



This is nanniest state of all with 267 regulatory bodies

■ Eithne Shortall

IRELAND is the ultimate nanny state, according to a survey by the University of Jerusalem, which found that it regulates more areas than 48 other countries.

The country has 215 organisations with statutory powers and 52 public bodies dedicated to regulation. A quarter of these were created in the past four years, after the government promised to check if some of them could be merged.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem tracked the growth of regulatory

agencies in 49 countries across 16 different areas, including health, environment and electricity.

While America was monitoring 13 areas in 1989, Ireland regulated just two. By 2002, Ireland was regulating all areas except insurance, placing it ahead of every other country surveyed. The Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority was set up in 2003 and it now regulates the insurance industry.

Regulate Better, a 2004 government paper, promised to consider consolidating the existing bodies and said regulators would be created only when the need for them "can be clearly demonstrated".

Colin Scott, professor of EU regulation and governance at University College Dublin, said that the government has since created 13 supervising bodies, including the Private Security Agency, the Taxi Regulator, and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). He said political pressure was a common reason for their establishment.

"It's a way of delivering a symbolic political commitment," Scott said. "Take the example of HIQA. There's a perception that the Health Service Executive is not performing as well as it could be and the minister is getting a bit of flak for it, so regulation

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is at the top of the solution list.” Regulation is a cheap way of appearing to solve a problem.

The Department of Health rejected this theory, saying HIQA was not set up “to avoid either criticism or cost but to start the process of establishing clear, objective standards for healthcare that providers and patients could rely upon”.

Marty Whelan, head of communications at HIQA, insisted it was a unique body carrying out necessary work. He pointed to an impending investigation of nursing-home standards as evidence of its usefulness.

“HIQA is there to set high standards and make sure they’re implemented. It’s far more than a regulatory body,” he said.

Scott said regulation took off in the 1980s as Ireland attempted to meet standards set by the EU, but many of the recently established groups have nothing to do with European policy.