

VET and professional education in health care and nursing in Ireland

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1 Introduction

The aim of this report, by the Irish partners within the project (Dublin City University), is to give a comprehensive overview of VET¹ and professional education in relation to Nurse Training Programmes currently operating within the Irish national context, thus contributing to the overall CREDICARE European macro context. Additionally this porports to explore the entry requirements from both formal (university) and informal (access courses) perspectives as illustrated in the National Framework Qualifications (NFQ) system and to draw overall comparison with the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Furthermore this report examines the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved in relation to pre and post registration² nurse training programmes available nationwide as well as outlining the role of and discussing An Bord Altranais (the regulatory board), The Nursing Careers Centre, entry requirements, programmes available, employment structure, and other relevant issues relating to the nursing education system in Ireland.

To this end, the Irish partners of this research project (Dublin City University) have proposed one nursing programme at pre-registration honours degree level from two Dublin Universities at EQF level 6 (NFQ 8). A formal questionnaire has been compiled based on the structural recommendations initiated for this project and this has been dessiminated to agreed parties to complete taking into consideration all the necessary requirements primarily outlined for exploration.

Subsequently from this, the Irish research partners provided the relevant appropriate information to explore the ‘equivalence’ process using the MLI tool and open up further valuable discussion and recommendations about transfer and progression through qualifications systems on a pan-European basis. Thus, ultimately attempting to harmonise the progress for learners to move freely between borders/countries for study/further education and work related purposes.

2 Background

2.1 Structure of vocational/professional education in nursing and health care

In parallel alignment, much reform in the overall educational structure in Ireland within the VET system has greatly influenced the way in which nursing has progressed paving the way to a multitude of routes into nursing studies by the significant national and international developments in terms of higher and further education. The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, led to the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC), and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). This learning framework relates all education and training awards to each

¹ In Ireland Vocational Educational and Training is also referred to as further and continuing education (FE/CE) as well as adult education.

² Pre-registration relates to the period of time spent in nurse education and training by the learner prior to qualifying and gaining registration with An Bord Altranais (The Irish Nursing Regulatory Board). Post-registration refers to all nurse education and training programmes at a post graduate level.

other. It brings coherence to the awards system. It establishes clearly defined standards about what a learner can be expected to achieve for each award. It introduces a new approach to the meaning of an award that will recognise learning outcomes, what a person with an award knows, can do and understands rather than time spent on the programme (An Bord Altranais, 2010). Of note, the amalgamation of FETAC, HETAC, NQAI into a new institution - Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland – is underway which is an important step in consolidating the governance structure for implementation of comprehensive NFQ (Department of Education, 2011).

The Irish situation relating to Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the progression issues relating to higher education are, on the surface, not entirely seamless. In Ireland, Vocational Education & Training (VET) embraces education and training which occurs primarily after second-level schooling and mainly in further and continuing education sector. VET also occurs in some tertiary educational environments. Appendix 1 - illustrates the Irish education system.

In Ireland a distinctive feature of further and vocational education generally is its diversity and breadth of provision and its linkages with other services such as employment, training, area partnership welfare, youth, school, juvenile liaison, justice and community and voluntary sector interests. Coincidentally, a wide range of Government Departments, statutory agencies and voluntary and community based organisations provide services in this area which adds a greater complexity to the educational system in a whole. Vocational education and training in Ireland is not only about employability, it also espouses the key concepts of life-long learning.

It is seen both in policy and structural terms as being one of the main pillars essential to the building and maintaining of a highly skilled work force operating within a knowledge society (Harper & Fox, 2003).

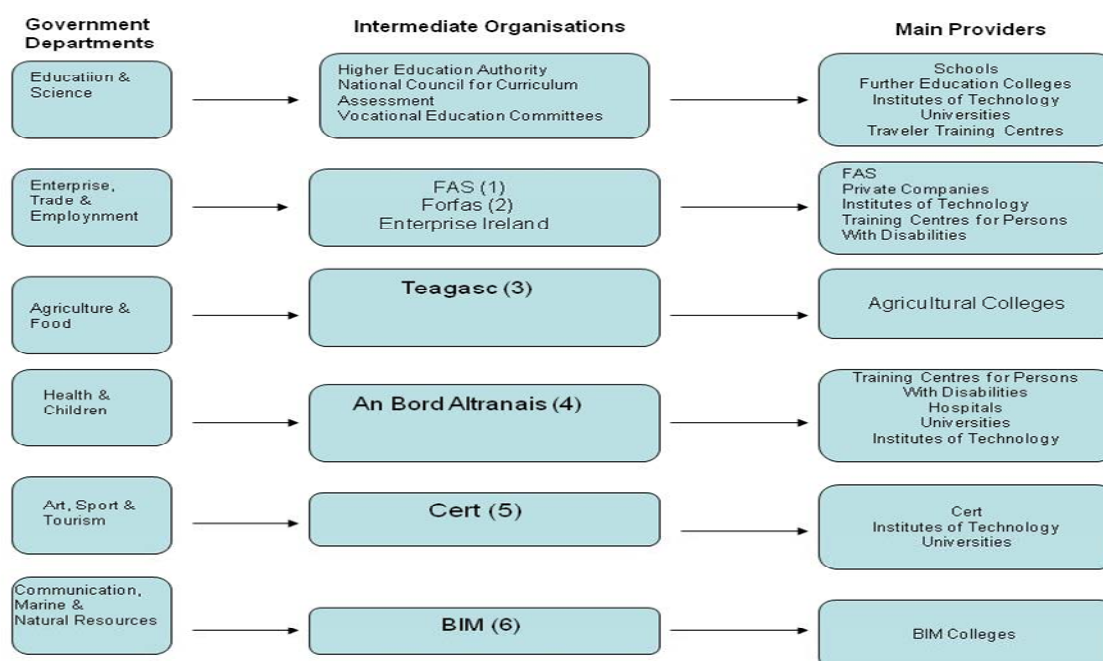


Fig. 1: Vocational education and training: administrative structure (source: Harper & Fox, 2003)

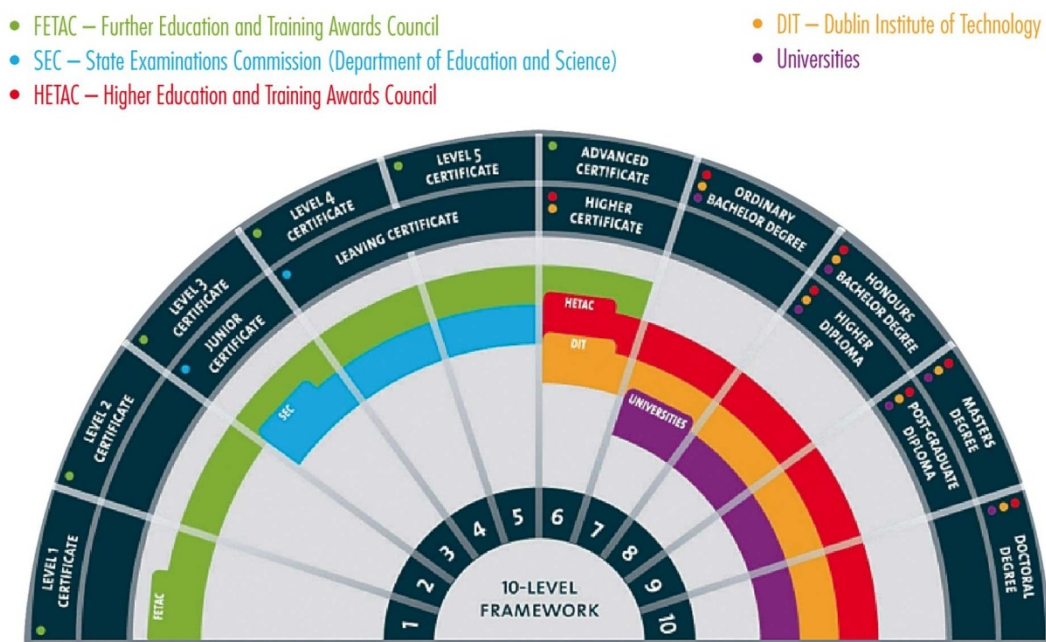
Legend:

- (1) The Training & Employment Authority
- (2) The National Policy Board for Enterprise, Trade, Science, Technology and Innovation.

- (3) Agriculture and Food Development Authority
- (4) The Nursing Board
- (5) Council for Education, Recruitment, Training (Hotels, Catering and Tourism industry), now Failte Ireland.
- (6) The Sea Fisheries.

2.2 The National Framework of Qualifications

The National Framework of Qualifications has been developed and maintained by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, which was set up in 2001 by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and governed by the Health Education Authority (HEA, 2005). The clearest way to explain the framework is through examining a visual representation of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.



This diagram illustrates the national Framework of Qualifications. It is a 10-level framework. The award types are listed on the outer rings of the diagram. The awarding bodies (e.g. FETAC, State Examinations Commission SEC, etc.) are shown as coloured bands going across the spokes.

Fig. 2: Irish National Framework of Qualifications (source: NQAI 2004).

The NFQ sets the overall standards of the awards of FETAC and HETAC as well as accommodating the awards of the Universities. The Framework is the single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other, and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards. The Framework of Qualifications comprises 10 levels, award types, level indicators (expressed as learning outcomes) and related policies on access, transfer and progression, including the Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit and is designed to facilitate the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system based on learning units (FETAC, 2007). It is also worth highlighting how the various Awarding bodies award qualifications within the various sectors from VET (FE/CE) through to HE. This is important as there is a crossover of awarding bodies at NFQ level 6 (EQF level 5).

The framework is based on learning outcomes that are determined by standards of knowledge, skill and competence. The higher education and training awards are at levels 6 to 10. Vocational Education and Training is not explicitly described within the Framework and this can straddle Levels 4 to 8 (EQF 4-6). Within the Nurse Education spectrum, this applies to Health Care Studies & Pre Nursing Courses level 5 (EQF 4) specifically and is designed to provide a foundation in the theory and practice of Health Science for graduates. Graduates who have successfully completed the Nursing Studies Course are eligible for consideration for academic progression routes in Nursing and related Health Studies in Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland. Combined with an award as stated above and a written examination in some instances affords the candidate the opportunity to progress to pre-registration Nursing in third level institutions. Furthermore, in order to gain employment as a health care assistant, FETAC 5 accomplishment is a strong recommendation by The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to practice in a health care setting. “All newly recruited care staff and those in post less than one year commence training to FETAC level 5 or equivalent within 2 years of taking up employment” (HIQA, 2009).

Nursing and Midwifery is located solely in higher education. Registration programmes are placed at level 8 on the NQAI framework of qualifications. An Bord Altranais recognises that Registered Nurses and Midwives as competent professionals practice at level 8 (EQF 6). Registered Nurses and Midwives teach, supervise, assess and support pre-registration students to achieve competence at level 8 at the point of registration (An Bord Altranais, 2010). Pre-registration into these courses commences at NFQ 6 (EQF 5). The post registration educational standards for clinical nurse specialists and advanced nurse practice posts have been set at levels 8 & 9 respectively (EQF 6 & 7). Additionally, level 10 (EQF 8) is concerned with The Nursing Doctorate programmes available. The frameworks for clinical specialists and advanced practice posts have been effective in streamlining the approval process and making it transparent from an awards viewpoint. This has been achieved through leadership from the National Council for the Professional Development of Nurses and Midwives, the establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications, investment by The Department of Health & Children and effective collaboration between Health Service and the academic education providers.

Higher education within Ireland is a broad system that encompasses the University sector, the colleges of education, the institutes of technology, and private, independent colleges. The Universities, Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Education are largely funded by the state through the HEA (Higher Education Authority), while others are funded and managed by a range of private bodies, including religious orders. The focus of this report is on the Universities that provide bachelor degrees of Science in Nursing. From a national objective, there is an impetus to move towards a ‘lifelong learning society’ in which learners can avail of learning opportunities at various stages throughout their lives and within the nursing context this is clearly visible.

Developing and enhancing a culture of educational excellence, lifelong learning and procedures to implement access, transfer and progression are key features of recent legislative instruments in the education sector internationally (An Bord Altranais, 2010). Ireland’s higher education system has played a major role in the development of Irish society and the economy, and has an even more critical role to play in the coming

decades as we seek to rebuild an innovative knowledge-based economy that will provide sustainable employment opportunities and good standards of living for all our citizens. Its role in enabling every citizen to realise their full potential and in generating new ideas through education and research area will be the foundation for wider developments in society (Department of Education, 2011).

Ireland was the first EU member state to reference its national framework of qualifications to the EQF. The final report referencing report was adopted by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in May 2009. Below is the referencing framework devised and highlighted within are the levels that Nursing crosses over.

(NFQ) Irish National Qualification Framework Levels	(EQF) European Qualification Framework levels
10	8
9	7
8	6
7	6
6	5
5	4
4	3
3	2
2	1
1	1

Level 6/7/8 – Undergraduate Nurse Training Programmes.

Level 8/9/10 – Postgraduate Courses up to Doctorate Level 10.

Tab. 1: Referencing from Irish NFQ to the EQF (source: NQAI 2009, p. 41)

2.3 The history of nursing in Ireland

The Education and Training of nurses and midwives in Ireland has undergone fundamental change over the last twenty years. Historically, nursing education was very much aligned with individual hospitals and in the early 1990's Centre's for Nurse Education were organised as such. Training was frequently imbued with the distinctive culture of the individual hospitals and consisted, in effect, of an apprenticeship scheme where a large number of young trainee nurses learned their skills from a small number of senior nurses while being an integral part of the workforce, undertaking all aspects of care within the hospital ward.

Many of these student nurses were working in religious controlled hospitals where the regimen and restrictions imposed by their superiors originated from the religious community. Three years of hospital duty rosters combined with blocks of class work in between (usually six weeks per year), and a final exam yielded a certificate in nursing studies i.e. A Registered General Nurse (RGN). From 1996, nursing moved to diploma based courses and became aligned with associated third level universities and VET's. Following the recommendation of a Commission on Nursing (Government of Ireland 1998) nursing and midwifery became the first country in Europe to adopt graduate

entry into the profession. As a result a since 2002 entry into the profession requires students to complete a 4 year fulltime Honours degree (NQF 8).

In order to practice nursing as a profession, every nurse must register with the nursing regulatory board, An Bord Altranais and continue to remain on a live register of nurses with yearly subscriptions.

An Bord Altranais (The board) established in June 1951, as the sole statutory regulatory body for nursing up to this point, began making revolutionary changes to work in alliance with newly found stakeholders to ensure that the nursing profession gained academic accolades and recognition within the Irish education system at large.

2.4 Nursing in Ireland in the twenty-first century

In response to the Commission on Nursing Report (1998) and the Health Service Reform Programme – Quality and Fairness – A Health Service for you (2001), today pre-registration nursing and midwifery education is firmly embedded in third level institutions. Pre-registration nursing and midwifery education now consists of a four year BSC programme in recognised third level institutions. Further programmes include:

- Higher diplomas
- Post graduate diplomas
- Masters Degrees
- Doctoral Degrees

The development of a graduate education structure for registration has greatly changed the expectations of nursing in relation to academic awards and recognition for education undertaken (An Bord Altranais, 2010). Pre-Registration nursing and midwifery education has undergone considerable evolution since the late 1990's.

Additionally access courses into nursing studies and care assistance programmes still remain at large within the VET structure and private institutions. These provide a platform for a diversity of learners to gain the knowledge/skills & competence to persue further education or indeed to simply upskill within their particular current working environment.

The National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery in Ireland (The National Council) was established in 2001 following the report on the Commission on Nursing to devise & implement an educational strategy for the professional development of nurses and midwives so that nurses could continue to contribute significantly to the positive health of the nation. Their mission statement being to “promote and develop the professional role of nurses and midwifery care to patients/clients in a changing healthcare environment” (National Council, 2003). In conjunction with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) & national stakeholders, this has been achieved through the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

2.5 An Bord Altranais

In order gain a clear understanding of nurse training programmes within the overall context of professional health education in Ireland, An Bord Altranais must be considered as having played a significant role regards nurse education. This body has been integral to addressing items such as nurse registration, regulation, structural and work changes, segmentation of grades, training & education requirements, promotional

opportunities and general assistance with the evolving profession of nursing particularly in the last decade.

An Bord Altranais (the board) is the statutory regulatory body for nursing and midwifery in Ireland. The primary function of the board is to promote the highest standards of professional educational conduct among nurses and midwives. Part IV 36 (1) (d) of the Nurses Act, 1985 states that “The board shall, from time to time as occasion may require but, in any event, not less than once every five years, satisfy itself as to the adequacy and suitability of post registration courses for nurses provided by bodies recognised by the board for that purpose”.

Roles and responsibilities include:

- To provide for the education and training of nurses and student nurses.
- The Board has statutory responsibility to approve providers and Health Care Institutions in respect of post registration nursing and midwifery education programmes/units of learning.
- To establish and maintain a register of nurses nationally.
- To inquire into the conduct of a registered nurse on the grounds of alleged professional misconduct or alleged unfitness to engage in such practice by reason of physical or mental disability.
- To give guidance to the profession.
- To manage the Nursing Careers Centre, which was set up in 1998 to facilitate a centralised system of processing and selection of applicants wishing to enter nursing and market nursing as a career; provide career information to registered nurses and midwives.

The present board was established under the Nurses Act, 1985. It consists of twenty-nine members, seventeen of whom are nurses and midwives elected by the nursing profession and the remainder, appointed by the Minister for Health, are representative of the Department of Health, The Medical Profession, The Management of the Health Services, educational interests and the general public.

Upon successful completion of an education programme, a student nurse/midwife may apply to be added to the appropriate part of the register maintained by An Bord Altranais. The attention of the applicant is drawn to the provision of Section 28 (5) of the Nurses Act, 1985 whereby:

“Nothing in this section shall operate to prevent the Board from refusing to register the name of any person, who is otherwise entitled to be registered, on the grounds of the unfitness of that person to engage in the practice of nursing”.

At a National Level the Board has established alliances with:

- The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
- The Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- The Further Education and Training Awards Council
- The National University of Ireland and the Constituent colleges
- University of Dublin Trinity College
- University College Dublin
- Dublin City University
- University of Limerick

- The Institutes of Technology
- The Department of Education and Science and
- The Department of Health and Children.
- Vocational Education Communities
- Private Educational Institutions
- Academic Teaching Hospitals
- Private Nursing Homes
- The Higher Education Authority

2.6 Employment structure

Around 226,000 individuals work in the health sector in Ireland (HSE, 2009). Most of these, 130,000 work in the health service. Approximately 70% of these are made up of the nursing profession. This is illustrated in table 2 below where it can be seen that there are currently 67,130 nurses on the active live register with An Board.

Nurses Registered					
	Active	Inactive	Female	Male	Total
Number of Nurses	66,888	25,838	85,525	7,201	92,726
Qualifications Registered					
	Female	Male	Active	Inactive	Total
Adv Midwife Practitioner	4	0	4	0	4
Adv Nurse Practitioner	91	21	109	3	112
Children's	5,441	88	4,220	1,309	5,529
General	73,308	3,639	55,433	21,514	76,947
Intellectual Disability	5,094	584	4,727	951	5,678
Midwives	18,052	27	11,850	6,229	18,079
Nurse Prescriber	526	6	481	51	532
Psychiatric	9,717	3,870	9,223	4,364	13,587
Public Health	3,303	9	2,402	910	3,312
Tutors'	695	126	604	217	821
Other	553	25	154	424	578
Total	116,784	8,395	89,207	35,972	125,179
Number of Newly Registered Qualifications					
	Ireland	EU	Others	Total	
Adv Midwife Practitioner	0	0	0	0	
Adv Nurse Practitioner	15	0	0	15	
Children's	147	3	0	150	
General	1,002	315	95	1,412	
Intellectual Disability	189	5	0	194	
Midwives	253	17	0	270	
Nurse Prescriber	145	0	0	145	
Psychiatric	273	27	0	300	
Public Health	73	0	0	73	
Tutors'	24	1	0	25	
Total	2,121	368	95	2,584	

Verification Requests		
	2012	2011
United Kingdom	727	725
Other EU	28	62
Australia	770	1,214
Canada	136	173
United States of America	77	111
Other non-EU	127	98
Total Requests	1,865	2,383
Total Nurses	1,591	2,059
Inactive File		
	2012	2011
Retired	11,218	10,472
Unemployed	1,052	1,013
Career Break	2,251	2,227
Working Abroad	6,945	6,513
Other	4372	4,345
Total	25,838	24,570

Tab. 2: *An Bord Altranais – Register of Nursing Statistics 2012*

Peak employment levels in the Irish Health service were seen in 2007 and since then, staffing levels have reduced by over 8,700. With current budgetary constraints, the European economic downturn and the current ‘moratorium’ on staffing levels within the Irish Health Service, we will continue to see significant reductions in frontline nursing professionals – approx 1,612 staff this year alone (HSE, 2012).

The Public Service Agreement (2010 – 2014) is the framework for delivering significant change across the public sector. Within the health service, it provides the framework to transform, modernise and minimise reductions in the health services by facilitating a reduction in staff numbers, increasing efficiency and productivity, reducing cost and improving quality and assisting Government’s change agenda and reforms (HSE, 2012). As a result work force planning and a strategy for sustainability of same has been an imperative of the HSE (Health Service Executive) given the current economic climate. The overall goal of this strategy is to ensure that strategic and operational planning processes are established as key activities in the health service (HSE 2009/2012). It provides the framework for workforce planning decisions that will lead to better outcomes. Furthermore, it highlights that workforce planning must be integrated with service and financial planning and outlines the principles for guiding better workforce planning decisions.

2.7 The Nursing Careers Centre and nursing programmes

Set up under the management of An Bord Altranais in November 1998, the Nursing Careers Centre (NCC) is responsible for:

1. The processing of mature code applications to the Pre-Registration Honours Degree Programmes.
2. The Promotion and Marketing of Nursing and Midwifery.
3. The Provision of information to Registered Nurses and Midwives (NCC 1998).

	Title	Duration	Leading to Registration
1	Children's & General Nursing (integrated)	4.5 years	Registered Children's Nurse (RCN) & Registered General Nurse (RGN)
2	General Nursing	4 years	Registered General Nurse (RGN)
3	Intellectual Disability Nursing	4 years	Registered Nurse Intellectual Disability (RNID)
4	Midwifery	4 years	Registered Midwife (RM)
5	Psychiatric Nursing	4 years	Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN)

Tab. 3: Programmes leading to registration with An Bord Altranais

As illustrated above there are five programmes leading to registration maintained with An Bord Altranais. All of these programmes are at level 8 Honours Bachelor Degree (NQAI, 2004) and representing the entry level into the profession in Ireland. The academic award is Bachelor of Science (BSc). In addition the Board provides for registration in 6 areas on a post-registration basis (i.e. candidates must hold one of the registrations outlined above already). These are

1. Post registration Children's Nursing/ Post registration Midwifery
2. Registration as a Clinical Nurse Specialist
3. Registered Nurse Tutor
4. Registration as a Public Health Nursing
5. Registered Nurse Prescriber
6. Advanced Nurse Practitioner /Advanced Midwife Practitioner

2.8 Number of programmes and places nationally yearly

All of the above programmes take place in 13 HEI's (Higher Education Institutes) in association with 57 main Healthcare Agencies (Hospitals/Clinical Sites).

There are 44 programmes with a total of 1570 places in nursing and Midwifery at pre-registration level:

Programmes	Description
Children's & General Nursing (integrated)	4 Programmes, with a total of 100 places, in 4 HEI's in association with 4 main Healthcare Agencies
General Nursing	14 Programmes, with a total of 860 places, in 13 HEI's in association with 22 main Healthcare Agencies
Intellectual Disability Nursing	8 Programmes, with a total of 180 places, in 8 HEI's in association with 10 main Healthcare Agencies
Midwifery	6 Programmes, with a total of 140 places, in 6 HEI's in association with 7 main Healthcare Agencies
Psychiatric Nursing	12 Programmes, with a total of 290 places, in 12 HEI's in association with 14 main Healthcare Agencies

Tab. 4: Description of Nursing Programmes

All applications into pre-registration nursing in Ireland are made through the Central Applications Office (CAO) (www.cao.ie).

2.9 An Bord Altranais education entry requirements

The Nurses Rules, 2010, 6.1 provide that:

Before admission to a programme leading to Registration in the Register of Nurses the applicant must:

(a) have obtained in the leaving certificate examination a minimum grade of C3 in two higher level papers and a minimum grade of D3 in four ordinary of higher level papers in the following subjects:

- Irish or English
- Mathematics
- A Laboratory Science subject (Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Physics & Chemistry of Agricultural Science)
- Three other subjects

OR

(b) have achieved the equivalent minimum educational attainments to the foregoing, such equivalent attainments to be adjudicated upon by the Higher Education Authority established under the Higher Education Act, 1971 (No. 22 of 1971).

OR

(c) meet the minimum educational requirements specified by the third level institution concerned for entry to the course provided that such requirements are not a lower standard than those set out in sub-paragraph (a) above (NCC, 2012).

Additional requirements may be specified by individual Universities or IOTs.

3 Description of selected qualification

3.1 General overview

For the purpose of this research a Degree of Bachelor of Science (Nursing) Hons has been selected and this qualification equates to NQF level 8 (240 ECTS) and/or level 6 on the European Framework.

3.2 Knowledge, skills and competencies

The graduates are expected to possess the following knowledge, skills and competencies at the end of the programme:

- To educate and train the student to degree-level knowledge and practice competence.
- To develop in the student a range of competencies in pre-specified domains of competence.
- To provide a professional education for the student within the statutory framework of the professional regulatory body.
- To develop in the student the capacities for the performance of a professional nursing role.
- To develop the student as a knowledgeable, skilled and caring professional practitioner of nursing, capable of acting independently in the provision of nursing service.
- To develop the students of professional awareness and professional responsibility and accountability.
- To develop in the student the capacities for critical thinking and critical self appraisal.
- To enable the student to value learning as a continuous and a necessary process in the context of his/her professional role.

- To develop the student as a clinical leader.
- To contribute to the personal growth and development of the student.

3.3 Typical work tasks and areas of responsibility of the graduates

The Degree of Bachelor of Science (Nursing) provides a professional education within the relevant regulatory and academic framework to degree-level knowledge and practice competency. In so doing, the programme aims to prepare professional registered practitioners with the capacities for the performance of a professional nursing role, who are capable of acting independently in the provision of nursing service, and who have a strong professional and academic orientation. Graduates will typically be employed as registered general nurses in the public and private health care systems in Ireland and further afield.

Year 1	Scientific Principles for Healthcare	5 ECTS
	Structure and function of the Human Body, Part A	5 ECTS
	Psychology & Interpersonal Skills	5 ECTS
	Foundations of General Nursing, Part A	5 ECTS
	(Elective #1) Elective of student's choosing	5 ECTS
	(Elective #2) Elective of student's choosing	5 ECTS
	Structure and function of the Human Body, Part B	5 ECTS
	Social Science for Healthcare	5 ECTS
	Perspectives on Nursing	5 ECTS
	Foundations of General Nursing, Part B	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Induction 1	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Induction 11	5 ECTS
Year 2	Patient Safety, Microbiology, Infection Control Pharmacology	5 ECTS
	General Nursing (medical-surgical nursing 1)	5 ECTS
	Specialist Services	5 ECTS
	(Elective #1) Elective of student's choosing	5 ECTS
	(Elective #2) Elective of student's choosing	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Accident & Emergency	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Child Care & Paediatrics	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Care of Older Persons	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Mental Health	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Maternity Care	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Nursing Home	5 ECTS

Year 3	Clinical Placement Operating Theatres	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placment Out patients Department	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement High Dependency	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Medical-surgical 1	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Medical-surgical 2	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement Medical-surgical 3	5 ECTS
	General Nursing (Medical-surgical 2)	5 ECTS
	General Nursing (Medical-surgical 3)	5 ECTS
	Applied Social Science for Healthcare	5 ECTS
	Biopsychosocial Approaches	5 ECTS
	(Elective #1) Elective of student's choosing	5 ECTS
	(Elective #2) Elective of student's choosing	5 ECTS
Year 4	Nursing in Diverse Settings	5 ECTS
	Medical/Surgical 1V	5 ECTS
	Teaching and Accessing in Practicum	5 ECTS
	Promoting Health	5 ECTS
	Management and Quality Improvements	5 ECTS
	Evidence Based Practice	10 ECTS
	Clinical Placement, Part 4A (internship)	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement, Part 4B (internship)	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement, Part 4C (internship)	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement, Part 4D (internship)	5 ECTS
	Clinical Placement, Part 4E (internship)	5 ECTS
		240 ECTS

Total Hours of instruction 4,472 hours.

Tab. 5: Organisation of the educational programme including modules and ECTS points

3.4 Teaching and learning methods

It is acknowledged that there is a relationship between teaching styles and approaches and the learning styles and approaches of the learner, including the learner's orientation to learning, and the learner's perceptions of the learning situation and the learning task. A variety of learning experiences are provided, including modified lectures, tutorials, and seminars and these are complemented by a range of student-centred methods, such as student-led workshops and discussions. In order to promote learning through reflection on experience, guided reflection in the practicum and critical incident technique are deployed. Student learning is supported by a range of web-based resources. The focus of clinical instruction is the development of competencies, through the application of knowledge and the learning of specific clinical skills, generally for use in the practicum. Teaching-learning strategies for facilitating the development of clinical competencies employ a combination of supervised practice in the practicum and instruction in the clinical skills laboratory, using a variety of methods, such as stimulation exercises, role play and team teaching. Each student is expected to assume responsibility for his/her own learning, with academic and clinical personnel

acting as facilitators of learning. The teaching-learning process emphasised student engagement, meaningful immersion in subject content and independent learning, and students are supported in making conceptual links between subjects and across theoretical and practice-based modules.

3.5 Assessment and certification

Learning takes place in almost equal measures between clinical instruction in health service providers (hospitals, community settings etc) and university based lectures, classes, tutorials and library based activity.

There are a multitude of methods used for the assessment of the learners' knowledge, skills and competencies. These include:

- Exams (Essay form & Multiple Choice Questions),
- Group Project work,
- Clinical skills assessment,
- Poster presentation,
- Oral Presentation,
- Clinical Competence assessment,
- Online Assessment,
- Assignments.

Each module must be passed in order to be eligible for the final award. There is therefore no final summative exam. Continuous assessment forms part of this ongoing process of evaluation also. In alignment with this, grade point averages is a standardised grading system used that takes an average from results gleaned over a specified period of time.

Trusting that all the above is on order, each student is awarded a certificate in Bachelor of Science (BSc) Nursing and becomes a Registered General Nurse on paying an annual registration fee to An Bord Altranais. It is a mandatory requirement for every practising nurse to register prior to taking a nursing post/contract.

3.6 Transition points and perspectives

All potential candidates must apply through the Central Applications Office (CAO) Ireland to access this nurse training programme with the minimum requirements as set out by the regulatory body of An Bord Altranais. Additionally, following graduation from this degree programme there are multiple opportunities for transition to further education, e.g medicine or other nurse specialisms.

Obviously, nursing graduates are eligible to apply for further study in nursing (many progress to level 9 courses such as MSc or Graduate Diplomas). There are opportunities to participate in the relatively newly devised 'Practice Nurse Practitioner' training programmes that affords roles and responsibilities similar that of a junior doctor. Similarly all graduates can apply to other courses and degrees in various university settings in accordance with their level 8 status.

Many graduates do end up working abroad but they work as nurses in broadly similar roles. Within the EU, they are eligible for registration as nurses in all other states under the mutual recognition arrangements.

3.7 Summary

This report clearly illustrates how the integration of nurse training programmes into higher education has come to be firmly embedded in the Irish educational structure. It outlines how the National Framework of Qualifications operates and carefully monitors the levels applicable within nursing practice plus potential to further learning opportunities from both a formal & informal entry point. Further, It highlights how An Bord Altranais has a pivotal role to play concerning education, regulations and standards and how this Board works across a multitude of sectors in this ongoing endeavour.

This report also emphasises the uniqueness of the Irish system of transfer, progression and ongoing developments within the nursing healthcare system as it permeates successfully between a somewhat parallel education system (VET & Universities). Moreover this shared ownership illustrates how the system continues to work to improve standards both nationally and internationally to provide the highest quality, sustainable education for undergraduates, adult learners and post-graduate healthcare professionals alike.

4 Results of MLI assessments in health care and nursing in Ireland

The final section of this document describes in detail the potential case study for the equivalence check (meso level). It concerns one nurse training programme at pre-registration honours degree level NFQ 8 (EQF level 6) chosen from an Irish University and information gleaned from a questionnaire devised in cognisance of the structural recommendations set out initially within this overall project context.

4.1 Implementation of the MLI procedure

The designed equivalence check i.e. the Learning Outcome Matrix (LOM) and the Module Level Indicator (MLI) toolkit was utilized to analyse and evaluate learning outcomes in the field of Health Care, in particular focusing on a BSc General Nursing Studies programme. The implementation of the MLI toolkit was for the most part carried out by a field expert accompanied by interviews and a questionnaire completed by a University Lecturer responsible for delivering this curriculum within the BSc Programme. Additionally information was gleaned from the extensive online information available. Further clarification where necessary was sought from the initial Credicare MLI-FAQ sheet supplied, which provided supplementary information regarding how to accurately and effectively apply the MLI tool.

4.2 Selection of modules

As aforementioned, there are 31 modules (units of learning) including 8 practical/clinical placements ranging from 5 – 30 ects (240 ects in total). The duration consists of a 4 year fulltime undergraduate training programme. Arguably in comparison to some other partner countries, the volume of modules there within is significantly higher.

4.3 Results of the MLI procedure

The qualitative analysis illustrates overall a very high MLI level – an average of 7.1 across all 31 modules. Infact 22 modules score an MLI greater than 7 with only nine

module MLI's scoring in the high 6's. This would appear to mitigate against the assumption that this BSc Irish Nursing programme is pitched at EQF level 6.

4.3.1 The top three highest MLI score findings

- 7.86 – Across 20 modules, all in 'Consideration of Social and Ethical Issues'.
- 7.73 – Across 23 modules, all in 'Problem solving'.
- 7.39 – Across 30 modules, all in 'Communicative Competence'.

Notably, there are consistently high scores evidenced in areas such as 'consideration of Social and Ethical Issues', 'Problem Solving' and 'Communicative Competence'.

In particular, the clinical learning/placements modules in hospital glean very high results regarding all three competencies. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate this clearly.

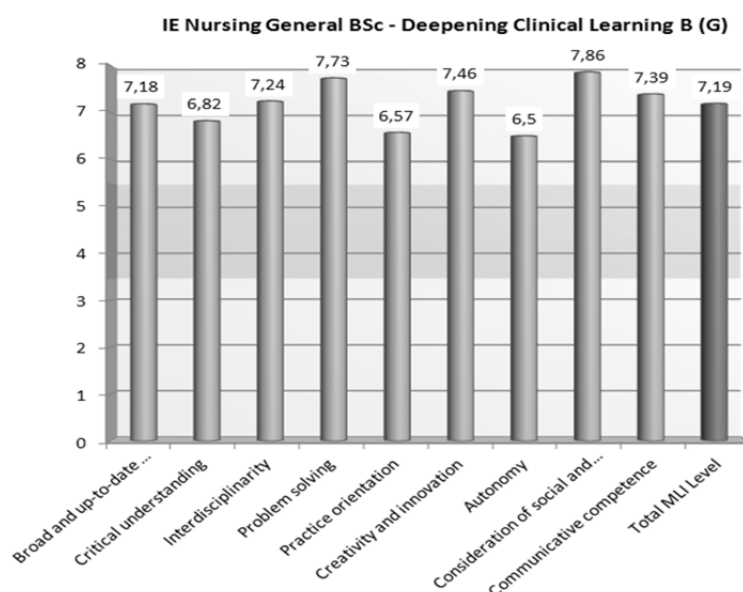


Fig. 3: IE Nursing General BSc – Deepening clinical learning B (G)

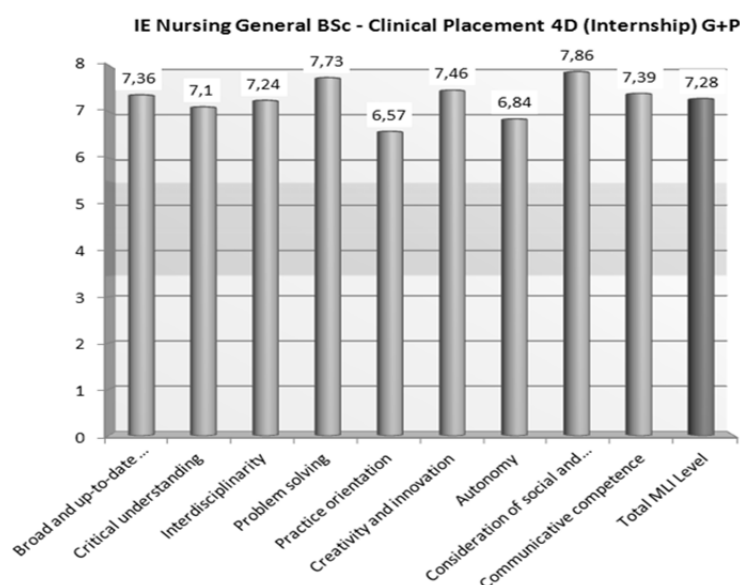


Fig. 4: IE Nursing General BSc – Clinical Placement 4D (Internship) G&P

These particular competencies would indeed confirm the professional profile and nature of Nursing and support the ongoing developments within Healthcare & Nursing in Ireland particularly considering the close interconnectivity between ethical/social issues and problem solving. On a day to day basis, it is assumed that the professional nurse is challenged by these fundamental competencies at ward level and moreover underpinned by effective communication with the patient/family and the Multidisciplinary Team alike. A further explanation for the high MLI scores is the high level of teaching practice across all Universities. Lecturers are at very least expected to have a MS.c in Nursing Studies or equivalent and preferably a PHD. In general they focus on one particular module/subject and specialise in this area imparting the latest research and up to date knowledge in their chosen field. Additional as evidenced in Figure 5 – Teaching and accessing in the practicum, this module aims to deepen students understanding of teaching and learning in nursing and midwifery practice and prepare them for their role as practice educators.

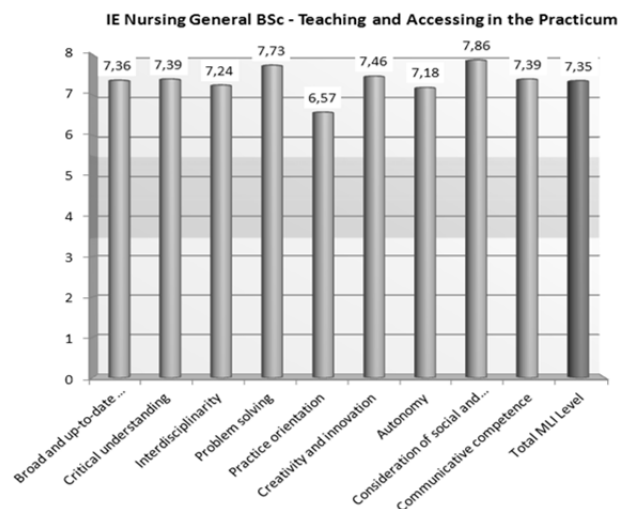


Fig. 5: IE Nursing General BSc – Teaching and Assessing in the Practicum

4.3.2 The lowest three MLI score findings

- 5.01 – Social Science for Healthcare in 'Practice Orientation'.
- 5.48 – Patient Safety, Microbiology & Infection in 'Creativity & Innovation'.
- 5.48 - Deepening Clinical Learning A (G) in 'Autonomy'.

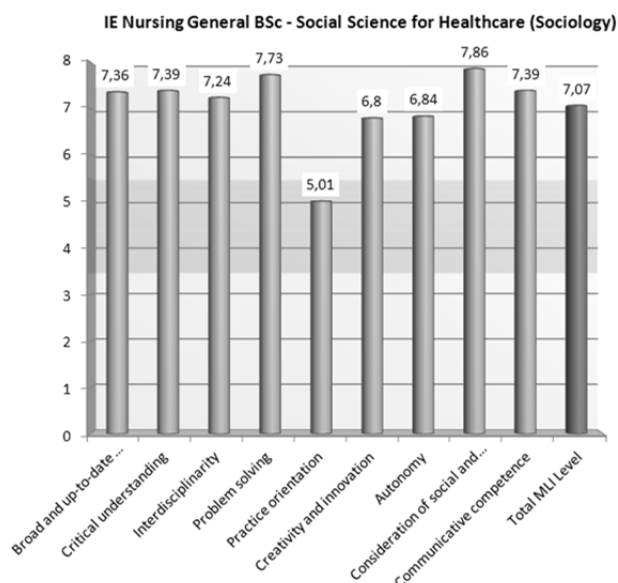


Fig. 6: IE Nursing General BSc – Social Science for Healthcare (Sociology)

The lowest MLI findings are in respect of IE Social Science for Healthcare (Sociology), figure 6 regarding ‘Practice Orientation’. Considering that this module is an introduction to Social Science, and although the newly introduced theories and models can be discussed and learned at classroom level, skills are not immediately transferrable to practical situations but they are practiced by the student over time and with experience the student becomes proficient and competent dealing with these sociological aspects when providing nursing care.

Equally, when considering the module Patient Safety, Microbiology and Infection, figure 7 below ‘creativity and innovation’ does not feature highly with regards learning competencies as this is very much a knowledge based subject with text book learning thus little room for variation.

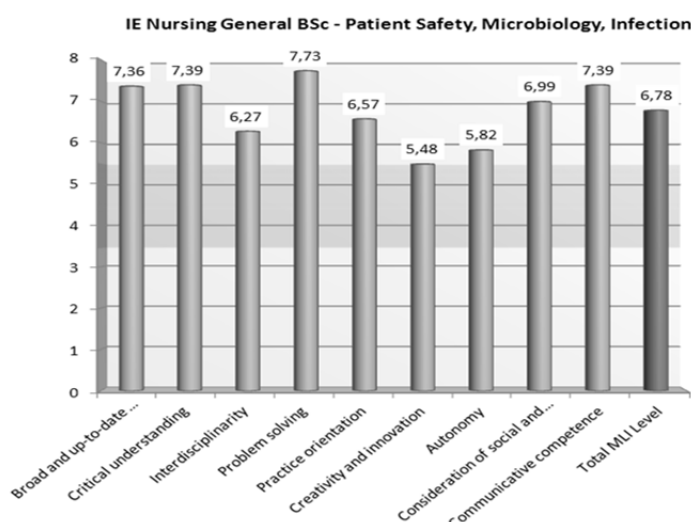


Fig. 7: IE Nursing General BSc – Patient safety, microbiology & infection

Finally, as evidenced below in figure 8, ‘Autonomy’ does not score highly in relation to the ‘Deepening Clinical Learning’ module. One theory behind this may be as follows; as the Student Nurse is working in an acute busy hospital environment, she must be

supervised closely by a Registered General Nurse (RGN) at all times whilst carrying out her daily nursing duties. All decisions relating to individual patient care must be discussed and agreed with the RGN therefore although the student nurse is taking responsibility as required ongoing, she cannot act independently and design solutions autonomously.

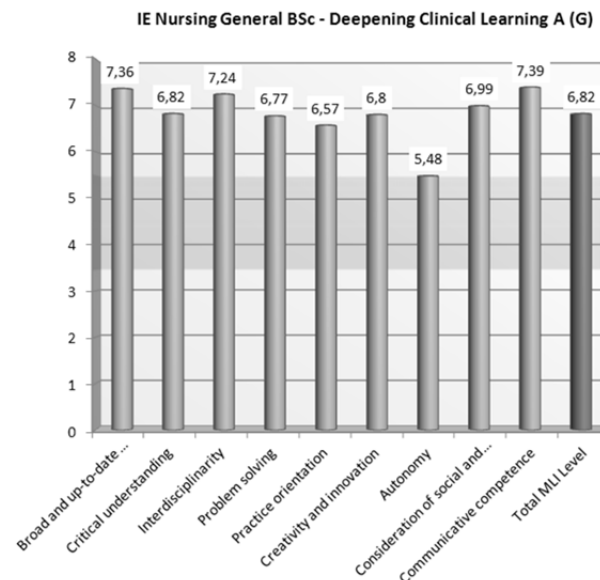


Fig. 8: IE Nursing General BSc – Deepening clinical learning A (G)

4.4 Conclusion

On reflection of the MLI results and the very high level scoring attained (average of 7.1 across all modules) using this toolkit, this unequivocally highlights the clearly balanced and controlled standardisation of practice in the Irish nursing curriculum. Notably this differs from the established EQF level 6 however either way, gives rise ultimately to a very high quality of sustained nursing care.

This curriculum entails the theory and practice of nursing in a fully integrated manner, establishing a strong foundation for a future career within the Healthcare setting. Lectures, workshops, library, tutorials and project group learning are all delivered on college grounds, while “hands on” practice/clinical placements that enhance learning and development of nursing skills take place locally in a designated Dublin Academic Teaching Hospital (DATH’s) and a variety of other Health Care Settings. The diversity of learning methods evidenced within this curriculum duly mirrors the high level results gleaned for the equivalence check i.e. the Learning Outcome Matrix (LOM) and the Module Level Indicator (MLI) tools.

The MLI is a useful tool to begin to explore comparisons on a transnational basis between units of learning and or modules, however it should not be the used as the only basis of comparison. The pedagogical and constructivist approaches to learning within the Irish Nursing Programme may differ greatly in practice to the other partners. Often the stated learning outcomes can also mask the hidden curriculum which operates by default in practice, Nuances within the assessment tools and strategies can also vastly alter the level and depth and complexity of a unit of learning and not reflect broadly the desired stated learning outcomes. The MLI analysis of the Irish modules reflects how these units are written and are intended operate in practice but other

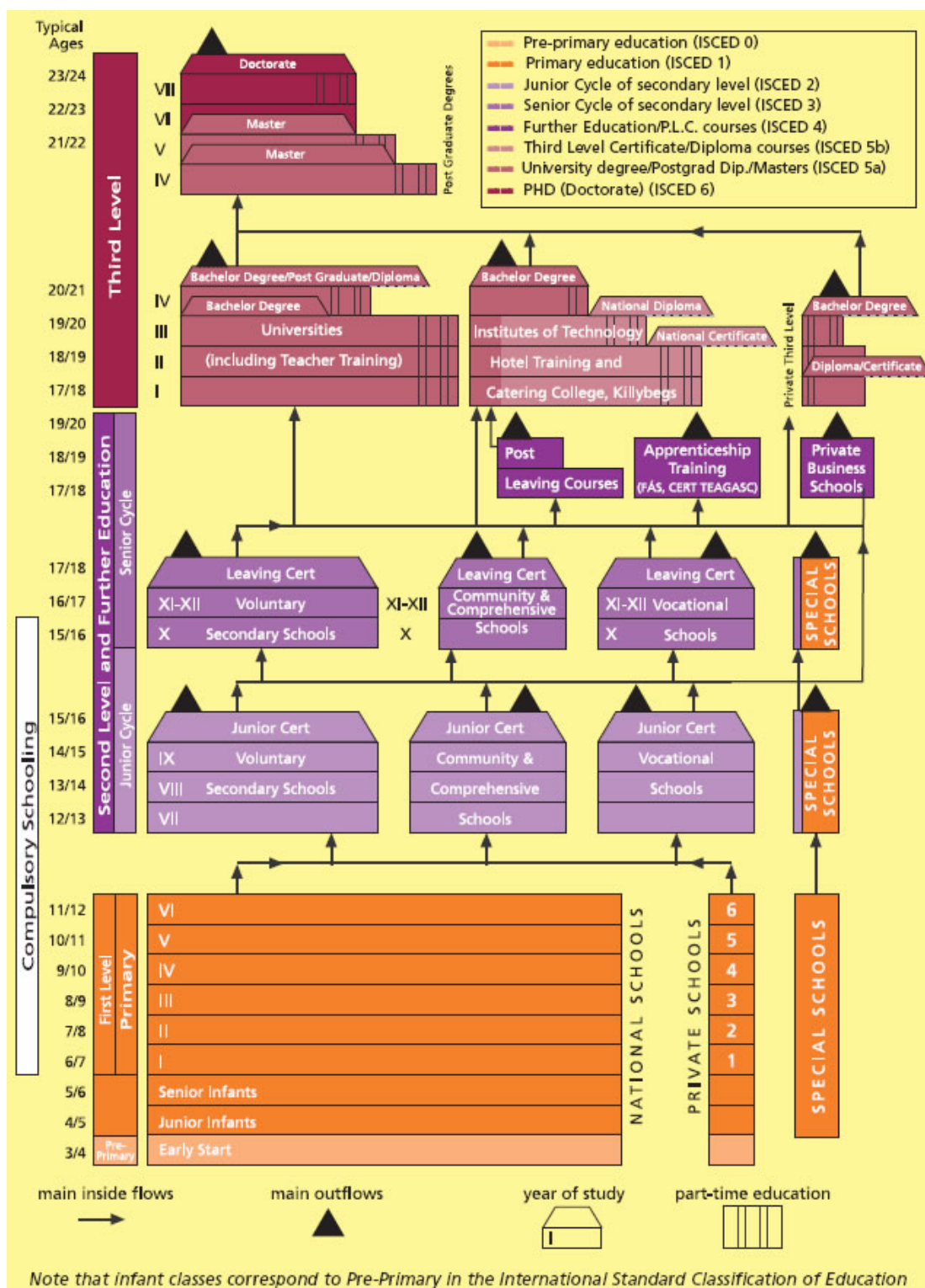
qualitative means should also be used to gain a true and authentic picture of the programme and the 'level' it represents.

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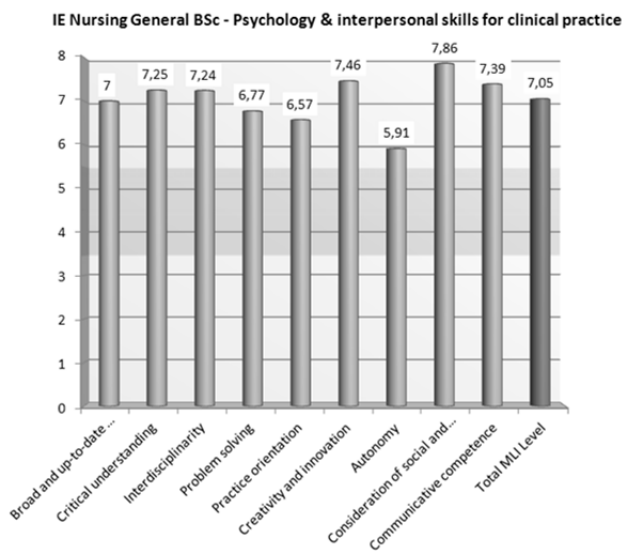
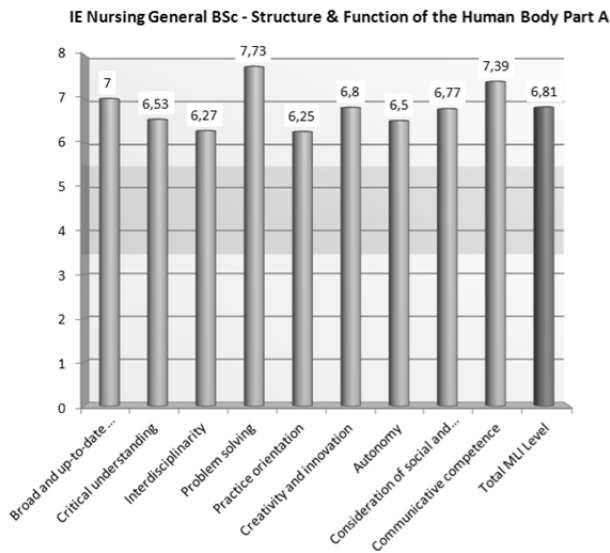
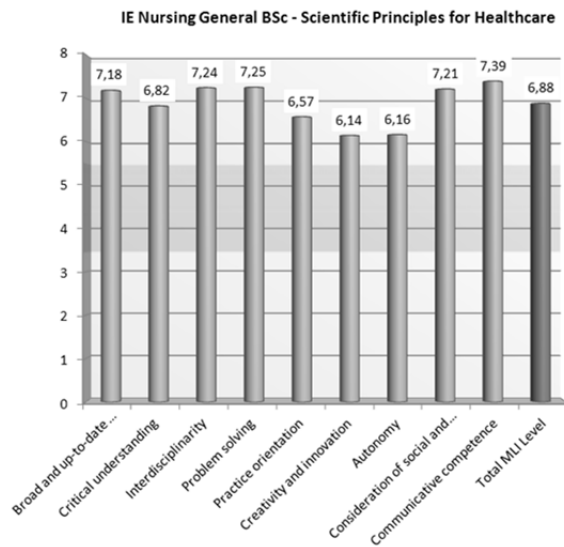
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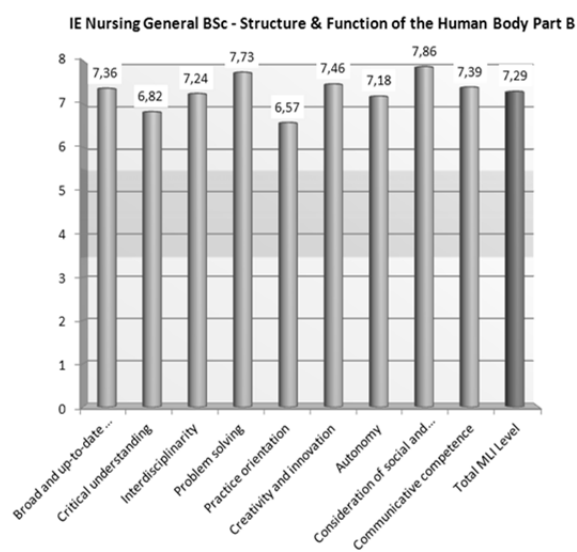
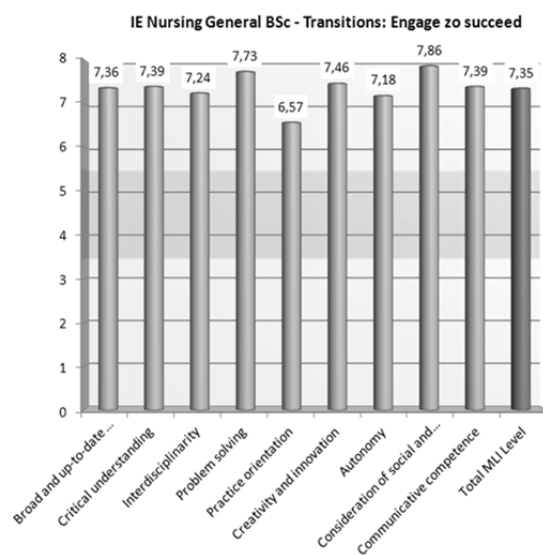
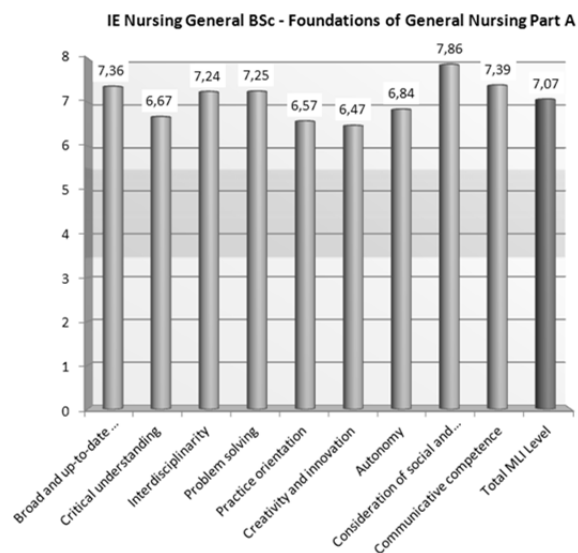
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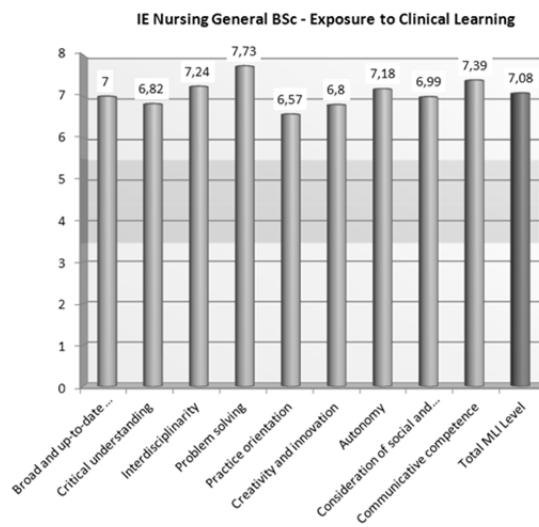
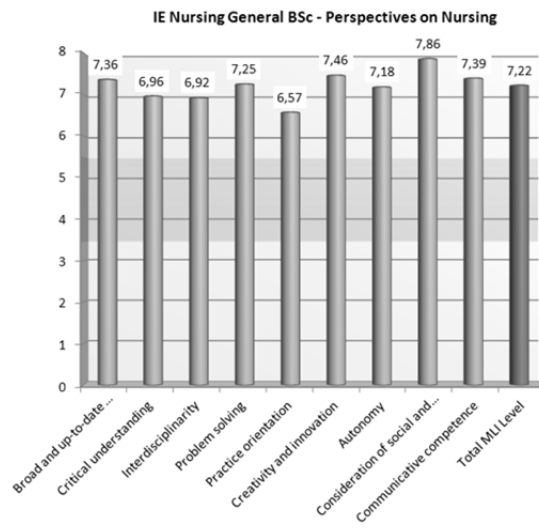
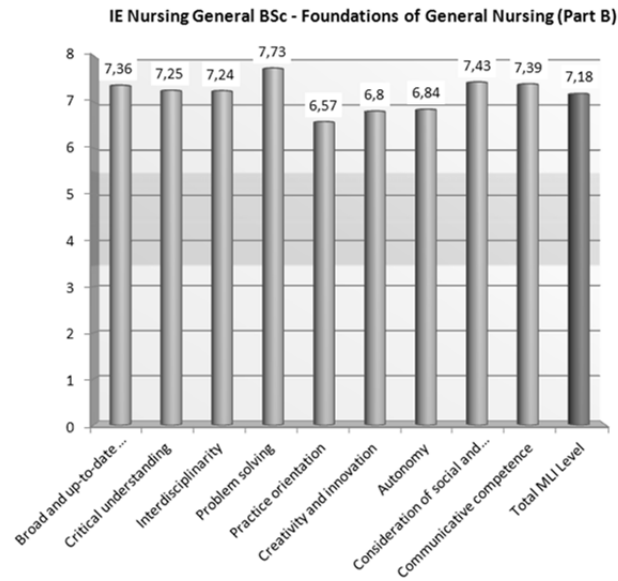
Appendix 1: Irish Education system diagram (source: DES (2006))

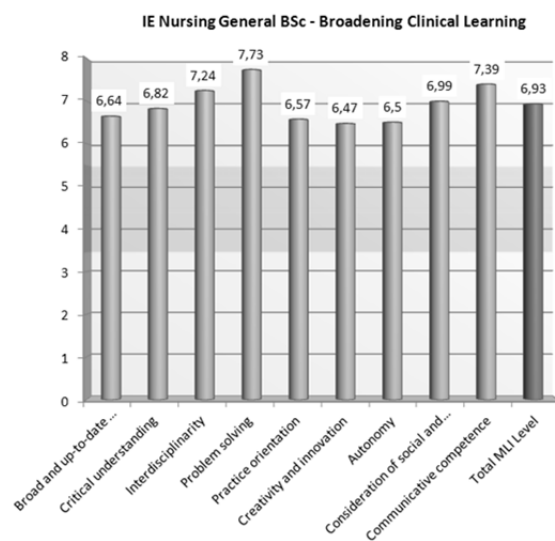
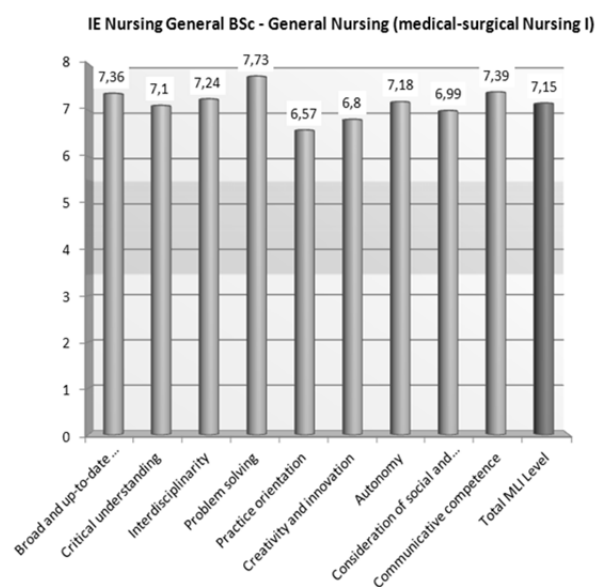
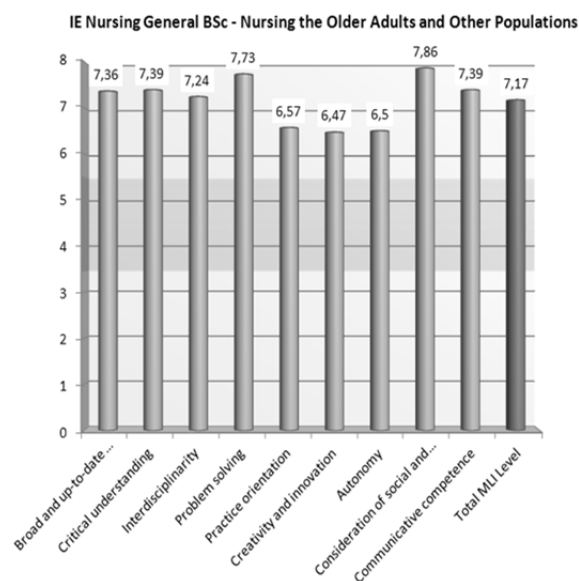


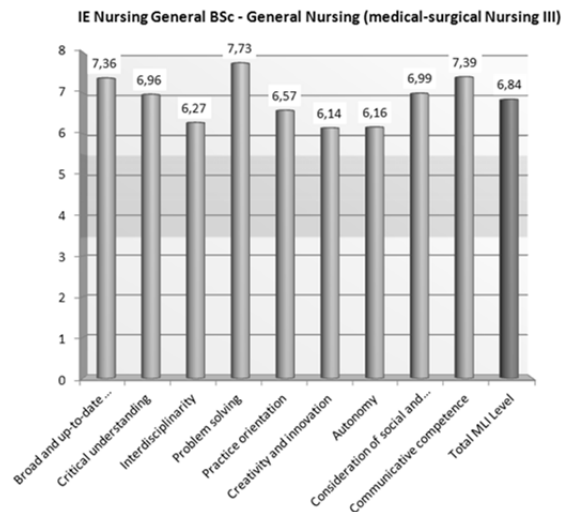
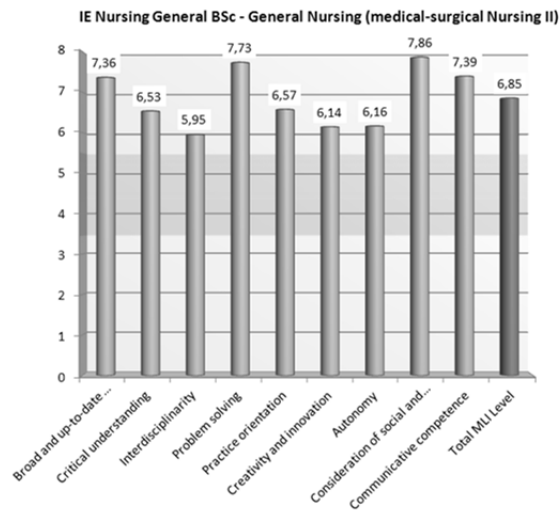
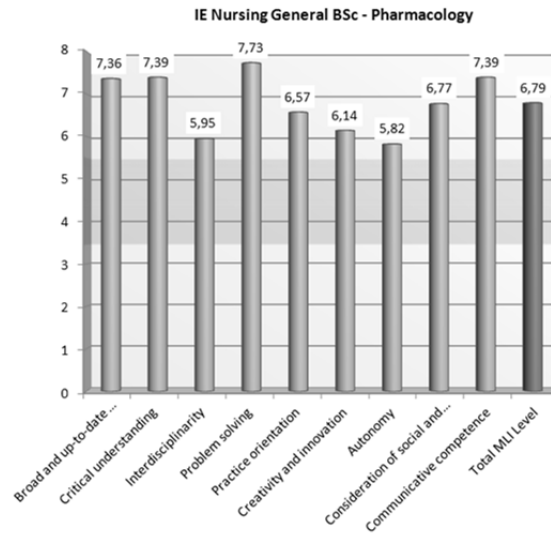
Appendix 2: MLI results

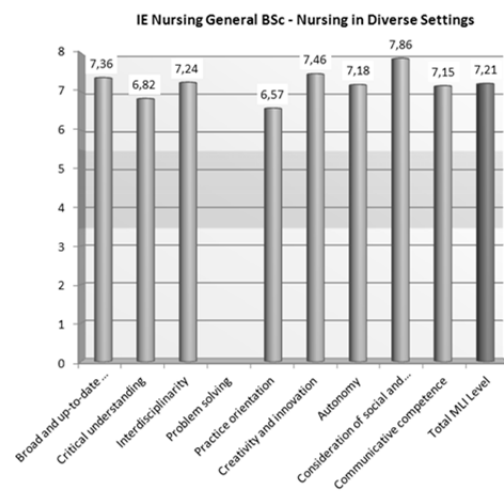
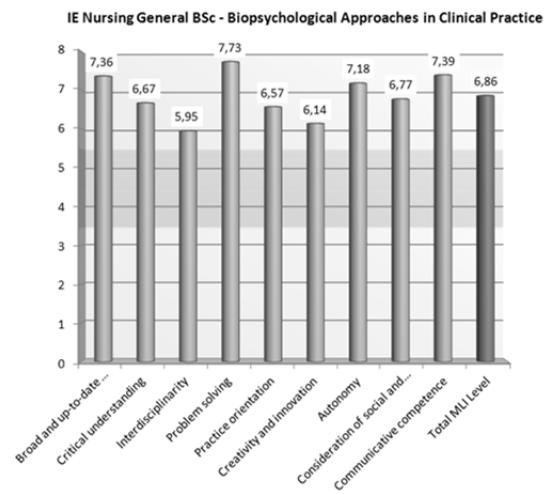
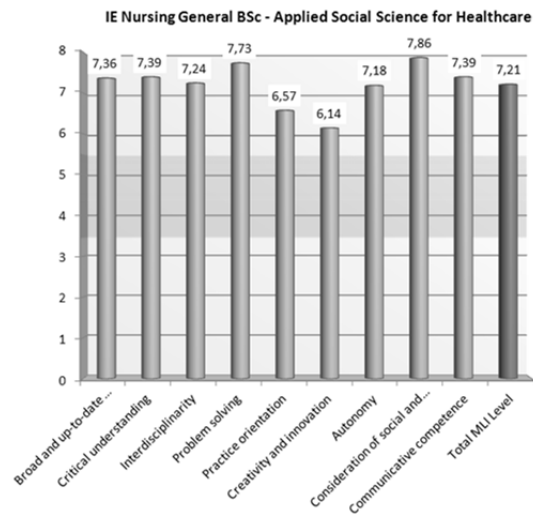


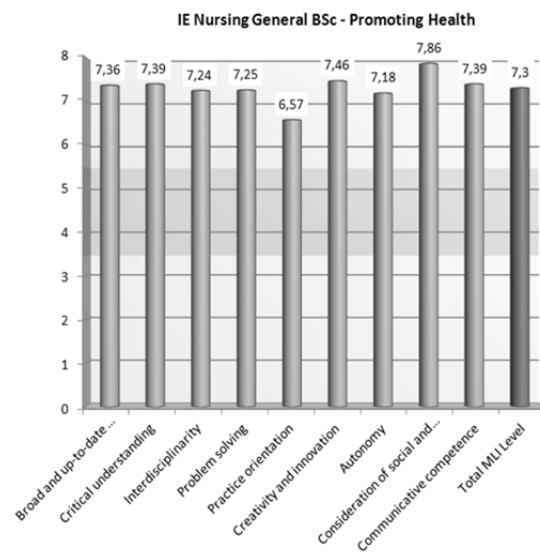
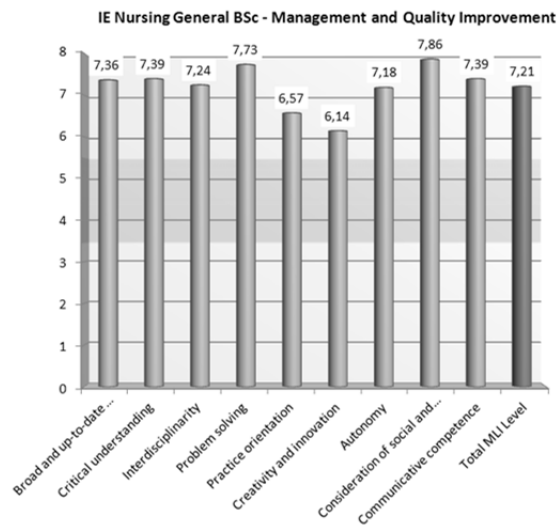
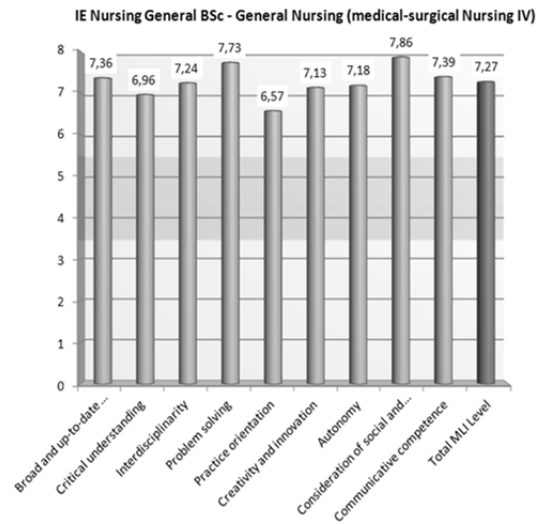


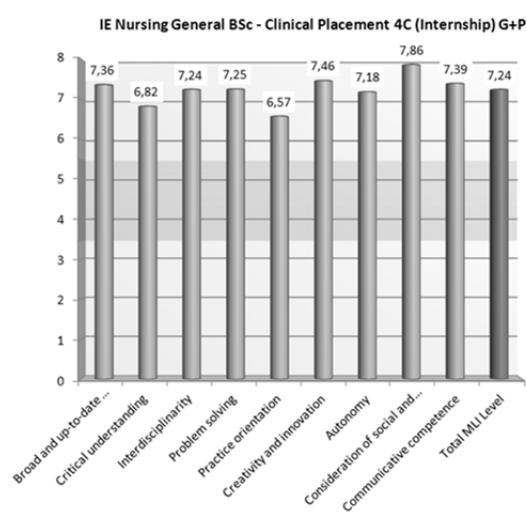
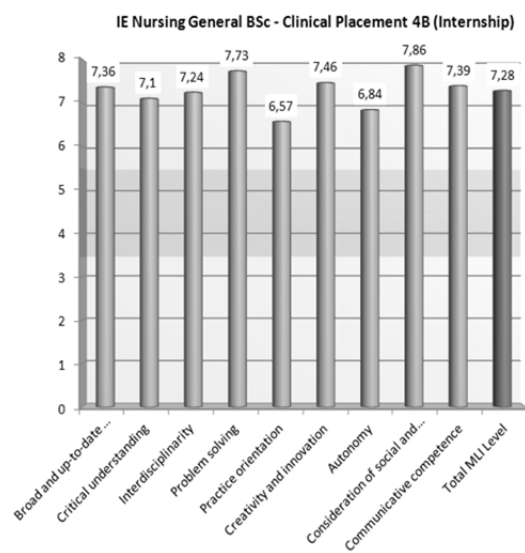
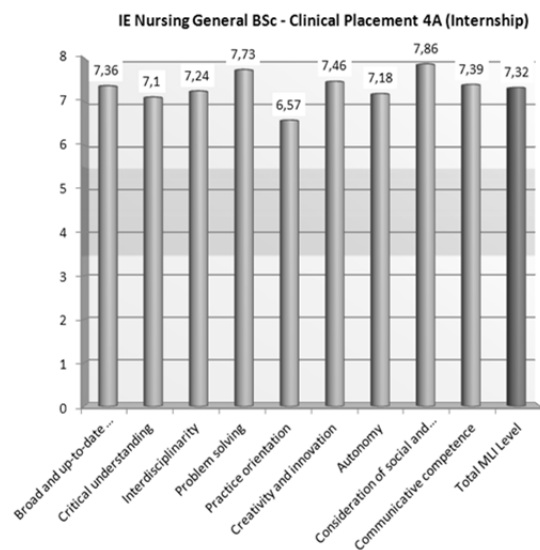


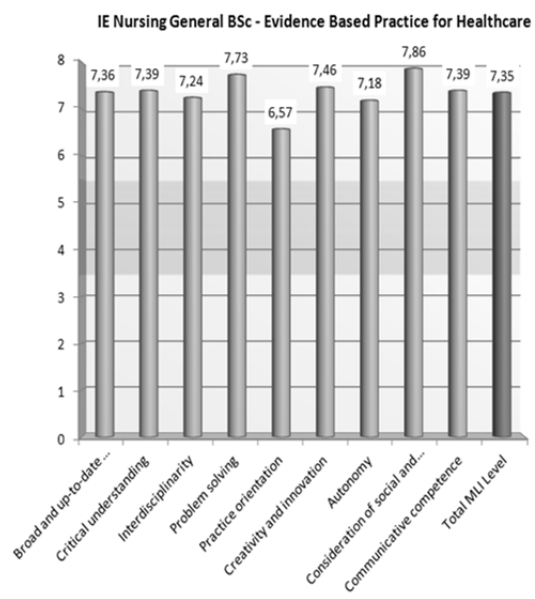












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