fee assessment

International Scholarships

living cost

Payments portals

- Flywire

- Transfermate

Offer holder Portal

Study abroad and exchange information → study

Before Travelling to Ireland

At the Airport

After Arriving

Covid-19

Help And Support

Important information

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre

Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Travel guidance → Service

- Pre Departure Session
- Free Airport collection

Online Booking form

After Arrive → Experience

- Attend Induction
- meet ATU Sligo
- Complete important tasks
- Meet New people

Offer holder → Study

Accepting your place

- email Int office
- PAY €6000
- Payment options
- fly wire
- Transfermate

Registering with immigration - Experience

Before and After you arrive

Tuition fees - Study

- Tuition fee cost
- Payment options
- Refund policy

Academic support → Service

- writing
- Disability
- Maths
- English

Experience

Before you arrive

→ Pre departure

online sessions

- Preparing for Arrival

- Traveling to Ireland

- What to expect Induction
and first week at Siigo



Contact Int office → People

- Book online Virtual Appointment

Entry Pathway → Study

Pathway Degree Agreement
Canada.

two-year diploma and

earn a degree, with additional
2 semesters of study

Information from successful past
students → People

~~Success~~ → Success stories in courses
→ Student Quotes

Information about Programs and
courses → study

Business and Social Science

Business Marketing

Tourism & Sport

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Social Science

Engineering

Construction

Arts, Design & Architecture

Science of life

Health & Nutritional Science

No information on filter
option to International

Course details → Study

- Summary
- Course information
- Entry Requirements
- Careers
- Further study
- Alumni
- Fee → NO international
- Course format
- Apply part-time
- Apply full-time
- No info

No info
International

→ Experience Policies and Procedures



Class Recording

Data Protection

Criminal Convictions

Garda vetting

Social media

Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure

Marketing office

Health and Safety

Record Retention Schedule

Student Personal Accident

Student Alcohol Policy

Placement Policy

Social Science Professional Placement Policy

Equal Opportunities

Professional Practice

Affidavits in Social Work

Professional Practice Code of Conduct

Student Data Protection

→ Services Traveling Guides or Brochure

Discover useful resources.

Information Guides

Most commonly asked questions

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Letter Registration
Bank Account
Information Guide } Service

- International Student Assistance Fund
- Registering with Immigration
- Working in Ireland as a Student
- Third Level Graduate Scheme
- Information for New Students
- Travelling between Sligo and Dublin Airport
- Covid-19 - Government of Ireland

~~Useful~~ Useful links → Service

- Academic Calendar
- Examinations office
- Irish Immigration Services
- Fees and Grants
- IT Service Help Desk
- Student Sport Services
- Covid 19
- HSE
- Irish Council for Int Students



Contact Us - People
Virtual Appointment
Email

Yes ~~no~~ Phone number by department

COMMUNICATION

Online facilities for lodging Complaint
Online form → People

Search engine → Services
All websites

Online glossary function → Services
Yes

Multi language - N/A → Service

Student Queries Online → People
Yes - ~~is~~ chat box

Brochure Request capabilities → study
course > Download Prospectus
names, email.

Website feedback → NO → Experience

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

FAQ → People

- What study options are available for me?
- Do you offer international foundation courses?
- Do you offer English language preparatory or pre-sessional courses?
- What fees are payable?
- Are any grant/scholarship?
- I need to pay my tuition fees. How do I do this?
 - Can I pay instalments?
 - When deadline to pay the tuition fees?
 - My Gov will pay for my fees. What can I do?
 - What's the refund policy?
 - How do I pay?
 - When applications open?
 - What are the deadlines?
- Is there an application fee?
- Entry requirements for first student?
- Can I apply before I complete my exam?
- English is not my first language, can I still apply?
- Does ATU Sligo have a Uni entrance exam?



- How & Submit Additional documentation
- Do you Accept transfer Applicants
- How long does it take for Applicant to be processed?
- When do your course begin?
- I've been offered a place what do I do?
- Do I need a visa to study in Ireland?
- How do I Register with Immigration?
- Does Int Student Need medical Insurance?
- How to set up bank account
- How much do I need money to support myself?
- What's life like in Sligo
- What Accommodations Available
- What supports are Available?
- How do I contact the Int Support

Contact information → People

- Phone
- Email
- Online form
- Book online Appointment office

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Transaction

Online booking facilities - Services

Free booking online form

FAQs on the page

- What time collection operate?
- Do I have to book in advance?
- What to expect At the Airport?
- What should I do if my flight get cancelled
- Will I go to my accommodation?
- Will the Airport collection only work at Dublin Airport?
- Can pets use the airport collection?
- Can family member use the service?
- I will be travelling outside the gates. can I book airport pick up?

Online Accommodation booking →

- Student Accommodation → Services
online booking of
- Student Villages
online booking
- Digs
online booking
- Private Rental
~~diff~~ House online service

University database
house search via
student union



Accommodation Officer

Accommodations FAQ:

- What help can Student Union give me with searching Accommodation?
- Signing a lease / agreeing to rent a place
- Is it very difficult to find student accommodation in Sligo?
- What kind of student accommodation is available

Employment database → People

Staff Profile

- Name & Position > Department
- Contact details
- Phone Number
- Email
- Biography
- Research
- Publication
- Professional
- Teaching

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Online booking facilities of pre-arrival information session → Service

Virtual Information Session -

May - September

Microsoft Teams

Offerholders receive link by email

Irish Standard Time

Unable to attend ^{virtual} back information session

- Preparing for ARRIVAL

RELATIONSHIP

Self - credit and Admissions Assessment → Study

Courses have specific requirements subject to grade, portfolios and interview and English Language Requirement

N/A

Self - course fee calculator → Study

~~10,500~~ - 10,500 per year

PG fees - 12,000 per year

Study

Self offer Acceptance
and defer

No

1) Email Int Support

2) Pay minimum €6,000



Self/enrolment → Experienced

Yes

→ Student Services

→ Online Registration

Personal information

Alternate Address

Emergency Contact

Programme/Course Detail

Last third level institution Attended

Fee Questionnaire

Confirm Registration.

→ Outstanding fees

Pay now / Pay later

Customised or filtering options → study

Course type & outline, undergraduate,
direct application, postgraduate
study boards

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Study are Area → School &

Duration > full-time, part-time

Delivery > Campus, online, blended

Entry type? CAO, direct, springboard
Add on

mission international.

Privacy policy → Experience

Available at footer

GDPR rule

TECHNICAL MERIT

Navigation → easy to go back to
Services where you want to go
and come back
Very intuitive

Relevant links → No currency change option
Experience No broken links
Design not broken

Site Mapping → Design clean and
Design mapping easy to
Services identify international

Availability of Videos → Very good. Many
Experience Videos in course pager
and other xco as tutorial

Social links → YES

Appendix 4: Thematic analysis of University A ICTRT framework


University A

Service

Availability of videos

Course pages and at least one every page

links to social media working



Maynooth - University B


Home page of Int Students

- ↳ Student testimonial (Banner) → People Quote And Image
- ↳ International Summer School → study
- ↳ Scholarships
- ↳ Studying Abroad
- ↳ Accepting Applications

Location

- ↳ Why Study At Maynooth?
 - Student testimonials
 - Videos
 - Blogs

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



LIBRARY
HELP CENTRE

Library Help Centre
Tel: 01 4498645 / 01 4498733
Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Menus

Experience → Before you Arrive
→ After you Arrive

Study → Our global partnership
→ Perspective full Degree students
→ Study Abroad & Non-EU Incoming
→ Go abroad with MAYNOSTER
→ Summer and Short-Term Programmes

People → International Student Experience At
MAYNOSTER.

Extra. Menu

→ Int Office → People

→ View Our Campus → location

→ Letter Request Form → Service

→ Meet MAYNOSTER → location

→ Our Global Partner Universities → Study

→ US Financial Aid → study

→ Go Abroad with MAYNOSTER study

Information displayed according to region

21 countries + Rest world

Study

MAPS AND DIRECTIONS → LOCATION

Address at footer

Support Services - Services



Student Services

- ↳ People (Staff Directory)
- ↳ Exam Support
- ↳ Responding to Student in Distress
- ↳ Staff Contact Form for Student HelpDesk
- ↳ News
- ↳ Events
- ↳ Contact Us
- ↳ Speak out Reporting Tool
- ↳ Student Counselling
- ↳ Student Health Centre
 - ↳ Chaplaincy
 - ↳ Student Support Officers
 - ↳ Student Help Desk
 - ↳ Student Budgeting Advice Service
 - ↳ Laptop Loan Scheme
 - ↳ Student Emergency Fund
 - ↳ Student Support Hub
 - ↳ Check Facilitator
 - ↳ Home Finder Service
 - ↳ How to find us

More... Contact Detail

Counselling, Health Centre, Sports,
Student Support Hub, Budgeting, Chaplaincy
Student Support Desk, Budgeting

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in

Student support officers
Homefinder



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

People

Student Society → Experience

100+ clubs and societies
make new friends, joining a
club or society

Health and safety, medical and
insurance information. → study

Insurance

All Non-EEA students are required
to have private medical insurance
it should cover accident, or disease
and any period of hospitalization.

Students are required when registering
with immigration

College group scheme

Firsttime Requirements of coverage

€ 25,000 Accident

€ 25,000 disease

Any period of hospitalisation

2ndtime and beyond

Irish health insurance provider

Health Centre -

Free of charge

Available on campus every day

1 Doctor

2 Nurses

Legal Requirements → Study



↳ How do I apply for visa?

Applications Irish

Ambassy in your home country

The main conditions

- 7 y limitation to remain in state for purpose of studying
- Letter of acceptance
- Fees paid in full
- Financial proof €3,000
- Private insurance

↳ Do I need a re-entry visa?

€60 single entry

€100 multiple

↳ Can I work in IRL After I graduate?

- Letter of college successfully completed their studies

Accommodation information → Service

As study abroad student you will be informed of a dedicated booking date to secure campus accommodation.

• Accommodation Virtual Tours

3-4 students - own room

- Have your own bathroom

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Life style information → Experience

Why Mary Nooter - International

Student Blog campus

Alumni connect

Academic Dates or Calendar ^{→ study}
Available

Financial assistance, living cost,
travel, scholarships → study

Scholarship

→ Taught Postgraduate Scholarship

→ SoB Postgraduate Scholarship

→ Edinburgh Scholarship → study

Study abroad and exchange information

Study [→ find your courses - what can I study?
→ sign up - How to apply

Service [→ student accommodation

Experience [→ Registration - class Pre-Appraisal
Dates & Pre Arrival information
integration

Service | link to current guide broken (can v)
→ study in AT MAY
→

- ① Before you travel to IRL
1. Proof of being MU Student
 2. Covid-19 Passenger Form
- ② Official MAYNORTH Registration
Online registration
Email sent to you by records.office
- ③ Thing to PACK
- ④ Arriving At Dub Airport
No airport shuttle available
- ⑤ Arriving At MU Campus
- ⑥ Orientation
International Student Orientation for
Study Aboard, Exchange Erasmus
- ⑦ Student Help Desk - Service
- ⑧ First Day of classes
- ⑨ Communication while in Ireland People
- ⑩ Online and Remote Interaction



Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Tel: 01 4498645 / 01 4498733
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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Services

⊛ Important Information & Resources for living & studying at MU

⊛ welfare and student services

⊛ Academic support

⊛ General information

- Immigration
- IRP card
- Health Insurance
- Banking
- living in Ireland
- shopping and dining
- Important Dates

People

⊛ Connection with Int office

Pre-entry and pathway programme

⊛ Int foundation Programme

This is a programme designed to help students be prepared to degrees at MU. It covers:

- English language development
- Academic subject
- UN: study skills

Benefiter

- Supportive learning
- Small class sizes
- Full access to UN: facility

Study



People
 Information from successful past students
 Blogs > Testimonials
 Student Quotes + Photos

Information about courses
 UG > PG > Centre
 Taught Research OR Schools

Student
 Course example
 Summary
 Entry Requirement
 Department People
 Course Structure
 Career options
 How to apply

Policies Penalties
 Uni Governance
 Uni Regulation
 Academic Policies

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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 Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

study

Rules and Regulation Study

- Human Resources
- Finance
- Research Policies
- Data and Privacy
- FOI Publications
- Health and Safety
- Website Cookies
- Research Legislation
- Computing Policies
- Equality and Diversity
- Inf Security
- Language scheme
- Protected Disclosures Policies
- Student services supports

Study Experience

Travel guides or brochures

- Ireland Key Facts
- Packing for IRL
- Cost of living
- Banking
- Working
- Health Care & Medical Insurance

People

Telecom information

- Phone
- emails

People

Contact information

- Yes - email / Department
- Int office - online booking APP

FAQ for international students

- How do I request a letter to open a bank account or get a re-entry visa?
- Are you still accepting App for Sep 2020
- Can I study abroad in my final year
- Are you still accepting application for 2020
- How do I find accommodation?

TRANSACTION

Service

Online Booking facilities for free
Airport pick up

No / Students make their own way

Service

Online Accommodation booking
Yes

People

Employment database

↳ University office / Department

Service

Online booking facilities of pre-arrival
information session

N/A

COMMUNICATION



Online facilities for
lodging complaints or
academic appeals

N/A - email → People

Search engine function → Service
Yes - Right hand side - upper
enter search appears

Online glossary function → Service
Yes - site map

multi-language services → Service
N/A

Facility for online student query → People
N/A - email

Browse request capabilities → Study
N/A - pdf interactive - Swap

Website feedback columns → Service
N/A

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

RELATIONSHIP



Self credit and addl
assessment facility → study

yes - The Common App or PAC

Self - course fee calculator → study

yes → Art & Humanity 14,000

Business/Law 15,000

Engineering / Science 15,000

Msc Immunology 16,000

Self - offer Acceptance and offer

N/A

↳ study

Self - enrolment → Experience

yes

Customised and filtering opti on

N/A

↳ ~~00000~~

Experience

Privacy policy

yes - GDPR

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

~~Detail~~ Technical Merit

Navigation → Service

user friendly

easy to find date

use search engine when needed to

specific things. does not find items
with spelling mistakes

Relevant links → Experience

Majority of links working but
information not up to date and

Accurate

Webpage design and site up-service

Images with low quality

Design feels a bit old.

Impressive interactive browser

long time for pages to load.

Links to social media

Yes → Experience.

Appendix 5: Thematic analysis of University A ICTRT framework

Information



Home page for Int students

Different students / Target markets

Incoming student.

→ Non-EU Exchange x

→ Study Abroad → Study

- Semester programme

- International summer

school programme

- Freshman Programme

Why UL? - Life in ^{Location} Limerick

Accommodation → Service

Pre-Arrival Information → Experience

FAQ - People

Post students have to say → People

Mini Menu

Pre-Arrival Information → Experience

Student hub → Service

Why UL? → Location

Buddy Programme

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in

FAQ - People

Stay Connected - People

US Financial Aid

study



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Information decide according to
require N/A - visa information
↳ study

MAPS AND Directions → Location
Inf in the website footer

Student Support services and resource

- Service
- ① Academic support
 - ② Personal support
 - Financial Support
 - Student Assistance Fund
 - ① Science learning centre
 - Writing Centre
 - ICT learning centre
 - Regional Peer - supported learning
 - Mable hearing
 - ② First year support coordinator
 - Counselling Service
 - Student Health Centre
 - Student Welfare Office
 - " Academic "
 - " President "
- Experience

Sports and student societies information
website link available, but
blank page

Health and safety → study
medical and insurance
information



Private Health Insurance
Providers - ~~Research~~ Study and Protect
Aviva Health Insurance
Laya Healthcare

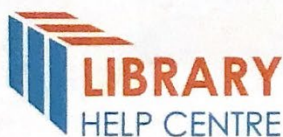
UL Student Health Centre
GP - General Practitioner
Book in Advance telephone

Legal Requirements → study
Vista info breakdown in
country and PDF format (easy to
breaklink)

Service
Accommodation information, ^{2 student} villages
Is on campus application available
How can I find off-campus Accommodation?
Be careful of Fraudulent Accommodation
Advertisement

Lifestyle & Experience
Transport - Bus, Train, plane, Driving,
cycling - location

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Experiences

Sport

- Thomond Park
- Gaelic Grounds
- UL Sport

Culture

- Hunt Museum
- River Fest
- Theatres
- music

History

- King John's castles
- St Mary's Cathedral
- Burrenny Castle

Shopping

- Milk Market
- Groceries and Food Delivery
- Mobile Phone and Phone Network
- International shops.

Academic Calendar → Study Available

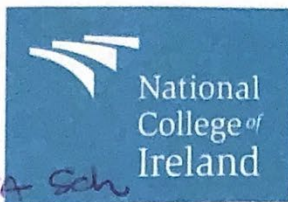
Financial Assistance → Study

Once Applicant submit Scholarship they are automatically accepted for Scholarship

Faculty of Science and Engineering
|| of Arts, Humanities and Social Science
Kemmy Business School. Scholarship

study

Faculty of Ed and Health
Science So



Peter Real Analog Device USA Sch

Trinity Student's Scholarship

UL Progression Scholarship

Sustainability Leader Scholarship

Gov of Ireland Scholarship

Spork Scholarship

→ Experience

Study abroad and exchange information

Arriving in Ireland → Experience

- when should I plan to arrive
in Ireland for the 2022/23
as new post graduate

- on campus moving date
20th Aug

- Orientation 30th Aug

- Semester starts Nov 5th

- Booking flights to Ireland?

Book between 8am - 8pm

- UL collection service

- Sharno Airport Sun 20th

- Late Arrivals Mon 21st

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Pre-entry pathway programme → study

① Year Round Programme

~~General English Programme~~

Learners from various levels of English who wish to improve their general English communication skills

- Develop fluency of spoken English
- How language works
- Develop speaking, listening, reading, writing
- Increase knowledge of British culture
- Practice and improve intercultural skills
- Develop ability to learn languages

Study

Information from successful past students Bios and Profiles

Name
Country
Cause of study
Employer
Job Title
Contact email

People

Information on programmes and courses



Study at UL - International
- Postgraduate study

Search course > Course type - study

Taught
Research

> Faculty - study

Art, Humanities, Social Science
Education Health Science
Irish World Music & Dance
Business School
Science Engineering

> ~~Application~~
> Course status - study

Apply now
Application closed
Not current running
Coming soon
Express interest

> Part-time

Course Detail - Study

Available

Faculty

Contact

Duration

Course type

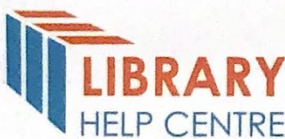
Apply now

Award

Fees

Express interest

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Brief
Overview
Programme context
Entry Requirements
Fees
Graduate Profile

~~Academi~~

Policies - study

Academic Programme Review Policy
Acceptable Behaviour in the Workplace
Acceptable Usage Policy
Access and widening Participation
Anti-Fraud Policy
Awards Titles Framework
Clinical Research
Code of Conduct for employees
Code of conduct Gov Authority
Collections Development and Management
Contract Management - Research Post
contract signing
DATA Protection
Equality and Diversity Policy
External examiner Policy
Flexible working Hours Scheme
Framework for Management Severance Agree-
Further Study Policy
Gender equality and Gender Expression
Grievance Procedure

STUDY



STUDY

- Handbook of Academic Regulations and Procedure
- Health Research Policy
- High Performance Athlete Policy
- Institutional Repository Policy
- Intellectual Property Clinic
- Internal Audit Charter
- IT security Policy
- Joint Degree and Dual Awards
- Library Code of Conduct
- Link Provider Framework
- Long service Awards Policy

Experience

Experience

- Travel Guides or brochures → ~~scribble~~
- Pre-Arrival Information
- September Coming - Arrival in IRZ
- Accommodation
- Orientation
- English language Requirement
- Getting to UL
- Useful medical information
- Visa and Immigration

- ⊗ Activate UL Student Account
- Student Portal
- Emergency Contact Form
- Student Email
- Timetable



Solis Clearing Manager DITA form

Library Help Centre
 Tel: 01 4498645 / 01 4498733
 Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie
 Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

Experiences

Student ID card

Printing

Wifi

Gutenberg library

* Parent Information

↳ what are the advantages of
↳ Studying Abroad

↳ why should your son or
↳ daughter study at UL

↳ what should I know about
↳ health and safety?

↳ How can I be more supportive

↳ Before your son/daughter
↳ departs

↳ How will I get informed / get in
↳ touch

* English language qualification

* Getting to UL

Airport

Car

Train

Ferry

STUDY

* Visa and Immigration

↳ How do I apply for a study visa?

↳ What documents do I require
↳ if I do not need a student visa?

↳ Will I need a student visa?



What programmes can
 Non-EEA national
 study in Ireland

STUDY

If I need a visa to come to Ireland,
 where do I get my visa support letter?

What documents should I submit
 with my visa application?

When can I travel after receiving
 my visa?

Do I need to register with immigration
 in Ireland?

How do I register with immigration?

How do I renew my Irish Residence
 Permit?

Where can I get medical insurance?

I want to travel to another country
 for a weekend/holiday. Do I need
 another visa?

What do I need to know about
 working in Ireland on the Third
 Level Graduate Scheme?

Where can I get a letter to
 apply, open a bank account?

Telecommunication - People

Phone footer + Departments

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



Library Help Centre
 Tel: 01 4498645 / 01 4498733
 Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie
 Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
 Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

COMMUNICATION

online facilities for lodging complain

* email → People

Search engine → Service

* Available At the top

Online glossary function → Service

* N/A

Multi-language version → Service

* N/A

Facility for online student query → People

* Embedded online form

↳ send email

Brochure request capabilities → Study

* Every page above footer Request

prospective copy

website feedback columns → Service

* N/A

~~Contact information~~

FAQ for International → People
students



◦ Eligibility and Entry Requirement

↳ Can I apply without

English language Certificate?

↳ Do I need to provide English language Certification?

STUDY

↳ I haven't received my Academic Results yet. Can I still apply?

↳ Should I take Academic IELTS or general?

↳ What are the English entry Requirements?

◦ Applying

↳ Can I apply for a part-time programme?

↳ Can I apply through an Agent?

↳ Can I apply through An Agent?

↳ Can I study an English language course before my studies?

↳ How can I check the status of my application?

↳ How long will it take before I

will be contacted about my application?

↳ How many programmes can I apply for?

↳ I forgot to upload a document with my application. What should I do?

↳ My password for my application portal has expired.

STUDY

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

- ↳ what are the deadlines for applying
- ↳ what do I need to know about surrounding references?
- ↳ what should I include on my application

STUDY

• Admissions

- ↳ Can I extend my acceptance deadline?
- ↳ How do I accept my offer
- ↳ How do I defer my offer
- ↳ I haven't received my offer, what should I do?
- ↳ Is my acceptance deposit refundable?

STUDY

• Fees

- ↳ When do I need to pay my tuition fees?
- ↳ Are there scholarships available?
- ↳ Can I be in receipt of more than one scholarship?
- ↳ Can I pay my tuition fees in instalment?
- ↳ How much is the cost of living?
- ↳ Will my acceptance deposit be deducted from my tuition fees?

Experience

• When You Arrive

- ↳ Can I view a timetable of the programme?
- ↳ Do I need to register with immigration
- ↳ What happens if I am not able to arrive on time?
- ↳ What if I cannot make it to my immigration appointment

Is the A UL Society for full students?
Will it need to bring an adaptor?

TRANSACTION

Online booking facilitate for free
Airport pick-up \rightarrow Service

Free collection available but no
information how to book it

Online Accommodation booking \rightarrow Service
on campus student living
Accommodation

Employment Database \rightarrow People
Department contacts

Online booking facilities of
information session \rightarrow Service
N/A

Accommodation via UN: ~~UN~~

Available not easy to find
Service

Relationship



Self-credit and
loan assessment facility
yes - via pdf → study

Self course fee calculator → study
NO - app fee 35
Centre Levy 92
Tuition fees 16,465

Self acceptance offer and defer
€600 deposit → study
defer email

Self enrolment facility - Experience
Online portal

Customising or filtering options
➢ Course type - ~~the~~ Experience
➢ Faculty
➢ Course Starters
➢ Part time / Full-time

Privacy policy → Experience
Yes ➢ GDPR regulation

Need help with your assignments or research? Book an appointment online or drop in



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Email: libraryhelpcentre@ncirl.ie
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/libraryhelpcentre
Web: libguides.ncirl.ie/library/

TECHNICAL MERIT

Navigation → Service

many different websites

Confusing to get information as

there are many channels

links not easy to find

Naming convention not intuitive

long images

MANY of the content doesn't look

like up to date

Files and image name

with initials or acronyms

which makes hard to find

information when search in

the search engine

relevant links / link workability ^{→ Experience}

many links guide to pdf and

those are many broken

Design → Service

new website landing page

professional and flash / fancy

old ones with student and

staff information old / 2000

Appendix 6: University C websites

Main website: Modern

The screenshot displays the University of Limerick's main website. At the top, the university's logo and name are on the left, and social media icons are on the right. A navigation menu includes links for Home, Study at UL, Faculties and Departments, Research, Enterprise & Innovation, About UL, International, and UL Alumni. The main banner features a smiling woman with the text "Stay Curious". Below this is a "Study at UL" section with a grid of six course-related images: Undergraduate, Postgraduate, International, Research, Professional Studies, and Priority Subjects & Subjects Area. A dark green "Discover UL" section contains icons for The Campus, Accommodation, Camp, Glucksman Library, Student Gateway, and Staff Gateway. The "Latest News" section includes a "Latest News" button and three article cards: "UL Researchers develop a process to produce Food that can help Reduce Heart Disease", "University of Limerick announces new 80 bedroom student village in Rhebogue", and "UL's Glucksman Library showcased to Librarians from across the globe". The footer is divided into "Have a QUESTION? Contact us" and "Request a copy of our PROSPECTUS", with contact details for the University of Limerick, including phone numbers and email addresses. Logos for various partners and accreditation bodies are also present.

Secondary Website: Classic

The screenshot displays the classic website layout for the University of Limerick. At the top left is the university's logo, featuring a stylized green figure holding a staff, with the text "UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK" and "OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH" below it. To the right of the logo is a language selector showing "ENGLISH | GAEILGE". Below this is a navigation bar with buttons for "International", "Alumni", "Staff/Students", "A-Z Directory", and "Quicklinks". A search bar with the text "Search..." and a magnifying glass icon is positioned below the navigation bar. To the right of the search bar are radio buttons for "Entire UL" (selected) and "Current site".

The main navigation menu is a dark green horizontal bar with the following items: "Home", "Study at UL", "Research", "Enterprise & Innovation", "UL Campus", "About UL", and "Covid-19" (highlighted in yellow). Below the navigation bar, the main content area features the text "University of Limerick" in a large serif font. Underneath, it says "You are here: Home". On the right side of the content area, there are links for "Print" and "A A A" (font size). A dark green rectangular box with the text "Read More >>" is positioned on the right side of the content area.

The footer is a dark blue-grey area. On the left, it contains links for "Contact UL", "Cookie Statement", "Disclaimer", "Location", and "Sitemap". On the right, it says "Follow UL on..." followed by social media icons for LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Below the social media icons are several award and funding logos, including "Athena SWAN Bronze Award", "THE SUNDAY TIMES GOOD UNIVERSITY GUIDE 2019 IRISH UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR", and "Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020 Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union".

Appendix 7: University C links to external PDFs

[UL Home](#) | [Global](#) | [Incoming Students](#) | [Pre-Arrival information](#) | [Orientation](#)

[UL Campus Map](#)
PDF

Céad Míle Fáilte! (A Hundred-Thousand Welcomes!)

It gives us great pleasure to welcome you to the University of Limerick, Ireland's most innovative and dynamic University.

[Limerick City Bus Services](#)
PDF

To ensure that your transition from home to UL is a smooth one, the UL Global team has put in place extensive support structures, details of which you can find on this page.

Here at UL Global, we look forward to getting to know you during your time at UL and we wish you every success for your time here.


[UL Home](#) | [Global](#) | [Incoming Students](#)

[Dublin Airport Transport](#)
Map
PDF

Getting Here from the Airport

[UL Campus Map](#)
PDF

[Shannon Airport](#) 

[Dublin Airport](#) 

[Cork Airport](#) 