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# 15 Human Resource Development in Ireland and the UK

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines HRD in Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK). Ireland refers to the Republic of Ireland comprising the 26 counties in the South of Ireland. The UK comprises England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Ireland and the UK provide an interesting region in which to analyze and understand HRD policy and practice. The five countries are geographic neighbors located on the western periphery of Europe, many with contiguous borders. At a political, cultural, and institutional level, Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland share a similar history heavily influenced by British rule. Furthermore, Ireland and the UK are classified as Anglo-Saxon countries. Mead (2007, p. 15) argues that Anglo-Saxon countries are characterized by a “slowly evolved liberal political system focused on innovation, a pluralist approach to society, and a capitalist system preoccupied with material wealth not for its own sake but because of a passion for growth, for achievement, for change”. Notwithstanding this similar historical, economic, and cultural backdrop, different national approaches to HRD and VET can be found within the region today while accepting that some general commonalities are also prevalent.

This chapter examines the HRD landscape in the Ireland and UK region, taking into account its historical, economic, social, and cultural backdrop. Particular attention is given to the development of the vocational and educational training context in the region. The chapter reviews the key institutions, actors, and stakeholders in the HRD landscape in the region and assesses organization-level HRD policy and practice. The chapter assesses the key similarities and differences in HRD across the countries examined in the region and concludes with a discussion of current issues and challenges for HRD in Ireland and the UK in the coming years.

## HRD IN IRELAND AND THE UK: THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

### Ireland

Ireland is a small country with a population of 4.6 million (CSO, 2014) located on the western periphery of Europe. Ireland is a developed economy and ranked forty-fifth globally with a GDP in 2013 of \$232 billion according to the IMF (2014) Global Economic Outlook. At eleventh place globally, Ireland is ranked as 'very high' in the UN Human Development Index 2013, which is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. Modern-day Ireland's culture has been influenced heavily by Gaelic culture, British rule, Americanization, and elements of broader European culture. Historically, religion has played a significant role in the cultural and political development of Ireland since the seventeenth century plantations resulting in political identity and divisions based on religion. However, modern-day Ireland, religion plays almost no role in politics, and there is a concerted move to ensure greater separation between church and state.

Ireland gained independence from Britain in 1922. The Irish political system is a parliamentary democracy based on the constitution of 1937 (*Bunreacht Na hÉireann*). Ireland has experienced considerable economic, social, and cultural development over the past century. It has developed from being an inward-looking country focusing on an economic development strategy of self-sufficiency and isolation for the first few decades of its independence to being one of the most globalized, dynamic, and innovative economies in the world in 2015.

Ireland adopted an isolationist and protectionist approach to economic development from 1932 to 1958 based largely on the agricultural sector. However, the late 1950s saw a small 'modernizing elite' successfully change its isolationism strategy (O'Donnell, Garavan, & McCarthy, 2001), when Ireland embarked on a process of export-led-industrialization based on foreign direct investment (O'Malley, 1989). This policy shift changed the nature of Irish society in the intervening years and is widely considered a catalyst for Ireland's progressive economic development. Ireland's economic performance over the past decade has seen her reach the pinnacle of economic success, culminating in Ireland's characterization as the 'Celtic Tiger' during the mid-2000s but then rapidly falling victim to the global financial and banking crisis of 2007 that resulted in an EU/IMF bailout. The GDP for Ireland was 4.9% in 2014 and is estimated to be 5.0% in 2015, representing a significant increase from a figure of -0.9% in 2011 (Duffy et al., 2014). Thus, at the time of writing, Ireland's economy is starting to recover and predictions for growth are positive.

### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) has a population of over 64.1 million (ONS, 2014), with 53.9 million in England, 5.3 million in Scotland, 3.1 million in

Wales, and 1.8 million in Northern Ireland. The UK is a developed economy ranked fifth globally with a GDP in 2013 of \$2,945 billion in the IMF (2014) Global Economic Outlook. The UK's culture has developed as a result of many different influences, including its history as a major colonizing power, its Western liberal democracy, and its being a union of four countries in which each retains distinctive traditions, cultures, customs, and symbolism (Rebellato et al., 2011). The UK political system is a constitutional monarchy. Whereas there is no written constitution in the UK, the constitution resides in established conventions, traditions, and judicial precedents that can be changed by Acts of Parliament. The UK Parliament operates in London with devolved powers for some decision making to the Scottish and Welsh Assembly and more recently in Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Following World War II, the UK Labor government implemented a radical program of reforms, which had a significant effect on British society in the following decades (Francis, 1997). Francis (1997) enumerates the reforms as including the nationalization of major industries and public utilities and the establishment of a welfare state with a publicly funded national health-care system (now the National Health Service or NHS). The rise of nationalism in the colonies resulted in the inevitable policy of decolonization (Lee, 1996). In 1947, independence was granted to India and Pakistan, and during the following 30 years, most colonies of the British Empire gained their independence.

Following a period of widespread economic slowdown and industrial strife in the 1970s, Dorey (1995, p. 15) reports that the Conservative government of the 1980s initiated a policy of "monetarism, deregulation, particularly of the financial sector (for example, Big Bang in 1986) and labor markets, the sale of state-owned companies (privatization), and the withdrawal of subsidies to others". While this policy led to economic growth, it also led to high unemployment and social unrest. Around the turn of the new millennium, the establishment of devolved administrations for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland resulted in major changes in UK governance. The 2008 global financial crisis severely affected the UK economy, and in 2010, the government introduced austerity measures intended to tackle the substantial public deficits. Like Ireland, its recent economic growth and growth projections are more positive. The Office of National Statistics in the UK (ONS, 2015) reports that GDP was estimated to have increased by 2.8% in 2014, compared with 2013.

## **HRD INSTITUTIONS, POLICY, AND ACTORS IN IRELAND AND THE UK**

An informative approach to understanding the institutional context of HRD in any region is to assess whether national government plays a voluntarist

or interventionist role in HRD policy and practice (Stewart and McGuire, 2012; Stewart et al., 2013). In Ireland and the UK, the institutional context is a mix of both, with national government policy in each country accounting for various dimensions of the HRD landscape but where HRD activity is also very much determined at the organizational level.

## **Ireland**

Since the late 1950s, major changes and expansion of both the industrialization process and the education system have taken place in Ireland (O'Donnell et al., 2001). In this period, the Irish class and occupational structure changed from one primarily based on property ownership to one based on educational credentials and wage employment (Breen et al., 1990; Fahey, 1995). O'Connell and Rottman (1994, p. 219) outline how "family resources rooted in the old agrarian class structure facilitated acquisition of the credentials and qualifications that governed access to the new class positions in services, industry and the welfare state". Those who adapted to the new regime of credentialism obtained the major benefits.

The advent and growth of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Ireland is widely regarded as a turning point for HRD practices at the firm level. Since the early 1960s, Irish governments have adopted a policy of 'industrialization by invitation' expressly focused on attracting FDI through various tax and financial incentives (Gunnigle et al., 2003). Heraty and Collings (2006) argue that Ireland's national HRD framework commenced in earnest in the 1960s, having been limited only to apprenticeship training up to that time. The establishment of a national training authority under the Industrial Training Act in 1967 pointed to a significant change in government training and development policy and the move toward more of an interventionist approach. Following the 1967 Act a new national training authority was established called An Comhairle Oilun (AnCo), whose activities covered three key areas: training advisory service, training for individuals, and apprenticeship training.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the increase in foreign direct investment to Ireland, as well as sustained efforts to heighten the importance of training and development at a political and policy level, resulted in a myriad of reports and policy papers that influenced HRD policy and practice in Ireland. The 1986 *White Paper on Manpower Policy*, the 1987 Labor Services Act, and the 1988 Advisory Committee on Management Training all heralded a new era for training and development, arguing that investment in human capital was key to Ireland's future economic development and success, including addressing the needs of the long-term unemployed. Heraty and Collings (2006) argue that the publication of both the *Galvin Report on Management Development* in 1988 and the *Culliton Report* in 1992 acted as a critical starting point for Ireland's national training and development infrastructure and as a catalyst for subsequent reform. The *Culliton Report*

(1992) strongly advised that greater workplace training was necessary and that the national training agency, FÁS, should refocus its efforts toward workplace and employee-level training and development. In response to continued criticism of the state's role in Ireland's training infrastructure, the government produced a policy document entitled the *Human Resource Development White Paper* in May 1997 (Heraty and Collings, 2006). The white paper identified three critical pillars for developing effective HRD strategies at a national level: promotion of investment in the development of skills and knowledge of the workforce; promotion of gainful employment by helping people develop their knowledge and skills to full potential; and achievement of high levels of efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money in delivery of state training interventions. This white paper strongly argued a move from program or provider-led training and development to demand-led approaches focused on requirements of learners, employers, and industries. These various policy papers and reports were instrumental in influencing the institutional context of HRD in Ireland and in establishing many of the bodies and organizations with responsibility for training, learning, and development in the country.

The qualification framework in Ireland is overseen by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), which was formed in 2012 through the merger of the Higher Education Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC). QQI establishes the standards of awards from the secondary level, which include the Junior Certificate at the age of 15 or 16 and the Leaving Certificate two years later at the age of 17 or 18, through to third-level certificates, diplomas, degrees, master's and PhD level. Third-level education in Ireland is available from a range of providers, including 14 state-funded institutes of technology, seven state-funded universities, colleges of education, and various other private-sector learning and development organizations and bodies. The Higher Education Authority is the statutory agency responsible for the funding of universities, institutes of technology, and certain other higher education institutions. It has an advisory role in relation to the whole sector of third-level education. Apart from the various statutory bodies and educational and training institutions providing learning and development programs, there are a number of important representative groups and policy-led bodies that impact the HRD landscape in Ireland, as the next section sets out.

The Management Development Council (MDC) was established in 2007 to advise the government on the adequacy and relevance of management development provision in Ireland. The aim of the MDC was to promote a coordinated approach to building awareness and appreciation in small and medium-sized businesses for the value of and need for upgrading leadership and management skills. In its 2010 report entitled *Management Development in Ireland*, a number of demand-side reforms were called for, including participation in relevant management development programs among SMEs not currently catered for by either the local government level through

County Enterprise Boards (now called Local Employment Organizations) or by Enterprise Ireland (the government organization responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets). The report also called for a number of supply-side reforms, arguing that the third-level sector should play a greater role in the area of management development, particularly in the area of continuing and professional development. The report also strongly argues that state funding should be used to drive the use of best practice among management development training providers and that regular research should be conducted to ensure that the best practice guidelines highlighted in the report remain relevant and up-to-date. The County Enterprise Boards, now Local Employment Offices, should continue to address management development in companies employing up to ten people, and the state should provide a funding allocation starting at €10–12 million per annum from the National Training Fund to fund management development networks. The Skillnets Program has been in operation in Ireland since 1999, a state-funded, enterprise-led support body tasked with promoting and facilitating training and upskilling as key levers for achieving Ireland's national competitiveness. Skillnets supports and funds networks of companies wishing to work together to design, manage, and deliver specific sectoral or industry-level training that they require. Due to funding constraints, many of the Skillnets member companies may not be able to provide this training on their own, and there is a synergy to working as a group that defrays design and delivery costs. Eight hundred networks have been supported during the first ten years of the Skillnets program, and over 240,000 employees have participated in Skillnets training (Indecon, 2014). The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) was set up in 1997 and advises the Irish government on the current and future skills needs of the economy and on other labor-market issues that impact on Ireland's enterprise and employment growth. EGFSN has a central role in ensuring that labor market needs for skilled workers are anticipated and met.

At present, the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2018* report argues that the further education and training sector in Ireland has developed from a combination of educational policies and different workforce employment and development strategies across a range of government departments and agencies characterized by an absence of “coordinated strategic direction”. The adoption of the Further Education and Training Act (2013) heralded the replacement of the national training agency formerly known as FÁS with a newly created agency, SOLAS. The new strategy aims to provide for more coordinated and integrated FET arising from the streamlining of 33 existing Vocational Education Councils into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The former FÁS employment services function transferred to the Department of Social Protection in January 2012. SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, comes under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills. It is responsible for the strategic coordination and funding of the further education and training sector, as set out

in the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2018*. Therefore, a number of important changes have occurred in the institutional and policy context that set an agenda for national learning, training, and development in Ireland in the coming years.

## **United Kingdom**

A wide range of policies and institutions have impacted the development of the HRD field in the UK. The weak economic performance of the UK in the post-war period resulted in greater intervention and policy development in the area of training (Wilson, 2012) not present in the UK up to that point. One of the seminal training policies in the UK was the 1958 Carr report on apprenticeships and the subsequent setting up of Industrial Training Councils. This was then followed by a 1962 white paper and the influential Industrial Training Act of 1964 (Holmes, 2012). The 1972 white paper reviewing the 1964 Act was an important precursor to the adoption of the Employment and Training Act in 1973. The Employment and Training Act in 1981 led to the abolition of most of the Industrial Training Boards. The review of vocational qualifications led to the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in 1986; and in 1989, it led to the establishment of locally based Training and Enterprise Councils in the UK and the Local Enterprise Companies in Scotland. The Investors in People initiative of 1991, originally administered by Investors in People UK and now administered by UK Commission for Employment and Skills, is quoted by many HRD commentators as an important move in encouraging organizations to invest in learning and development.

The Leitch (2006) report stands as one of the most important HRD policy developments in HRD in the UK in recent times (Harrison, 2009). It was commissioned following various criticisms about skills development and how it was inadequately aligned with economic growth and development. For example, the 2005 white paper entitled *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work* (DfES) and the 2006 Engineering Employers Federation report both criticized the supply, relevance, and structural and provisional nature of HRD in the UK. The Leitch (2006) report paved the way for significant change in learning, training, and development in the UK and formed the basis for the government's revised national VET targets, plans, and delivery framework to meet the targets of the 2003 Skills Strategy (Harrison, 2009). The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) was set up in 2008 following Leitch's (2006) recommendations and is tasked with providing strategic leadership for skills and employment areas across the four countries in the UK. The commission is a social partnership with representation from a broad range of organizations, further and higher education, large and small employers, trade unions, and the third sector.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) were established in the mid-2000s with responsibility for skills and workforce development of all those employed

across the 21 existing SSCs. SSCs are employer-led skills organizations and cover a broad range of sectors from professional staff to tradesmen and women, administrative staff, support staff, and other ancillary workers. They also cover all sizes of employer, from large firms to micro-businesses and the self-employed. They work with over 550,000 employers to define skills needs and skills standards in their industries, to support employers in developing and managing apprenticeship standards, and to reduce skills gaps and shortages and improve productivity.

More recently, the Scottish government's (2010) *Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth* report sets out a framework to ensure that citizens and employers have the opportunity to access the right advice, support, and opportunities for skill development that can contribute to and benefit from future economic success. The report also sets out a strategy to simplify the skills system to ensure that it is more coherent and easy to understand for individuals and employers as well as strengthening partnerships and collective responsibility between public, private, and third sectors to improve skills and economic success. In the UK, the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and the Department for Education launched the *Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills Policy* report (2013), which lists the achievements since the 2010 National Skills Strategy and sets out measures to raise standards by making the system more professional, by intervening in poor provision, as well as creating traineeships to prepare young people for work. The 2013 report focuses on reforms and improvements needed in the quality of apprenticeships and on how the UK can make qualifications more relevant and more highly valued by using funding to make skill development provision more responsive.

In terms of the education system in the UK, there are five stages: early years, primary, secondary, further education (FE), and higher education (HE). Education is compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 (4 in Northern Ireland) and 16 ([www.gov.co.uk](http://www.gov.co.uk)). FE is not compulsory and covers nonadvanced education, which can be taken at further (including tertiary) education colleges and HE institutions (HEIs). The fifth stage, HE, comprises study beyond GCE A levels and their equivalent, which, for most full-time students, takes place in universities and other HEIs and colleges. On completion of lower secondary education, students typically take the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exams, which are a prerequisite for entering upper secondary education. The majority of students enter upper secondary education for two years leading to A-level exams, which form the main basis for entry into third-level education. Musset and Field (2013) argue that vocational education and training routes are much less structured and less clear-cut than academic qualifications in the UK. Students who do not continue to HE after secondary school can follow a variety of training programs, such as apprenticeships, that are sometimes at a lower level than upper secondary education. The programs and

qualifications, which span a broad range of progression routes to postsecondary VET programs, are also highly diverse (Musset and Field, 2013). There is no automatic right to progression from one level to the next in the UK system (UKCES, 2013). Further education colleges are the main providers of sub-bachelor-degree-level professional and technical education and training in the UK.

In summary, the institutional and policy context of HRD in the UK shares common features, but there are also important differences given that each of the four countries that make up the UK can determine national-level approaches. Raffe et al. (1999) present a comparative treatise of education across the four UK countries. They report similarities in terms of nationally prescribed curriculum to the age of 16 years. Raffe et al. (1999) argue that the four systems are interdependent to a much greater extent than for entirely separate national states. This interdependence is an expected outcome of devolution. However, they conclude that the similarities are more important than the differences across the four UK countries and that each has distinctly 'British' features. These features include similar institutional structures of schools and third-level providers, similar structures in terms of secondary education and certification, as well as third-level certification, and a growing recognition for the need for flexibility and relevance of learning, training, and development at national level, which enables economic growth and development.

## VET BASE FOR HRD IN IRELAND AND THE UK

The VET systems in Ireland and the UK share, in general, many similarities; although some divergence of activity exists in terms of VET policy and VET stakeholders. The VET system in any country involves a range of stakeholders, including government, VET providers, trade unions, employee representative groups, regional and local governmental authorities, and accreditation and professional agencies and bodies. In Ireland and the UK, the HRD actor landscape is broad ranging (Stewart et al., 2013), which has the potential to strengthen HRD in the region but also can result in tensions across the various stakeholders depending on their power, interests, and values. The OECD has recently published a number of reports on VET in Ireland and the four UK countries in its series entitled *Skills Beyond School: The OECD Study of Postsecondary Vocational Education and Training*. This series of reports informs the discussion in this section of the chapter.

### Ireland

The history of VET in Ireland can be traced back to 1930 when the most important legislation within the vocational education system, the Vocational Education Act, was passed, which led to the establishment of 33 regionally

based Vocational Education Committees (VECs) (Barry, 2007). The Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, 2001, broadened the representative element of VECs to include public representatives, parents, teachers, local businesses, and a requirement for the VECs to adopt education plans (Barry, 2007). In the 1960s–1970s, the most significant legislation in vocational training was the establishment of a number of public bodies with responsibility for VET, including AnCO (the Industrial Training Authority), which became FÁS (the National Training and Employment Authority) in 1998 and is now SOLAS. Fáilte Ireland is a significant HRD actor in the tourism and hospitality sectors and Teagasc is the agriculture and food development authority that supports training in the science-based innovation in the agri-food sector and the broader bio-economy.

The majority of young adults (usually entering at 15 or 16 and exiting at 17 or 18) in Ireland complete the Leaving Certificate at secondary level, which is designed around offering students a broad education, while also providing the opportunity for some specialization, in particular subject lines, e.g., science, business, and arts. The Leaving Certificate is used as the basis for selection into further education, employment training, or higher education through a national central admissions process. The traditional Leaving Certificate curriculum, which is quite academic in nature, has broadened over the past couple of decades into a new stream that offers a much more applied and vocational focus. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Program (LCVP) focuses on developing enterprise and entrepreneurship by developing students' interpersonal, vocational, and technological skills (DES, 2015). LCVP caters for students who do not wish to pursue third-level education. It is designed around three areas: vocational preparation, vocational education, and general education.

In Ireland, further education and training (FET) is broad ranging with numerous agencies, actors, and stakeholders involved in the system. The roles and responsibilities for the Irish education system, which includes vocational education and training, are distinct from the vocational training system, the latter being the remit of the labor-market authorities (Barry, 2007). Barry outlines three levels of responsibility in the publicly funded VET sector in Ireland: government departments that set policy and overall direction, including providing the public funding for VET; intermediate organizations that may be involved in implementing government policy, channeling funds, or acting as a provider of VET programs; and VET provider bodies such as SOLAS (formerly FÁS), which is the National Training and Employment Authority. Responsibility for the provision of early vocational education in schools and centers and institutes of further education is devolved from the Department of Education and Skills to 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), which replaced the 33 national Vocational Education Committees (VECs) in 2013. In terms of VET courses and provision in Ireland, full-time programs in FE include: Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses; Vocational

Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS); Youthreach, part-time programs that come under the remit of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI); Adult Literacy; and Community Education.

Apprenticeship training is the key approach used for developing craft-based skills in Ireland. Apprenticeship training in Ireland is regulated by legislation, with SOLAS as the regulatory authority. The current apprenticeship model is founded on the AnCO legislation (the Industrial Training Act), enacted in 1967, as amended by the National Training Fund Act 2000 and the 1987 Labor Services Act, which are based on the 1986 *White Paper on Manpower Policy* and the 1991 Program for Economic and Social Progress (PESP Agreement). DES carried out a review of the apprentice training system in Ireland in 2013, and in June 2014, the Minister for Education announced the establishment of a new Apprenticeship Council to oversee apprenticeship training in Ireland. The council is enterprise-led and has representatives from business, trade unions, further and higher education bodies, and the Department of Education and Skills.

Lifelong learning has been a priority focus of a number of recent governments in Ireland. A *White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life* was published in 2000, and the National Framework of Qualifications was established in 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, in order to improve access, transfer, and progression within the VET system.

In 2000, Ireland's labor, employment, training, and development agenda formed a significant part of the government's National Development Plan (NDP) for 2000–2006, which became the principal government framework for the allocation of funding for all VET programs provided by the state. The EHRD OP for this period set out a range of programs and services to be provided to improve access to employment opportunities, address skills and labor shortages, and tackle social exclusion. The NDP for 2007–2013 retained investment in human capital as one of its five strategic investment priorities. Today, at a policy level, responsibility largely rests with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Social Protection. In 2014, the Department of Education and Skills provided €826m to support further education and training provision in Ireland (SOLAS, 2014).

## **United Kingdom**

After 1945, the UK started to expand small-scale provision of secondary education, which involved dismantling senior elementary education (roughly, 10–15 years phase) by setting a universal age of transfer to secondary schools and determining how technical education should be provided at secondary level (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010). In the 1960s, various day-release courses, complementary to apprenticeships, had been established

in further education colleges. These courses resulted from the work of the Industrial Training Boards that were set up under the 1964 Industrial Training Act. The courses were mainly in the areas of craft construction, engineering, and manufacturing industries and were offered by City & Guilds of London Institute (CGLI).

In the 1970s, the Business Education Council and its parallel Technician Education Council (which subsequently merged and became the Business and Technician Education Council, BTEC in 1983) offered courses in broader vocational areas than CGLI, with an express focus on more general education and designed to enable progression from secondary to sub-degree level while offering higher national certificates (West and Steedman, 2003). BTEC went on to offer full-time courses, issuing diplomas rather than the part-time certificates (Richardson and Wiborg, 2010). By the late 1980s, a system of substantial full-time vocational education courses was available, ranging from the first level (level 2 equivalent in the National Qualifications Framework), through the advanced level National Diploma, to the Higher National Diploma (HND). These programs were offered in colleges of further education and in polytechnics. The other major body offering vocational education courses was the Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board (RSA), which mostly delivered secretarial and administrative courses. Richardson and Wiborg (2010) argue that whereas these courses and providers prevailed over time, the offerings did not add up to a unified system of vocational education. The offerings of each body differed substantially in design, quality, assessment, and size. There were issues with progression across different programs and from different levels; and with the dismantling of many Industrial Training Boards in the 1980s, the degree to which these qualifications had recognition with employers became unclear. Richardson and Wiborg (2010) enumerate the key government initiatives that have impacted vocational education in the UK in the 1980s and early 1990s: the Technical and Vocational Employment Initiative (TVEI), announced in 1982, was intended to develop dedicated pathways of largely vocational education for nonacademic routes; the introduction of the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) in 1985 aimed at addressing the issue of high youth unemployment; the development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) aimed at developing curriculum, a syllabus based on standards of performance (outcomes) and a new assessment regime; General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were introduced at three levels (Foundation, Intermediate, and Advanced) and aimed at replacing HNDs and intended to provide more general education rather than forcing learners into early specialization with new GCSEs in vocational subjects; the establishment of the Further Education Funding Council, which took over the funding of colleges from local education authorities in 1993; and the development of vocational options in the 14–16 age phase, which enabled the introduction of expanded vocational education and training for some at the lower secondary level. In 1992, a tripartite system of academic A levels,

general vocational qualifications, and work-based vocational NVQs were created, providing an alternative to academic qualifications for students not suitable for A levels (Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995).

In terms of qualifications and certification in the UK, the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England and Northern Ireland, the Credit and Qualification Framework (CQFW) in Wales, and the Vocational Qualifications (SVWs) in Scotland cover most professional areas and set out the expected outcomes required for effective performance in a particular role (Stewart et al., 2013). National Occupational Standards determine the level of skills and knowledge required at different levels of achievement on the NVQs. They range from low-level skill requirements at Level 1 to complex skills and knowledge at Level 5. The NVQ system is, therefore, a competence-based system where the knowledge, skill, and ability requirements of various jobs are determined among employers, educational policy makers, and representative groups. The failure to link vocational qualification with the higher education Qualifications and Credit Framework is a key problem within the UK VET system (Lester, 2011).

A number of different governance, quality assurance, and regulation bodies operate in the VET landscape in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. There is a complex institutional framework in the UK VET sector, with the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS) sharing policy-making responsibilities in England. The policy-making authorities for VET in Northern Ireland are the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), and the Scottish and Welsh governments in Scotland and Wales, respectively (CEDEFOP, 2012). Government policies and private interests jointly drive the qualifications market in the UK. This has led to a large choice of qualifications and awarding organizations (CEDEFOP, 2012). Some criticism has been leveled at the NVQ system in England, arguing that the content of the qualifications does not adequately cater for employer needs (Gold and Thorpe, 2008). Stewart et al. (2013) argue that there are perceptions of lack of rigor with the VET and NVQ qualifications compared with the higher education sector and universities. A VET policy paper published by the Conservatives in 2008 argued that the UK VET system had become one driven by the requirements of the government's funding regime rather than the needs of individuals and the economy (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). Wolf (2011) argues that employers valued low-level NVQs very little, and yet such qualifications are taken by a large number of 16- and 17-year-olds.

Stewart et al. (2013) argue that the VET system in the UK is informed by a demand-led model and characterized by some common features that indicate its mature development: a single framework for transparency of competencies and qualifications, a system of credit transfer for VET, common criteria and principles for quality in VET, common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and information for

lifelong learning. An issue that exists in the broader HRD educational provision context in Ireland and the UK is the two-tier nature of vocational versus academic qualifications and skill development. Gold et al. (2013) argue that historical and cultural influences result in perceptions of a lack of equivalence based on which route learners have taken and which institutions they attended rather than assessing the outcome of those qualifications in terms of skills acquisition. Likewise, the SOLAS (2014) report confirms that status differences between further education and training and higher education remain an issue in the Irish context. The SOLAS (2014) report refers to the expected growth in partnerships enabling higher levels of progression from further to higher education in the Irish system, as well as calling for greater employee development programs at the workplace level. Wilson (2012, p. 136) concludes that the UK VET system consists of a “complex range of agencies and initiatives that, in spite of some rationalization, appear to be diversifying as the various countries of the UK develop their own system”.

### **HRD IN IRELAND AND THE UK: ORGANIZATION-LEVEL PROVISION**

In late 2012, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) conducted a survey of 445 member organizations to assess training and development provision and training priorities (IBEC, 2013). The findings report that nearly two-thirds of respondent organizations (63%) conduct training audits within their organization, more likely in larger organizations than in smaller companies. In terms of training and development content, IBEC (2013) reports that management skills, occupational health and safety, and leadership skills are the most common skills included in training and development programs in member organizations. Furthermore, the survey found that many organizations predict that over the next five years management and leadership will continue to be important, along with performance management. The IBEC survey also reports changes in training methods being employed by member organizations, increased use of technology being a key feature of these changes, with many companies reporting increased use of e-learning, online courses, webinars, podcasts, etc. The average cost of training as a percentage of payroll was 2.59% according to the 2012 IBEC survey. Furthermore, training spent as a percentage of payroll was highest in large companies with over 500 employees (3.20%) and lowest in companies with fewer than 50 employees (2.84%).

Since 1999, Ireland has operated the Skillnets program (see earlier discussion), which plays a significant role in organizational-level training for organizations that are members of a Skillnet. The programs, funded from the National Training Fund (NTF) through the Department of Education and Skills, operate on the basis of a networks model, whereby networks of

enterprises engage in the design, management, and delivery of specific training programs to employees as well as to jobseekers across a broad range of industry and service sectors nationwide. The Indecon (2014) report evaluated the activity and impact of these 64 operational Skillnet training networks for 2013. The enterprise-led approach to Skillnets is evidenced by the involvement across the networks of a total of 10,145 member companies, which provided industry matching funding amounting to €10.4 million in 2013. Indecon (2014) reports that in 2013, 45,878 trainees participated in Skillnets training and the total number of training days was 280,175 within the Skillnets program. The report goes on to conclude that the key strategic challenges for Skillnets include the need to maintain a rigorous ongoing focus on the relevance and quality of the training provided in line with its mission to further education and training policy in Ireland.

The recent Annual Learning and Development 2015 survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) provides useful information regarding organizational-level HRD structures and provision in the UK. The findings are drawn from the survey responses from 541 learning and development (L&D) specialists in the UK, with half of the respondents working in the private sector, a quarter in the public sector, and the remainder evenly split between manufacturing and production and nonprofit organizations. In terms of the role and purpose of L&D, in over 40% of respondent organizations, L&D is a specialist function within the HR department; about 20% of respondents report that L&D is an activity within a generalist HR activity set; and in the remaining 40% of respondents, L&D activities are split between HR and another area of the business or are completely separate from the HR function. The report found that L&D is extremely aligned with business needs in only 25% of respondent organizations, with 40% indicating broad alignment. The most common barriers to alignment cited in the CIPD (2015) report are: L&D practitioners' lack of clarity regarding business strategy, lack of resources, and lack of interest or understanding of the purpose and capability of L&D from business leaders. In terms of organizational-level HRD provision, on-the-job training, in-house development programs, and coaching by line managers or peers are the most popular L&D methods deployed. Delivery of training and learning through learning technologies is more common in larger organizations. Seventy-five percent of organizations currently offer coaching or mentoring, and an additional 13% plan to offer it in the next year. The survey found that there are a number of L&D capability gaps (such as analytical and technological skills) that need to be addressed. In line with previous findings in HRD studies, evaluation of L&D investment and impact is still weak, and the CIPD (2015) report found that only 30% of organizations try to quantify the impact of L&D on productivity. In terms of L&D investment at the firm level, the economic recession has had a deleterious impact, with more than 50% of public-sector respondents indicating that their L&D budget had decreased over the previous year. The private sector showed

a mixed landscape with 25% reporting decreased L&D budgets, whereas 25% reported increased budgets in the previous year.

## HRD IN IRELAND AND THE UK: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The sections heretofore in this chapter are helpful for understanding the historical and current HRD landscape in Ireland and the UK. Building from that base, a key question that emerges is how similar or different HRD is within the region. In addition to the discussion in the earlier sections, which draws out similarities and differences, Table 15.1 provides an outline of how Ireland and the UK compare when exploring their HRD institutional and policy context, post-war development context, state of VET development, and providers of HRD. This chapter, and Table 15.1, demonstrates that there are more similarities than differences across the Ireland and UK region in terms of its HRD history, landscape, institutions, actors, opportunities, and challenges. The analysis in this chapter supports Raffe's (1999) assertion that any comparison across the four countries in the UK education system could be best described as representing 'variations upon common themes' rather than being uniquely distinctive. The inclusion of Ireland as another country within the region and the HRD analysis presented in this chapter for all five countries indicates that variations upon common themes is also an appropriate lens through which to examine HRD in the Ireland and UK region.

*Table 15.1* Similarities and Differences in HRD in Ireland and the UK

	Ireland	UK
Institutional and policy context	Multi-actor institutional context. Ireland provides an infrastructure for the supply of skills, but the market for skills is demand-led by employers. This represents a mix of interventionism and voluntarism in HRD policy and practice and a mix of centralization in terms of skills supply through the QQI but decentralization at the firm level.	The UK provides an infrastructure for the supply of skills, but the market for skills is demand-led by employers. This represents a mix of interventionism and voluntarism in HRD policy and practice and a mix of centralization in terms of skills supply through the NQF framework but decentralization at the firm level. A complex and where criticism is leveled at the lack of integration of various institutions and actors in determining joined-up HRD and VET policy.

	Ireland	UK
Post-war development context	Move from agrarian and labor-intensive sectors to a knowledge-based economy. Education and investment in HRD is seen as a critical lever for economic growth and development.	Move from manufacturing and labor-intensive sectors to services sectors. Education and investment in HRD is seen as a critical lever for economic growth and development.
State of VET development	A well-developed National Qualifications Framework (NQF) with many providers and provisions for skill development from entry- and medium-level skills across different industries served by the FE sector to more advanced, high-level skill formation through the HE sector. Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Ireland is seen both in policy and structural terms as one of the main pillars for building and maintaining of a skilled workforce.	VET system in the UK is informed by a demand-led model and characterized by some common features that indicate its mature development: a single framework for transparency of competencies and qualifications, a system of credit transfer for VET, common criteria and principles for quality in VET, common principles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and information for lifelong learning.
Providers of HRD	Organizational-level through HRD or learning and development functions of organizations and private companies, professional associations, educational institutions, national Skillnets program, IBEC, and other sectoral (e.g., Teagasc) or statutory bodies (e.g., SOLAS and Skillnets).	Organizational-level through HRD or learning and development functions of organizations and private companies, professional associations, educational institutions, national Sectoral Skills Councils, employer groups, and government bodies.

This chapter reviewed the historical, political, social, and institutional influences that have impacted HRD in Ireland and the UK. The current state of play with HRD in the region shows many similarities in terms of overall structures and espoused objectives, which are ultimately aligned with the enhancement of the citizen and for the overall economic growth and development of each country within the region. However, the chapter also demonstrates that the region suffers from a lack of joined-up thinking across the various institutions and actors. The development of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the UK, National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Ireland, the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SQF) framework in Scotland, and the Credit and Qualification Framework (CQFW) in Wales is an essential component of the skills and qualifications elements of HRD in Ireland and the UK. These frameworks allow for identification of skill requirements, competence levels, and comparisons of assessment of qualification and skill equivalence across different national systems. While the development of VET qualification frameworks has significantly advanced the HRD field in the region, some concerns exist about their impact and effectiveness. Gold et al. (2013) argue that vocational qualifications are regularly criticized for their lack of rigor compared with more traditional third-level, university-based academic degrees and qualifications. Further, Stewart et al. (2013, p. 17) state that “VET in the UK is characterized by a lack of consistency, in that changes are fairly frequent and there are swings between the extent to which institutions operate at regional, sub-regional and local authority levels”. Similar concerns have been echoed in Ireland.

The focus, content, and appropriateness of educational, HRD, and VET provisions are other areas that need attention in future policy development in the UK in particular. The low-skills equilibrium (Wilson and Hogarth, 2003) in the UK, where the economy is trapped in a vicious cycle of low-skilled work and wages leading to a fall in demand for high-skilled, value-added jobs, presents a challenge for HRD policy makers. Government policy and organizational skill requirements focus on the more pressing and immediate lower-skilled labor supply at the expense of developing a more high-skilled workforce. Yet it is the latter that is increasingly seen as the source of national economic growth and development. The ability of HRD policy makers to both focus on the short-term HRD and skill requirements while ensuring the longer-term development of a highly skilled workforce necessary for sustained economic growth and development is an important balance that must be achieved in HRD policy and practice (UKCES, 2010).

Another key HRD debate in Ireland and the UK is the value of a more focused development strategy, for example, at the sectoral or functional level. Sambrook and Stewart (2007) argue that HRD policy and practice can vary depending on sector, e.g., public versus private and profit versus nonprofit. Therefore, HRD policy makers stakeholders need to ascertain if HRD within the region should also engage in sectoral-level analysis, which would complement generic national-level approaches. At a functional level,

the HRD field now features many academic- and practice-based contributions in areas such as leadership development, front-line/supervisory development, coaching and mentoring. The impact of funding reductions due to the global financial crisis has also affected functional based HRD initiatives at the firm level so that HRD practitioners need to focus on ensuring they can make the case for increased investment (McCarthy and Sheehan, 2014). MacKenzie et al. (2012) have articulated strong criticism of the financial bottom line taking precedence over any real considerations of HRD focused on employee development and career enhancement in organizations post the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2008. Furthermore, Keeble-Ramsey and Armitage's (2015) study of middle and front-line managers in the UK concludes that post-GFC HRD is silenced or absent and associated solely with low-cost-based e-learning rather than playing a strategic role in support of sustainable business objectives. A challenge for HRD in Ireland and the UK is to ensure that HRD's role in HRM at the organizational level will regain its potential to influence skill development in the workplace strategically and to argue convincingly the necessity for investment in HRD in a challenging financial context. The CIPD (2015) L&D survey in the UK found mixed views regarding the future of L&D funding at the organization level, with over 25% of the private-sector respondents forecasting an increase in the overall funding of L&D over the next 12 months but 15% expecting a decrease. However, the public-sector organizations report much more pessimistic projections, with more than half expecting a decrease in L&D investment. Therefore, challenges remain in terms of HRD investment.

## CONCLUSION

HRD in Ireland and the UK shares many similarities in policy and practice due to the common cultural and historical circumstances out of which it emerged. For example, the VET system in Ireland and the UK developed from broadly similar contexts with broadly similar objectives and expected outcomes. However, the extent to which various HRD stakeholders have influenced systems and policy at a national level and practice at organizational level is mixed. The CIPD (2015) report found that learning and development (L&D) professionals in the UK are increasingly aware of how important it is to understand business needs, to be commercially aware, and to align learning and development with strategic decision making in organizations. While L&D has improved its alignment with business strategy, there is still much that needs to be done to ensure that L&D is seen as a critical lever of organizational success. At a policy level, significant progress has been made in terms of VET and HRD policy in the region, but further work needs to be done in terms of ensuring that the various institutions and actors are aligned in delivering an integrated and joined-up approach to HRD in the region.

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