

Student mobility in Ireland and Northern Ireland

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Outline of presentation

- Aim of study
- Previous research on student mobility
- Mobility patterns
- Institutional factors
- Conclusions and implications for policy

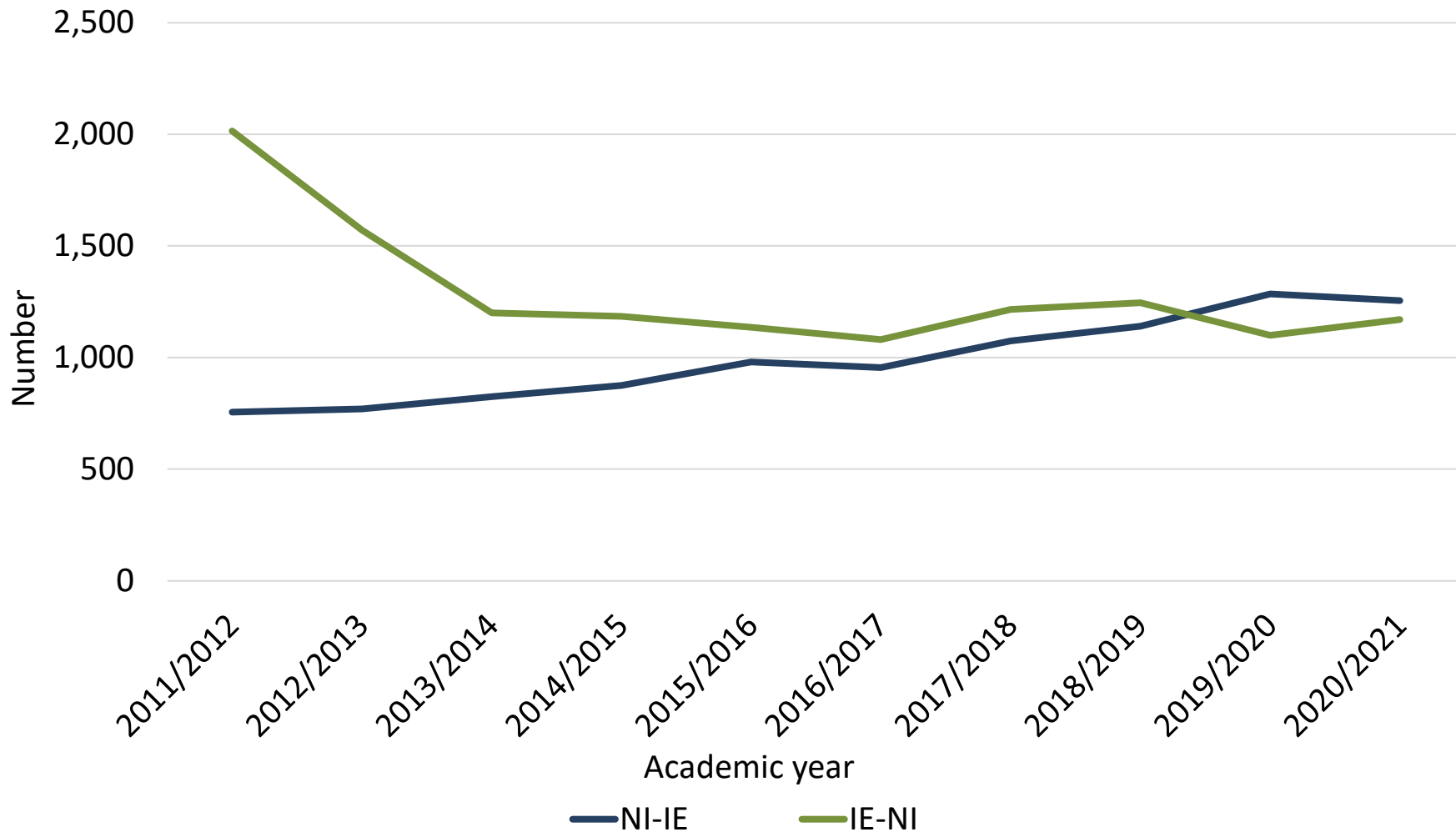
Aim of the study

- Focus on undergraduate mobility between Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain; excludes short-term mobility (term/year)
- Research questions:
 1. What is the level of student mobility between Ireland and Northern Ireland (and between NI and the other countries of the UK)?
 2. What factors are associated with student mobility?
 3. To what extent is there potential to increase student mobility across the island? And is this seen as a desirable objective by stakeholders?
- Administrative data, CAO microdata, interviews with key stakeholders and feedback from a consultation event

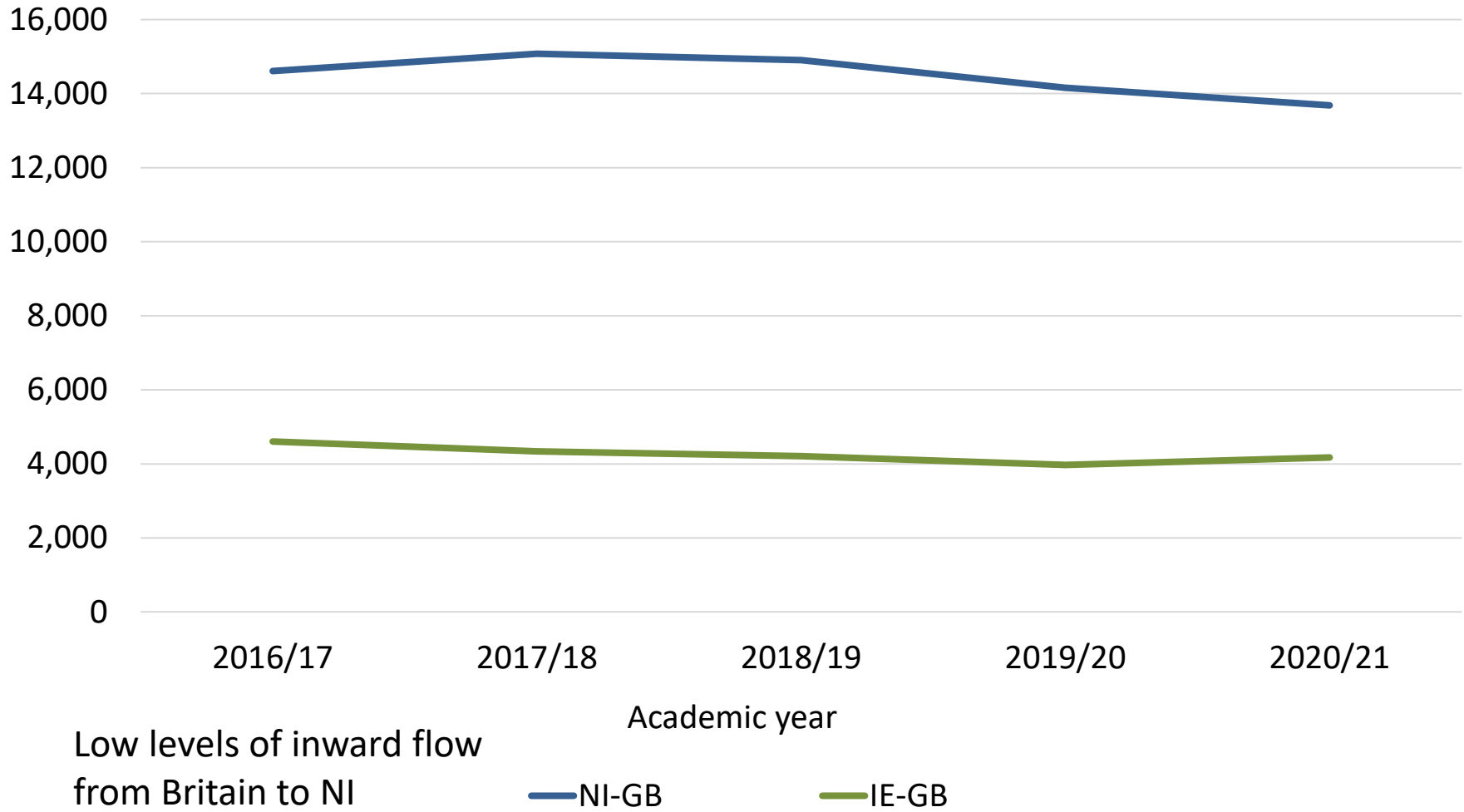
Previous research on student mobility

- Push and pull factors
- **Macro level** (Waters et al., 2011; Whittaker, 2014; West and Barham, 2009)
 - Number of HE places
 - Support for study abroad
 - Recognition of qualifications
- **Meso level** (Whittaker, 2014; Hooley and Rice, 2018; Rogers, 2020; Smyth, 2022)
 - School-based career guidance
 - Application process for HEIs
 - Social networks
- **Micro level** (Fidlay, 2011; Van Mol and Timmerman, 2014; British Council Ireland, 2022)
 - Family economic and cultural resources
 - Gender and age
- Policy documents: Joint Oireachtas Committee (2022); Royal Irish Academy (2021, 2022); British Council Ireland (2022)

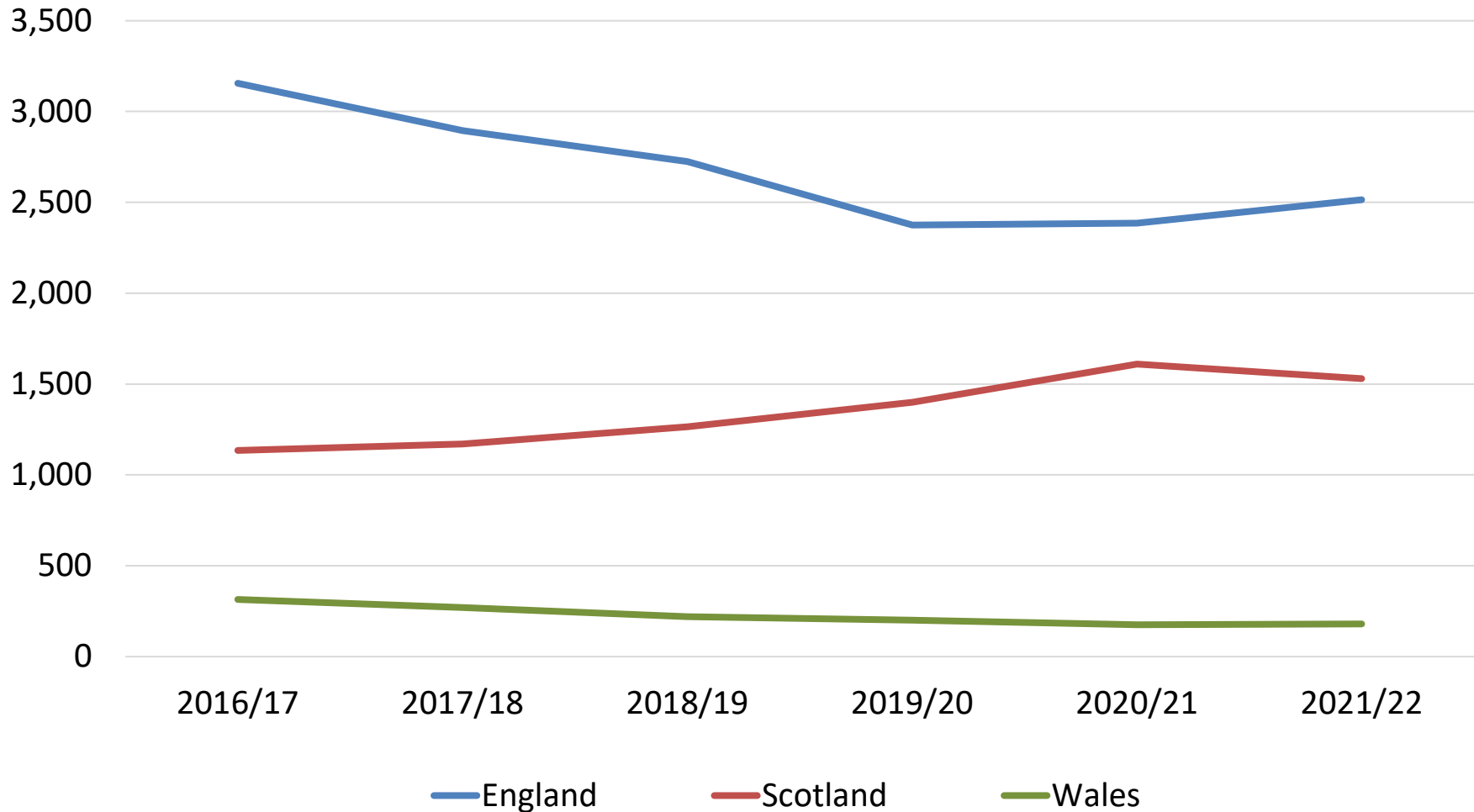
Cross-border undergraduate enrolments 2011/12-2020/21



Flow of undergraduate students from Ireland and Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK 2016/17 – 2020/21



Flow of undergraduate students from Ireland to Britain 2016/17– 2020/21



Institutional factors: Guidance

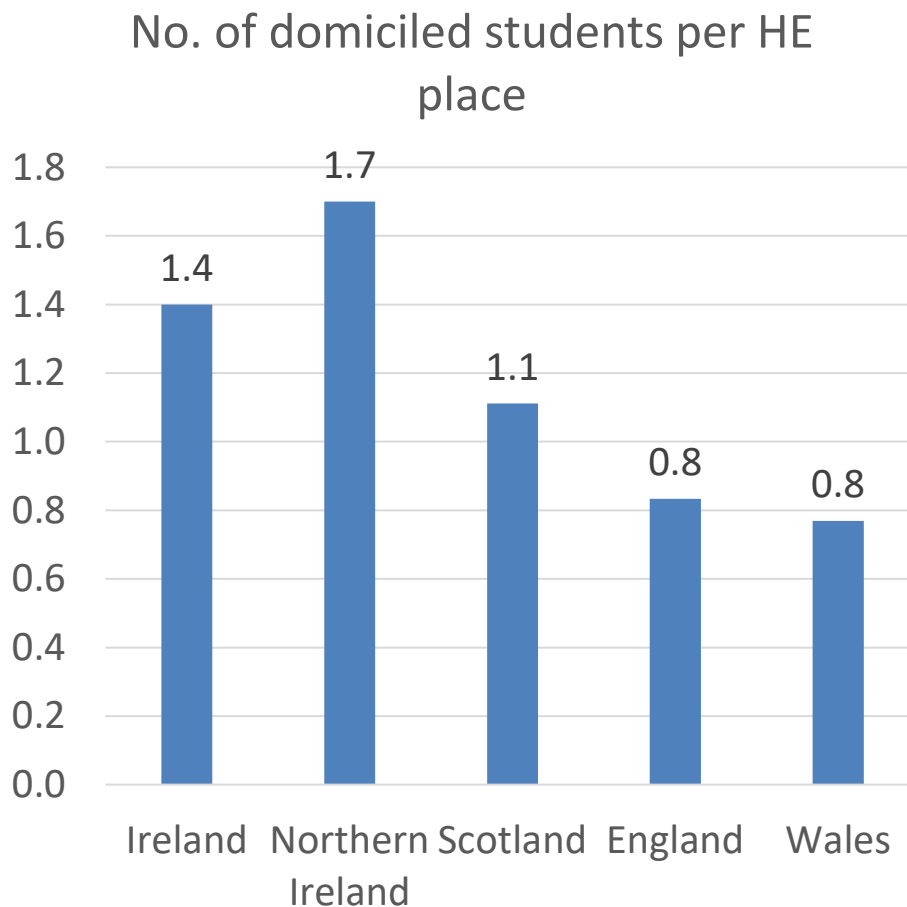
- In both systems, career/guidance teachers in the school; in NI, also external careers advisors who visit schools
- Lack of research on awareness of entry routes in other systems but overall constraint on guidance time

I think it's a lack of knowledge, lack of visibility of the Republic. Lack of understanding of our systems because ... our education systems aren't aligned. [Stakeholder, NI]

Guidance counsellors in the South having knowledge of the North and maybe of GB as well ...that would be most important in making students aware. How do you apply and the grant system and so on. [In raising awareness] the guidance counsellors are the key stakeholders that we would need to engage with. [Stakeholder, IE]

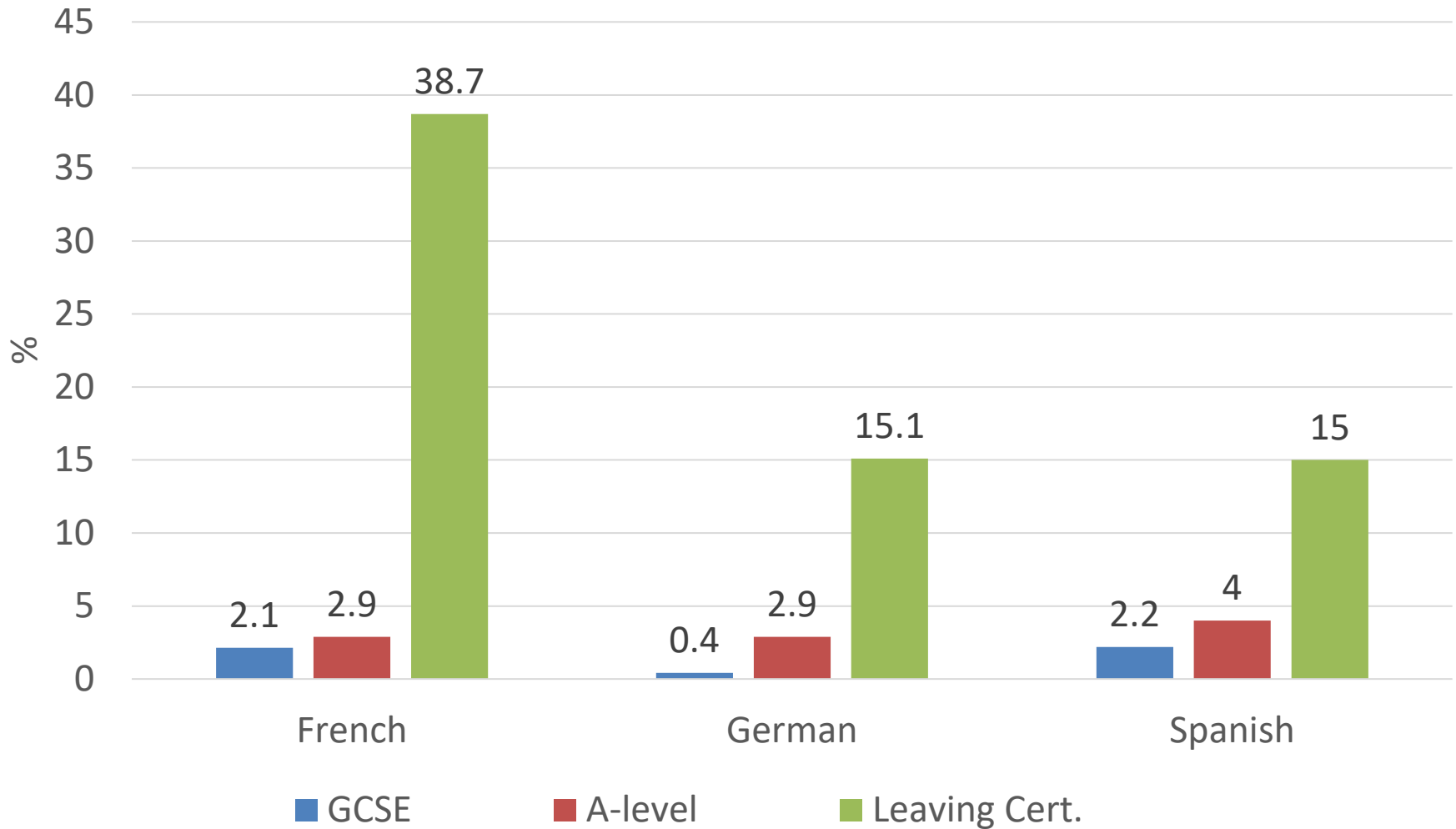
Institutional factors: Number of HE places

- Cap on places in NI for local students – mobility to rest of UK; IE candidates counted within capped numbers – potential disincentive for HEIs
- High demand for medical-related courses in both jurisdictions



- Both have centralised admission HE systems (CAO in IE, UCAS in UK)
- CAO and UCAS have set points equivalences for A-level/Leaving Certificate grades
- A-level candidates can only score maximum points in Irish system if get A* in 4 A-levels (incl. Maths)
- In 2022, only 3.6% took 4+ A-levels (CCEA)
- Foreign language needed for many courses; UK candidates can fulfil criterion using GCSE (if not language-related course)

Language take-up in both systems



Stakeholder perceptions

One of the big issues is the equivalencies. When 20 years ago, the new equivalencies were created and they were premised on the assumption that it got 600 points. You had to be doing four A-levels, which is a tiny fraction of the students in the North. And that really was a massive hindrance to mobility from North to South. (Stakeholder, IE)

Universities here in Northern Ireland are quite generous in terms of how we recognise the equivalence of Irish Leaving Cert to A-level. I don't believe that the corollary is happening. I'm really struck by how hard it is for our best and brightest students to get places in the likes of [2 HEIs in Ireland]. It's much, much harder for our students to go South than it is for your students to come here, which is why we have huge demand. (Stakeholder, NI)

Institutional factors: Criteria for HE admission (continued)

- UK – not all HEIs use tariff points with variation in specified grades across courses/providers (both NI universities set grade levels)
- UK HEIs issue conditional offers prior to final exams v. IE HEIs after Leaving Certificate results issued (August; September in post-pandemic period)

And ... the other issue we have then is the lateness of the Leaving Certificate results at the minute, [it is] extremely challenging, ... if the Leaving Certificate people meet the conditions of their offer, we're bound to give them that place. So we can't give it to the people ... from Northern Ireland because we have to hold it until we see what's happening with those. So ... there's a kind of long wait for those people. (Stakeholder, NI)

Institutional factors: financial factors

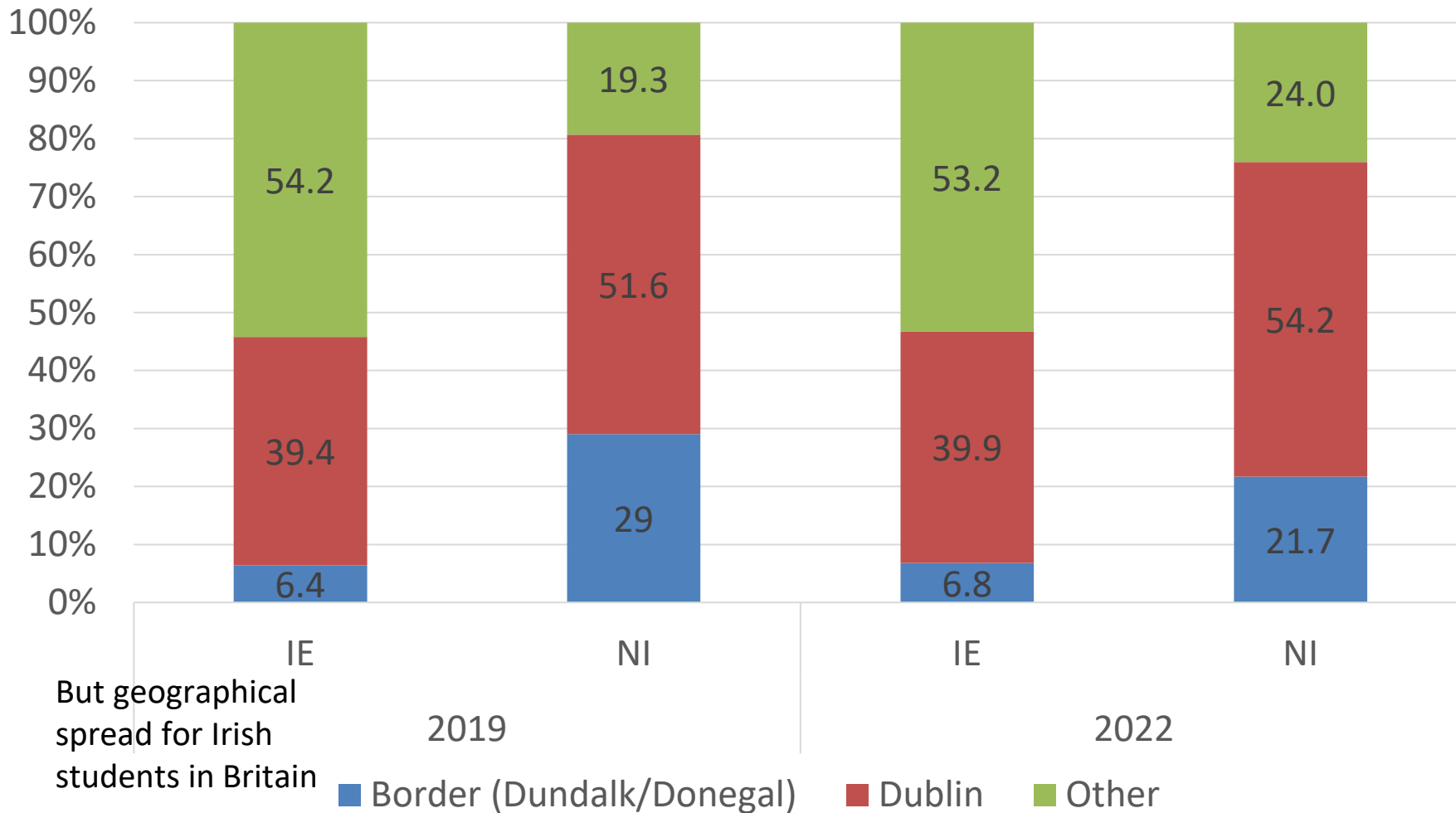
- Variation in (registration/tuition) fees across Ireland and four systems of UK
- Students from IE now charged RUK fees in Scotland
- Fees are higher for NI students studying in RUK than if they remain in NI
- IE students can get (means-tested) SUSI maintenance grant for studying in UK and can apply for UK student loans for tuition fees
- NI students in IE are eligible for SUSI fee grant but not maintenance grant; eligible for loan to cover student contribution charge

Institutional factors: financial factors (2)

- In both systems, student supports have fallen behind cost of living over time
- Increases in accommodation and cost of living
- Irish students in Irish HEIs more likely to live in the parental home than those in NI
- Difficulty in systematically comparing living costs

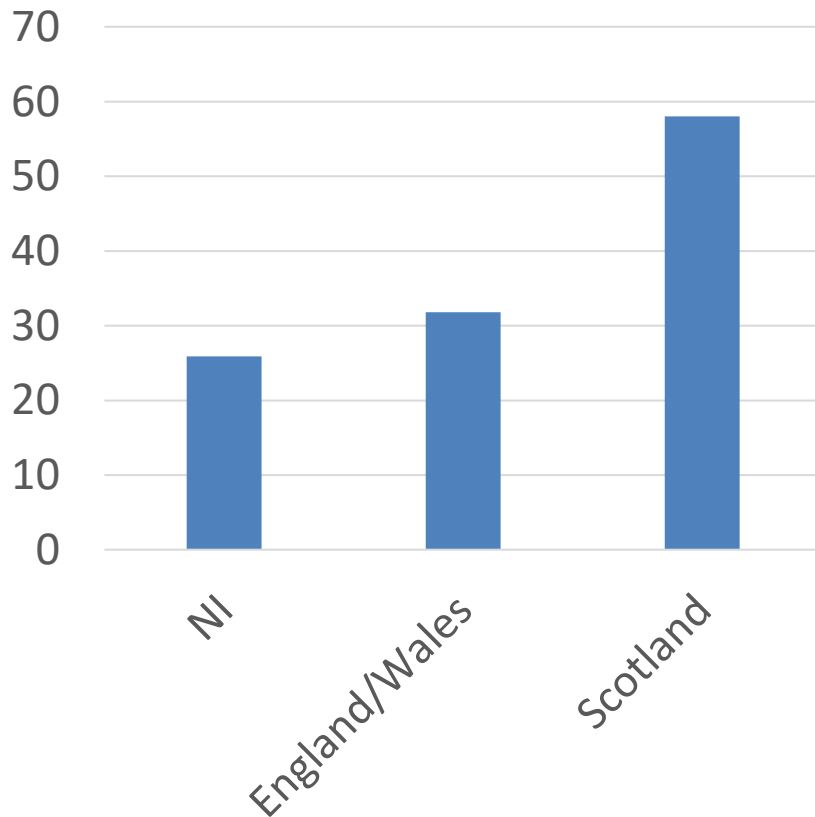
Location	On-campus accommodation (ensuite) for academic year 2023/24
Ireland	7,085 (TCD)
Northern Ireland	5,600 (QUB)
Scotland	5,764 (Edinburgh)
North-West England	6,097 (Liverpool)
London	6,784 (UCL)

Individual factors: proximity (applications)

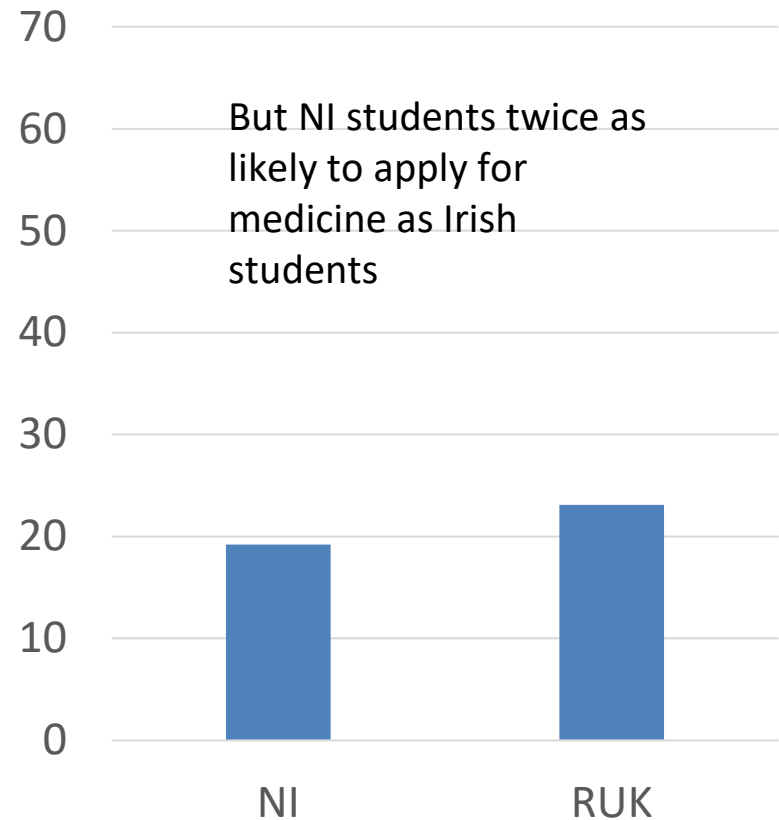


Individual factors: field of study

% of Irish students in UK
HEIs in medicine/related



% of UK students in Irish
HEIs in medicine/related



Individual factors: student characteristics

- Mobile students (in both directions) are disproportionately female
- Lack of information on the social background of mobile students – gap for future research but international research would suggest they are likely to be more socio-economically advantaged

Fall-off between applications and entry

- In both systems, ‘non-local’ students are less likely to meet course requirements – lack of awareness/guidance and potential barriers re language (and other) requirements
- But even among those who are offered a place, less likely to accept – insurance policy and difference in offer timings

Why does student mobility matter?

- Seen as desirable in terms of maximising resources, social cohesion and student choice

It's about strengthening the relationships between the institutions.... It's not so much that we're competing with each other, but that we're maximising the resources on the island to ensure that opportunities exist for students North and South on the island of Ireland. (Stakeholder, IE)

Choice is an important thing in education. People finding, you know, the right places where they will flourish and the right type of learning environment for them. And the more choice generally probably the better. (Stakeholder, NI)

As far as I'm concerned, the more interaction between North and South we can promote in this island to denude the fear and ignorance of validity, the better. (Stakeholder, IE)

Conclusions

- Levels of cross-border undergraduate student mobility are relatively low
- Role of institutional barriers
- Significant proportion of NI candidates not reaching minimum entry criteria – issue of points equivalence and requirements
- But fall-off in both jurisdictions between application and acceptance – timing and application as safety-net
- Decision-making: complex interaction of tuition/registration fees, financial supports and other living costs
- Cross-border student mobility is seen as desirable by stakeholders in terms of social cohesion, learner diversity within institutions and student choice

Implications for policy

- Greater potential to use school-based guidance in providing greater awareness of options in other jurisdictions; supported by outreach by HEIs
- Need to reconsider CAO point equivalences for A-levels and modern foreign language requirements (current working group by Universities Ireland)
- Issue of the timing of receiving course offers in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK – but less tractable
- Potential to revisit the inclusion of Irish-domiciled applicants in the MASN cap on higher education places in Northern Ireland (wider issue of HE funding)
- Broader issue of available financial supports for students
- Enhancing student mobility would require coordinated interventions across different levels of the system